

# February

## Newsletter

### SEEING THE BIGGER PICTURE

by Rev. Rob Merola, Rector

I could swear it's Pentecost. I'm looking out the dining room window while having a cup of tea, and there it is. A blazing red "tongue" of fire, plain as plain can be, is standing atop its head.

He is not, however, speaking in tongues. Rather, he is using his long beak to eat from one of our suet feeders.

"He" is a pileated woodpecker, a remarkable sight. This is the largest woodpecker in the United States, as big as a crow. They have been called the "real-life Woody the Woodpecker," and the similarity is obvious. I feel deeply blessed to see him.

It's not just him. The backyard is full of beautiful birds, at least 20 different species. There are bluebirds (Holy Cow!), blue jays, house finches, purple finches, cardinals, wrens, a yellow-bellied sapsucker, and many more, all stunners in their own way. What a gift it is to share space with them. It enriches my soul.

And it's not just birds, either. The backyard, like the world, is full of so many gorgeous, fascinating, awe-inspiring things. There are more things to behold and feel our spirit lifted by than we have time to really see. If I spent a whole day simply looking at all that surrounds me, marveling at it, reveling in it, being grateful for it, and worshiping God for it, I'd barely scratch the surface.

I know we are all busy, with much to do. And I know we all carry burdens, things that weigh us down and can cause us grief, sorrow, or anxiety. Sometimes it is hard to see anything else but the challenges and concerns before us. But I truly believe this is never the whole story—and in my experience, it is often the people who have it the hardest who know this the best.

Prayer is the traditional name given to the practice of seeing the bigger picture. **Developing a life rich in prayer is surely one of the most crucial life skills we can pursue in 2025.** Praying together in church is an



essential part of this. When we pray, we take the time to stop, to change our focus, to see the goodness that is always at work around us, and to be grateful for it.

For those of us, such as myself, who understand prayer as communication with a personal Being (God!), it is to say thanks, and in saying thanks, to realize how deeply and securely we are loved. That is a life-changer, believe me.

**It is my hope that our 2025 will be filled with the kind of prayer that really does change lives. It has surely changed mine.**

Warmly,  
Rob+

### THIS ISSUE

- Vision Sunday - February 2nd!
- Valentine's Weekend Vow Renewal
- Mac n' Cheese & Chili Cook-off
- Youth Mission Trip 2025 Announcement!

# February at St. Matt's

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
This is not a full list of all events or uses of the St. Matthew's buildings, visit: <a href="http://stmtts.org/calendar">stmtts.org/calendar</a> for the most up-to-date schedule.						1
2 Vision Sunday & Vestry Election Backpack Buddies & Tater Tot Bar 10:30 AM Finance & Q&A Zoom 6:30 & 7 PM	3 Social Time on Zoom at 12 PM ID: 681-861-620  Bread of Life Book Group 7 PM	4  Compline 8 PM on Facebook Live	5  Bible Study 7 PM	6 Bible Study 12 PM  Choir Rehearsal 7:30 PM	7 Compline 8 PM on Facebook Live	8 Men's Group 8 AM  Women's Meet-up at Ridgetop Coffee 9 AM
9 Genevieve Zetlan preaching Jersey Day & Game Day Snacks Kids Valentine Houses	10 Social Time on Zoom at 12 PM ID: 681-861-620  Bread of Life Book Group 7 PM	11  Compline 8 PM on Facebook Live	12  Bible Study 7 PM	13 Bible Study 12 PM  Choir Rehearsal 7:30 PM	14 Compline 8 PM on Facebook Live	15 Men's Group 8 AM  Vow Renewal Service 5 PM
16 Fr. Rob Preaching Valentine's Treats & Family Yoga at 10:30 AM	17 Social Time on Zoom at 12 PM ID: 681-861-620  Bread of Life Book Group 7 PM	18  Compline 8 PM on Facebook Live	19  Bible Study 7 PM	20 Bible Study 12 PM  Choir Rehearsal 7:30 PM	21 Compline 8 PM on Facebook Live	22 Men's Group 8 AM
23 Fr. Rob preaching Mac n' Cheese & Chili + Kids Animal Event 10:30AM Youth Event at 4:30 PM	24 Social Time on Zoom at 12 PM ID: 681-861-620  Bread of Life Book Group 7 PM	25  Compline 8 PM on Facebook Live	26  Bible Study 7 PM	27 Bible Study 12 PM  Choir Rehearsal 7:30 PM	28 Compline 8 PM on Facebook Live	

