



Society of St. Andrew
GLEANING AMERICA'S FIELDS
FEEDING AMERICA'S HUNGRY

Advent 2021

SCRIPTURE READINGS • REFLECTIONS • PRAYERS

SIGNS OF THE SACRED

Greetings to you this Advent season!

Advent signifies the beginning of the Christian year and a fresh new start! In this season of waiting and expectation, we look forward to celebrating the birth of the Christ-child. 2021 has seen similar challenges as in 2020 with the Covid-19 pandemic, racial inequities, and the economic impact on our families. The economic stress of those who have lost jobs, as well as those working long hours on the frontlines to heal the sick, continue. We continue to ask ourselves, "When will it end?" We must focus on the good and look for the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel. Let us look for positive signs of improvement and healing. May we all be in tune this season and look for Signs of the Sacred.

Many sacred signs preceded the birth of the Christ-child and His gift of salvation. Accepting His free gift of salvation, we are called and compelled to give back and to love our neighbor as ourselves. How can we give back and love our neighbors? We can give our time to glean fields, glean farmer's markets or serve others. We can give of our talents by writing these devotionals or organizing gleaning events. We can give of our treasure when we donate to the Society of St. Andrew to feed hungry brothers and sisters in Christ, physically as well as spiritually.

As your spiritual hungers are fed by these devotions this Advent season, please consider giving back to help the Society of St. Andrew meet the physical needs of others with a monetary contribution that will provide healthy nourishing food for people in greatest need, right here in the United States. Perhaps you will give an amount equal to what you would spend on a gift for a coworker or your child's teacher. You could possibly set aside a tithe of your Christmas budget to provide healthy food for our hungry neighbors through the Society of St. Andrew.

Thank you for using and sharing these devotional materials, for telling others about the Society of St. Andrew's gleaning and feeding ministries, and for making a generous gift. Together, let's seek the Peace that passes all understanding this Advent and help bring peace to hungry neighbors!

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Society of St. Andrew
GLEANNING AMERICA'S FIELDS
FEEDING AMERICA'S HUNGRY

The Hunger Problem

More than 40 million Americans sometimes lack sufficient food to eat. And many more cannot afford or access the nutritious food they need for a healthy diet.

Yet plenty of nourishing food is available. The USDA estimates more than 40% of the food grown in this country is never eaten. And much of that is food left in fields after harvest. The food left behind is deemed excess or unmarketable because it isn't needed to meet a sale contract or it doesn't meet strict grocery-store standards for size, color, and beauty. What's left behind, without SoSA's intervention, will be plowed under or sent to a landfill, where it will generate harmful methane gas as it rots.

With this much nutritious food available in the US, there is no reason that anyone should go hungry. We don't need to grow more food; we need to respond to the logistical challenges of getting available food to the people who need it most.

The Commonsense Solution

The Society of St. Andrew (SoSA) has a commonsense solution: bridging the great gap between millions of hungry people and billions of pounds of nourishing food that is available, but simply out of reach. SoSA.

SoSA has been serving others and sharing abundance for four decades, following Jesus' command to feed our hungry neighbors (Matthew 25). SoSA rescues good food otherwise destined to be lost, making it available to people in great need. SoSA does this by building links between farms and forks.

SoSA's grassroots, neighbor helping neighbor operating model distinguishes it from other hunger relief organizations. Three quarters of the food SoSA shares is eaten at a table less than 50 miles from the field in which it was grown.

God Nods

SUNDAY – NOV. 28

Scripture: Psalm 65:8

Funny, isn't it? How the God of eternity keeps trying to connect with humanity? God wants to be in relationship with us, but we have difficulty accepting signs of God's presence and provision. The Egyptians would not believe the signs. The Israelites despised God and all the signs God sent (Numbers 14:11). The folks who heard about signs from Jeremiah and Daniel floundered in unfaithfulness.

Sure, it would be amazing to witness angels, a babe in a manger, or see water turned into wine! I simply need to “lift up mine eyes” from my phone or TV to see signs – the God nods – pointing me to Christ and his covenant community:

The hymn my soul is singing before I wake up; the birds that face east, heralding the dawn; the coincidental conversation with a stranger who “happens” to affirm my call; or the softening of hearts when there is no chance of common ground.

Prayer: God, there is undeniable holiness in the Advent season. As we turn our attention toward what you are doing, help us make room for Jesus in our hearts. Help us shift busy-ness into blessedness and weariness into welcome. Thank you for sending us sacred signs pointing us to Your Son. Amen.

Katy Brugraber – Chambersburg, PA

Something from Nothing

MONDAY – NOV. 29

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:9-10

I have an unusual sculpture in my office. It is the gnarled root of a cedar tree. It looks like a creature from Dr. Seuss or Stephen King, depending on your literary bent. Ruby gave it to me. She called and asked that I drop by. She had blueberries to share and handed me this creature. “What do you think of this?” “Ruby, it's wonderful!” I said. “I made that,” she told me. “Sometimes I find something that looks like nothing and I make something out of it.”

It was the sign I needed. I had been feeling like I was nothing— that my mistakes would shape the rest of my life. Ruby showed me what God does

with us. Sometimes we feel like nothing. Then God makes us something. Not something terrible, horrible, or scary, but something wonderful. We are turned into children of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus.

The next time you feel like nothing, remind yourself God takes the ‘nothings’ of this world and makes them into ‘somethings,’ children of God.

Prayer: Loving God, thank you for making us into your children. Open our eyes so we may see the signs of your creativity! In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Michael B. Henderson - Florence, SC

A Life Well Lived

TUESDAY - NOV. 30

Scripture: Matthew 25:23

I believe God uses signs to speak to individuals. I know He moves us to act through the Holy Spirit. All we have to do is listen, and He will lead us into holy moments.

