



THE MOUSE

ST. JOHN'S OAKLAND - NOV 2025
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rector's letter: **the jury is out** The Rev. Scott Denman

As I write this reflection I am still recovering from a very long week in court. I was recently called for jury duty on a civil case. During a routine traffic stop, a Napa County police officer shot an unarmed Hispanic man six times, ultimately resulting in his death. The victim was driving drunk and his unwillingness or inability to follow orders which he may not have understood, including showing his hands, was taken as life-threatening to the officer. The victims' wife and three children sat in the row directly in front of me. After four exhausting days of jury selection, the judge deemed me as impartial. Her determination mattered not. I was ultimately dismissed by the defense attorney. I guess it should not have surprised me that the first thing I did when I arrived home was to collapse on my bed where I spent the next two hours in a deep sleep.

I know now that my exhaustion was a result of my pastoral soul spending the week listening to extensive questioning of dozens of fellow citizens. I was truly moved by the vulnerability of many who openly confessed how their own form of suffering made them feel like they could not be impartial. Traumas around racism, abuse, alcoholism, and authoritarianism were shared, stirring strong feelings of compassion and concern in me. There is a bailiff but why is there no court chaplain, I thought? It meant something to me that the judge considered me impartial, but this desire to serve, like the other times I have been called to jury duty, came to naught. I have yet to have a unanimous verdict on my ability to be impartial.

This personal story may not seem like an invitation to the season of Advent, but it is, at least for me. Before Jesus's birth there had been a 400-year spiritual drought during which no prophet had emerged to meet the people where they needed to be met. Jesus changed everything. In the most extreme way, Jesus was evidence of God's ability to be radically impartial when it came to seeing into the very being of every person he met. His verdicts were always based on love and came with a challenge for us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. While, by its nature, this love was never impartial to justice and always called us to respect the dignity of every person, it was, nonetheless, impartial when it came to compassion and understanding, qualities he made available to all humanity.

Advent is a season of longing. We live in a time when the jury is out in so many ways. We long for love and justice to manifest itself in all its forms. We remember that Jesus said "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled." Hunger and longing are spiritual disciplines, and the season of Advent is just that, a call to embrace our hunger and thirst for the birth of God in our hearts and in our world. May we embrace our longing in this sacred season for it will lead us to discover and receive the birth of God that is happening all around us all the time. God knows that deep within every human heart is a longing to be truly impartial when it comes to understanding and loving our neighbor as ourselves. And because of that, we will be filled and God will never dismiss us from our service to all God's children.

Scott+



Be sure to check out, among the convention's exhibitors, "...the premier confirmation program **Confirm Not Conform**, developed right here in the Diocese of California." So proclaimed a DioCal staff member during the opening remarks of the 176th annual Diocese of California convention on Friday, October 17.

This is something to cheer about! Allow me to explain.

Just a few weeks ago, I attended the diocesan convention at Grace Cathedral—not, as you might suppose, in my volunteer capacity as Senior Warden—but in my paid role representing **Confirm Not Conform**, the extraordinary confirmation curriculum that was "born and raised" right here at St. John's.

Used in over a thousand churches and institutions across a number of mainline denominations in the U.S. and abroad, **Confirm Not Conform** has finally received recognition in its own home diocese (where it has sometimes endured "a prophet's welcome"—which is to say, indifference).

So the accolades we received at convention are truly something to cheer about! And not only because it is gratifying to finally receive acknowledgement of the unique, compelling, and influential formation curriculum that the staff of St. John's created and refined over many years—with the indispensable support of the St. John's family—but also because the Diocese is getting behind the curriculum! In keeping with the "Multicultural Multilingual Ministries" plank of their [Strategic Vision Plan](#), the Diocese has signaled a willingness to underwrite the translation of the curriculum into Spanish, and we could not be more delighted. We want it to be used in as many congregations as possible!

So we were invited to promote **Confirm Not Conform** at convention this year (a first). And in November, boardmember Kellor Smith and I will be representing **Confirm Not Conform** at the Progressive Youth Ministry Conference in Austin, Texas, both as exhibitors and panel-workshop presenters.

