

SEPTEMBER NEWSLETTER

St. Matthew's Episcopal Church



Bishop Francis C. Gray & Confirmands at St. Matthew's in 2003

CONFIRMATION IS A CHOICE

by Rev. Rob Merola, Rector

Dear Friends,

Twenty-two years ago, when my older daughter, Christine, was confirmed. She wrote:

Hey, I'm getting confirmed this Sunday. And pretty much all of us know what Confirmation is, right? A "coming of age" into Christianity. It can only be performed by a bishop; it's got to be pretty big, right? Unlike baptism as children, this is something we choose to do, of our own free will. I mean, just because a baby's crying doesn't mean the bishop is going to screech, "HOLD THE BAPTISM!" Just 'cuz you're wailing doesn't mean you're not going to get dunked.

But this...this is something we choose. We accept what it means to be a Christian, and consciously pledge our lives to God. If we wail or cry this time, the bishop isn't going to say, "TOO BAD, BROTHA!" and hold us down, kicking and screaming, while he calmly proclaims the Confirmation rites.

That's not what Confirmation is about...that's not what Christianity is about. One of the biggest things about Christianity is free will...I think God wants living, breathing people, with all of our mistakes and faults. Because, with all of our blundering stupidity, with so many distractions and easy way-outs, it just makes our choices so much more valuable.

And that's why Confirmation is, literally, a choice. We choose to follow God, to obey him, to live our lives according to his will. That's a big commitment,

especially in a world such as ours, where commitments are avoided like the plague. Confirmation isn't just a one-nighter. It's an exclusive bond between us and God, as we proudly proclaim that we really do want to follow him... We're stating that church isn't just a tradition; it's a way of life. A promise that we're willing to make; a life that we're willing to live.

In short, it's a big deal. I seriously hope I'm mature enough to make such a choice, but I'm definitely willing to try. And so, during this week, with way too many things going on, and with me staying up much later than I should, I find myself tired...but I'm still looking forward to my Confirmation. It isn't something I'm going to sleep through, no matter how tired I may be. After all, that's what Saturdays are for, right? Sleeping, I mean.

-Christine Merola (^_^)

Perhaps you too would like to be confirmed. Good news—the Bishop will be here on October 12 for confirmations once again. If you are already confirmed, but would like to reaffirm your commitment to Jesus, you can do that too. I've personally found that to be a helpful practice, and so plan on doing so again this year. Details can be found in this newsletter.

Beyond confirmation, Christine also demonstrates a profound understanding of what it means to follow Jesus—and the cost of doing so that she was already experiencing. It requires the hard choices that are the essence of commitment, and without which there really is no commitment at all.

Whether you are going to be confirmed or reaffirmed or not, I do hope you'll make the choice to join us this September at St. Matt's.

With much love and affection,
Rob+

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- Confirmation Classes
- Meet our new Youth Ministry Team
- Welcome Seminarian Josh House
- Kona Ice Snow Cone Truck!

BAPTISM, CONFIRMATION, RECEPTION & REAFFIRMATION

UNDERSTANDING BAPTISM, CONFIRMATION, RECEPTION & REAFFIRMATION

We are so blessed to have so many people as part of our St. Matt's family, and we hope some of you will consider making a public affirmation of your faith during the **Bishop's Visit on Sunday, October 12, 2025**. If you've been wondering about Baptism, Confirmation, Reception, or Reaffirmation, here's what each means:

Baptism – Welcomed Into God's Family

Baptism is initiation into the body of Christ. Through water and the Holy Spirit, we are welcomed into the quirky, challenging, love- and grace-filled community of the Church. Baptism is an outward and visible sign of God's inward grace, marking the start of life with God.

Confirmation – Choosing Christ for Yourself

Confirmation is for those who were baptized earlier (often as children) and now wish to make their own mature commitment to Christ. Through the laying on of hands by the Bishop, you affirm your baptismal vows and claim your faith in a personal way.

Reception – Welcoming You Into the Episcopal Church

Reception is for those baptized and confirmed in another Christian tradition who now find a spiritual home in the Episcopal Church. It is the Church's way of formally receiving you and celebrating your commitment to live as an Episcopalian.