Recently, I visited my 90-year-old cousin who was diagnosed with cancer. She knew her remaining time was short. We spent two hours together. I spent that time in the presence of a woman who was secure in her faith, her love for her Savior, and her family, and who had no concern about her future. She was at peace.

As we remembered times past, we laughed, cried, and prayed. The house was filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit. While we prayed, you could almost hear the Master saying, “Well done, my good and faithful servant.” It was a reminder of the importance of family, of using your talents to serve others, and being rewarded when you enter into the Kingdom. Today, she is resting in her Savior’s arms.

GI  **ING TUESDAY**
Tuesday - November 30, 2021
Save the date!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for glimpses of your heavenly kingdom. We pray that when our time comes, we will be at peace, knowing we spent our lives in service to you. In the name of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Johnnie Draughon - Virginia Beach, VA

Look for the Cardinal

WEDNESDAY - DEC. 1

Scripture: Isaiah 31:5-7

I spent a lot of time outside walking around my neighborhood, the park, and hiking in the mountains, during the pandemic. So did LOTS of other people! When the paths were crowded, the exercise was not as enjoyable.

To maintain social distance, I veered off trails to avoid traffic. When a group was close by, I waited for them to pass. One time, I saw a spot of red nearby— A cardinal was perched in a tree ahead. I've heard seeing a cardinal symbolizes a loved one who died "coming down from heaven to visit."



image: Freepik.com

When my son was alive, he often ran ahead on trails. He knew to stay in sight. Once we caught up, he traveled ahead. While I worked my way back to the path, this cardinal swooped to another tree, then another. Following the cardinal, I managed to head back in the right direction. As usual, my son led the way.

This time of year, our vision becomes crowded. We are over-stimulated by things. The prophet Isaiah suggests we "throw away" things. This year, make an effort to re-focus on the true meaning of Advent.

Prayer: Lord, open our eyes and hearts. Fill us with your sacred blessings. Amen.

Kelly Desclas-Estes - Glen Allen, VA

God Answers Unexpectedly

THURSDAY – DEC. 2

Scripture: Philippians 4:11-13

I wasn't ready to retire, but needed more time with family. So, I decided to go part-time with both churches I served. It was a compromise for my churches and me. I would work from home, making the two-hour drive each weekend for services. The churches would save money, and I would have time with family.

Lately, I've asked God to reveal barriers to deepening our relationship, within me. One thing came to mind – financial worry. Would I have enough to do the things I needed and wanted? Would I have enough to keep up the house and car? Could I continue giving to charities I loved or continue to tithe? I hadn't realized the level of my anxiety.

The next day in my devotional time, there was my sacred sign. Paul told the Philippians that he had “learned the secret to being content in every circumstance... I can endure all these things through the power of the one who gives me strength”. I laughed in amazement! God's sign was clear. Follow Him and all will be well.

Prayer: Holy One, we are amazed at the signs you give us when we ask. Thank you for these sure signs of your love and sacredness. Amen.

Sybil Perrell - Lilesville, NC

A Sign in the Silence

FRIDAY – DEC. 3

Scripture: 1 Kings 19:11-13

Signs are important. Stop signs, danger signs, directional signs... Moses found God in a burning bush. It was a sign. Jesus' miracles are called signs. Angels announced the Messiah's arrival, saying the baby in the manger was the sign.

Sacred signs I have experienced weren't burning bushes or angels singing. Sometimes, they were ordinary folks speaking a word that influenced me. Usually, it was God speaking quietly, as in 1 Kings 19. There, we read of wind, earthquake, and fire, but it was in the silence afterward that God spoke.

When I was 23 and a student pastor, finances were tight. So, I decided to quit preparing for ministry. I went to inform my superintendent of my decision. I parked at his office and sat a while. An inner voice told me not to do this. I started my car, drove home, and never looked back. After 70 years in ministry, I still remember that quiet encounter with the Divine. No angels, no voice from the clouds; yet, it was a clear sign, for what I should do... Stay the course.

Prayer: God, thank you for the gift of Christ. It's a sign of your love. We pray hearts will open to the signs you provide to us. Amen.

Hasbrouck Hughes - Williamsburg, VA

And He Shall Be Called

SATURDAY - DEC. 4

Scripture: Numbers 14:11b

My husband, Dan, and I waited in the car for Mom. My father would not be joining us for the Living Nativity at church— he died eighteen months earlier. I watched the snow fall and swiped at tears. I was eight months pregnant with my dad's grandson, and I couldn't settle on a name I thought he would like. After weeks of indecision, we needed a sign.

As my mother scrambled into the car, her words fell on me like a blow. "Have you finally picked out a name for our baby boy?" I felt frozen, but Dan spoke up. "I like James Russell Lehman." It was one of the names we considered.

"Oh, Dad would love that", Mom said. "His best friend and co-pilot was Russ Fredericks. Jim called him Rusty." I remembered hearing stories about Rusty but hadn't realized his name was Russell. Dan squeezed my hand while Mom told us about the adventures of Dad and Rusty.

We received our sign, delivered through my mother. As we drove to see the reenactment of our Savior's birth, Dan and I knew what to call our son. Like another young couple long ago, we rejoiced in wonder.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for the small signs that remind us to believe. Amen.