These are exciting times for this outstanding formation program that was created in our parish—as well as for all those who use it to explore the Christian faith.

What is Confirm Not Conform?

Confirm Not Conform is a comprehensive confirmation program that encourages youth to explore, articulate, and own their faith—through the study and practice of Scripture, sacraments, creeds, prayer, and service. Other Christian denominations and religions, and the nature of heresy, are examined as well. The curriculum is currently available in youth and adult editions.

In a process that fosters deep reflection and dialogue, **Confirm Not Conform** empowers the entire church to help integrate youth into the church's mission and ministry as vital members of the congregation.

Confirm Not Conform unabashedly centers justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion for everyone, especially BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ youth, because we all deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

Many youth today are more suspicious of easy answers than of difficult questions. Yet when we honestly examine and separate creed from dogma, our exercise of inquiry, reflection, and discernment grows our muscles for engaging effectively with chaos.

In development since the early 2000s, **Confirm Not Conform** is used in over 1,000 congregations worldwide. Learn more at confirmnotconform.com.

assoc rector's letter
The Rev. Kathleen Moore

The Monks on the Mountain: Finding “Your Steady” this Advent Season

For several years, I lived at the foot of Mount Equinox in Southern Vermont. I have been told that at 3,000 feet, Equinox is really more of a “hill” from a California perspective. But what it lacks in height it makes up for in summer greens, winter whites and, of course, fall technicolor. You can hike or drive to the top, and explore trails with views of the landscape below. But there is one place you *cannot* go: hidden away on a patch of land nestled against a slope is the Charterhouse of the Transfiguration, the only Carthusian Monastery in North America.

Carthusian monks live an isolated life of overwhelming silence, and they have almost no contact with the outside world. I'll admit, I used to think this expression of Christian vocation odd at best and useless at worst—why not spend that energy and devotion in community and on community?

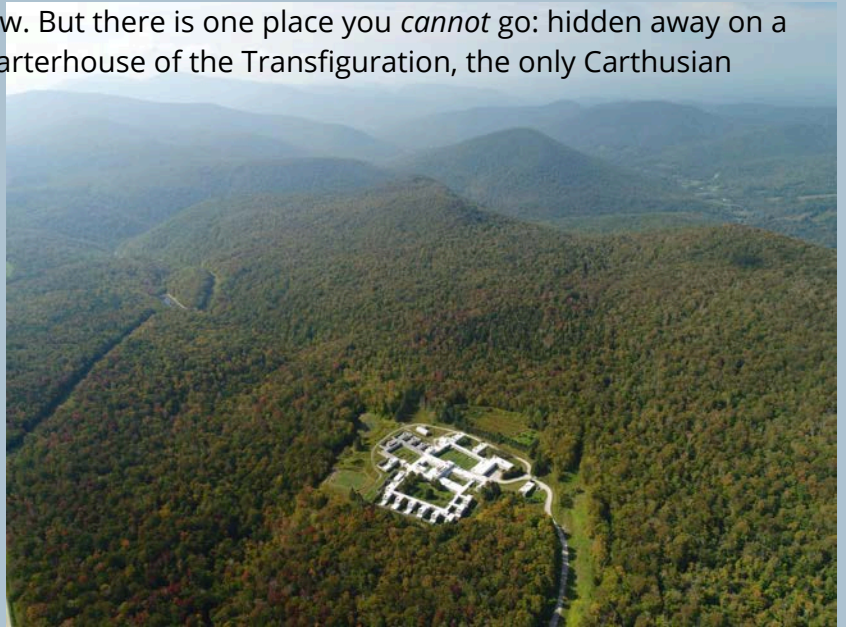
But that all changed in 2020. When I looked out my window toward the mountain, I wondered when and how and why the Charterhouse community found out the world had shifted on its axis. I wondered if they felt the shift before they were even told. And I wondered if they wondered how all of us were managing, suddenly taking on some measure of their vocation of quiet and isolation.

