

InSpire

Our transition process, revealed

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On Saturday, October 18, Resurrection's Vestry met with the Rev'd Will Dickinson, the Diocesan Transition Minister, to discuss what happens between now and our call to a new priest after Rev'd Jo's retirement on April 12.

The first thing we learned is that the appropriate vocabulary to use for this period is not transition or search, but discernment. We should not be surprised; after all this is an Episcopal Church! And this is good news for Resurrection. We have a robust history of

successful discernment. Remember we spent a year in congregational discussions (right, discernment) before committing to our redevelopment project. And more recently, we discerned a desire to increase our impact in our community with the Abundance Ministry and a focus on feeding programs, financial assistance, education, and new initiatives. And the Congregational Vitality Survey has provided much useful information about who we are.

What will be different about this particular discernment? Resurrection's future will be led by us working with our new priest and that priest will be called only when we decide who we want to be going forward. This period of discernment will require the active engagement of everyone who loves Resurrection and is committed to its future. Expect surveys. Expect congregational discussions. Expect individual conversations. And expect prayers.

(Continued on page 5)



The Rev'd Jo Belser

"My advice to you this Advent is to linger a little longer to savor the in-between time."

Our in-between times

A reflection on how Advent and the time between rectors are similar (and not!)

This issue of *InSpire* is chock full of information about transition, in two senses. The first type of transition we are undergoing is the transition from my time as your priest to who comes after I retire in mid-April. Kat Turner, for example, reports ([page 1](#)) about the diocesan transition process we are undertaking, and also what you have shared about what you value at Resurrection ([page 8](#)).

Because I am the one retiring, my transition tasks are different from the parish's. My tasks are to get the process going, which is almost done, and to focus on both the main work of the parish and leaning into a good "goodbye." We can accomplish this latter aspect of transition together by living faithfully day-to-day and sharing memories with each other, looking back as we lean forward together. Then, too, this is a time to name and let go of old hurts, if there are any, by sharing them with me so that I can make amends.

Then, too, Advent is itself another kind of transition. Judy Isaacs reflects ([page 6](#)) on Advent as a time to prepare for "a new way of living and seeing." And our Racial Justice and Healing Team provides an Advent Calendar ([page 4](#)) for us to use to reflect on justice while we await anew the coming of Jesus.

The tasks of Advent can be useful for us in our clergy transition. The main task of Advent is to wait for Jesus' birth, not to rush through to achieve the goal (Christmas!) but to recognize that the time of waiting helps prepare us for reaching the goal.

Just as we create space for and anticipate Jesus' birth during Advent, we can also consciously create space for and anticipate a new rector to lead Resurrection. This is a sacred pause for reflection, learning, and deepening our faith.

We find hope in God by remembering his promises and anticipating his future return, knowing also that

God gives Resurrection hope and a future.

We reflect on the life and example of Jesus to prepare our hearts for Christmas. We also reflect on the life of our parish these past 11 years as we look to the future.

There is one key difference that I must share, though, between waiting for Christ's coming and waiting for your new Rector: Don't confuse the two, as this will surely set you up for disappointment.

My advice to you this Advent is to linger a little longer to savor the in-between time. And too, let's give thanks together on November 27.

~ Rev'd Jo

Thanksgiving Day November 27



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9:30 am
Come early
for coffee/tea

10:00 am
Worship

11:00 am
Stay after
for coffee/tea

Church of the Resurrection

2800 Hope Way, Alexandria 22311

Expect an intimate time of giving thanks and sharing joy this Thanksgiving Day.

Logos

The ordering of intelligence woven into creation

On our way home, my wife Emily and I witnessed the destruction of a wooded grove—the systematic felling of elder trees to make way for new houses. That moment of trauma has stayed with us, pressing together several strands of thought that had been quietly growing in the background.

Zoë Schlanger's book, *The Light Eaters: How the Unseen World of Plant Intelligence Offers a New Understanding of Life on Earth* (2024) brings clarity and wonder to the emerging field of plant intelligence.