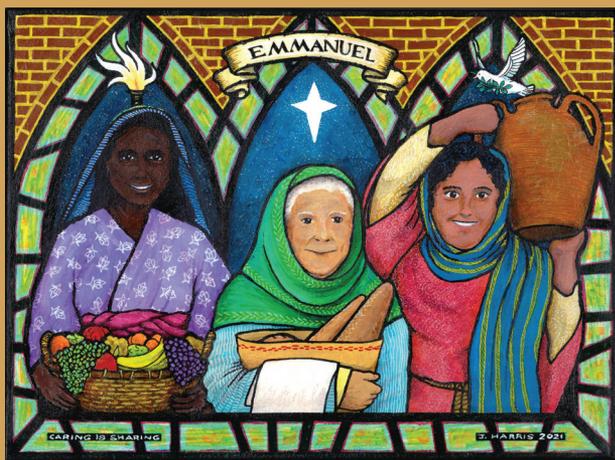
Andi Lehman - Hernando, MS

Show your love with
Society of St. Andrew
Christmas Cards!

Send them to everyone on your list:
Co-workers • Neighbors • Pastors
Friends • Teachers • Shut-ins • Relatives

Give a gift from the heart. Your gift of \$15.00 or more, in your friend or loved one's honor, will put 500 servings of nourishing, healthy food on the tables of hungry people!

Your honorees will receive a beautiful Alternative Christmas Card, designed exclusively for Society of St. Andrew for 2021 by Virginia artist James Harris.



sample of 2021 card

The full color 5" X 7" card will feature original art for this Christmas season and an inspiring verse that conveys God's love and reminds your honoree that they hold a special place in your life. This unique card announces your generous gift to feed the hungry in your friend or loved one's name. We'll also send a card to you, with our thanks & confirmation of your gift order.

Finish your holiday gift shopping in only a few minutes today!

Order Alternative Christmas Cards by mail (using the form on the reverse side of this page), by phone, email, or online.

Order today (form on reverse side) or
800-333-4597 • card@endhunger.org • Endhunger.org/card

Society of St. Andrew Christmas Cards!

Minimum gift donation for each card is \$15.00.

Do not send cash through the mail. Your donation is tax deductible.

Charge my: VISA • Master Card • American Express

Make checks payable to: Society of St. Andrew

Account # _____ Exp _____ CVV _____

Signature _____

Total enclosed or to be charged to card: _____

Orders must be received by December 3rd to ensure delivery before the Christmas holiday. We will make every effort to expedite late orders. Please PRINT all information. Mail to: Society of St. Andrew
3383 Sweet Hollow Road • Big Island, VA 24526

Your name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Daytime phone _____

Email _____

Send _____ cards to me for personalizing and mailing.

Personalize and mail the following cards on my behalf:

In the blocks below, please indicate how you want each individual card signed. Attach additional sheets, if needed, to complete your list.

In honor of _____
Address _____
City _____
State _____ Zip _____
Sign this card with these words:

In honor of _____
Address _____
City _____
State _____ Zip _____
Sign this card with these words:

In honor of _____
Address _____
City _____
State _____ Zip _____
Sign this card with these words:

In honor of _____
Address _____
City _____
State _____ Zip _____
Sign this card with these words:

Angels in Disguise

SUNDAY – DEC. 5

Scripture: Isaiah 12:2

Somehow, I stumbled and fell on my face in our driveway. The result: abrasions, blood, and bruises wherever I hit! My husband's call to 911 brought paramedics who took my vital signs and pronounced them good. Angels in disguise?

As word spread about my fall, more "angels" appeared in the form of people who prayed for my recovery, sent cards, and one who showed up with a meal! I took each as a sign of God's care and presence.

In scripture, we often read, "Do not be afraid." Like the shepherds in the field keeping watch over their flocks by night, we need assurance that angelic visits are no cause for fear. They are from the Lord, who always has our salvation at heart.

Through this, I learned God is my strength and might. If I ignored the signs of God's care, I would not be as far along in my recovery as I am. Indeed, God's healing presence is available to all. And may we each recognize God's angels when they visit!

Prayer: Thank you most gracious God for your presence to us, especially in Christ, who saves and heals us through the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Chris Saerdieck – Emmitsburg, MD

A Sign in a Dream

MONDAY – DEC. 6

Scripture: Matthew 1:20-24

I walk with purpose down a long, carpeted hallway. The walls are lined with art and photographs. At the end of the hallway, I either turn the corner or fling a closed-door wide open.

I am struck with wonder by an expansive room with high-ceilings and another hallway lined with doors to more rooms. Inevitably, I exclaim, "I didn't even know this wing/room/space was here!"...and then I wake up.

One of my recurring dreams for decades has been discovering the places I live and work, whether childhood home, dorm, parsonage, or church building, has a whole wing of rooms I did not even know existed.

I tend to dream this at cross-road moments in life and have realized, with hope, that God is aware of my trepidation. As I step in a new directions He promises me unexpected opportunities, challenges, and blessings await. It is a comfort to know there is more at hand than I can see and that God will meet me around the corner or on the other side of the door.

Prayer: O holy God, prepare us in heart and mind for your Advent in the world. Give us dreams filled with hope. Come, Lord Jesus, come! Amen.

Kathleen Overby Webster - McGaheysville, VA

A Sign: God's Confirmation

TUESDAY - DEC. 7

Scripture: Luke 2:10-12

My front yard grass is straw and the flowers brown. The August heat feels like an oven. I ask, "Will summer ever end?" The store clerk says, "Don't worry, winter is around the corner!" I soon see "signs" the clerk is right: night is closing in, the maple leaves fall, and a fleece vest feels good.

The angel reveals the news to terrified shepherds: a Savior, Christ the Lord, is born. This is a sign for you: a babe wrapped and lying in a manger. A sign confirms the truth of the angel's word; a sign proves God is revealing himself in the world. The shepherds verify it: this child is the Messiah.

Signs confirm faith and validate God's grace in one's life. In 1982, God kindled a desire within me to study John Wesley's theology in England. Many challenges arose. If I went, how would my wife and I support ourselves? Pieces, not money, fell into place. The sign we needed would be to have enough money by Easter. On Palm Sunday, friends Bob and Karen Schiller pledged \$1500! Their pledge gave us enough and confirmed my longing!