## SUNDAYS

Services at 8, 9:30 & 11 AM

Faith Factory 9:30 AM (Age 4 - Gr. 5)

Donuts & Discovery 9:30 AM (Gr. 6-12)

## SAVE THE DATES

Mar. 1 - Kara Laughlin Ordination

Mar. 4 - Pancake Supper

Mar. 5 - Ash Wednesday

Services at 6 AM, 12 PM, 7 PM

Mar. 9 - Daylight Saving

Mar. 12 - Lent Book Study Begins

# VISION SUNDAY VISION SUNDAY VISION SUNDAY

## ANNUAL MEETING & VESTRY ELECTION SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2025

Every story, every step of faith, every moment of belonging—you are part of something bigger at St. Matthew's.

Join us on **February 2, 2025, for Vision Sunday**, a time to reflect on God's faithfulness in 2024 and look ahead to all He has in store for 2025. This special Sunday will be an opportunity to connect, grow together, and elect new members to our vestry.

The annual vision meeting will take place in **two parts. Part I, during all three services** on Sunday at 8, 9:30 and 11 AM, Fr. Rob will share the vision for 2025, and voting will take place for a new member of the leadership team.

In the evening, **Part II at 6:30 PM on Zoom**, we will be covering the financial overview, 2025 budget, and at 7 PM we will offer a Q&A session. Questions may be submitted ahead of time. Please send to [office@stmtts.org](mailto:office@stmtts.org).

**Zoom Information:** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87107932342>

We hope you will join us as we step forward together into all that God has planned for our community in the year ahead!

Check out the Annual Report on our website: [stmtts.org/AnnualReport2024](https://stmtts.org/AnnualReport2024)

## PLUS - FEBRUARY 2ND IS ALSO . . .



### NATIONAL TATER TOT DAY

Join us on **Sunday, February 2nd**, at 10:30 AM in the parish hall for a **Tater Tot Bar** in honor of National Tater Tot Day! Whether you like your tots loaded with cheesy goodness, drenched in chili, or taco-fied to perfection, we've got all the fixings to make your tot-al dreams come true.

**Don't just be a spec-tater—dig in!**



### BACKPACK BUDDIES

Join HRTS as we pack 280 bags of food to help kids in need right here in Sterling at 10:30 AM.

Grab a bag, and be a part of something that truly nourishes our community. It's fun for all ages, and a great way to start your week! Learn more: [sterlinghelp.org](https://sterlinghelp.org)





# February Events



## BIBLE STUDY

### February Bible Study

Wed. at 7 PM or  
Thurs. at noon

Join us as we dive into the Book of Romans and explore the question, *"How Shall We Then Live?"*

Each week, we'll take a look at the book of Romans, and focus on a deeply practical chapter that guides us in living out our faith.



## WOMEN'S MINISTRY COFFEE MIXER AT RIDGETOP COFFEE

### Women's Coffee Mixer

Saturday, Feb. 8th  
9 AM - 11 AM

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

Kids are welcome (Ridgetop has a great play area for small children).



## JERSEY DAY

### Jerseys & Game Day Snacks

Sunday, Feb. 9th

It's GAME DAY!

Wear your favorite sports jersey to church, and enjoy some tailgating treats during coffee hour.

Have a favorite dip or snack? Bring some to share!



## We still do VOW RENEWAL SERVICE

### Vow Renewal

Saturday, Feb. 15th  
at 5 PM

All married couples are invited to a special vow renewal ceremony. No sign-up needed—just come as you are and recommit to the love that brought you together! Whether you've been married one year or fifty, renew your commitment in a meaningful way. Friends & Family are invited!



## Valentine's Treats

### Valentine's Treats

Sunday, Feb. 16th  
at 10:30 AM

What goes better with coffee, chocolate or cookies?

Join us on Sunday, February 16th for a variety of Valentine's themed treats.

It's a great way to finish off Valentine's Weekend!



## MAC N' CHEESE & CHILI

### Mac n' Cheese & Chili Cookoff

Sunday, Feb. 23rd  
at 10:30 AM

Have an award winning Mac n' Cheese or Chili recipe?

Bring yours in a crock pot (and an extension cord) on Sun. Feb. 23rd for a cook-off and taste test to see who has the best!



## Game Night

### Monthly Game Night

Friday, February  
28th at 6 PM

Join us for a fun-filled evening of games, laughter, and community! Bring your favorite game and snacks to share! Don't miss this chance to unwind and connect as we kick off the new year together. See you there!



