



# THE MOUSE

ST. JOHN'S OAKLAND - MAY 2025  
1707 GOULDIN RD OAKLAND CA 94611  
WWW.STJOHNSOAKLAND.ORG

## rector's letter

The Rev. Scott Denman

This Summer, St. John's will undergo a major transformation. In July, the first two phases of The Gateway Project will be completed. This means that no one will have to enter St. John's down our current unsafe entrance. This means that the thousands of people who drive down the Thornhill corridor every day may be surprised to discover that there is a church behind the trees. This means that a safe and beautiful entrance will present itself to the broader community as an invitation of welcome. The vision to expand our welcome, started long before I arrived in 1996, will become a reality. We will finally see the fruit of over 20 years of hard work that grew out of a vision of hospitality.

The completion of phases 1 and 2 will include a new 2-lane bridge and pedestrian walkway, and a new parking area with 28 new legal parking spaces. This new area which gently slopes up to connect with our existing parking lot will come with all new infrastructure, including engineered underground drainage, new parking and pathway lighting, and professional landscaping, complete with top of the line irrigation technology. Phase 2 also includes a new fire hydrant which, coupled with a bridge designed to handle heavy fire trucks, will radically improve the fire safety of the entire neighborhood.

Phase 3, slated to begin sometime after the current campaign is completed, will include major improvements to our existing parking areas and a turnaround allowing for safe off-street drop-off for

Thornhill School. We are pausing phase 3 for two reasons: phases 1-2 accomplish our most crucial improvements, and pausing will not burden St. John's with long-term loans, a priority of the vestry. The goal was to stay within our available resources so that we might continue supporting the staff needed to be true to our mission and growth mandate.

There are three sources of financing for phases 1-2 of The Gateway Project: the Capital Campaign, sale of St. John's house and Thornhill 2, and, for cash flow purposes only, a line of credit of \$1.5 Million underwritten by the Diocese of California which will facilitate complete payment of the costs for completion of phase 2 (projected in July, 2025) until Thornhill 2 is sold and the balance of capital campaign pledges are paid.

*Continued on the next page*



# sr. warden's letter: **the before, the now, & the not yet**

[Sarah Jones](#)

It is my faith that we will have life after death, and that it will be glorious.

And it is my earnest hope that, in the afterlife, we will have special elective opportunities, one of which I very much hope will be time travel. To be able to experience, from a bird's eye point of view, in hyper-speed (obviously), geologic time: now that would be something. And then to slow way down (relatively speaking) to view the timeline of human history. Think of it: an immersive sensory experience in heaven's auditorium—a Holodeck, if you will—but out of doors and for real. Maybe with an angel as a guide. Because to see and experience the scope and the arc of our planetary and human stories would be simply fascinating. In fact, I could probably spend a large portion of eternity immersed in its contemplation. Then, I could begin to understand how we got here—to the now.

We live in the now, but the now includes everything that went before. And I have found that the more you know about the before, the fuller the experience of the now.

I recently invited all the former St. John's Senior Wardens to gather together. A dozen of us convened and shared stories of our collective “before.” Not only did I learn about things that had happened during other wardens’ tenures over the last 30+ years, but also, and even better, I had the pleasure of sharing the room with a “brain trust” of individuals who possessed lived experience doing the job that I am currently assigned to do. It was truly a blessing. And we're not done yet.

In addition to looking backward at our “before,” this group is also planning to look forward to our “not yet.” We are dreaming and talking about what we envision for our faith community in five years, ten years, and beyond. And I would like to extend the invitation to you, too: *Where would you like to see the St. John's community in the “not yet”?*

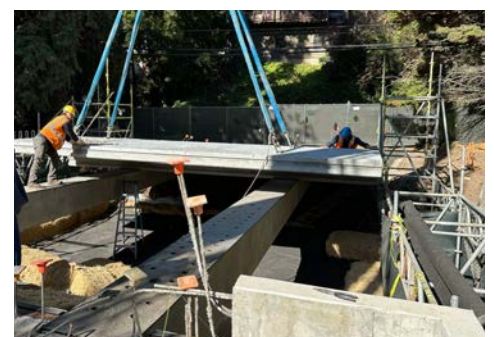
I'd love to hear your thoughts.