Her work joins a growing chorus of scientists and writers who argue that plants are not passive background scenery but active participants in the drama of life. This doesn't mean plants are conscious in the human sense, but it does suggest they possess a form of **distributed intelligence**, a way of sensing, responding, and adapting that challenges our anthropocentric definitions of mind.

The Light Eaters feels like a continuation of Charles Darwin's botanical curiosity, updated with modern science and a touch of reverence. Where Darwin saw the root tip as a proto-brain, Schlanger invites us to see the entire plant kingdom as a vast, interconnected intelligence—an "other mind" that has been quietly shaping Earth for hundreds of millions of years.

For communities of faith, this resonates with the idea of creation as a communion of beings, each with its own dignity and role in God's unfolding story. In Christian theology, *logos* is the Word through which all things were made (John 1:1–3). It is both rational principle and living presence, the ordering intelligence woven into creation. If we take seriously the insights of Zoë Schlanger—that plants sense, adapt, and communicate in ways that border on intelligence—then we might see them as **living expressions of the logos**.

- **Photosynthesis as Word-made-energy:** Plants translate light into life. In a sense, they are interpreters of the divine Word, converting the radiance of the sun into the tangible bread of existence.
- **Root networks as communion:** Just as the *logos* binds creation together, plant root systems and fungal mycorrhizal webs knit ecosystems into a single, responsive body.
- **Memory and response as echo of reason:** When plants "remember" drought or stress, they embody a kind of logos-driven continuity—an order that persists across time.

The vision of *logos* converges on a radical humility: the mind of God may be refracted through forms of life we once

dismissed as mute. Therefore:

- **Ethically**, we are called to treat them not as raw material but as fellow witnesses to the Word.
- **Spiritually**, they become teachers of patience, rootedness, and quiet resilience.
- **Liturgically**, the bread and wine of Eucharist—fruits of plant intelligence—become even more profound: the gifts of creation, transfigured by the Word, returning us to communion.

Closing thoughts:

May the grief of felled trees become in us a deeper reverence for what still stands.

May the silence of the woods teach us to listen for the Word in leaf and root.

And may our stewardship be not only practical but prayerful, so that future generations may walk among living witnesses and hear creation's hymn of praise.

My meditative prayer-blessing that weaves together Zoë Schlanger's *The Light Eaters*, Darwin's botanical wonder, and the Johannine vision of *logos* is [on page 6](#).

~ David Ewing



David Ewing

"If we take seriously the insights of Zoë Schlanger ... then we might see [plants] as living expressions of the logos."

Our Advent calendar

Our Racial Justice and Healing Team has created an Advent (and Christmas) Calendar for us to use this year.

Their calendar begins on November 30, the First Sunday of Advent this year, and continues through The Epiphany on January 6—although only a portion of their full calendar is shown here. The December issue of *InSpire* will include the rest of the calendar.