I felt suddenly close to those monks on the mountain. I felt the power of their prayers rolling down to us—to me—at all hours of the day and night. The Carthusian motto is “the Cross is steady while the world turns.” These monks were a steady presence for me in a world that felt anything but.

These days, the world has again taken on a quality of profound unsteadiness, and I am so proud of the ways the St. John's community is responding. We're showing up where and how we can for those most marginalized by the current political climate—feeding, demonstrating, accompanying, protecting, and on and on.

But this work can be unsteady. Just as Jesus sought time by himself to pray, I suspect we should all find ways to steady ourselves in order to keep living out our Gospel values in an unsteady world. Whether it's joining the mindfulness or centering prayer groups, singing in the choir, going for a walk or a hike in nature, journaling, painting, or praying with friends, I encourage you to “find your steady” during this coming, quiet season of Advent hope.

And if you need inspiration, just think about those monks on the mountain. There's a very good chance they are praying *right at this moment*, “steady while the whole world turns.”





a roaring success

Denise Bingham, Auction Co-Chair

St. John's Roaring 20s Speakeasy Auction was truly a September night to remember! With a lively 1920's speakeasy theme, guests arrived in style wearing flapper dresses, fedoras, and vintage flair. Laughter, fellowship, food, libations, and generosity filled the evening as we came together to support St. John's. Thanks to the incredible participation of our community, **we raised over \$25,000** for the church's operations, ministries, and mission. It was a joyful reminder of what we can accomplish when faith and fun come together!



SPECIAL WORSHIP SERVICES

join us for worship

Sundays at 7:45 & 10am

- Nov 23, 5pm** – Oakland Churches Together Gratitude Service & Soup Supper
- Nov 30** – Advent begins; Advent Lessons & Carols
- Dec 6** – Cathy Crocker Celebration of Life
- Dec 7** – Baptism of Henry Bruening
- Dec 21, 6pm** – Winter Solstice Labyrinth Walk
- Dec 21, 7pm** – Blue Christmas Service
- Dec 24** – Family Service, 4pm; Choral Service, 7pm
- Dec 25, 10am** – Christmas Day Service
- Dec 28, 10am** – One service: Christmas Lessons & Carols
- Jan 26, 10am** – One service & St. John's Annual Meeting

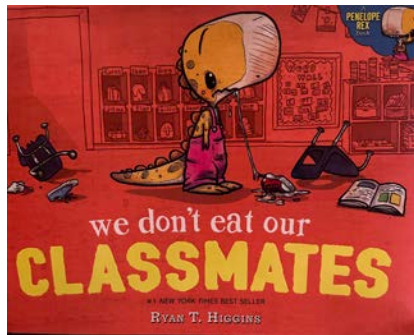
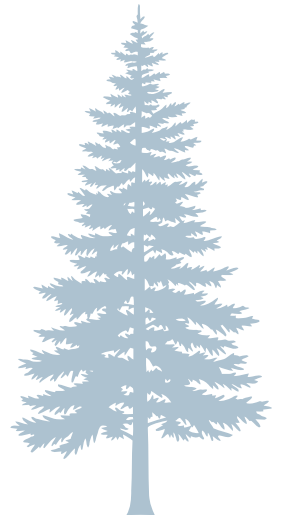
IMPORTANT DATES

- Nov 27** – Thanksgiving Day; office closed
- Nov 29, 4pm** – Advent Night
- Dec 11, 4pm** – Montclair Holiday Stroll
- Dec 16, 6pm** – Men's Holiday Dinner
- Dec 17, 6pm** – Banned YA Book Club
- Dec 18, 8am** – ICE Vigil
- Dec 24-Jan 2** – St. John's office closed
- Jan 19** – MLK Jr. Day; office closed

