

## St. Mark's Forum

### Spring 2026

**Jan 4**

#### *Paging Dr. Sbaits: AI as Counselors?*

**Jamie Hommowun**

In the 1990s, Creative Labs released Dr. Sbaits, the “Sound Blaster Acting Intelligent Text-to-Speech Operator,” an interactive “therapist.” This early precursor predicted the rise of Large Language Model (“AI”) “counselors” that people – especially youth – are turning to online to address relationship, emotional and even spiritual concerns. Join Dr. Jamie Hommowun, PsyD, as we explore how these tools are shaping people, and how we can respond in love.

**Jan 11**

#### *The Year of Matthew—An Overview*

**Vicki Fink**

This year, Matthew is the primary source for the Gospel Readings in worship. Its themes and what is unique to Matthew will be highlighted in this session. Matthew’s emphasis on Jesus’ Authority, The Way of Righteousness, and the Church will be discussed.

**Jan 18**

#### *The Subversive Sermon on the Mount*

**Lindsey Paris-Lopez**

The Sermon on the Mount is the heart of Matthew’s Gospel and arguably the heart of Jesus’ teaching. While the Beatitudes are so familiar that they may have lost their flavor, they are actually radical upendings of the status quo. Lindsey Paris-Lopez will facilitate an exploration of this subversive sermon, and we’ll contemplate ways of applying it to our lives.

**Jan 25**

#### *A Christian Response to I.C.E.*

**Miguel Briones  
and Kim Reed**

The Rev. Miguel Briones, St. Mark’s Deacon, and parishioner Kim Reed will discuss how the Episcopal Church, the Chicago Diocese, and St. Mark’s have responded to increased immigration enforcement in our country and in Illinois, especially the Chicagoland area.

**Feb 1**

#### *From Family Separation to Community Care: The Story of 6000 Moms*

**Suzanne Luchs**

St. Mark’s member Suzanne Luchs will speak about 6000 Moms, a grass-roots organization she founded in response to family separations at the U.S. border. The organization has since grown into a 501c3 non-profit providing practical, emotional, and legal support to immigrant families. This session will explore how people of different backgrounds and beliefs can unite around shared values of compassion, dignity, and justice.

<b>Feb 8</b>	<b><i>Organizing for Our Community</i></b>	<b>Kim Reed and Alice Plutko</b>
Community organizing and participation in socially responsive groups can be key to implementing change and improving one's mental health. Kim Reed and Alice Plutko will briefly share how they got involved and will give a quick outline on how to get started.		
<b>Feb 15</b>	<b><i>ChatGPT as a Spiritual Companion</i></b>	<b>Bob Lundin</b>
Parishioner Bob Lundin will discuss how conversations with ChatGPT and other AI platforms have deepened his spiritual life and supported his personal growth. He will reflect on AI's surprising spiritual fluency across traditions and offer brief demonstrations of its remarkable ability to engage in spiritual dialogue and to create thoughtful, meaningful prayers.		
<b>Feb 22 – March 8</b>	<b><i>Paul Re-Viewed: A Fresh Look at the Apostle's Message of Inclusion, Justification and Faith</i></b>	<b>Father George Smith</b>
<p><i>A 3 part series challenging common assumptions about St. Paul and his letters</i></p> <p>Often seen as an historical figure, Paul's radical call to faith and freedom is profoundly relevant for the challenges of today. Over three Sundays, we'll unpack his core message, exploring themes of faith, identity, and community that still speak directly to our lives as followers of Jesus.</p>		
<b>Feb 22</b>	Beyond the Law: Understanding Paul's emphasis on radical grace.	
<b>March 1</b>	Identity in Christ: What Paul teaches us about who we are and who we are called to be.	
<b>March 8</b>	Community and Conflict: Applying Paul's vision for unity in a divided world.	
<b>March 15</b>	<b><i>Lenten Encounter with Icons</i></b>	<b>Aphrodite Peponis</b>
Encounter the events of Christ's Passion through the beauty and symbolism of several Icons of Easter. Join Aphrodite Peponis, a respected lecturer and presenter of icons and iconography, as she shares her love for the theology and symbolism of the icon.		
<b>March 22</b>	<b><i>The Call of Moses and Our Call to Mission Today</i></b>	<b>Vicki Fink</b>
We may never have thought we have much in common with Moses, but the account of his experience of God's call and the burning bush may offer a connection. In this session Moses' call story in Exodus will be explored as a potentially beneficial model for ministry today.		