The Racial Justice and Healing Team is busy identifying activities to suggest for many of the days on the calendar. Each week, *e-Notes* will include active links to that week's portion of the calendar to help you reflect and act on racial justice and healing as you await and then rejoice and act on Christ's coming anew into our world.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
NOV. 30 1st SUNDAY OF ADVENT	DEC. 1 ROSA PARKS DAY START YOUR REVERSE ADVENT CALENDAR FOR THE FOOD PANTRY WORLD AIDS DAY	DEC. 2 INTERNAT'L DAY FOR THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY	DEC. 3 INTERNAT'L DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES NAT'L ROOF OVER YOUR HEAD DAY	DEC. 4 WORLD WILDLIFE CONSERVA- TION DAY	DEC. 5 INTERNAT'L VOLUNTEERS DAY WORLD SOIL DAY	DEC. 6 ST. NICHOLAS OF MYRA DAY
DEC. 7 2nd SUNDAY OF ADVENT	DEC. 8 BODHI DAY (Commemorates the enlightenment of Buddha)	DEC. 9 GENOCIDE PREVENTION DAY	DEC. 10 HUMAN RIGHTS DAY	DEC. 11 MARTYRS OF EL MOZOTE (EL SALVADOR 1981) UNICEF ESTABLISHED	DEC. 12 INTERNAT'L UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE DAY MOUNT VERNON BY CANDLELIGHT (TICKETS REQUIRED) OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE DAY	DEC. 13 MOUNT VERNON BY CANDLELIGHT (TICKETS REQUIRED) ST. LUCIA DAY
DEC. 14 3rd SUNDAY OF ADVENT HANNUKAH #1 AUDUBON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT DEL RAY MENORAH LIGHTING NAT'L ENERGY CONSERVA- TION DAY	DEC. 15 HANNUKAH #2 AUDUBON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT BILL OF RIGHTS DAY	DEC. 16 HANNUKAH #3 AUDUBON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT SOUTH AFRICAN DAY OF RECONCILIATION	DEC. 17 HANNUKAH #4 AUDUBON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT CLEAN AIR DAY	DEC. 18 HANNUKAH #5 AUDUBON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT INTERNAT'L MIGRANTS DAY	DEC. 19 HANNUKAH #6 AUDUBON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT MOUNT VERNON BY CANDLELIGHT (TICKETS REQUIRED)	DEC. 20 HANNUKAH # 7 AUDUBON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Thank you, Resurrection, for “getting on the bus”



The 20 elected state and local officials who attended the October 19 Homes for All assembly in Herndon where we advocated for attainable housing

Our transition process, revealed

(Continued from page 1)

While the timetable is not run like a train schedule, we can expect certain things to happen in a particular order.

Step 1: The Vestry appoints a Discernment Committee. This will occur at a special Vestry meeting on Sunday evening, November 9. In preparation, the Vestry developed a list of candidates and Senior Warden David Ewing contacted those people to see if they feel called to serve. The qualities that the Vestry looked for were deep empathetic listening, no preconceived agenda, ability to keep confidences, and willingness to commit time and energy to the process. While individuals leaving the Vestry at the end of this year were considered, there otherwise will be no overlap between members of the Vestry and the Discernment Committee.

Step 2: The members of the Discernment Committee will be commissioned during a Sunday liturgy. There was some discussion about who

should do this and when. Because Rev'd Will is not available until mid-December, our Senior Warden will commission the Committee at the 10:00 am service on Sunday, November 16.

Step 3: Learn about the discernment process. The Discernment Committee and Vestry (and oncoming new Vestry members, if known) will meet on Zoom with Rev'd Will on Tuesday, November 18, to hear about the steps in the discernment and search process.

Step 4: Active Discernment – the Discernment Committee will engage the congregation in conversations, surveys and other means to develop clarity about who we are and what we are called to do. This process usually takes 2 – 3 months, but remember, we have intervening holidays to celebrate. (This process has already begun; see related article on [page 8](#)).

Step 5: The Discernment Committee will develop a Parish Portfolio, guided by a

Diocesan template, about what they have learned. This is a 1-2 months endeavor and will form the basis for advertising the position.

Step 6: In mid-spring we can expect that the Discernment Committee will begin interviewing candidates, by Zoom or in person. This will result in recommendations of one or more candidates to the Vestry.

Step 7: Vestry decision to call a new priest, in consultation with the Diocese. Note that steps 5 and 6 may need to be repeated if the right candidate has not appeared.

Step 8: We can expect a period of 8 – 12 weeks after Rev'd Jo's retirement when worship will be led by supply priests.

Step 9: A new priest is called and installed and Resurrection continues God's work in our community.

~ Kat Turner



Kat Turner

Advent

A season of preparation and waiting for the coming of Christ



Judy Isaacs

Definition of Advent: arrival, a start, or commencement. The beginning of a season, the coming of Christ into the world four Sundays before Christmas. Think in terms of preparation for a new way of living and seeing.

