The Herald

St. Raphael the Archangel Episcopal Church
Vol. 61 No. 5 Advent & Christmas 2026

From Our Priest in Charge

Calendar

Nov. 22 Annual Parish Meeting One service at 10 am, lunch following; see details on page 2

Nov 28 Greening of the Church, 10 am

Nov 29 Advent I 8:30 & 11 am

Dec 6 Advent II 8:30 & 11 am

Dec 13 Advent III 8:30 & 11 am

Dec 16 Blue Christmas, Noon

Dec 20 Advent IV 8:30 & 11 am

Dec 24 Christmas Eve
5:30 pm with Organ
10:30 with Brass & Choir

Dec 25 Christmas Day, 10 am

Dec 27 Christmas Lessons & Carols, one service at 10 am
Treasured Nativities on display

Jan 6 Epiphany Celebration, Noon

Dear friends,



Rev. Melanie Yankey

Advent is a season of holy tension. We prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ, Emmanuel, God with us, who came as a vulnerable child in Bethlehem. At the same time, we look toward the day when Christ will come again to make all things new. We live between these two comings, remembering what God has done and waiting for what God has promised.

That in-between place is where hope lives. Real hope is not wishful thinking or forced cheerfulness. It does not look away from the grief, fear, and brokenness around us. Real hope looks honestly at the world as it is and still trusts that God is at work, even in the dark.

Emily Dickinson put it this way:



"Hope" is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul –
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all –

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I've heard it in the chillest land -
And on the strangest Sea –
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.

For Dickinson, hope is small and steady. It doesn't need to have all the answers. It simply keeps singing, even through the storm. Perhaps that is like what Advent asks of us: to keep looking, keep listening, and keep loving while we wait for Christ.

Advent also begins a new church year. On Sunday, November 29, we start Year B of the lectionary, and most of our Sunday Gospel readings will come from Mark. Mark is the shortest of the four Gospels, just 16 chapters. It moves quickly; one of its favorite words is "immediately." And it begins not at a manger but in the wilderness, with John the Baptist crying out, "Prepare the way of the Lord." That is an Advent word if ever there was one.

I invite you to read the whole Gospel of Mark this Advent. Four chapters a week will carry you to Christmas. Read it on your own, with your family, or with a friend, and notice where you meet Jesus along the way.

As we wait and watch together, may hope perch in your soul and keep singing.

With joy and hope in Christ,

Melanie+

Annual Meeting and Pledge Ingathering – November 22

We will have **one worship service at 10:00 am.** Please plan to attend!

State of the Parish update • Communicants in good standing vote for new vestry members and deputies to the 2027 Diocesan Convention.

There will be a chili potluck luncheon following the service in the parish hall downstairs. Volunteers willing to bring a pot of chili please text Carol Summers at 859-227-1380. Otherwise bring a side or dessert.

Episcopal Church Women Christmas Brunch

The diocesan ECW Christmas Brunch and Annual Meeting will be December 5 at 10:00 am at St. Paul's, Newport. All women of the diocese are welcome! Please let Rev. Melanie know if you are interested in attending, so that we can carpool, or if enough interest, possibly rent a van.

Let's fill the Church with Poinsettias for Christmas!

It is our tradition that during the season of Advent the altar is decorated only with greenery, no flowers. Then on Christmas Eve, a festive explosion of bright red poinsettias adorns the sanctuary and nave thanks to the Altar Guild and our donors. If you are able to contribute to this effort, please mark the memo area of the check or online donation with "Christmas Flowers". Thanks!

Volunteers Needed for the Greening of the Church

Join the Altar Guild on Saturday, November 28, at 10 am, to begin decorating St. Raphael's for the Advent season. We'll set the altar with advent hangings, prepare the Advent Wreath for lighting each Sunday, & decorate our Chrismon Tree with needlepoint religious symbols & other ornaments handmade by members of the congregation. This is a fun intergenerational activity for adults and children to share, so bring the kids. Refreshments will be served. Hope to see you there

A Musical Note



Dr. Vicki Bell
Organist & Choir Director

Our St. Raphael choir is unified by one goal: to create our best music for the glory of God. We look forward to the beautiful music we are preparing for Advent and Christmas!

We follow the Episcopal tradition of choral scholars, a program that invites young and gifted musicians to participate in our choirs. Here's a brief introduction to our scholars, whom you've both seen and heard this fall.

Soprano Kendall Applegate hails from Versailles, KY. She attended Asbury University, where she earned an undergraduate degree in music. Kendall is presently completing a Master's degree in music therapy at the University of Kentucky.

Alto Ella Clark grew up in Independence, KY. She is a second-year student at the University of Kentucky, where she double-majors in vocal performance and music education.

Tenor Cory Fee is from London, KY. He is a two-time graduate of the Eastern Kentucky University Music Department, and he plans to continue his vocal studies at the doctoral level. Cory is a valued member of the Kentucky Bach Choir, a professional choir in Lexington, KY.

Bass Seth Dossa grew up in Crescent Springs, KY. Seth is a student at the University of Kentucky, where he pursues a music performance degree in tuba as well as studies in law and justice.