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank you for your word and sign confirming that for us a Savior is born who is Christ the Lord! Amen.

Tom Thomas - Forest, VA

Scripture: [Luke 2:15-16](#)

My wife and I came across a detour sign blocking the road coming home from a doctor's visit. Driving less than half a mile, another detour sign loomed before us, but it headed back toward the town.

I ignored that one since it was not going the direction I thought it should. I promptly got lost in a maze of off-roads before finally stumbling across a regular street several miles away, where I found yet another detour sign with an arrow.

This time I followed the signs... even if I thought they weren't taking me in the direction I wanted to go. Eventually, by following the signs, we reached the main road and arrived safely home. Typical male, you may say. The problem was my attitude— not the abundance of signs along the way.

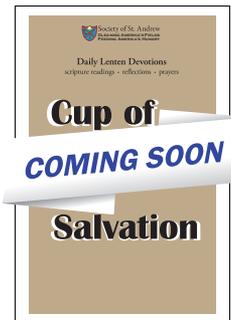
Sometimes, we miss the signs and get lost. And sometimes, we see them but want to go our own way. Are you facing a roadblock in your life? Am I the only one who has ignored a sign and gone my own way when God tried to bring me home? The shepherds followed the signs that led to Jesus. Will you?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, be patient and guide all of us willful, wayward children home. Amen.

William Nash Wade - Strasburg, VA

Daily Lenten Devotions **The Cup of Salvation**

All New Lenten Devotions for 2022
PRE-ORDER online: EndHunger.org/lent



It All Started With A Puppy

THURSDAY – DEC. 9

Scripture: Job 12:7-10

We planned to pick out a puppy. That day's devotional said: "Wonders will unfold!" We saw a puppy that looked different with mismatched markings. We were intrigued. When we picked her up, she nibbled my husband's ear and curled around his neck in the same unique way as the pet we recently lost. It was incredible. It felt like God whispered "pick this one." So, we did!

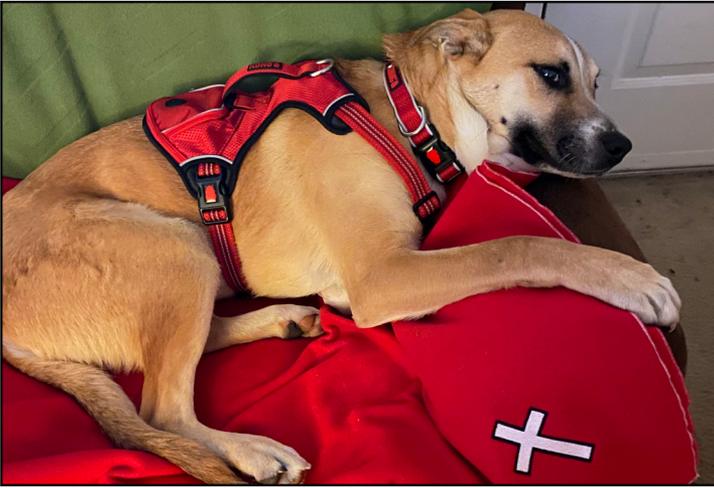


Image: Gayle Fiser

Later, my husband met a friend who taught a therapy dog class. They invited us to certify our dogs. The next week, our pet-friendly minister wondered aloud if members should have their dogs trained as therapy dogs to visit people in local nursing homes. I said, "I can make that happen!"

That was the "accidental" beginning of our pet ministry. Over the years, our dogs have brought comfort to many. The most significant time was a Blue Christmas service during Advent for those who have experienced a loss. The therapy dogs were gathered in the hall after the service, and people who were hurting hugged the dogs to let out their pain.

Prayer: God, thank you for showing us signs of new ways to use our pets in ministry. Amen.

Gayle Fiser - Little Rock, AR

I Believe in Guardian Angels

FRIDAY – DEC. 10

Scripture: Psalm 91:11-12

The image of a guardian angel shepherding two children across a bridge remained with me for 70 years as God's messengers and protectors. My belief in angels began in childhood with that picture, and I attribute my escape from death to divine intervention on two occasions.

After World War II, my birth country, Hungary, became communist. As a result, my family was in danger and needed to escape in the night. At the Austrian border, two men from the families fleeing with us went ahead to defuse mines in our path. The border guards became aware of our escape attempt.

Everyone panicked. I was almost pushed through a nearby hole in the fence. At the last second, my mother pulled me back. I later learned there were mines through that hole in the fence. Despite the chaos, God watched over me!

The second incident occurred decades later when I was in an accident. Our vehicle slid out of control, hit a guard rail, and rolled down an embankment. Once again, my guardian angel protected me. Angels are all around, if only we open our eyes and heart.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for sending your angels to protect us. Thank you for all sacred signs of your presence in our lives, making our journey possible and bearable. Amen.

