Happy New Years! I hope you are all off to a great start for 2015. New years is always a time for me, as for so many people, to reflect on the past year, and begin to set a direction for the new. Looking back, 2014 was one heck of a year here at St. Mark’s. Twelve months ago I could not have even imagined all the ministries and volunteers that are happening around here. Two Saints Kitchen continues to feed hungry people in Jonesboro; worship and music ministries are great and getting even better; Christian Education and EYC on Wednesday evenings give meaningful spiritual contact to our youth; our garden ministry; 20’s and 30’s; men’s club and ECW - and there are so many other ministries and groups that I have not mentioned which continue to be the life force of St. Mark’s. Attendance is up almost 16% over last year, and while at the beginning of 2014 we had a financial setback with several families moving away from Jonesboro, we finished the year stronger than I expected. I cannot say thank you enough for all you do and give here at St. Mark’s.

I want to say a special thank you to everyone who sang, played, and gave of their time to make our Christmas services amazing. Our choirs, Rhonda, Johnny and our vergers, altar guild- thank you all so much for the quality of worship you make possible.

What will God do here in 2015? Do I dare even guess? When I start to make my plans for the next year, I always seem to underestimate what will happen here. I do have a few thoughts as we start this new year, however; here are some things we will be working on: The first big thing is a new Sunday afternoon Eucharist service. We have not figured out all the details yet, but this service will be designed for families with sensory sensitive children, especially those with autism or other special needs. Keep a watch out for announcements, and if you want to help with facilitating this (extra eyes and hands, music, etc), please let me know.

Of course 2015 will bring its challenges for us as well: continued upkeep of our building and air conditioners (not very glamorous, but necessary), servicing our small remodeling debt, expanding and continuing current ministries, and discerning what the future will hold for our curate position. Each of these are indeed challenging, but let us never forget they are the type of problems we want- these are growth challenges (the good kind!). No one ever said change and growth were easy! Yet surely these are the types of challenges that we can face head-on as we begin another year of being the welcoming church with an ancient tradition here in Jonesboro.

I have faith that next year, I will be writing something similar, surprised by what God can do with a few hundred willing and dedicated hearts. May God continue to bless this church, and I look forward to another year.

God bless, Jesse +
The Curate’s Corner....

Here at St. Mark’s, I’ve been seeing the light of hope shining everywhere: the garden lies dormant for now, with dreams of seed catalogues dancing in its head. The 20s/30s group has taken on a life of its own, one of vitality and openness and welcome, a solid presence in a typically under-represented demographic in religious affiliation. Two Saints had a Christmas dinner that brought together many folks, and my own dad came from Kansas to be a part of it (well, and to visit me.)

Starting this week on Wednesday nights, some of the youth here are choosing to participate in Confirm Not Conform, led by the unflappable Lori and Philip Poston and me. CnC is way more than a road to confirmation: it’s a program designed to help students connect meaningfully with their faith and community. It is not a Bible quiz or a "getting saved" enterprise, but an opportunity to help youth articulate their faith, face their doubts and questions, and find a community of other people doing the same thing.

The curriculum includes discussions of our tradition and Christian belief, trips to other places of worship to experience different religions and denominations, discussions of the world’s needs and how youth can make a difference through faith in action, and more.

Besides me and the Postons, there will be mentors among the wider community of St. Mark’s who will be there to offer encouragement and support to participants. Like I said, it’s far more than a road to confirmation -- it’s a way for the whole community of St. Mark’s, regardless of age or background, to connect and support one another.

All of this is saying to our youth that in order to make it in the spiritual life, we need others. Our salvation isn't found in a formulaic prayer, but in the person of Jesus Christ. Our faith cannot be reduced to rote memorization; it must also be rooted in community, aware of others, and ready for the work of reconciliation and justice. "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried," GK Chesterton wrote. What have you found difficult and left untried? What is God calling you to strive for in the coming year?

May the light of this season of Epiphany guide you.

peace,
Amber
Christian Education

Happy and Holy new year! St. Mark’s Christian Education program for children has been blessed in so many ways. The teaching staff and our families have been committed and faithful to this program.

Before the Christmas and New Year break, we had our Family Christmas gathering on December 17. Parents provided finger foods for our party and the kids had a great time playing LEFT, RIGHT, NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS GAME with the dollar exchange gifts they brought.

Christian Ed will resume after our Christmas and New Year’s break on Wednesday, January 7 at 6:00pm. We will begin the new year by celebrating Epiphany with a special activity with the children. So, if your school age child has not been participating in St. Mark’s Children’s Christian Education sessions, we would like to invite you to check us out. We meet on Wednesday evenings from 6-7:30pm and open to all school aged children from grades K - 6.

We are thankful for the parishioners and families who have provided meals for the youth on Wednesday evenings. We will need your continued support during the upcoming year. We ask parents and parishioners to please consider either providing a simple meal or making a monetary donation to help purchase food items for the kids who participate in Christian Ed or young people who participate in youth group. Please contact Father Jesse or Rose Mary (935-0236) for more information.

