

The Second Sunday of Lent 2025

Dear people of God,

Allow me to begin with the Collect for this week, which reminds us that we are all works in progress:

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

As you might know, our bishop has been on sabbatical for the past couple of months. On February 12, she broke her sabbatical to give me a call. She called to offer me a short-term position on the diocesan staff as the interim Canon to the Ordinary. Now, a canon, in this case means “a member of the clergy on the staff of a cathedral or diocese.” (*An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church* by Slocum and Armentrout) The “ordinary” refers to the diocesan bishop. In this specific case the bishop needs me to serve for three months (April through June) regarding transitions, which means helping churches find clergy to serve them. This will be a ¼ time position and will involve once-a-month trips to Helena, along with some other occasional travel. I consulted with the vestry before accepting the position and have already begun some of the work.

We are now deep into the Lenten season, so I thought it was worth alerting everyone of Holy Week services. We will celebrate Maundy Thursday on April 17 at 6 pm with Holy Eucharist and will honor Good Friday on April 18 at noon. **Easter Sunday will be celebrated with Holy Eucharist on Sunday, April 20 at 10 am.** All services will be in Ocee Johnson Chapel at St. John’s United and available online on YouTube Live.

Shortly after Christmas, Nancy Doerr told me about a small pantry that St. John’s United offers for its residents. The goal is to provide light shopping and entertainment options for residents who cannot easily get out on their own or are a little short of funds at the moment. I reached out in January to find out what sort of things would be helpful and which would be... less helpful. Well, the other day we got an answer in the form of two different lists. One is very specific and focused on recent requests/needs. The other is much broader and more long-term. So, I combined the two and you will find it enclosed with this letter. This is just one small way we can help our neighbors and partners and continue to live out our commitment to “seek and serve Christ in all persons.”

As I mentioned earlier, Easter is coming! During the Eastern season I would like to offer a book study on *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The author was one of the greatest martyrs of the 20th century and this is his pivotal work. Amazon describes it as, “*The Cost of Discipleship* is a compelling statement of the demands of sacrifice and ethical consistency from a man whose life and thought were exemplary articulations of a new type of leadership inspired by the Gospel, and

imbued with the spirit of Christian humanism and a creative sense of civic duty.” I am not sure if this will be an in-person discussion or online but welcome the suggestions or insight of anyone interested. Please reach out to me if you are interested. This isn’t a huge book and doesn’t require any deep theological understanding, just an interest to learn more.

Finally, on behalf of the vestry I wanted to share some important news. After over twenty-five years of service to Saint Stephen’s, Doris Gerstner has decided it is time to retire as the treasurer. There are not enough words in the English language to describe Doris’s service to our church.

This also means we are in need of someone to serve as treasurer going forward. We are going to pay a bookkeeping service and payroll service to handle a lot of the grunt work. So, all that the new treasurer should have to do is report to the vestry on the finances and generally just share information.

In closing, I ask for your continued prayers for those on our parish cycle of prayer. I also ask that you pray for all those who are impacted by conflict around the world, especially in Ukraine and the Holy Land. Please also pray for refugees around the world and those who seek to help them. Finally, please reach out to me or the office if you ever need anything.

Lovingly yours in Christ,

Father Stephen