

**OFFICE HOURS:**

Monday-Friday 9:00 am -1:00 pm

**RECTOR:**

The Rev. Brooks A. Cato 501-554-1236  
brooks.cato@gmail.com

**DIRECTOR OF MUSIC:**

Dianne Adams McDowell 315-750-6027

**PARISH ADMINISTRATOR & YOUTH DIRECTOR:**

Leah Brockway 315-750-6040

**WARDENS**

Martha Berry 315-263-6384  
Jane Welsh 315-824-3070

**VESTRY MEMBERS:**

Wynn Egginton '25 315-825-5534  
Connie Harsh '25 315-824-2183  
Maureen Ghent '25 315-893-7383  
John Orr '26 610-716-2501  
Kerry Linden '26  
Rose Novak '26 315-824-2082  
Debbie Barker '27 315-691-6203  
Debbie Knuth-Klenck '27 315-750-0468  
Ellie Weyerter '27 315-345-9432

**CLERK OF THE VESTRY:**

Susan Cerasano 315-824-1037

**TREASURER:**

John Bowen 315-824-4118

**SEXTON:**

Barbara J. Hicks 607-244-3397

**TIDINGS EDITOR:**

Rose Novak 315-824-2082  
rnovakhamilton@gmail.com

# Tidings



*St. Thomas' Episcopal Church is an inclusive and worshipping Christian community that accepts the challenge of living the Gospel.*

## The Rector's Column

In some ways, our entire context has changed drastically in recent weeks. Aspects of our government, neighborhoods, and even families have become unrecognizable, and the tenuous nature of social contracts has become all too apparent. The loudest voices under the Christian banner promote a Christianity that would've been foreign to Christ while a bishop of our own church was lambasted for preaching Christ's mercy. The earth beneath our feet shifts far more quickly than many of us realized was possible. It's terribly easy to get discouraged, and the reasons for becoming so are myriad.

The events of the past few weeks are indeed shifting sand, but Christ remains our rock. And with Christ as our rock, our mandate remains unchanged. Look to our Catechism for what that entails. On page 855 of the Book of Common Prayer, the section titled "The Ministry" spells it out. We are all -- lay people, bishops, priests, and deacons -- ministers of the church. And while the foci of our ministries differs, the core remains the same for us all.

For the sake of brevity, I'll point out some highlights, but I encourage you all to read that section (and really, the whole Catechism. It's less than twenty pages) on your own. We are all called to represent Christ and his Church, bear witness according to our gifts, carry on Christ's work of reconciliation, proclaim the Gospel, and serve those in need.

While shifting sands provide increasingly ample opportunities to practice our faith, what we ought to do has not changed. To put it more succinctly, love God and love your neighbor.

Brooks+



## Scripture Lesson

And now faith, hope, and love remain, these three, and the greatest of these is love.

—1 Corinthians 13:13

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## Episcopal Public Policy Network

Interested in learning how the Episcopal Church gets involved in advocacy work? The Office of Government Relations and the Episcopal Public Policy Network are hard at work, and you can sign up at the links below to learn more and get involved:

[www.episcopalchurch.org/ministries/office-government-relations/](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/ministries/office-government-relations/)

and

[www.episcopalchurch.org/ministries/office-government-relations/eppn-sign-up/](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/ministries/office-government-relations/eppn-sign-up/)

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## “Souper” Bowl Sunday

February 9th after church, you're invited to a special “Souper” Bowl Sunday lunch! We'll have fresh soup for you to enjoy, and we encourage everyone to bring a canned good in exchange. We'll use that time to present the 2025 Budget and answer your finance-related questions. Whether you're rooting for the Eagles, the Chiefs, or for the Bills to make a surprise appearance, we'd love to have you! Invite all your friends for extra credit!



## Join the Conversation: Bible Study

After a loooooong journey through Jeremiah, we've finally turned our attention to the Letter to the Hebrews. We may finish before February lets up, in which case we'll dive into Revelation.

Also, notice that the name of the book is Revelation in spite of the broad temptation to add an "s" at the end.