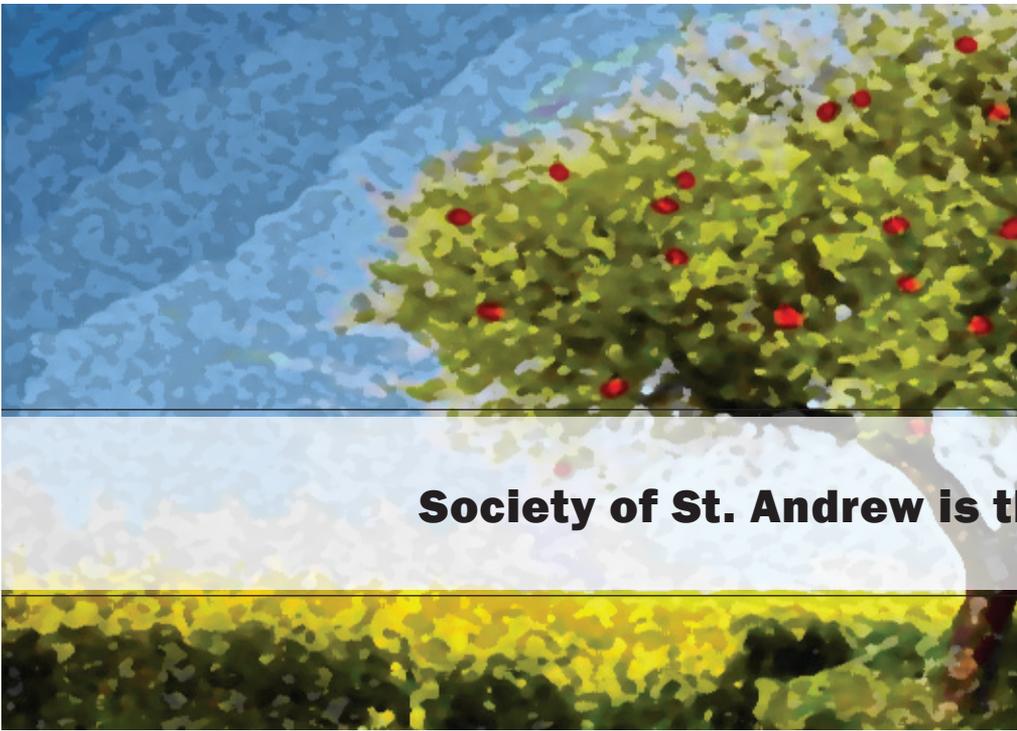
Eva C. Kalke - Maricopa, AZ

Signs

SATURDAY – DEC. 11

Scripture: Philippians 4:8

"Sign, sign, everywhere a sign... blockin' out the scenery, breakin' my mind. Do this, don't do that. Can't you read the sign?" That is the chorus to Five Man Electrical Band's 1971 song Sign. Whenever the topic of signs comes up, that song plays in my mind. The song is about not judging a book by its cover.



Society of St. Andrew is t



Good Stewards of God's Creation

Society of St. Andrew (SoSA) was founded in Virginia in 1979 on Christian principals of caring for the environment; living a simple, sustainable lifestyle; and caring for the “least of these” by modeling a commonsense solution to the problems of food waste and feeding the hungry.

SoSA uses the excess of God's abundance to feed those who don't get enough to eat, for 5¢ per serving.



Saves Good Food from Going to Waste

SoSA saves tens of millions of pounds of perfectly good, fresh produce each year, food that would otherwise go to waste, and donates it to feed the hungry throughout the nation.

Using the proven biblical practice of gleaning farm fields and orchards after the harvest, each year SoSA engages tens of thousands of volunteers who pick, bag, and deliver leftover crops that, for a variety of reasons, would not be sold.

Go Green with the Society of St. Andrew



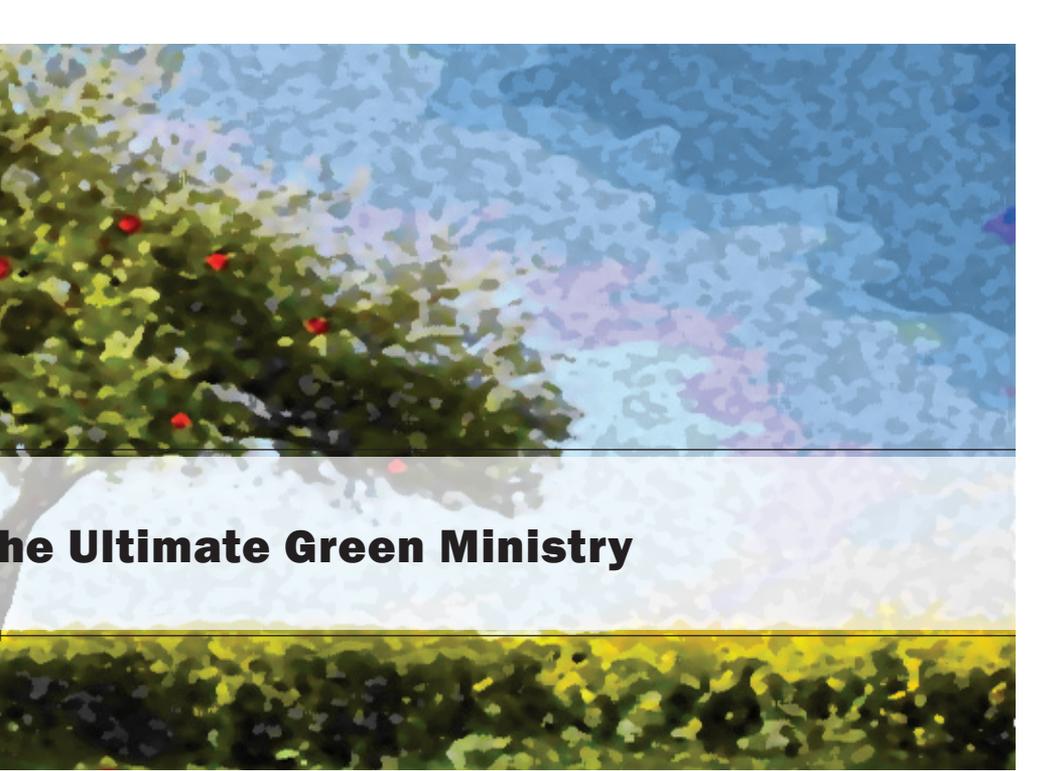
Pray



Volunteer



Donate



The Ultimate Green Ministry



Benefits the Environment

SoSA keeps thousands of tons of food waste out of landfills, not only saving good food, but also reducing the production of methane gas, which damages the atmosphere.