## *rector's letter continued*

As of May 2025, we exceeded our capital campaign goal of \$2.5 Million with approximately 80% of pledges already in hand. We have sold St. John's house for \$1.18 million; \$120,000 of the sale has been transferred to St. John's operating budget to replace three years of lost rental income on that property. We are in the process of selling Thornhill 2, projected to generate higher net proceeds than St. John's House. Also, as with St. John's house, a portion of the sale proceeds will be returned to St. John's to cover three years of lost rental income.

We have often heard people describe St. John's as a community of faith that makes all feel welcomed. What a gift it has been to watch the commitment and grit with which so many of our leaders have, in the words of Jesus, taken the bushel off our lamp by literally paving the way for a visible welcome that matches our spirit of welcome. Stay tuned for details about an official opening celebration and blessing of this project.

I am so grateful to be your rector, Scott+



# assoc rector's letter: a ministry of confidence

The Rev. Kathleen Moore

During my senior year of seminary I felt drawn to, but also terrified of, a class offering called "Church Music and Liturgical Singing." I was a big ball of anxiety at just the thought of singing in a small group, or (gasp!) *alone*. But I need not have worried, because my professor was Dr. Ben Riggs.

Ben provided an incredible foundation of knowledge about church music in a short amount of time, and his ethos of not discouraging anyone, particularly our children, from singing came through early on. Church is one of the last spaces we have where the practice of singing together is normative. We should do everything we can to make this communal experience that benefits our mental and spiritual health inclusive.

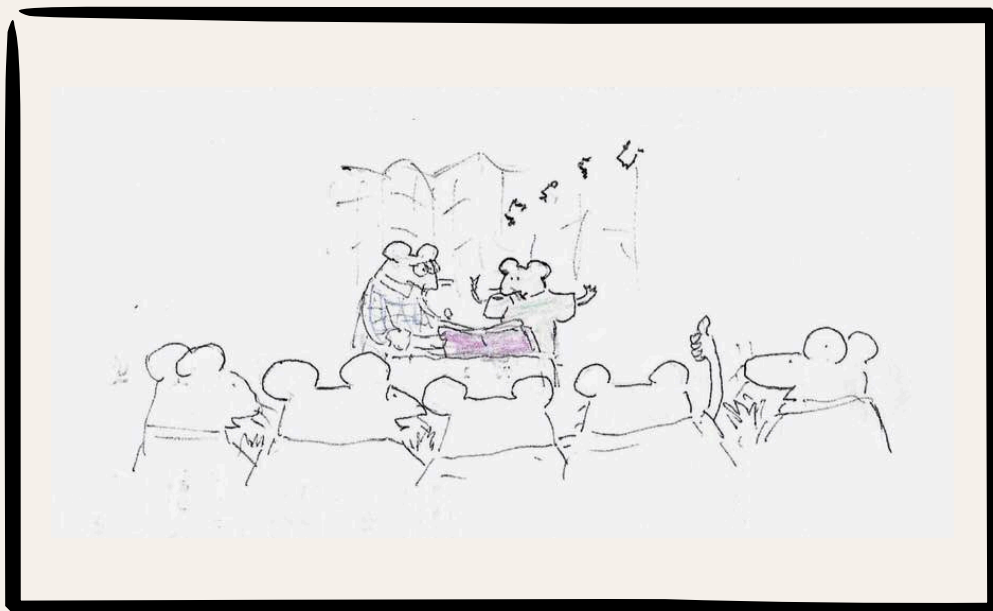
Ben's message was intended not only for his students to take into our future ministries, but also to take to heart ourselves. I watched as he instilled confidence in each nervous seminarian as we learned to chant the gospel and the prayers.