**March 29** **A Walk Through Holy Week** **Father George Smith**  
In our culture, it seems that valentine's hearts are quickly discarded for Spring colors, bunnies, and Easter candy. Easter seems to arrive in February. For Christians, however, that is not the case. Every year we focus on Lent for 40 days and then act out the amazing drama that is Holy Week and culminates in Easter. Father George will lead us through an explanation of Holy Week observance at St. Mark's.

**April 5** ***Easter – No St. Mark's Forum today***

**April 12** **Making Peace With the Bible: Jacob and Esau** **Lindsey Paris-Lopez**  
Continuing last year's series on making peace with stories from scripture that have sometimes been subjected to violent interpretations, Lindsey Paris-Lopez will facilitate a discussion on Jacob and Esau. Stories of Abraham's descendants have historically been misappropriated to imply continual enmity between Arabs and Jews, or Judaism and Christianity on the one hand and Islam on the other. But the story of these long-estranged brothers actually ends in reconciliation. A particularly timely tale for a world in the throes of conflict yearning for mercy and peace!

**April 19** **Making Peace with the Bible: Joseph's Story of Forgiveness** **Lindsey Paris-Lopez**  
There's much more to Joseph than his technicolor Dreamcoat. This final section of Genesis is among the most dramatic in scripture, taking us on a journey from jealousy and betrayal to forgiveness and reconciliation. Lindsey Paris-Lopez will facilitate a conversation about Joseph's story as a prefiguration of the story of the Prodigal Son and, ultimately, of a wayward humanity's reconciliation with God.

**April 26** **Bishop Visit in Mahon Hall** **Bishop Paula Clark**  
There is no St. Mark's Forum today, but you are invited to join those who will be confirmed and received as they meet with Bishop Paula Clark in Mahon Hall

**May 3** **Spirituality Among Americans** **Miguel Briones**  
For many people, being spiritual means observing rituals, studying texts, and attending religious services—well, religiously. For others, it is not at all a question of traditional structures or notions of God. Deacon Miguel Briones will lead us in this about how we define spirituality in these times?

**May 10**      **The Nicene Creed: A Theological Exploration**      **Lindsey Paris-Lopez**  
We recite the Nicene Creed every Sunday, but why do these affirmations, in particular, make up the core tenets of our faith? What do they say about the Triune nature of God, why do they omit the substance of Jesus' life and ministry, and how do they shape our living faith? Lindsey Paris-Lopez will facilitate a conversation on core content and key questions regarding the Creed.

**May 17**      **Making Peace with Our Neighbor**      **Jamie Hommowun**  
At times, it feels like the differences between us are growing wider by the minute. It seems that everyone wants to bridge the gaps and "return to civility," but no one has a plan for how to do that – especially when the things that divide seem so fundamental and irreconcilable. Join Dr. Jamie Hommowun, PsyD, for a discussion of some of the principles of reconnection explored in the Enemies Project and how we might apply these to our own lives.

**May 24**      **Stepping Forward: Leadership as Ministry**      **Josh O'Shea, Patti King, & other past and present St. Mark's wardens**  
Join a conversation with current and past wardens as they reflect on what it's like to care for and serve the life of our church. Through shared stories and guided discussion, we'll explore how leadership takes shape through faith, relationship, and everyday acts of commitment. This is an opportunity to listen, reflect, and consider how we support one another in the common life of our parish.

**May 31**      **Beyond our Sight: The Function of the Liturgy.**      **Seth Luna**  
The liturgy appears to be made of words and actions but the subject of Eternity eludes both language and intellect. Join our music director, Seth Luna, to explore the mysteries made real by our weekly services which transcend time and place.

**Jun 7 - Aug 30 or Sept 6 Summer Schedule**