Opportunities to Act on our Faith

SoSA supplies fresh fruits and vegetables rather than high-caloric “filler food,” improving the health and well-being of our society’s most vulnerable.

Harvest of Hope, SoSA’s mission retreat program, teaches youth and adults how to live responsibly in a hungry world, and to care about those who are hurting.

SoSA’s Gleaning Network and Potato & Produce Project put faith into action by gleaning leftover produce from farms and bagging excess loads of potatoes, and then distributing the food to local feeding agencies.

SoSA offers seasonal devotions and other programs– Lent, Advent, Vacation Bible School, and Christmas Cards – to enrich spiritual life, and inviting participants to feed the hungry through prayer, volunteerism, and financial giving.

We, humans, aren't that great at reading signs. We often see the signs that confirm our desired outcome and ignore the signs leading us away from our will toward God's will.

The Bible is full of references to signs, but many of those are warnings we can misinterpret. *You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omen, to lead astray.* (Mat. 24:24)

So, how can we tell which signs to pay attention to? There is guidance in Philippians – *measure it according to what is true, honorable, just and commendable.* If you find that the sign is leading you away from these things, it is leading you astray.

Prayer: Lord, help us to read the signs and stay on the path to a closer relationship with you. Amen.

Chris Howell – Madison Heights, VA

Listening for a Still Small Voice – or Mighty Thunder!

SUNDAY – DEC. 12

Scripture: 2 Peter 3:9

I constantly watch for signs from God – telling me what to do – what not to do. Some days begin badly at dawn. The car won't start, and when it does I get stuck in a massive traffic jam, or a surprise storm finds me without an umbrella! Sometimes, I think God is saying, "Don't go to work today!"

Occasionally, I'm on unfamiliar roads. While I have GPS programs, I've learned these are not 100% reliable. You'd think following road signs would help— not so much. If my sense is to turn right, the correct way is usually left! I just need another kind of sign.

Years ago, I pondered going into pastoral ministry. I thought about going to seminary and following in my father's footsteps. I tried to hear a call from God— Is this what I should do? I listened hard for a word, – a call to ministry.

Finally, I heard Him say “Are you kidding me? I did call you – you are right where I need you.” I realized God doesn’t always answer the way we anticipate.

Prayer: God in heaven, open our hearts and minds to hear and understand your plan for us may not be what we expect or think we want, but it is Your will. Amen.

Kathi Wise – McLean, VA

Signs of God's Love

MONDAY – DEC. 13

Scripture: Psalms 37:7

During this stressful time in my life, a time of waiting for solutions and answers, God sends signs in varied forms. One of these signs is a new scripture; Psalms 37:7- *Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him.*

Rushing before the predicted thunderstorm, my eyeglasses dangling from a cord around my neck, I struggled to move the 40lb. bag of dog food from the grocery cart to my truck. I heard a little ‘ping’, like an object falling and hitting something. Not seeing anything, I drove home. Later, putting on my glasses, I noticed the left lens was missing from my glasses!

I searched everywhere, to no avail, and then remembered the ‘ping’ I heard in the parking lot earlier. Rushing back to beat the storm, I located my previous parking spot. There, leaning vertically on its edge, standing safely against the curb, was my missing lens!

Not smashed by a car tire nor scratched at all! What are the odds? God’s help in this situation was a sign of His love, compassion, and care for me, as well as a reminder that He is always with me.

Prayer: God, I thank you for this and the many other signs of your constant care that I receive daily. Amen.

Carolyn Stone Purdy – Harrisonburg, VA

The Parking Lot Cries Out

TUESDAY – DEC. 14

Scripture: Luke 19:40

I was appointed to a new church in July 2020. I found myself isolated from the people I was called to serve. My people were isolated from each other. The church was isolated from the community, all due to the COVID pandemic. Our church leadership wanted to remind people about the joy of Christmas, despite COVID, but how? A drive-through nativity.

Stations were established and families were recruited. Then the CDC rules tightened, and fewer people were allowed outside. Concerns grew.

Could Jesus' birth be communicated with a skeleton crew? Would it be sacred if it happened outside of the church? Nevertheless, we made plans, built sets, prepared costumes, and made scripture recordings to play through car stereos.

The weekend before Christmas, the church hosted the drive-through nativity. For two nights, a steady stream of cars drove through. There were smiling children, grateful parents, and occasional tears. We invited those in each car to worship with us that Christmas. By the time the event was over, two thousand people had driven through and heard the good news.

Prayer: Holy God, remind us of creative ways to share the gospel boldly and give us signs to show us how You move in spite of us. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Jacob Sabms – Chesterfield, VA

Signs of Love

WEDNESDAY – DEC.15

Scripture: Acts 5:12-14

This Advent season invites us to look in awe at God's ultimate sign of love, gifted to humanity— the baby Jesus. There are many signs in the Bible, and I find myself searching for new signs today. In my prayers, I often ask God to "show me a sign!"

In Acts we're told, "The early Apostles did signs and wonders among the people, so that more believers were added to their numbers daily. This challenges my thinking. Rather than looking for signs from God, how can I be a sign of love to others?"

During this busy season, I will look for opportunities to put love into action. It may mean giving a word of encouragement to a tired store clerk, or visiting a shut-in neighbor, or giving a welcoming smile to the strangers I meet. Are you prepared to be a sign? What gift can we bring?

"Love came down at Christmas." A wondrous, miraculous gift was brought to Earth! During this sacred season, I pray we stay alert to everyday encounters, where we can be a loving sign to all who come into our path.

Prayer: Lord, teach us to be signs of love so we may help new believers come to you. Amen.