His students told one another at the time (and still do, I checked!) that it wasn't just about the singing. Ben gave us the confidence—more than any other professor in any other class during three years of seminary—to serve as leaders in liturgy. He gave us permission to use our own authentic voices to recite the familiar words of our worship and not feel as though we should match the cadence and intonation of "traditional" (generally white, male) priests. During his class, I gained confidence in believing I was allowed to be a priest who looked and sounded just like me.

In so many ways, it has been a joyful and unexpected life turn to get the opportunity to serve on staff with Ben here at St. John's. My education has continued as we worked together on liturgy and music and all manner of church logistics. It also allowed me to watch him engage in that same ministry of instilling confidence with our choirs at St. John's and in his work with Resound Ensemble and Oakland Gay Men's Chorus.

While I'm *very* sad to see Ben and John go, I smile at the thought of all the people Ben's ministry of confidence will serve during his next chapter in New York, and all the beautiful music that will come of it.

Thank you, Ben. And thank you to our choir and all the incredible St. John's musical talents who continue to make that wonderful music ring out every Sunday.



**Image:** A drawing by my classmate Sr. Faith Anthony depicting Ben helping a student practice presiding at the altar while the rest of our class looks on (all as church mice!).

# farewell, ben & john

Sylvia Ahern, on behalf of St. John's Choir

With sadness, but with confidence in a bright future in the Big Apple for both, we say goodbye to our much-loved Minister of Music, Dr. Ben Riggs, and his husband, the Rev. John Dwyer, who has served us regularly and faithfully as Associate Clergy. They are departing for New York, where John's Church Divinity School of the Pacific (CDSP) post has moved to the mother ship at Trinity Church NYC.



Ben arrived at St. John's in 2018 after a long search. He established himself quickly in our hearts and our liturgies as a superb church musician, a wonderful conductor, rehearsaler, and leader, and an expert in contemporary American repertoire—new to us, and which we have come to love. He also wrangled the littles and inspired the Youth and Senior choirs in our monthly family services.

Under his stewardship over these seven years, the Chancel Choir has grown in size and skill despite the very challenging period of the pandemic lockdown and subsequent contagion precautions. Singing, it turns out, is a super spreader activity!

Ben held the music program together through that stressful period with regular Zoom rehearsals to keep us singing. He also offered online hymn sings and Choral Evensong services open to all.

Please join us on May 25, their last day with us, at a special Coffee Hour after the 10am service to celebrate Ben and John's tenure and to bid them farewell. We will certainly miss them, but are so very grateful for our time together and we wish them all the best in their upcoming chapter!



## messages of appreciation



*Just so much love and gratitude for Ben, for all the reasons. - Sylvia Ahern*

*Dr. Ben Riggs is extraordinary. Yes, you are! I have loved working with you, singing with you, laughing with you, and eating with you (thank you for sharing your ravioli!). I am heartbroken that you are leaving, but I truly wish you every good thing in New York. Choir will never be the same. You will be so, so missed!!! Lots of love and best of everything. - Kathy Araujo*

*Though I am probably the newest addition to the choir, I still have incredibly deep appreciation for Ben. He runs the most efficient, effective rehearsals ever, is strategic in his suggestions, and his positivity brings out the best in us all. I'm so grateful to have had a chance to sing with him. - Ginger Cook*

*Hi Ben, It's bittersweet for me to have only sung one season with you. Thank you for allowing me to add my voice to the Chancel Choir. I've enjoyed the wonderful selection of anthems you chose, many (for me) for the first time. Thank you for introducing me to Gwendolyn Walker! Best of luck in New York! I'm sure you and John will both thrive and grow. Best wishes, Sterling Hada*

*Best wishes Ben on your move to the Big Apple - I will miss you, especially when it comes to rehearsals. You always kept us focused and relaxed at the same time, allowing us to work hard and sing our best. Bravo, Maestro! - Jim Hasler*