Reaffirmation – Renewing Your Promises

Reaffirmation is for those who were baptized and confirmed in the Episcopal Church but wish to renew their baptismal promises in a very intentional way. This may follow a return after time away, a crisis of faith, or a season of deep growth.

If you are considering any of these steps, **please complete the form by scanning the QR code** or, if you prefer, visit stmmts.org/BishopsVisit for more information

CONFIRMATION CLASSES

If you are ready to make a public declaration of your faith, this is a wonderful opportunity to do so. Confirmation preparation classes will be held at the following dates and times. **You only need to choose one series that works best with your schedule.**

- **Group 1- Wednesdays:** September 24, October 1 and 8 at 7PM
- **Group 2- Thursdays:** September 25, October 2 and 9 at 12PM
- **Group 3- Saturday:** October 4, 10AM–2PM. Lunch will be provided.

Preparing for confirmation involves time for reflection, learning, and spiritual growth. Your presence at all sessions is part of that commitment.

Classes are open to all, but are required for those who wish to be confirmed.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Scan the QR code or visit stmmts.org/Confirmation (*note this is the same form as above for Baptism, Confirmation, Reception, and Reaffirmation)

Questions? Contact office@stmmts.org



BISHOP'S VISIT

SUNDAY, OCT. 12, 2025

Mark your calendar for Sunday, October 12. We are honored to welcome the Rt. Rev. Mark Bourlakas, who will be with us in worship and lead the celebrations of Confirmation, Baptism, Reaffirmation, and Reception.

SCAN
ME! >>



SCAN
ME! >>



SEPTEMBER AT ST. MATT'S

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
	1 LABOR DAY No School FCPS/LCPS Social Time on Zoom at 12 PM ID: 681-861-620	2 Garden Volunteering 8:30 AM Compline 8 PM Online	3	4 S Choir Rehearsal 7:30 PM	5	6 Men's Group 8 AM
7 Pastor Annabelle Markey Preaching  Hunger Action Month Food Packing at 10:30 AM	8 Social Time on Zoom at 12 PM ID: 681-861-620 A Matter of Balance Class 1:30 - 3:30 PM	9 No School FCPS Garden Volunteering 8:30 AM HRTS Backpack Buddies Packing 12 PM Compline 8 PM Online	10	11 Choir Rehearsal 7:30 PM	12	13 Men's Group 8 AM Women's Coffee Meet-up at 9 AM
14 Pastor Phil Carl Preaching Kona Ice Snow Cone Truck & Kids Tie Dye Event at 10:30 AM 	15 Social Time on Zoom at 12 PM ID: 681-861-620 A Matter of Balance Class 1:30 - 3:30 PM	16 Garden Volunteering 8:30 AM HRTS Backpack Buddies Packing 12 PM Compline 8 PM Online	17	18 Choir Rehearsal 7:30 PM	19 Women's Retreat	20 Men's Group 8 AM Kara Laughlin Ordination Women's Retreat
21 Fr. Rob Preaching Welcome Seminarian Josh House  Apple Treats at Coffee Hour Kids Pajama Day Women's Retreat	22 Social Time on Zoom at 12 PM ID: 681-861-620 A Matter of Balance Class 1:30 - 3:30 PM	23 No School FCPS Garden Volunteering 8:30 AM HRTS Backpack Buddies Packing 12 PM Compline 8 PM Online	24 Confirmation Class Group 1 7 PM	25 Confirmation Class Group 2 12 PM Choir Rehearsal 7:30 PM	26 Game Night 6 PM	27 Men's Group 8 AM
28 Fr. Rob Preaching  10:30 AM: Chocolate Cakes HRTS Winter Coat Drive Sorting  11 AM Youth Laser Tag Outing 12 PM FreedUp Financial Living Class	29 Social Time on Zoom at 12 PM ID: 681-861-620 A Matter of Balance Class 1:30 - 3:30 PM	30 Garden Volunteering 8:30 AM HRTS Backpack Buddies Packing 12 PM Compline 8 PM Online	SAVE THE DATES Sun., Oct. 5th at 5 PM - Pet Blessing Service at Algonkian Park Sat., Oct. 11th Parish Work Day Sun., Oct. 12th Bishop's Visit & Confirmations Sun., Oct 19th Thanksgiving Food Drive Begins Sun., Oct. 19th Trunk or Treat & Pet Blessings Sun., Nov. 23rd Christmas Pageant Auditions Sun., Nov. 30th Advent Begins			