## CLOTHING DONATIONS

### Women Giving Back

Clothing Donation  
Drop-Off Dates

Help WGB replenish women and children's fall and winter clothing.

#### Dates:

Feb. 2nd 9:30 AM - 11:30 AM & Feb. 17th 10 AM - 12 PM

**Location:** 20 Export Drive, Sterling, VA (do not drop off at church).

Learn More:







# faith factory

Sundays at 9:30 AM

## GOD'S CALL

**FEBRUARY MEMORY VERSE:**  
**BEFORE I FORMED YOU IN**  
**YOUR MOTHER'S BODY, I**  
**CHOSE YOU.**  
**JEREMIAH 1:5A**

This month in Faith Factory, children will explore the theme of God's Call—how God calls people for a special purpose!

Through Bible stories like Jeremiah's calling, and Jesus' calling the disciples, kids will learn how God chooses and guides His people. More importantly, they'll discover how God calls each of us to serve, use our talents, and live out our faith every day. It's a powerful month of learning, reflection, and growing in faith!

Beginning Feb. 2nd at 9:30 AM, we will be starting a NEW preschool class! More details coming soon through email. Contact Hilary.Hultman-Lee@stmtts.org with questions.

## kids coffee hour

Sundays at 10:30 AM



### Feb. 2 - Backpack Buddies

Kids are invited to help pack food bags supporting the Hunger Response Team of Sterling.



### Feb. 9 - Valentine Houses

Get creative with candy and make a Valentine theme tiny house!



### Feb. 16 - Family Yoga with Zorana

Zorana Rouse will be hosting a family-friendly yoga session.



### Feb. 23 - Heeling House

Learn about and meet service dogs! Dog food donation drop offs are appreciated or give online: [heelinghouse.org](http://heelinghouse.org)



## PARENTING RESOURCE

*"As our young kids head into the second half of the school year, my own kids included, I felt this article from [parenting.org](http://parenting.org) was very insightful and a good read for any parent. The excerpt below is a key point:*

Hilary Hultman-Lee, Faith Factory Director

### Why Failure Is Important

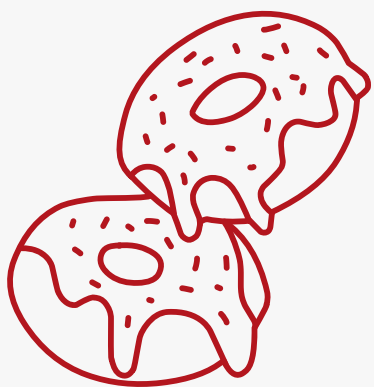
- Rescuing creates dependency. Don't "rescue" your child if he/she is scared or nervous about a situation by sheltering your child from those situations or providing excessive reassurance. This can send the message that you don't believe the child is capable of handling the situation, which may make him/her dependent on you in order to cope.
- Problems lead to problem-solving. For teens, learning to handle difficult situations and decisions is critical. The teen years are a key developmental time when we develop our executive function skills and our human skills, such as our abilities to make decisions, problem-solve, think through problems and regulate emotions. And, we learn not only from success but also from failure. That's why teens need to experience situations where they can make bad decisions, because it's actually how they'll learn to make good decisions.

Read the full article:



# YOUTH FEB EVENTS 2025

For students in grades 6-12



## DONUTS & DISCOVERY

**SUNDAYS AT 9:30 AM**

**Series Continues: *Arguments for God and Biblical Artifacts***

Join Ben and Tom on Sunday mornings for a series of engaging discussions about **the evidence for God** and the **fascinating world of biblical artifacts**. Each session dives into thought-provoking topics, blending faith, history, and discovery in an approachable way.

Enjoy delicious donuts, meaningful conversations, and a welcoming community. Whether you're a curious skeptic, a long-time believer, or anywhere in between, this is a space for exploration and growth.



## COOK FOR TREE OF LIFE

**SUNDAY, FEB. 23RD | 4:30 - 7:30 PM**

Help prepare a delicious meal for over 70 people in need at Tree of Life's Sterling location. This is a wonderful opportunity to serve the community and make a meaningful impact. There's no cost to participate, plus, dinner is included.

Come be a part of something special and make a difference through food and fellowship!



## 2025 SUMMER YOUTH MISSION TRIP



[stmtts.org/YouthMissionTrip](https://stmtts.org/YouthMissionTrip)

**RSVP: [STMTTS.ORG/YOUTHEVENTS](https://stmtts.org/YOUTHEVENTS)**