Help keep the Choir Scholar program going with a contribution to the Friends of Music fund!
Donate by check or online, marking the memo area with Friends of Music so it gets to the correct fund.
Consider adding a Friends of Music amount to your General Fund pledge for 2027.

We love our non-stipendiary singers too! If you are interested in singing with the choir or playing a musical instrument either with the choir or as a soloist or part of an ensemble, please let Dr. Vicki know.

Mission and Ministry

If the holidays don't instantly fill you with joy or you find yourself hitting a proverbial (or literal) wall during this time, you're not alone. Holidays can stir up grief, loneliness, stress, family conflict, anxiety, sadness, financial woes, and many other challenges.

Some overarching tips for handling holidays in a mentally healthy way:

- Set realistic expectations for yourself and others. People don't have personality transplants before holiday gatherings. Plan for how things are, and not how you dream they are.

- Give yourself the grace you'd give others. Assume the best intentions, and resist jumping to negative conclusions. God doesn't expect you to be perfect!
- Resist the temptation to add on even more responsibilities or details to your celebrations at the last minute. Make plans, but be flexible when they don't roll out precisely as you envision.The season of advent is one of spiritual waiting and anticipation, not a "to do list" season!
- You are already enough. Resist perfectionism. Resist the urge to compare yourself with others. God loves you as you are! Jesus wasn't born in a perfectly decorated home.



For those facing their first holiday season without a significant person, there are a few grief-specific tips:

- Acknowledge your feelings. Notice that sometimes grief shows up as anxiety, as anger, as frustration. It's okay in all its forms, and be prepared for those to happen.
- Have a plan for handling it when grief gets to you this season. Grief isn't linear, and it doesn't happen all at once. It can sometimes creep up on you slowly, and sometimes it jumps out and grabs you. Are you carrying tissues? Do you have an exit plan in case an event gets to you? Prepare as best you can, and resist shaming or blaming yourself for having those feelings whenever they happen.
- Create a gentle memorial to your loved one. Keep an empty seat at the table, light a specific candle, or find another way that suits you to honor the person who has died.
- Not every holiday tradition has to be kept. Decide what traditions may be too hard this year. Create new traditions and routines as needed.
- Decide what your boundaries are in advance. How will you handle the questions from others? Will you want to collect memories others share with you? How long do you want to stay somewhere that your loved one may be the topic of conversation? Think through as much as you can in advance.
- Attend our Blue Christmas service, so you can experience the holiday in the gentle, loving way that advent expects.

This isn't an exhaustive list, and there are a lot of great resources on mental health and the holidays at MHANational.org and NAMI.org, among others.

Wishing you the best Advent and Christmas season you can have,

Marcie Timmerman
Mental Health Advocate



Money Matters

It's that time of year again—when letters, sermons, reminders, and cheerful handshakes all point toward an appeal to share more of yourself, including your financial support, with St. Raphael's. If you're anything like me, it's a season you might dread or try to hide from. But it is also a time to reflect on what this church community means to us and how we can best support it.

Recently, Rev. Melanie asked me a seemingly simple question: *"What keeps you coming to St. Raphael's?"* I expected to toss out a few standard "churchy" words and call it a day. But my real answer was simply that St. Raphael's feels like home.

In some ways, that feeling is literal—several of my family members reside in our columbarium. In other ways, it's like a family home I don't visit as often as I should, yet I always leave feeling more grounded and secure. Sometimes I see old friends, sometimes I make a new one; sometimes I find words of wisdom, sometimes I get annoyed, and sometimes I feel nothing at all. Throw in the occasional nap, and it really is quite a bit like home.

When I returned from church the morning I wrote this, my son greeted me with the news that our property taxes were due—a not-so-subtle reminder that homes come with costs. Keeping our church home going also requires resources: financial contributions, as well as our members' time and talent.

The good news is that we are doing well on both fronts. Our operating expenses are lower than last year, and the DreamCare Learning Center helps offset our financial costs considerably through rent. We are also blessed with talented parishioners who maintain our building, prepare our services, sing, teach, and volunteer in countless ways.

It might be tempting to say, "Things are looking good, let's just stay the course." But settling can lead to trouble. In fact, many of our members have not changed their pledge in over five years. We need to focus on what we do best—being a spiritual home that both supports and challenges us. What new ministries can help us grow rather than just maintain? Furthermore, many of our dedicated volunteers have been serving for many years. We need new people with fresh ideas and energy to step up as active leaders in our parish.

For 2027, our projected operating expenses are about **$205,000**. Assuming DreamCare continues to rent our space, we need to raise approximately **$165,000** in pledges. For context, our 2026 budget included $153,000 in pledges, leaving a **$12,000 gap**. While we typically cover this difference through plate offerings, holiday gifts, and unpledged donations, relying on that only brings us to our absolute baseline.

I believe we can do better—in what we pledge, in the time and talent we offer, and in what St. Raphael's can provide for our members, our neighbors, and all who seek a spiritual home.

