

Under THE OAK TREE

Q1 2025

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION FROM ST. MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

A FIRST QUARTER REFLECTION

Planting Seeds of Connection

**Lent & Easter
Highlights**

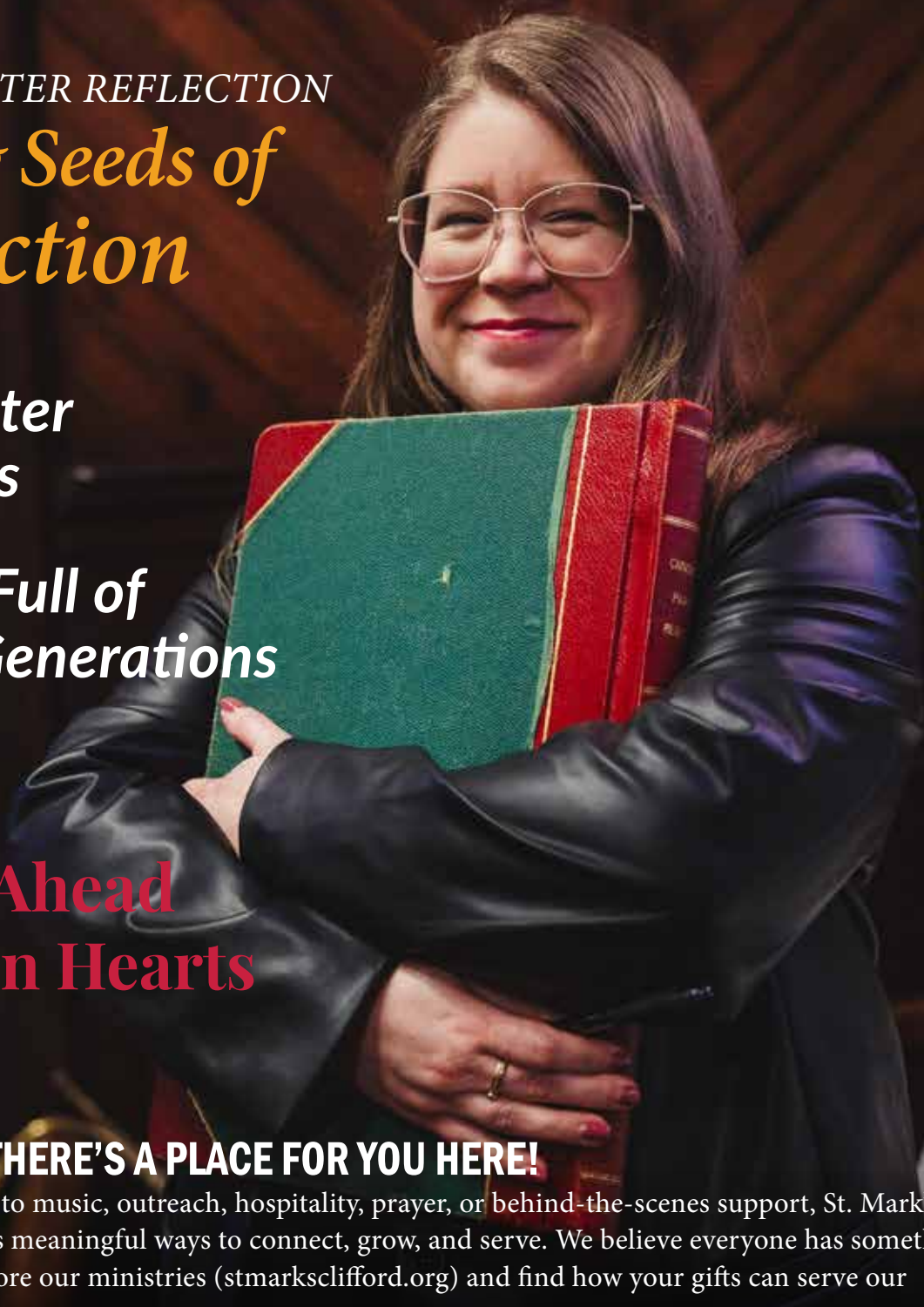
**A Sunday Full of
Spirit & Generations**

PLUS:

**Looking Ahead
with Open Hearts**

GET INVOLVED: THERE'S A PLACE FOR YOU HERE!