a successful work day

Tina Popenuck

We had a great turnout for our parish work day on Saturday, September 20, with at least 29 parishioners, staff, and clergy rolling up their sleeves to take on numerous tasks, large and small. We washed rugs, cleaned windows, repaired and painted patches, cleaned up the landscaping in the Meditation Garden and around the church, and managed vegetation on Thornhill Drive to reclaim sidewalk space. We cleared out the basement storage room, the organ room, and Kathleen's office to reorganize space so that Lori Robinson can now share Kathleen's office. The cobweb crew worked hard inside and outside. Sarah Jones spent all morning cleaning solar panels on the church roof! Many lightbulbs were changed, which elicited jokes about Episcopalians screwing in lightbulbs. Afterwards, we enjoyed a BBQ lunch provided by Laurie Bennett. I am grateful for all the helping hands, smiling faces, and lots of laughter that made this much needed event both a success and a pleasant morning.



books for franklin elementary

Anne Meyer

A huge thank you to everyone who donated to Books for Franklin Elementary! Principal Lusa Lai requested books for their anti-bullying campaign in October, and we were able to fulfill their wish list of four copies each of twelve grade-level appropriate titles. We have been able to positively impact an entire school and the community. Stay tuned for our next Books for Franklin effort.

genesis: be the change

Mary Lim-Lampe

Thank you to the 72+ people who attended the Genesis *Be the Change* Breakfast at First Unitarian Church of Oakland on September 27. St. John's was well represented. Genesis raised \$11,540 and exceeded the goal of \$8,000 which underwrites the Genesis Youth Internship program.



2025-2026 confirmation: confirm not conform

Lori Robinson, Director of Children & Youth Ministry

Confirmation is a rite of passage where an individual makes “a mature public affirmation of their faith and a commitment to the responsibilities of their baptism. And when people make this commitment and intend to act on it, the church is forever changed by their presence and their gifts” (From the *Confirm Not Conform Welcome*, p4).

In September, six youth from St. John’s Episcopal Church and Montclair Presbyterian Church committed themselves to a nine-month formation process to explore God and faith in relationship to their own lives. During this time, they will be looking at faith through the lens of their own experiences and beliefs.

They ask questions. They challenge assumptions. They form their own opinions. They agree. They disagree. They learn. They grow as they make this journey together.

Each lesson impacts the way they see themselves within the context of faith. Wrestling with who they are, what they believe, and why that matters are fundamental stepping stones to a more mature understanding of what it means to be a child of God.

And they are not making this journey alone. They have each other, their teachers, and you. As these youth go through confirmation, you – as their faith community – can support them along the way. Here are some concrete ways you can be part of their journey:

- Pray for them by name: Jamie, Jesse, Keller, Fred, Anna, and Mira.
- Sign up to provide a meal for one of their meetings.
- Support the fundraisers for their service project.

In a world that often overlooks and undervalues the gifts of youth, we in the church are called by God to value our youth and recognize the unique contributions they make within our community. We are called to recognize their insights and wisdom. We are called to understand their struggles and challenges. We are called to love them just as they are and treat them as equal members of our faith community.

If you want to know more about what we’re doing in confirmation and how you can support our youth, feel free to contact [Lori Robinson](#).



Some of the **Confirm Not Conform** lessons we've explored this fall:

Introduction

Life lesson: *You have a voice, and you can choose your values.*

Life skill: Taking responsibility for your choices.

The Gospel According to Whom?

Life lesson: *You can't get to where you want to go unless you know where you're starting from.*

Life skill: Understanding yourself.

Your Truth

Life lesson: *Just because you're telling the truth doesn't mean people will like it.*

Life skill: Speak your truth; listening to those we disagree with.

A Mad Dash through the Good Book

Life lesson: *You are not alone; other people have experienced what you are going through.*

Life skill: Seeking wisdom from those who have gone before.

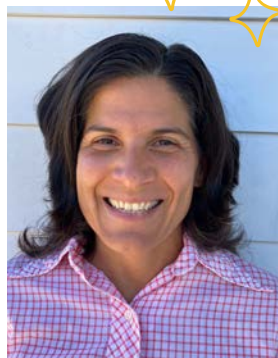
Prayer and Practice

Life lesson: *To understand prayer is to understand relationships.*

Life skill: Learning how to pray.



meet st. john's new staff members!