*Ben, I will miss your kindness and encouragement. You have brought such joy and fun to our choir rehearsals, and have helped us to focus on our ensemble singing. I have enjoyed the introduction to modern choral composers like Gwyneth Walker and Elaine Hagenberg. I also appreciate how you 'fit' our music to the seasons of the church year and to the readings every Sunday. I will miss you and I wish you all the best in your new home and work. - Kathie Heller*

*Dear Ben, Thank you for all your hard work and encouragement for the choir, your beautiful piano playing, and your dedication to finding relevant anthems written by a wide spectrum of contemporary composers which the choir loves to sing. Very best wishes to you and John as you move on to the next exciting phase of your lives. - Cheryl Keller*

*Ben is a magician. He can get us choir cats quieted down, focused, and singing our best with a joke, a wink, and a nudge. We can then set about truly making a joyful noise. - Carrie Leadingham*

*The choir has been blessed to have Ben as our choir director. He has led the choir in developing not only an informed, nuanced, and spirited musical expression but also introduced us to some of the outstanding composers of the 21st century. The work of these musicians integrate both the richness of the classical era and the stunning diversity and inclusiveness that is the best of America's heritage. We will miss his guidance, good spirit, lyrical voice, and his brilliant husband's ministry to us. - Susan Merrill*

*I especially appreciate all of the new music compositions Ben introduced to us! - Bonnie Moran*

*Dear Ben, It has been an absolute pleasure to work with you. I will miss you greatly. Sincerely, Sig Seigel*

*Some of us knew from the first five minutes of singing with you that to have you as our Music Director would bring our singing at St. John's to an entirely new level, and we were right! Your experience (of which we knew very little), your low-key, friendly manner, your broad knowledge of the available repertoire, and your ability to relate it to our performance level, your excellent time management, and respect for the needs of this diverse group of mostly "senior" singers have been truly extraordinary. You have somehow enabled each one of us to grow in ways we needed. Your perception and leadership have been a delight for all of us, individually and as a group. We will miss you but send you off with every good wish for producing joyful music wherever you find yourself! Warmly, Nancy Swearengen*



*Thank You*

## SPECIAL WORSHIP SERVICES

*Join us for worship*

*Sundays at 7:45 & 10am*

**May 25** - Dr. Ben Riggs's last Sunday at St. John's

**June 7, 3pm** - Tom Fregoso's ordination at Grace Cathedral

**June 8, 10am** - Pentecost Celebration of the Rev. Dr. Fran Toy

## IMPORTANT DATES

**May 26** - Memorial Day; office closed

**June 1-7** - Youth Service-Learning Trip

**June 7, 10:30am** - Summer Choir Rehearsal & Lunch

**June 11, 6pm** - Banned YA Book Club: *The Hate U Give*

**June 20, 6:30pm** - Summer Solstice Labyrinth Walk

**June 21, 9am** - Project Peace Day of Service

**July 20** - Peter Freeman Sundae following the 10am service

# saying goodbye to dr. ben riggs & the rev. john dwyer

The Rev. Scott Denman

As the Queen Mother used to say, "grief is the price we pay for love." So, as we all feel grief about losing both Ben and John as they start a new life back East, it's helpful to soothe our grief, by remembering its source: the love we have shared together.

Ben, of course, brought great talent, experience, and liturgical depth to our community. But what I will remember were the occasions when Ben so willingly responded to a spontaneous movement of the Spirit and the emotional tone that would meet us right where we most needed to be met.

One time, as I was feeling moved to entirely change my sermon, I found myself remembering Joni Mitchell's "Both Sides Now." I called Ben up on Saturday and told him my crazy idea for the next day. Talk about last minute. My idea was that I would reference the lyrics of that moving song if he would be willing to sing it at the end of my sermon. With a kind of majestic instancy, Ben responded with enthusiasm and immediately began thinking about which arrangement he would choose. If you were there that day, I know you will remember it. When music resonates with the readings and liturgy the impact is mightily amplified. I will never forget that moment because of its emotional content.