Whether you're drawn to music, outreach, hospitality, prayer, or behind-the-scenes support, St. Mark's Episcopal church offers meaningful ways to connect, grow, and serve. We believe everyone has something valuable to share. Explore our ministries (stmarkscifford.org) and find how your gifts can serve our community.



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A quarterly publication from
St. Mark's Episcopal Church

ST. MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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Mother Allison is the Rector of St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Clifford and Grace Episcopal Church in Massies Mill. Our churches partner to share a full-time priest. Together we are Two Small Churches with one big heart.

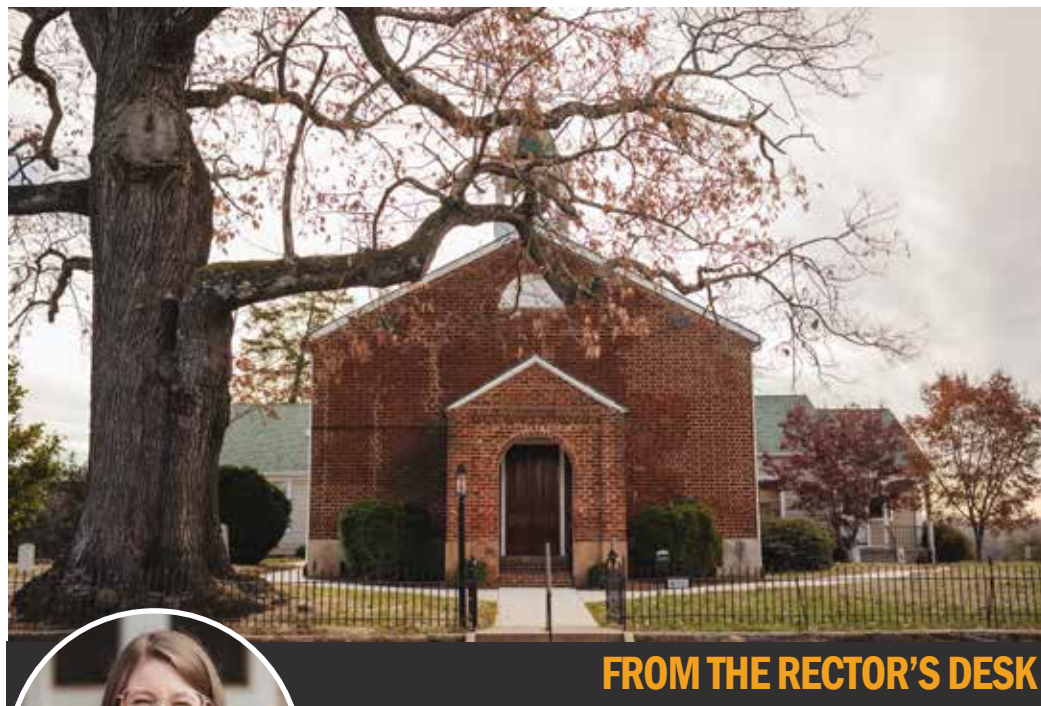
Mack Sutherland
Senior Warden

Leif Aagaard
Junior Warden

Melissa Sutherland
Parish Nurse

SUBMISSIONS

Submissions of church news, personal reflections, and upcoming events from members of St. Mark's are warmly invited. If you're interested in contributing, feel free to email Mother Allison at dearmotherallison@gmail.com.



FROM THE RECTOR'S DESK

As we reflect on the first quarter of the year, I'm filled with gratitude for the life we're living together as a church family. The Spirit is clearly moving—through laughter, learning, and new beginnings.

This is our very first issue of the St. Mark's quarterly newsletter, and I'm so glad you're holding it in your hands (or reading online!). It's one more way we celebrate and stay connected as a community and with our partners at Grace.

In February, we launched our Wednesday Night Bible Study on the Gospel of Luke, and we celebrated our youngest member's 4th birthday—complete with balloons and cake! We also welcomed Turner Faires, a talented high schooler from Roanoke, as our Worship Music Intern. He now plays keyboard twice a month at St. Mark's.