Samyukta Chaney (they/them) is overjoyed to join the St. John's team as **Parish Administrator** and to be working in a spiritual community again. They studied history, math, education, and yoga and are currently working toward a Master's in Divinity degree in Buddhist chaplaincy at the Institute of Buddhist Studies in Berkeley. They have been a chaplain resident, math teacher, and library page. Their love of community comes from joining and founding book and activity groups, recruiting and leading volunteers in projects, and volunteering in kitchen, carceral system, and elder care facility. They enjoy indoor rock climbing, knitting, glamping, queer talent shows, and deviating from recipes and sharing the results.



Cara Meredith, a speaker, writer, and public theologian, is the author of two spiritual memoirs, *Church Camp* and *The Color of Life*. She has been featured in national media outlets including *The Oregonian*, *Religion News Service*, and *The New York Times*, and writes regularly for *The Living Church*, *The Christian Century*, and *Baptist News Global*. Passionate about justice, spirituality, and storytelling, Cara holds a Master's of Theology from Fuller Seminary and is a postulant for Holy Orders in the Episcopal Church. With a background in education, nonprofit work, and communications, Cara is St. John's **resident**. When she's not working, you'll likely find her reading, tinkering in the garden, or hanging with her family.



Dr. Aaron Nee is thrilled to join St. John's as **Music Director**. He has worked as organist at the Catholic Cathedral in Denver and as a chorister at the American Cathedral in Paris. He received the Doctor of Musical Arts in Piano Performance from the University of Colorado, Boulder. Aaron loves to teach and has been a faculty member of Bard College Berlin, Carthage College, The University of Wisconsin Parkside, and the Crowden School in Berkeley. Currently he works as accompanist and vocal coach at San Francisco State University. Aaron spent four years living in Zürich, Paris, and Berlin. Hobbies include working at a winery, hiking, cooking, gardening, languages, and exploring the beauty of Northern California.

morning has broken

Submitted by John Seals

Long before Cat Stevens [now Yusuf] made it a global hit, the words to *Morning Has Broken* were quietly penned by a woman who believed in the beauty of simple things.

Eleanor Farjeon was born in 1881 in London to a family of writers, musicians, and dreamers. She had a way with words that felt like sunlight on paper—gentle, lyrical, full of hope. Known for her children's books and poems, she created enchanted worlds for young minds to explore. But it was one short hymn, tucked into a 1931 church songbook, that would leave her most lasting legacy.

Set to a haunting old Scottish melody called *Bunessan*, her poem *Morning Has Broken* was a celebration of dawn, rebirth, and gratitude. It quietly made its way into the hearts of schoolchildren and churchgoers in England—but it was still far from fame.

Then, in 1971, something extraordinary happened. A young singer named Cat Stevens discovered the hymn and was captivated by its message of peace and new beginnings. He recorded it with tender vocals and a memorable piano arrangement, and the world listened. The song soared to the top of the charts and became a spiritual anthem for generations.

Eleanor Farjeon passed away in 1965, never knowing that the words she once wrote to honor the freshness of morning would one day rise again—sung around the world, cherished by millions, and carried like a prayer on the wind.

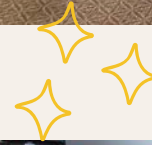
Found on Old Photo Club's Facebook page

Morning has broken like the first morning
Blackbird has spoken like the first bird
Praise for the singing, praise for the morning
Praise for them springing fresh from the world

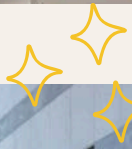
oakland churches together stays busy

Laurie Bennett

St. John's is a member of an ecumenical group of local churches sharing opportunities to help the community and each other. In September, Lakeshore Baptist led a Sing For Justice event at The Point, an assisted living senior facility in the Rockridge district. OCT churches made stoles for participants to wear for the October 16 immigration vigil sponsored by Genesis. On October 25, St. John's joined St. Paul Lutheran for a Project Peace Day of Service at Oakland International High School in the Temescal District. At every event, we have been thrilled to get to know other Christians with similar values.