For the staff, Ben has been our mentor when it comes to keeping clear boundaries. This gift may be why his ministry seems boundaryless. He emanates deep emotion through all his musical choices and choral direction, not only at St. John's but in the other Bay Area choruses he directed. That emotional expression has had a huge impact on knitting our community and other communities together in profound ways. I could go on, but he would not like me to do so.

As for John, he is the best ambassador for what I think of as the perfect Episcopal priest. His wit, intellect, biblical knowledge, and that special curiosity our church embodies is always represented in his sermons and liturgical leadership. His deep voice doesn't hurt either. I am also profoundly grateful for his broader leadership in seminary education where he is part of a new vision which is courageously meeting the challenges of the church as we move into the future.

God bless you both as you continue to bless humanity in a new location and context. What a blessing you have been to St. Johns, and to me.

Until we meet again, with Love, Scott+

## celebrate the new play structure: sunday, june 1



The 2024 CnC class fundraised to install a new play structure in support of children's mental health. Come celebrate & bless it with us!



# oakland churches together's first anniversary!

Laurie Bennett

For the past year, Oakland Churches Together representatives have been meeting monthly to discuss our common goals and create opportunities to serve our community. It has been rewarding to host a screening of the movie about Christian Nationalism, *Bad Faith*, organize Christmas caroling at the Grand Lake Farmers' Market, work with our clergy to present a Lenten series, and learn more about how our communities are similar and different.



Join us for the [Project Peace Day of Service at Franklin Elementary School](#) Saturday, June 21, 9am-noon

**Project Peace East Bay** mobilizes volunteers and resources to serve our trusted community partners as we pursue biblical justice in the East Bay. We host quarterly Days of Service, inviting hundreds of volunteers to participate in a variety of high-quality service projects that help our partners achieve their missions and enable our communities to flourish.

**Franklin Elementary**, located in the heart of Oakland's San Antonio-Eastlake neighborhood, is proud to be one of OUSD's most diverse schools. It serves students from over 30 different countries who speak over 20 languages. As a hub for newcomer and refugee students, Franklin works with a large number of students who have recently made Oakland their home and provides support to help meet their unique needs. In the past, volunteers have provided enormous support to the Franklin gardening program, working with school staff in the butterfly, produce, and sensory gardens. June tasks may include helping clean and organize classrooms.

People of all ages and abilities are welcome. **To volunteer, email any OCT rep by June 15:** [Laurie Bennett](#), [Michael Daly](#), & [Anne Meyer](#).

## executive council talking points: march 2025

Carolyn George



**Diocesan Social Justice Priorities:** The diocese is actively working to promote social, racial, and environmental justice, with a focus on creating a welcoming environment for clergy of color and engaging with diverse communities.

**Strategic Visioning Process:** A strategic visioning process is underway to guide the future direction of the diocese, with a focus on gathering input, identifying key themes, and developing a communication plan to share the vision with the wider community.

**Canon Davey's Transition:** The ministry of Canon Davey Gerhart is concluding.

**Assessment Appeals Committee:** The Executive Council is working to form an Assessment Appeals Committee that complies with the canons and is tasked with reviewing the appeals process.

**Prayers for Bishop Austin's Birthday**

The full minutes: <https://www.diocal.org/governance/executive-council/ec-minutes/>



## a contemplative retreat Maryann Blouin

Over a dozen St. John's members gathered for a half-day retreat, giving ourselves the gift of a few hours spent in different contemplative spiritual practices. Just as important as the practices themselves was the time spent in community. It's wonderful how quickly a community can spring up!