SEPT. SPECIAL SERVICES & COFFEE HOUR EVENTS



SEPT
07

Hunger Action Month Food Packing

September is National Hunger Action Month. Join us on Sunday, Sept. 7th at 10:30 AM to help fight hunger and pack bags for our Care Response Team, helping families right here in our neighborhood.

Learn more:
stmmts.org/Care



SEPT
14

Kona Ice Snow Cone Truck & Kids Tie Dye

Cool off between our 9:30 and 11 AM services with the Kona Ice Snow Cone Truck and let kids dive into a colorful tie-dye craft.

A sweet and creative way to celebrate together!



SEPT
21

Apple Treats & Kids Pajama Day

It's Kids' Pajama Day! (While moms are at retreat, dads can keep it simple—bring the kids in PJs.)

Then join us at 10:30 AM for apple treats, because September is apple season!



SEPT
28

Chocolate Cake Day at 10:30 AM

Celebrate a beautiful Sunday with chocolate cakes of all kinds (and Fr. Rob's birthday). Do you enjoy baking? **Please bring your favorite chocolate cake to share.**

Come enjoy a slice of cake, good company, and help us wish him a happy day—no gifts, just joy and fellowship.

SEPT. SMALL GROUPS



MON
7 PM

Bread of Life Book Discussion Group

Mondays at 7 PM

Bread of Life will continue reading **The Book of Joy by the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu.**

Together, they explore the Nature of True Joy and confront each of the Obstacles of Joy.



TUES
8:30
AM

Celebration Garden Volunteering

Tuesdays at 8:30 AM

Help harvest fresh produce for local food pantries and enjoy a morning of fellowship in the garden.

All ages and skill levels welcome! Continues through September.



SAT
8 AM

Men's Group Weekly Gatherings

Saturdays at 8 AM

Build friendships and grow in faith with men of all ages through prayer, Bible study, and service.

Meetings Saturday mornings at 8 AM in the trailer.



SEPT
13

Women's Coffee Mixer at Ridgetop

Sat., Sept. 13th at 9 AM

Meet up with other women at Ridgetop Coffee in Sterling for a casual morning of great coffee, conversation, and connection.

Children are welcome!



GAME NIGHT

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26th
at 6 PM

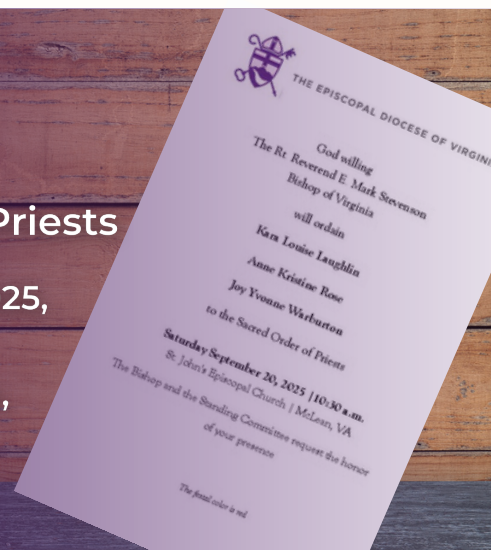
Bring a snack and your favorite game to share as we enjoy some friendly competition and great company.

Fun starts here!