Bob Brooks - Fredericksburg, VA

A Tiny Messenger with a Big Message

THURSDAY - DEC. 16

Scripture: Isaiah 40:28-31

A couple of years ago, I had a "routine" operation that led to two more hospitalizations and illnesses of all kinds. My operation was in February. By May, I was underweight and exhausted. I barely had the energy to make it through the day. I wondered if I would get well or if life would now be like this.

Every morning, I sat on our deck, watched the birds, and prayed. One day, while holding my prayer beads, my head bowed in prayer, I suddenly heard the fast beat of tiny wings. I looked up at a Ruby Throated Hummingbird hovering inches from my face.

The bird darted from side to side but centered itself before me again. Clear as the sight of the little bird, these words came into my mind: "You are small, but just like this tiny hummingbird, you are strong."

God knew I'd been reading about hummingbirds. They fly 500 miles nonstop across the Gulf of Mexico to return from their migration. I wondered

how something that small could make such an arduous journey. Now, because God gave me this sign, I knew I could make my trip back to health.

Prayer: Father, thank you for listening to our prayers and meeting us in our everyday lives. Amen.

Regina K. Carson – Chesterfield, VA

Meant Just for You

FRIDAY – DEC.17

Scripture: Luke 2:12

It takes practice. How many years were those shepherds keeping watch over their flock? It takes awareness. In the dark of night and the silence of the hills, they were vulnerable. It takes trust to not be afraid! Surely an angel, standing before them in all God's glory, would be sign enough! It takes listening. They stayed, leaned in, and heard every word spoken to them.

They were told there would be a sign for them...not more angelic messengers of astonishing brilliance, but an ordinary sign— A baby, born in the recesses of a rough stable. This is the sign of a Messiah? Yes, it was a sign meant just for them, in their trusting, ordinary lives.



image: Freepik.com

It takes being open. It takes being *opened*. It's like seeking, stepping into a world with as few distractions as possible, then, being distracted with something that catches your eye. A sign meant just for you. Like looking at a bare tree in the dead of winter, one that you've seen hundreds of times, and seeing in the twisted branches the rough shape of a heart. That was a sign for me, that after hundreds of ardent prayers, I knew my daughter and her family would be alright.

Prayer: Lord God, bid us to see with the eyes of our hearts, the wondrous signs of love meant to captivate us completely. Amen.

Nancy Severin - Fort Morgan, CO

Such a Blessed Sign

SATURDAY - DEC. 18

Scripture: Daniel 4:3

My dad was sleeping, exhausted from moving to a hospice house the night before. The doctor estimated he had four days left. My so-called wisdom told me to let him sleep that afternoon. I decided not to wake him.

The following day, I would wake him up, regardless, to talk. So, I busied myself with work on my laptop while I sat by his bed, thinking about things I wanted to tell him. Less than eight hours later, however, my dad was gone. My regret from not waking and relaying my message to him became agonizing.

Weeks later, God gave me a sign: a vision on a sanctuary wall during a worship service. My dad appeared with his arm around my mother (who passed the year before). They looked healthy and peaceful. He smiled, waved, and disappeared. I knew then my dad was telling me everything was fine. He knew what was in my heart, and they were with the Lord.

Until today, I'd only shared this event with close friends and family. This opportunity to tell about a time God gave me a sign is another sign— it's time to declare more of God's abundant goodness.

Prayer: Lord, we're grateful for your mercies this Advent season and always, especially those which give us peace. Amen.

Julie Erickson - Olathe, KS

Getting Still, Finding Peace

SUNDAY – DEC. 19

Scripture: Psalm 46:10

I was feeling “caretaker overload” and needed time away. A friend told me about a Franciscan prayer center. There, I could have a private room and three meals a day. It sounded like heaven. And it was, but it didn’t appear so at first.

Located in a rural area without much scenic allure, the center felt isolated. The interiors were dimly lit and too quiet. Inside my room, a small lantern glowed next to a placard that read: *Be still and know that I am God*. I admit, I felt a little trapped and at loose ends.

I looked for things “to do.” I walked the labyrinth, explored the library and browsed the book store. At dinner, I had a friendly conversation with another guest. Afterward, I scrolled the internet to find a good local hike for the next day.

It took twenty-four hours, but I finally got still. I sat without a book, wandered outside with no destination, and took a nap. The quiet and absence of demands on me worked their holy touch. Peace replaced anxiety.

Prayer: Loving God, we are busy and distracted. Grant us stillness in the midst of our comings and goings so that we may know your peace. Amen.

Katherine Roberts – Chapel Hill, NC

This Will be a Sign for You

MONDAY – DEC. 20

Scripture: Luke 2:8-14

Ms Mary, our Boston Terrier, looked up at me, and in her eyes, I saw a sign of God’s presence and love. Love declares that God is here.

Ms Mary jumped for the door handle, asking to go outside into the sunshine, the breeze, the sounds and presence of life. She reminded me that God created all things to be cherished and enjoyed. Ms Mary leaped up and down, her excited bark announcing she was ready for her supper.

She was a sign of the God who made all living beings and called us to the miracle of life. Ms Mary played with us, chasing her ball and tagging a laser beam as it danced across the floor. She showed us how God made us to delight in all things.

Prayer: God of life and light, come to us this Advent. Touch us in love with the wonder of all creation. Let nothing pass that is not a sign of your care for us all, in the name of the child who lay in the manger. Amen.

Bill Olewiler - Fleming Island, FL (In memory of Ms Mary, 2010-2021)

Unexpected Sacred Signs

TUESDAY - DEC. 21

Scripture: Isaiah 40:5

What would we do without signs? They tell us which way, how far, names of streets, buildings, parks, etc. They warn of danger, point to attractions, and advertise coming events.