One of the most surprising things about silent retreats is the companionship that develops without the need to talk. The conversation as we gathered for the retreat and over lunch set the scene for our quieter moments. In our praying with colors session, amiable camaraderie accompanied our silent coloring as we were absorbed in our creations. Gathering for centering prayer in the sanctuary, we brought our own silent prayer to the holy ground of our weekly worship site, our individual prayers enhanced by all that had gone before us. Making our way around the labyrinth in meditative quiet seemed like it might become a mass traffic jam, but instead turned out to be a delightful ballet. Our final session, modeled on the Wednesday morning mindfulness group, eased us back into the world as we listened to each other read a few paragraphs of a mindfulness text with time for self-reflection in between. It was a wonderful way of sending us forth, back into the busyness of our lives, with a little mindfulness tucked away in the nooks and crannies of our souls.

Many thanks to the Rev. Kathleen Moore, Lori Robinson, Anne Meyer, Betsy Slate, and Siv Ricketts for joining forces to put on the retreat, and to everyone who attended, creating such a special community in just a half-day.

## lenten labyrinth practice Anne Meyer

We began our Lenten journey on the Labyrinth on Ash Wednesday, March 5. We were invited to prayerfully consider three questions as we walked the three circuits of our labyrinth: *How will I pray?*, *How will I fast?*, and *How will I give?* We received ashes after walking the labyrinth with the prayer that each person would go forth with a better sense of how God was inviting us into the wilderness journey of Lent.



On Good Friday, April 18, our labyrinth walk reflected on the Stations of the Cross. The stations are a journey through the difficult moments of life as demonstrated in the last day of Christ's own life. The labyrinth is a place for modern pilgrims to pray, meditate, and contemplate their own life journey. The Stations of the Cross and labyrinth walk together served as a pilgrimage and an opportunity to experience the passion of Christ on a personal level in an ancient way.

Our next labyrinth walk will celebrate the Summer Solstice, June 20. Weather permitting we will walk the Labyrinth on the patio in the vesper light of early evening and enjoy light refreshments, too. We will gather at 6:30pm and have a string quartet, too!

# *prepare a table before me...* join the altar guild

[Susan Merrill](#), Altar Guild Director



The Episcopal Church liturgy is rich in mediating meaning and worship via the senses, whether through the reading of Scripture, song, scent, movement, or vision. The Altar Guild in particular serves to bring us into the presence of the Holy by setting the stage, laying the cloth runner and cup on the Altar table and adorning the walls with banners in a spectrum of evocative color that shifts depending on the season.

The Altar Guild has had a reliable and committed group of volunteers serving over many years, yet we are entering a period where some of our experienced members will be stepping down. After more than 20 years of serving with good cheer and devotion, Pauline Felder will soon complete her time with Altar Guild. Please ask her about her experience of Altar Guild as a contemplative Christian practice.

Altar Guild has four teams, and Team 4 (serving the fourth weekend of each month) currently has the most pressing need for new members. Each team covers one weekend a month, a fifth Sunday one time per year, and Christmas and Easter seasons add some additional service time. Optimally a team has three members so that if one is away the team still has enough support. Typically, teams meet on Saturday mornings to set up for the 7:45am Sunday service; on Sunday mornings between services to clean up and reset; and following the 10am service, all is cleared away, covered, cleaned, and stored.

A BIG thanks to Pauline upon her retirement, and to the rest of the Altar Guild team: Laurie Bennett, Lisa Cadwalader, Ken Fuller, Anne Meyer, Mark Miller, Bonnie Moran, David Mundy, and Nancy Roscelli. Please feel free to connect with me if you might be interested in serving on Altar Guild.



## Pauline Felder retiring from altar guild

Laurie Bennett

Pauline Felder has been a member of Altar Guild Team 4 for 23 years, faithfully preparing St. John's altar for worship. Recruited by Judith Fleming in 2002, Pauline's first teammates were Mary Lou DeLauer and Bonnie Moran. She enjoyed learning about the changes in each liturgical season, seeing behind the scenes, and keeping things in order.