Ordination of Kara Laughlin to the Sacred Order of Priests

Saturday, September 20, 2025,
at 10:30 AM

St. John's Episcopal Church,
McLean, VA



— SAVE THE DATES —

FIND FREEDOM WITH YOUR FINANCES

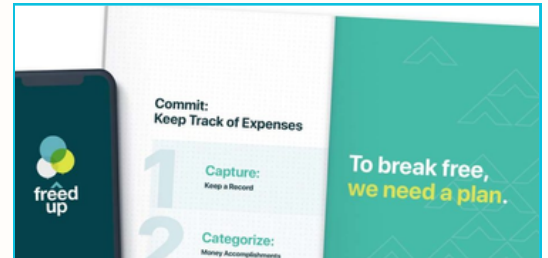
FreedUp Financial Living Classes

Sundays at 12 PM, starts Sept. 28th at St. Matt's

You're invited to join **FreedUp**, a practical and grace-filled small group experience that helps you take the next step toward financial freedom and faithful stewardship.

Whether you're carrying debt, seeking peace of mind with money, or simply want to grow in how you manage what God has entrusted to you, **this class is for you.**

Let's walk this journey together. Learn more at stmtts.org/FreedUp or sign up by emailing office@stmtts.org



PET BLESSING SERVICE

Algonkian Park, Shelter 2

Sunday, Oct. 5th at 5 PM

This year's Pet Blessing Service will be extra special, we're gathering at beautiful Algonkian Park! Bring your furry, fuzzy, feathered, or scaly family members and join us outdoors as we celebrate the gift of animals and ask God's blessing on all creatures great and small.

Held in honor of St. Francis Day (October 4), this joyful tradition is the perfect way to enjoy God's creation with the whole family—pets included!



TRUNK OR TREAT

Sunday, Oct. 19th 2PM - 4 PM

Whether you host a trunk, help greet our neighbors, or come in your costume to have some fun, we'd love to see you there!

Plus, pets are welcome! Treats for kids (and pets) will be offered throughout the event.

LEARN MORE & SIGN UP:
stmtts.org/TrunkOrTreat



OUTREACH



HAITI BENEFIT CONCERT & BBQ

Because of your generosity, the Haiti Benefit raised **\$21,564** (as of August 28, 2025) to support the students of St. Mathieu's School.

A heartfelt thank you to the dozens of volunteers who cooked, organized, performed, face-painted, set up, cleaned up, and so much more. This incredible event simply would not be possible without you.

And the impact doesn't stop here, there's still time to make a difference for the 300+ schoolchildren at St. Mathieu's. Give today at stmtts.org/Haiti.



WELCOME JOSH HOUSE, SEMINARIAN

Josh is a candidate for the priesthood in the Diocese of Virginia and is in his final year at Virginia Theological Seminary.

Before seminary, Josh spent a decade as a civil-rights lawyer at two national nonprofits, litigating constitutional cases nationwide. Originally from California's East Bay, Josh has degrees from the University of California, San Diego (History of the Near East) and The George Washington University (Law), where he remains an adjunct professor. When he's not studying or working, you can find Josh rock climbing, playing soccer, or spending time with his wife, Lauren, and their two daughters.

Josh joins us beginning Sunday, September 21st, please join us in giving him a warm St. Matthew's welcome!

SEPTEMBER IS HUNGER ACTION MONTH

Join us in turning faith into action all month long.

Each September, people across the country unite to raise awareness and provide nutritious food to neighbors facing hunger. Here's how you can take action with St. Matt's and our Hunger Response Team of Sterling (HRTS):



Sunday, Sept. 7 at 10:30 AM Food Packing at St. Matt's

Join us at 10:30 AM to help pack food bags for families in need. **(See page 5 for full details.)**



Tuesday, Sept. 9 at noon HRTS Backpack Buddies Kickoff

Be part of HRTS's first Backpack Buddies pack of the 2025–2026 school year. **Learn more at sterlinghelp.org/BackpackBuddies.**



Sunday, Sept. 28 at 10:30 AM Winter Coat Drive Sorting Event

The HRTS Winter Coat Drive has been extended through September 28. Drop off new or gently used coats (sizes 6–16) and join us at 10:30 AM between services to help sort donations for local students. **Learn more: sterlinghelp.org/wintercoatdrive.**

This month in Faith Factory, kids are learning...



Life is full of choices: what to wear, what to eat, who to follow. Some choices are easy, some are hard.