Children’s Christmas Pageant

St. Mark’s Christmas Pageant was great! The children did a fantastic job of bringing the story of the Nativity to life. Special thanks to Krystin McClellan, Stephanie Matthews, Matthew Stone and Marya Langford for all their hard work and for all the children who participated in the pageant. May our great God bless you all richly for all the good work you do.

HAPPY NEW YEAR from ST. MARK’S ECW!!

ECW will meet Saturday, January 10th at 9:30 for our January meeting. We will be electing officers for the coming year. We will also be planning our Book and Bake sale.

ECW’s annual Book and Bake sale will be held again this year in conjunction with the Men’s Club’s Pancake Breakfast on Saturday, January 31. Please consider baking something for us to sell, or donating used books, CDs, Puzzles or Videos. If you are setting aside items for donation, please do not bring them to Church until the week before the sale, since storage space is limited.

Our meetings are always fun, and a nice way to start off the New Year with the women of St Mark’s. Reconnect with some long-time friends and make some new ones. We have a wonderful group of women at St. Mark’s.
A NEW YEAR, NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Happy New Year to one and all! Did you make a New Year’s resolution? I did: to make Jonesboro a more welcoming place to live. The month of November at Helping Neighbors had some impressive stats: 879 households were served (141 of those were new families), 2326 individuals received food, 29,278 pounds of food went out. St. Mark’s went above and beyond during 2014 with monetary and food gifts to Helping Neighbors. ASU organizations which Philip Tew was affiliated with had an awesome end-of-year food drive – over 6400 cans of food. St. Mark’s really stepped forward at the end of November with the 15 Can Challenge – over 1600 cans of food. The month of December brings out lots of people to try to help those less fortunate in our community: buying toys, food bags, clothing drives, etc. – but it also brings out lots more people in need because of children being out of school for such a long vacation. Unfortunately, too often people go back to their normal lives and routines in January and forget about the ongoing needs in the community. We’ll have to stock all of our shelves and freezers to take care of the January folk, so please add an act of generosity to your weekly routine: buy a few cans of beans, peanut butter or canned meat to bring on Sundays so that we truly will have a better community. Blessings to you and your family.

Barbara

Santa was very good to the children and staff of St. Mark’s Day school. The holidays were a well deserved break! We are excited to see all of our children returning and welcome a few new faces as well!

Remember that St. Mark’s follows the Jonesboro Public School closings for inclement weather. Also be sure to "like" us on Facebook for "up to date" announcements and information. School will be closed Monday, January 19th, in observance of Martin Luther King Day. We will be starting our enrollment process for the "Summer Program" so be watching your backpacks for information.

Thanks, Peggy
January Birthdays

1/04  Bill McCaughn
1/04  Kailey Ferguson
1/04  Linda Cobb
1/05  Robin Dauer
1/06  Ann Fritz
1/07  Dennis Zolper
1/07  Donna Gilbert
1/07  Ashlyn Moore
1/12  Alyson Gill
1/16  Joey Murphy, Jr.
1/16  Katie Toombs
1/16  Sam Fagan
1/20  Dan Bishop
1/20  Noe Heim
1/21  Phillip Poston
1/21  Bradley Reed
1/21  Adele Johnson
1/23  Matthew Dauer
1/24  Kelly Welch
1/25  Hanne Heim
1/25  Beth Smith
1/26  Dee Dee Hudson
1/26  C.W. Toombs
1/26  Gabriel Looney
1/26  Gianna Hudson
1/28  Robin Robinson
1/30  Carroll Scroggin
1/30  Rhonda Dauer
1/31  Timothy Penley

January Anniversaries

1/02  Erik and Donna Gilbert
1/29  Todd and Kelly Welch

Two Saints’ Special Christmas Meal

On Saturday, December 27th, Two Saints served a Christmas meal. Team 6 lead that week, and desserts, a soufflé, and all manner of extra kitchen work was brought by other teams chipping in; there were even to go bags of cookies at the door. Helping the ministry grow even larger are the dedicated members of St. Paul's Methodist who drive the van weekly to bring patrons in.

The meal was a huge success with 51 people dining in, and 10 carry out trays. Other than a slight miscalculation on ham cooking on my part, the meal went off without a hitch. There were rave reviews by the patrons, and I hope we can make this a Christmas tradition for years to come.

Brandon Johnson
Upcoming Events

Jan 6   Epiphany Service of Light
Jan 10 ECW Meeting
Jan 11 Coffee with the Rector
Jan 15 Men’s Club Meeting
Jan 18 Annual Meeting and Potluck Luncheon
Jan 24 Robert Burns Night
Jan 25 Vestry Meeting
Jan 31 Pancake Day

Pancake Day
Saturday January 31st.
6:30 to 11:00

10 tickets will be mailed to everyone.
Everyone is encouraged to sell or buy 10 tickets.
Ticket price is $6.00.

Financial Update

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