Pauline has also been the Flower Guild Director since its inception. During her first years on Altar Guild, each team had four members who would prepare the altar and create the pedestal floral arrangements. Sometimes flowers were ordered from J. Miller Flowers & Gifts, but that became expensive.

In 2005 AG Director Karen McGuinn asked Pauline to coordinate a new ministry to handle St. John's floral needs, and the Flower Guild was born. Pauline invited existing AG members and recruited others to form weekly teams of two people. For 20 years, this has been a truly beautiful and artful ministry at St. John's.

Although Pauline will step down from Altar Guild on Sunday, May 25, she will continue as Flower Guild Director. She says, "It's been a fulfilling experience to be a part of something so meaningful. It makes me feel more a part of the community."

# summer 2025

YOUTH SERVICE-LEARNING TRIP  
JUNE 1-7 // 7-12 GRADES



## the organizations we serve

Lori Robinson

The youth are leaving the building! From June 1-7, St. John's youth will be in Salinas, California to learn, work, and build relationships.

Among other things, our group will learn about the lives of migrant farm workers and their families, help with an elementary after school program, prepare meals at a food kitchen, visit two organic farms, learn about the local community garden movement, and hear from teachers and activists who live and work in the community.

As you know, our youth have been fundraising for this trip. The money raised helps cover the costs of food, lodging, and transportation. Additionally, some of the money we've raised will be donated to the organizations we serve. These organizations will spend time to educate us by sharing their expertise with us, and we will honor their time and expertise with both our service to them and our financial support for them.

Check out the websites of the organizations we're donating to in St. John's name:

[Dorothy's Place/Dorothy's Kitchen](#)  
[Agricultural & Land Based Training Association](#)  
[Catalan Family Farm](#)  
[Center for Land-Based Learning](#)

If you missed the opportunity to participate in one of our fundraisers, you could still support the work we're doing in Salinas by donating directly to one of these organizations. And **please join us in worship at 10am on Sunday, June 1**, when the St. John's community will bless our youth and chaperones as they head to Salinas!

## confirmation 2025-2026

[Lori Robinson](#)

**A new confirmation class will begin  
September 2025!**



We'll be using St. John's own confirmation program, Confirm Not Conform (CnC), for youth interested in exploring the faith. All youth in grades 7 and above are invited to participate.

Mentors: Adults interested in being a mentor for one of our confirmation students are invited to participate as well. You will be trained and resourced for your role of accompanying a youth on the confirmation journey,

Interested youth and adults can contact Lori Robinson, Director of Children and Youth Ministry, for more information.



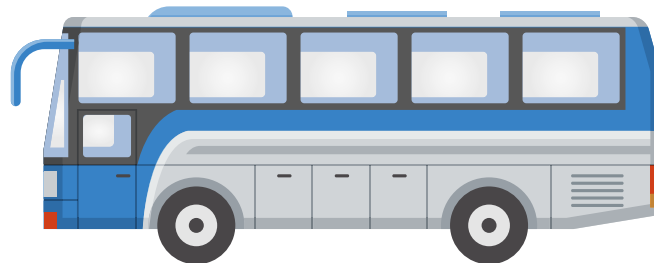
mark your calendar!  
Contact [Ken Fuller](#) or [Denise Bingham](#) if you have items to donate.



coming soon!  
Contact [Sara Evinger](#) or [Cheryl Keller](#) for more information.

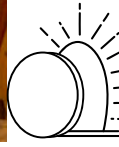
## get on the bus for justice

On May 15, Alameda County Supervisor Nikki Fortunata Bas joined Genesis leaders on a bus ride. She also signed an agreement to lead the board of supervisors to support new progressive funding initiatives for public transit, necessary to so many in our communities and one of the best strategies we have for combating climate change.



# holy week, easter, & the parish retreat

Thanks to Fred Felder, Sarah Jones, & others for sharing their photos!



THE  
END