Our multigenerational spirit is thriving. On a recent Sunday, a young mom and her child read Scripture, a high schooler served as acolyte, and we were joined by youth and college musicians. We even had a high school visitor join us on her own—signs of vibrant, cross-generational life.

Ash Wednesday on March 5th marked the beginning of Lent, captured in beautiful photos featured in this issue. During Lent, we also hosted Go Now In Peace, a five-week series on end-of-life planning that welcomed members from five Episcopal churches and others in our wider community.

Perhaps most exciting is our six-month visioning process with Canon Jenni Faires. We've already held two sessions exploring how we can better serve and welcome our neighbors. Among the thoughtful post-it note responses were two from our youngest members: one simply said good, the other included a hand-drawn heart.

We'll gather again in May, and I hope you'll be part of it. This is a season of planting seeds—of connection, creativity, and vision. And I can't wait to see what blooms.

With gratitude and hope,

Mother Allison



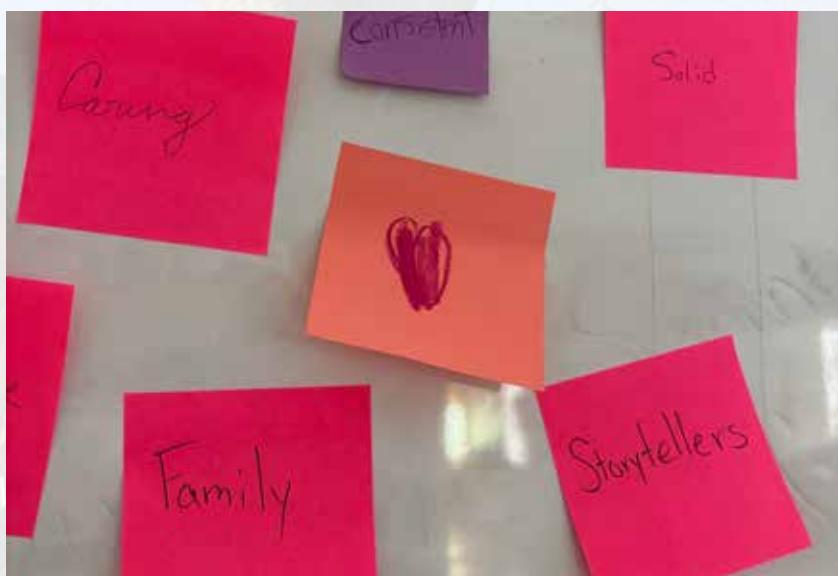
The Blessings of Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday marked the beginning of our Lenten journey with sacred stillness, quiet reflection, and a deep sense of community. Gathered in the soft glow of our worship space, we received the sign of the cross in ashes—a reminder of our humanity, our need for grace, and the gift of God's mercy.

This year's service was especially meaningful. From the powerful Scripture readings to the reverent silence during the imposition of ashes, each moment invited us to pause and remember who—and whose—we are. The photographs taken that evening beautifully captured the spirit of the service: heads bowed, hearts open, and a holy hush that filled the sanctuary.

One parishioner reflected that Ash Wednesday reminds her she is not alone on her Lenten journey, as we all walk together in the wilderness.

As we journey through Lent, Ash Wednesday stands as a sacred beginning—a blessing that centers us in God's love and calls us forward with humility and hope. ■



Looking Ahead with Open Hearts

This spring, our church began a six-month visioning process led by Canon Jenni Faires, inviting us to prayerfully reflect on who we are and how we can better serve and welcome our community. With honesty, creativity, and hope, we've gathered for two sessions so far—with a third scheduled for May.

Through group discussions, post-it notes, and thoughtful sharing, a beautiful picture is emerging of a congregation rooted in faith and ready to grow. One of the most heartwarming moments came during our "Who Are We?" activity, when two of our youngest members added their voices—one writing simply,

"good," and the other contributing a drawing of a heart. Their responses reminded us that every voice matters, and that even the smallest among us can reflect the love and spirit of the church.

This process is just beginning, but the energy and openness in the room have already been a blessing. The goal of this process is to identify ways we can grow and share our gifts with new people who are searching for a community like ours.