This September in Faith Factory, kids will discover that the most important choice of all is to follow Jesus. The best part? We don't have to wonder if we're good enough or lucky enough, Jesus has already chosen us.

That's why our theme is **'Choose Jesus, because He chooses you.'** Each week, kids will hear powerful stories from the Bible and learn that God's love and guidance help us make good choices every day.

Sept. 7 – Luke 14:25-33: The cost of discipleship. Choosing to follow Jesus (even when it's hard).

Sept. 14 – Luke 14:1-10: Lost sheep & lost coin. Jesus chooses the lost and rejoices.

Sept. 21 – St. Matthew's Feast Day! Jesus chose Matthew, an unlikely disciple.

Sept. 28 – Luke 16:19-31: The rich man & Lazarus. Choosing compassion over selfishness.

PARENTS!

Update Your Child's Faith Factory Info

With the new school year beginning, we want to make sure we have the most up-to-date contact and safety information for every child in Faith Factory. Please take a moment to (re)register your child so we can provide the safest, most personal, and fun experience possible.

Visit stmmts.org/FaithFactory or Scan the QR code



SEPT. kids events

Sundays at
10:30 AM

SEPT. 7

FOOD PACKING & CARE CARD MAKING

Celebrate Hunger Action Month with food packing and create care cards for those in need.



SEPT. 14

KONA ICE SNOW CONE TRUCK & TIE DYE

Grab a snow cone from the Kona Ice Truck and join us for some fun tie dye! Wear clothes you won't mind getting messy!



SEPT. 21

KIDS PAJAMA DAY & APPLE TREATS!



While moms are on the women's retreat, kids are welcome to wear pajamas to church!

Then at 10:30, join us for some apple treats & games!

SEPT. 28

CHOCOLATE CAKE DAY & CUPCAKE DECORATING

Decorate your own chocolate cupcake at coffee hour!



ST. MATTHEW'S YOUTH

GRADES 6-12

MEET OUR NEW YOUTH MINISTRY TEAM

We're so excited to introduce you to our new Youth Ministry Team, both are long-time members of the St. Matthew's community and former members of the youth program!



Alex Davenport | Donuts & Discovery Leader for High School Youth

Alex first came to St. Matthew's in the early 2000s before heading off to JMU, graduate school in Illinois, and then several years in Minnesota. He moved back to Northern Virginia last August and is glad to be closer to family, the St. Matt's community, and away from snowy winters.

In Donuts & Discovery, Alex will be guiding high school youth through the weekly lectionary readings and figures from church history, showing how Scripture connects to the real issues teens face today. Looking back, his favorite part of youth group was the deep friendships he formed, many of which remain strong, as well as spending two summers as one of St. Matt's first youth interns.



Rachel Leary | Donuts & Discovery Leader for Middle School Youth & Youth Events Coordinator

Rachel has been part of St. Matthew's since she was just three days old. She studied Design and Technical Theater at George Mason University and enjoys hobbies like crocheting and playing Dungeons & Dragons.

In Donuts & Discovery, Rachel will be using a scripture-based curriculum geared towards the needs of middle schoolers and guiding them through the big questions they have about faith. One of her favorite memories from her teenage years at St. Matt's youth group is a rainy bike ride through Central Park during a mission trip to New York City, a moment that still makes her smile. She is excited to return to working with our youth (having been a youth ministry intern in 2023) and give back to the program that shaped her so much as a teen by leading our middle school youth and coordinating events for all ages.

JOIN US IN SEPTEMBER



DONUTS&DISCOVERY
Bite Into Faith, One Donut at a Time
SUNDAYS AT 9:30 AM | GRADES 6-12
CLASSROOM 4

YOUTH OUTING
LASER TAG
AT FUNLAND FAIRFAX

Sunday, Sept. 28th
11 AM - 2 PM

CHAPERONES NEEDED!

RSVP ON THE BAND APP 

Meet Rachel at St. Matt's at 10:30 AM, following the service, to carpool to FunLand Fairfax for an afternoon of Laser Tag!

What to bring: Comfortable clothes and sneakers, spending money for the arcade (optional).

What's included: Pizza, drinks, and laser tag.

Cost: FREE