Why are we going through such difficult times right now? Think in terms of what the tribes of Israel went through when they left Egypt – The trials and tribulations they went through following Moses in the desert and the dangers they faced.

How does that compare with our scary experience with COVID and all the changes that we have been facing since the start of this year. How does this compare with living through what is happening in our country right now?

We have lived for many years relying on resources the earth has provided: clean air, water, and food. Now we need to see our “island home” in a different light, contaminated with pesticides. Some are unwilling to see the need for change. Are we able to face the challenges this new world offers?

Weather extremes, bad air quality from fires, destructive hurricanes. Can we make the changes necessary to reduce our carbon footprint and rely on natural ways to produce energy?

Can we trust Jesus to show us a better way to lead us

into the future? That elusive faith that we need to have restored with the coming of a new light into the world.

Maybe that should be our focus in this Advent season.

~ Judy Isaacs

A Prayer of the Light Eaters

Creator of Light and Life,
You spoke the Word, and it became seed and root,
leaf and vine,
a green chorus bending toward the sun.

We give thanks for the plants—
for their patient intelligence,
their hidden conversations beneath the soil,
their memory of drought and rain,
their steadfast turning toward light.

As Darwin once marveled at the root tip,
“hardly an exaggeration to call it a brain,”
so we marvel at the wisdom
woven into creation’s smallest gestures.

Through Schlanger’s witness,
we glimpse anew the mystery:
that plants are not silent,
but interpreters of your radiance,
translating light into bread,
and breath into song.

May we learn from their rootedness,
their communion beneath the surface,
their quiet resilience.

Teach us to honor them not as resources,
but as fellow bearers of your Word.

And as we break bread and share the cup,
may we remember:
these gifts are the fruit of plant intelligence,
transfigured by your Spirit,
returning us to communion with You
and with all creation. **Amen.**

Clergy & Staff

Rector

[The Rev. Jo J. Belser](#)

Deacon

[The Rev. Theresa Lewallen](#)

Pianist

Virginia Sircy

Seminarians

Kate Mumey
Torie Linner

Bookkeeper

Holly Zarazinski

Parish

Administrator

Angie Armwood

Sexton

Beltway Cleaning, Inc.

Let interfaith engagement connect us all

Last month, members of the Church of the Resurrection gathered with people from many faiths and cultures to rally for affordable housing in Northern Virginia and across the Commonwealth. I am always inspired by interfaith or intercultural events and am grateful that I have so many opportunities to pray and to work with people who hold a range of beliefs or who bring their cultural experiences to our work.

Earlier this year someone asked me why I find interfaith engagement so important to my ministry. For me, interfaith engagement helps me to refine and more deeply understand my own faith and beliefs. Interfaith engagement offers a space where I can clarify how I articulate and live my baptismal promises, how I hear and work to answer the call to follow Jesus, and how being an Episcopalian is both similar and different from other Christian denominations.

Interfaith engagement reminds me that across faith communities, we have more similarities in what we believe than differences. At my first large VOICE action more years ago than even Facebook remembers, I heard all of the faith leaders invoke the Spirit. When the Imam quoted from the Koran about the Spirit's role in moving us to action, it reminded me that the Abrahamic faiths all recognize the Spirit. I have

since learned that other faiths, and often people who profess they have no faith, invoke the Spirit in their work toward justice.

Across faiths, people believe the call to strive for justice and peace. They uniformly see a universal dignity in all human beings, even if they don't articulate that all are created in God's image. Some view Jesus as a member of the Trinity while others see him as a prophet or great teacher. Acting out of love is a universal faith value.

Praying alongside other faith leaders helps me to more clearly see when a person's faith is considered "other." Working in intercultural settings helps me to more clearly see then a person's culture or color or race is being "othered." It is in those moments that I know that we are called to work with all of God's people toward justice, peace, and freedom through love and action.