We hope you'll join us as we continue discerning where God is calling us next.



EASTER JOY AND COMMUNITY CONNECTION

We had a great turnout for Holy Week and Easter Sunday services, plus a joyful Easter egg hunt for our youngest parishioners, organized by one of our youth. St. Mark's also had a strong showing at the Sweet Briar Easter Sunset Service on the Boathouse deck, supporting the students who invited us—30 participated in total!



GO NOW IN PEACE: A LENTEN SERIES ON LIFE AND LEGACY

During Lent, we hosted a five-week series called Go Now In Peace, focused on end-of-life planning and decision-making. The series created a sacred space for thoughtful conversations around medical, legal, and spiritual aspects of preparing for life's final chapter. We were honored to welcome participants from five Episcopal parishes, as well as neighbors from other local churches, making it a truly collaborative and meaningful journey.



A Sunday Full of Spirit and Generations

One recent Sunday beautifully captured the heart of our church: a young mother and her 4-year-old led the Scripture readings, a high schooler served as acolyte, another played the piano, and a college student shared her gift of music on the flute. We also welcomed a visiting high schooler attending on her own. It was a joyful reminder that we are a truly multigenerational church, where all ages are not just welcomed—but fully engaged.

“These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

DEUTERONOMY 6:6-7 (NIV)



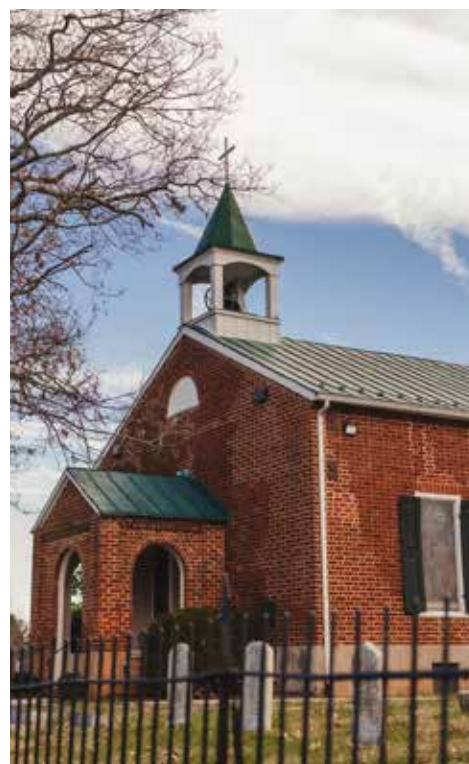
"Children remind us that church is not just a place to worship—it's a place to grow, wonder, and delight in God's love together."



We celebrated our youngest member's 4th birthday with a special coffee hour complete with balloons and cake.



Turner Faires, our new Worship Music Intern from Roanoke, brings his talent to the keyboard twice a month at St. Mark's.



Our Wednesday Night Bible Study on the Gospel of Luke began in February, bringing thoughtful reflection and lively discussion midweek.



As we welcome the warmth and renewal of spring and summer, we hope to see familiar and new faces around campus, joining us in fellowship and community.

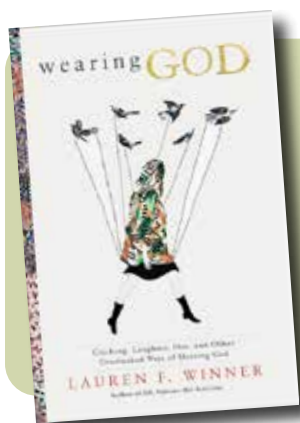


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"Your hands can make a difference—join us in serving the church and growing together in faith."



DISCOVER GOD IN NEW WAYS THIS SUMMER

JOIN US IN JULY FOR ST. MARK'S SUMMER BOOK CLUB, meeting every Wednesday at 10 a.m. as we explore *Wearing God: Clothing, Fire, and Other Overlooked Ways of Meeting God* by Lauren Winner. Beginning July 2nd, we'll dive into thought-provoking conversations about the surprising metaphors used to describe God in Scripture. Come for the coffee and community—stay for the inspiration. All are welcome, so bring a friend and join the journey!