As Christmas approaches, we hear, once more, what the angel said to the shepherds, "This shall be a sign unto you". The shepherds were given directions and promised a sign, so they would recognize the Holy Family. It was a personal, sacred sign.

I've never heard God tell me to watch for a specific sign. However, I am often surprised by a sight or sound that becomes an awesome moment. These moments remind me God created, and is in charge of, the world in which we live and the universe around us. These unexpected moments are my personal sacred signs.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for sharing signs of your sacredness with us. Teach us to become more attuned to your wavelength. Amen.

Carolyn P. Maness - Lynchburg, VA



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2020 STATISTICS

Pounds Distributed:

46.2 Million

Events Held: 6,142

Volunteers: 23,125

2.7 billion servings shared

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Less than 3% overhead



Noticing When Jesus Smiles

WEDNESDAY – DEC. 22

Scripture: Mark 12:30-31

Living on the Mississippi Gulf Coast brings big rain totals. So not even 15” of rain in 36 hours, could keep the trash guys from being out and doing their job. When seeing them, I always enjoy telling them THANK YOU, and on this rainy day, following that with a fist bump for the guy riding on the back of the truck. Seeing his smile made my day...

A soaking wet glove releases a big spurt of water during a fist bump. Many would not fist bump a trash handler’s “dry” gloves let alone his soaking wet gloves. This was a small gesture for me, but it seemed to be a refreshing treat for the trash handler.

So an old white guy interacting with a young black guy whose smile lit up the world at that moment felt like seeing Jesus smiling down on us. This moment between two brothers in Christ was free from racial tension. God smiles when we take advantage of the opportunities He offers.

Prayer: Father God, thank you for bringing people into our lives and allowing us to experience your love with them. I pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Denny Engle – Gaatier, MS

God Emerges from Our Chaos

THURSDAY – DEC. 23

Scripture: Luke 2:16

I was serving a church in Hampton, VA when Hurricane Isabel devastated the area. Powerful winds tore down power lines and put us in darkness for days. Storm surge from the bay sent floodwaters into folks’ homes.

At one home, the water carried away a prized nativity set, scattering the figurines and pieces. After the storm, I noticed in the newspaper an item in the Lost and Found section: *Found – After Isabel – Olive Wood Joseph – hand carving*. Since there was a phone number and I wrote a religious column for the newspaper, I decided to call and see if there was a story.

The person who'd found Joseph told me that after the ad ran, someone reported she found Mary in her yard. Another person in Hampton had found a Wise Man. The entire set wasn't put back together but there was hope— just as we have when putting the pieces of our lives back together after a storm in our lives. Here was a sign that God's good news endures the worst of storms. Joseph and Mary emerged from a wrecked world, the first two actors in the drama that was the birth of Jesus.

Prayer: God who emerged from the darkness of this world to save us, make us whole this Advent season. Amen.

Norman Tippens - Selma, VA

Signs of Wonder

FRIDAY - DEC. 24

Scripture: Mark 1:9-11

I am all but completely bed-bound. I look at the same walls every day. So when I have an occasion to get out of the house, it's special. It had rained for days. On my way home from the doctor, the clouds opened up showing blue sky. It was a wonder.

Watching cloud formations can be a grace-filled time. Moments like these are signs pointing to the marvels of creation; an icon pointing to the blessings of God. Icons come in a number of shapes, images and actions reminding us of the love of God, and His plans for us. However, we need to pay attention to change, to the unexpected, to the unexplained.

Just as Jesus stopped to listen for God's expression of love, so must we stop and be still. We must pay attention to the people around us to see signs of the sacred in front of us; to experience the blessings God has set aside for us.

Prayer: Lord, take us out of the routines which fill our days. Open our eyes and hearts, so we can see signs pointing to the sacred reminders of your love for us. Amen.

Susan Keith - Rutherfordton, NC

Boxing Day

CHRISTMAS DAY – DEC. 25

Scripture: Mark 8:36

Quaker author Philip Gulley was asked the difference between a Quaker and an Episcopalian. He replied, “If a Quaker gets a new sweater, and there is not room in his wardrobe, he gives a sweater away. An Episcopalian buys a larger wardrobe.” While I’m not sure his generalization applies to all Episcopalians or Quakers, his point was made. Most of us are in pursuit of more.

In some countries, the day after Christmas is another holiday, Boxing Day. People take their excess food, gifts, money, possessions, box them up and give them to those in need.



Here, the day after Christmas is the day to buy more stuff, hopefully at better prices than before. Because the business of the American kingdom is... business. But the business of God’s kingdom is people, according to Jesus.

Nothing wrong with business. It provides a means for people to live, but people should be the priority. Jesus did not die so the stock market could go up. He died so people could be saved. I look around at all my stuff and ask “What do I really need? What is important to me?”

Prayer: Dear God, help me to be honest about my priority, by your Spirit, make it the same as yours. Amen.

Michael B. Henderson – Florence, SC

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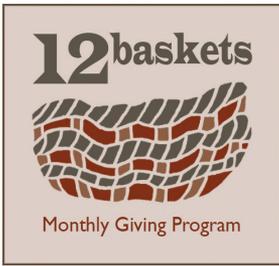
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Hunger Relief Ministries of the Society of St. Andrew

You're invited!

You are more than welcome, you're invited! As the Advent season ends will you continue to participate in the mission to reduce waste and end hunger?

Families in your community need your help.

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How will you continue to participate?

How will you help the families in need, in your community? Visit the Society of St. Andrew's website to learn more about donating, volunteering, having a staff person speak to your group, or leading the effort in your own community.

Society of St. Andrew, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, grassroots, interfaith ministry, has been working toward a world without hunger since 1979.

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