As the Racial Justice and Healing Team prepares for Advent, we talked about the various celebrations of love, peace, joy, light, justice, and freedom that intersect in November and December. The team is publishing a calendar of these celebrations and events. Along with our reverse Advent Calendar contributions for the food pantry, we hope that the calendar encourages you to be curious, and to bring new light and hope into your celebration of Advent.

We pray the calendar helps you to understand articulate your own faith about the time of "almost and not yet" and the reality of the Incarnation in history and each and every day through time.

We look forward to hearing from you about your own reflections and use of the Advent Calendar.

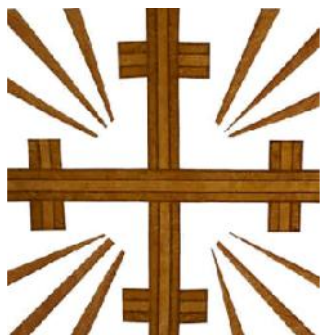
~The Rev'd
Theresa Lewallen



*The Rev'd
Theresa Lewallen*



We said farewell to Taylor, Mara, and Benny Hall on All Saint Sunday (they are moving to Dallas)



Church of the Resurrection

2800 Hope Way
Alexandria 22311-2220

About InSpire

InSpire is the monthly newsletter of the Church of the Resurrection, describing the people of our congregation and our faith journey together. The following individuals contributed to this issue of *InSpire*:

- The Rev. Jo Belser
- Coral Childs
- David Ewing
- Lea Fowlie, editor
- Lenore Funkhouser, photos
- Judy Isaacs
- Kat Turner

Church of the Resurrection serves the people in the Beauregard Corridor of the City of Alexandria, home to many recent immigrants. In April 2021, Resurrection completed an eight-year mission to provide 113 units of affordable housing to its community.

Discernment has begun

As you see in the [article on the Diocesan Transition Process on page 1](#), the key to a successful call to a new priest is the congregation's discernment about who we are and what we want to be and do going forward. This requires individual and group reflection, and all of us will engage in this over the next several months.

If you are like me, you've already begun this process, by thinking about what you value at Resurrection. My own list includes:

- our outreach programs;
- the way we live frugally as a congregation so we can use our resources to help people;
- our strong sense of community (we seem to like each other!); and
- and our worship services that use different versions of a core liturgy augmented by holy music and excellent preaching.

As the Capital One commercial asks, "What's in your 'wallet'?"

We began congregational discernment rather informally at the Forum on October 19 when we listed some items that we think would be attractive to any priest considering Resurrection as their next call:

- We are not broke.
- We are not broken. No factionalism.
- We do God's work.
- We are flexible and resilient and creative.
- We are engaged as a congregation and in the community.
- Our track record, for example, The Spire.
- We have no deferred maintenance or capital needs.
- We are close to the seminary and we love having seminarians.
- Our members have wisdom and experience.
- Northern Virginia is an attractive area to live in, particularly if there is a spouse who works and children in school.
- We are aging in our "pews."
- Parking.
- Priests in larger congregations may be used to more staffing resources.
- Resurrection has had only four priests, three long-term rectors in its six decades of history. How willing are we going to be to welcome a new priest without constant comparisons to our BFRs (Beloved Former Rectors)?

I'm sure you can think of many other pluses!

But, we must be realistic, too. There are some things that might be seen as challenges, only some of which are in our control:

- There is a clergy shortage, with more priests retiring than being ordained.
- The cost of living in Northern Virginia is high, especially compared to other parishes in less

urban parts of the Diocese and elsewhere.

I look forward to working with the Discernment Committee to develop a Parish Portfolio that describes what a remarkable example of God's love we have at Resurrection. Our discernment and prayers will bring us a new priest who sees value in us and what we do and is excited about joining us in fulfilling the Diocese's vision to Love Jesus, Embody Justice, and Be Disciples.

~ Kat Turner