My ask is simple: Please look at your contribution from last year and consider increasing your pledge by **3%**. (I humbly note that this increase is less than the rise in my own property taxes, and less than the annual Social Security Cost of Living Adjustment!).

Thank you for your generosity and commitment to our community.
Tony LoBianco
St. Raphael Vestry

A View from the Pew

Bishops I Have Known, Part 2

Douglas Hahn was consecrated as the seventh bishop in 2013. His term ended abruptly in March 2016 when he was suspended by Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, and later resigned. The church newsletter is not the place to review this incident. I'm not here to hurt anyone. If you want to know more, do research and read newspapers of the time (available online).

Instead I would like to write about a pleasant event at St. R that involved the bishop: the wedding of Johnnie Ross and Julie Johnston in June 2015 during a Sunday service. Rules of the Church require that a a priest must obtain permission from his bishop to marry, and the bishop must perform the ceremony. But the bishop's schedule is crowded, which may be why they decided to have the wedding in the middle of a service. Neither Johnnie nor Hahn had actually done a service like that, but they worked out an order of service within the Prayer Book Eucharistic service. Altar Guild, servers, ushers, acolytes all rose to the occasion. A friend of the bride arranged flowers. Before the wedding, someone helping the arranger set a vase of flowers on top of the grand piano. When the organist Melinda came in to warm up, she couldn't raise the lid of the piano, which has to be done to play one. The vase was quickly moved. I went into the sacristy where the bishop was waiting and told him what happened. He said "If they put superglue on the bottom of the vase, it wouldn't fall." I said, "If it ever happens again, I'll tell them you said that."

Meanwhile, in Mozambique, the Rt. Rev. Mark Van Koevering, an American, was serving as Bishop of Niassa 2003-2015. For personal reasons, he chose to return with his family to the U.S. He was assistant bishop in Charleston, WV, when he was called by the Diocese of Lexington in February 2018 as provisional bishop, becoming Diocesan bishop in 2019. At the same time, the Rev. Canon Dr. Helen Van Koevering was called to be our new rector. As I think I said before, God does know what he's doing.

It was his particular challenge to lead us through an unforeseen, unheard of, impossible to plan for crisis: Covid. Strangely, it seems longer ago than it was and yet at the time seemed endless. In March 2020 the pandemic reached the US. Bishops could not make their own decisions about what became known as social distancing. All churches were forced to abide by state rules and federal guidelines. Besides all of us were very much afraid. Livestreaming began. By March 2021 vaccination of most people made it possible for social life to begin again, all wearing masks of course. As we returned to indoor worship, we went through a series of steps affecting worship. At first, no hymnbooks in the pews and only the choir could sing—singing was thought to spread germs more than speaking. First there was only bread for the Eucharistic, and when wine was permitted, it was in individual cups like the Baptists, not from a chalice. The Peace has still not returned to what it once was. Few people leave their seats but we do shake hands now.

Bishop Mark retired in June after eight years as bishop. In January, the Rev. David Sibley will become the Rt. Rev. David Sibley, ninth bishop of Lexington. The date is determined by when the presiding bishop can be present. There's a rule about that. He will be our youngest bishop. Don Wimberly, next youngest, was 47 when he became bishop.

The past is prologue. The future begins tomorrow.

Rose Canon–*Rose Canon*

Around the Diocese

A New Year in the Spirit

Youth in grades 7 – 12 are eligible to take part in A New Year in the Spirit, a Cathedral Domain camp experience from December 27 – 30. More detains and registration info at https://www.cathedraldomain.org/new-year-in-the-spirit

Symbols of Office Fund

As we prepare for our bishop's ordination, the Transition Committee, together with the Standing Committee, has established a **Symbols of Office Fund**. Individuals, congregations, organizations, and dioceses are invited to contribute. Scan the QR code at right for online giving, or you can send checks to the Diocese of Lexington, P.O. Box 610, Lexington, KY 40588-0610. Memo: Symbols of Office Fund.



Photo Gallery

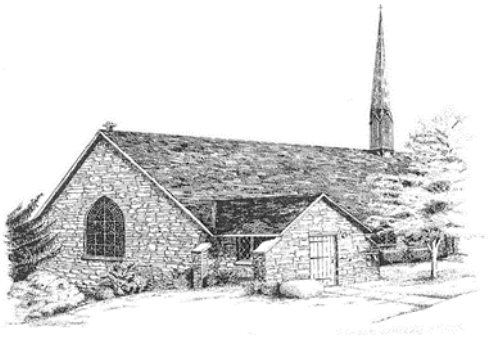
TRUNK OR TREAT





Celebrate Advent and Christmas with us!

Nov 29, Dec 6, 13, 20	Eucharist Services at 8:30 and 11 am
Dec 16, Noon	Blue Christmas Eucharist
Dec 24, 5:30 pm	Christmas Eve Family Service
Dec 24, 10:30 pm	Christmas Eve Service with Brass and Choir
Dec 25, 10 am	Christmas Day Service
Dec 27, 10 am	Christmas Lessons & Carols
January 6, 2027	Epiphany Celebration, Noon



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