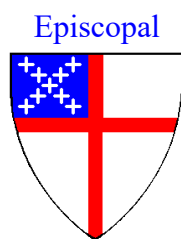


St. Alban's Episcopal Church
1308 Meadowbrook Drive
Syracuse, NY 13224-1718
Website: stalbansyracuse.org
Facebook: stalbanschurchsyr
Church email: stalbans.syr@gmail.com



Emmanuel Episcopal Church
400 W. Yates Street
East Syracuse, NY 13057
Facebook: emmanueleastsyracuse
Email: emmanuel13057@gmail.com
Website: emmanueleastsyracuse.org

The Rev. Julie E. Calhoun-Bryant, Rector
Email: julieatalban@gmail.com
Cell: 315-416-7133

The Rev. Julie E. Calhoun-Bryant,
Priest-in-Charge

January 23, 2024

Dear People of God,

I can't wait to see you this weekend! The nebulizer that arrived last Thursday did the trick and I am much better, thanks be to God.

January 25 marks the end of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity by celebrating the Conversion of St. Paul. Before his conversion he was Saul of Tarsus, a pharisee who is said to have studied under the great rabbi Gamaliel. As Saul he was so zealous in defending his faith that he actively sought permission from the chief priests to go out and arrest Christians. He was present at the stoning of Stephen, the first known Christian martyr, and traveled widely with letters from the authorities empowering him to arrest any Christians he found in the synagogues and bring them in chains to judgment in Jerusalem. The nascent Christian community was terrified of him.

One day when he was traveling to Damascus to arrest Christians there for the heresy of proclaiming Jesus as the Christ he and his traveling companions were blinded by a light and fell to the ground. A voice came from heaven saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The voice answered, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Saul was left blind by the light and the men with him, who heard Jesus' voice, led him by the hand to Damascus. For three days he went without sight and neither ate nor drank. (Acts 9) Only after a Christian named Ananias, who was instructed by Jesus to go to Saul and pray for his sight to be restored, was Saul able to see again.

As Saul he used his ardent devotion to God, his years of education in the Law of Moses and the Hebrew Scriptures, and his growing reputation to stamp out the Christian sect before it had a chance to take root. Heart, mind, soul, and strength were harnessed for this mission. As Paul he used his ardent devotion to God, his years of education in the Law of Moses and the Hebrew Scriptures, and his growing reputation to plant new churches in city after city, from Jerusalem to Rome. The theological teaching in his Letter to the Romans, the practical advice he gives in correcting the behavior of pagans turned Christian in Corinth, the joy he expresses in the faith of the Christians in Philippi during a time of persecution echoes through the ages and informs our faith today.

However, in this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity the story of Saul/Paul's conversion is a cautionary tale that speaks to the disunity of Christians in America today. As Saul persecuting Jews who proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah/Christ he got it wrong. It wasn't until Jesus himself told him to stop what he was doing, and then left him blind for three days to rethink his life's work, that Saul became Paul. His efforts to stamp out Christianity before it took hold were not God's will. Yes, Paul "saw the light" and used his considerable skills to grow the Church, but before that he caused many people much harm in the name of God.

Just because other leaders agree with you and give you the authority to carry out "God's work" does not necessarily mean you are doing God's will. The brutality carried out in the name of Jesus Christ throughout these two thousand years is horrific. Christians have tortured and killed other Christians for not believing in and worshipping Jesus Christ "correctly". Today in America Christians don't burn each other at the stake, instead they "massacre" one another in mass media. We demonize and stereotype. We talk at each other instead of with each other. There are profound differences of opinion in our understandings of God's will for American Christians. Take the issue of abortion. Is it always wrong? What exceptions are morally acceptable? Is it morally acceptable to perform an abortion or to help a woman cross state lines to undergo one? What are the Christians who oppose abortion doing to help the mothers and babies who are born in less than ideal circumstances? Such deep questions will not be solved by sound bites and tweets. Nor will it be solved by self-righteous liberal and conservative Christians who refuse to listen to one another with the goal of better understanding the other side.

It's human nature to gather in opposing groups and rally around an enemy. But this is not how God created us. This is not God's will for the Church universal. Jesus Christ died for each and every one of us. We all are beloved by God. I close with this prayer.

"O God, the creator and preserver of humankind, we humbly beseech you for all sorts and conditions of men and women everywhere; that you would be pleased to make your ways known to them, your saving health to all nations.

"More especially we pray for your holy Church universal; that it may be so guided and governed by your good Spirit, that all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth, and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life. Finally, we commend to your tender goodness all those who are in any ways afflicted or distressed, in mind, body, or estate; that it may please you to comfort and relieve them according to their several necessities, giving them patience under their sufferings, and a happy outcome out of all their afflictions. And this we beg for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen." (Prayer Book, page 814, language updated.)

Mother Julie+

Winter Mission Project at Both Parishes
InterFaith Works Food Drive
For 25+ Local food pantries

January - March

Pasta and Sauce
Canned Fruits
Peanut Butter
Jelly
Canned Vegetables
Soups/Ramen
Ensure
Cake mix/frosting



Canned Tuna/Chicken
Vegetable Oil
Cereal/Oatmeal
Baby formula
Pancake mix/syrup
Flour and sugar
Mayo
Shelf Stable Milk

This Weekend's Events



**Spaghetti Dinner
and
Game Night
at
Emmanuel
6:00 p.m.**



ST. ALBAN'S ANNUAL MEETING

The Holy Eucharist and Annual Meeting are interwoven and begin at 9:30 a.m. Zoom Codes: 826 9515 6305 & 446765

Nominations

Warden for 3 Year Term (Junior, Senior, Emerita) - Gina Odell

2 Vestry Members for 3 Year Terms - Bobbi Lombardo and Wendy Wickenden

Continental Breakfast provided by the Vestry.