St. John's will host an Oakland Churches Together gratitude service followed by a soup supper prepared by members of Montclair Presbyterian church on Sunday, November 23 starting at 5pm. Everyone is welcome to attend, get to know our OCT friends, and discuss projects for 2026.



october faithful response to ice

Anne Meyer

Twenty people from St. John's, Genesis, and allies took action to respond to US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). We gathered at San Francisco Immigration Court on on October 16, 8-10am. Those who attended the vigil felt the peaceful presence we created was an excellent antidote to the fear and uncertainty being inflicted on immigrants and refugees. We served coffee and breakfast bars. We brought toys, sidewalk chalk, and play doh for the children in line. We distributed solidarity cards and rapid response information. We prayed and sang. Most importantly we made personal connections with the people waiting for their immigration hearings.

Another vigil is being planned. Email actionandjustice@stjohnsoakland.org for details.

a peak at diocesan convention

oct 17–18 Maryann Blouin



Attending the diocesan convention is a little like peering into the gears behind a clock—you know something must keep things running... As a first-time attendee and a delegate for St. John's, I wasn't sure what to expect. My overall impression was that a small army of folks, mostly volunteers, work year-round to keep church governance ticking, with convention as the face of that work. (For more about governance, see [the diocesan website](#)).

St. John's sends four lay delegates to convention, elected at our annual meeting in January, along with our two clergy delegates. I was joined by fellow delegates Ken Fuller, David Mundy, and Alex Slatoff, and our clergy. In addition, Carolyn George, who serves as Secretary of the Executive Council for the Diocese, and senior warden Sarah Jones, representing the Confirm Not Conform program, also attended.

The convention is an all-day Saturday affair, starting with coffee in the Cathedral courtyard and punctuated by a lunch break that allows time for fellowship. The convention itself is quite a sight. Grace Cathedral's pews are taken over by clergy and delegates from member churches. The convention is conducted using Robert's Rules of Order, with an air of formality and a touch of humor. It was rather charming to see the bishop running the convention from a table set up at the front of the altar, with help from nearby aides. A lot of time was spent on the new strategic vision plan, with presentations and speakers on each of the plan's main points. (See [the full plan here](#)).

The convention actually started Friday night with a three-hour zoom presentation that teed up the issues. A fair bit of advanced prep work was required, using the convention booklet (98 pages!), to learn about the candidates, proposed canon changes, and resolutions under consideration. Votes can happen pretty quickly, so it's best to have an idea how you'll vote. We elected lay and clergy delegates to the next general convention and filled positions on various diocesan committees and councils. The candidates appear to be a qualified group of individuals with impressive service records to the church and community.

Some votes were technical, such as what constitutes a quorum. Some were heartfelt—St. John's delegate Alex Slatoff spoke movingly in support of the resolution on affordable housing, describing the struggles faced by students she teaches who lose sleep at night because they have no place to call home. And some issues were a bit contentious, especially around the diocesan assessment. Each parish pays a certain amount, determined according to a formula, and this assessment supports local and national church governance. In 2025 St. John's assessment is \$120,507. There is currently an effort underway to reexamine the assessment formula. Learn more about [passed resolutions](#).

We also took time for matters of the spirit. Worship was woven into the schedule and included eucharist, with a lovely choir singing in the background. We also heard a gospel reading, a sermon from Bishop Rios, and prayers of the people. Our moments of worship reminded us why we were all there.

Like any long meeting, the convention had its highs (for me that included voting, receiving eucharist, and just taking it all in) and lows (scarcity of breaks and caffeine). By the end, we felt tired and satisfied. And first-timers like me certainly learned a lot about how things work.

If you are interested in serving as a delegate for the next convention, let our clergy or wardens know in time to put your name forth at St. John's annual meeting in January. It's a wonderful way to see another side of the church!