**Where:** Hebrews is near the end of the New Testament, and Revelation is the last book of the Bible.

**What to Watch for:** In Hebrews, we'll look at how the author's context differs from ours, and in Revelation, we'll study ancient satire. In both, we'll examine the dangers of misapplying ancient texts to the modern world.

**References:** Hebrews makes extensive use of the Old Testament but not always in a favorable light. Revelation requires a grasp of the socio-political world under the Roman Empire, but don't worry, we'll cover that, too!

**Content:** Hebrews declares Jesus as The Way and builds a case for following him. Revelation looks to impending disaster and attempts to make sense of existential threats posed by life under the thumb of empire.

**Lectionary:** A little less than half of Hebrews appears in the Lectionary, primarily in Years B and C and on certain holidays. Revelation rarely appears in the Lectionary, but we will hear it several times in this year's Easter Season.

### Upcoming Events

**March 4, 2025: Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper.** Details still to come.

## Insights to Bible Study

Most Thursday mornings from 9:30-11 am, a group of parishioners meet with Fr. Brooks in the Parish Hall for Bible Study. Most show up in person. Many participate through Zoom - if out of town, the weather is snowy, or they just want to hop on from home. Folks come and go throughout each class but are always much welcomed.

Fr. Brooks has been leading Bible Study at St Thomas' since 2016 and in 2018 introduced the goal of reading the Bible in its entirety -- all 66 books! The end is in sight. All that remains are the books of Hebrews and Revelation, but that doesn't mean the fun will end with the completion of those books. There's plenty more to come!

There is a wide range of experience with Bible Study. One member has spent 20 years in various Bible Studies and has read the Bible in its entirety at least 12 times! Another has been involved in Bible Study since the 1980s. Others are new to studying the Bible beginning as recently as three months ago.

If you're curious and want to know what to expect, the basic experience involves going around reading sections of scripture out loud, and as we do this, Fr Brooks will say "let's pause here" to explain more about a passage. He may point out the meaning of a word as it was understood at the time the Bible was written, who may have written it, describe what was happening in society, and gesture at his creatively drawn maps to show the geographical location of what was occurring. Occasionally we'll explore current issues through the lens of Scripture. Questions ensue!

Members of the class say Bible Study "gives more meaning to what it means to live a Christian life. It allows me to be more expressive as a lector, since I know the full story of what I am to read rather than the few lines on the page." The class and conversations "help me explore what it means to be a Christian."

Some approach Bible study as part of a larger exploration of faith, saying "It grounds me in universal wisdom" and "it is an intellectual exploration of Christ...I also explore the tenets

of Buddhism and learn how other religions and philosophies view the world, societies, culture, and the afterlife."

Bible Study is an accepting community and Fr. Brooks' leadership is "excellent and makes all the difference." One member describes it as a group of "fellow students diving into a topic together." Another says "I enjoy the ability to fully explore the scripture and ask questions about difficult passages without being censured or looked down upon." A new member appreciates that Bible Study is made up of a "really kind and curious group of people. Initially I felt anxious asking questions or sharing my views but quickly felt at ease."

One remarked enthusiastically, "I love the historical aspect!" Another said she "likes that Fr Brooks approaches Bible Study not only through a ministerial lens, but also from a historical, cultural, and philosophical view."

Other particular aspects members like about Bible Study include deep dives into familiar and unfamiliar stories alike: reading more about women and their various roles in the Bible; the open, intelligent, and philosophical discourse; and the exploration of current events within the context of Christianity.

Hopefully this provides some insight about what goes on Thursday mornings at St Thomas'. Come check us out in person or on Zoom. You'll certainly never be bored, and we hope you enjoy getting to know fellow parishioners better while you're at it!

—Kate Lucey

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## Scrabble Club Reminder

Scrabble Club will meet only on the first Tuesday of the month. We'll be slinging tiles from 4:00 - 6:00 pm in the Unicorn Suite. If you'd like to join, feel free to drop in or reach out to Denise Dixon to be added to the text list for updates and other information at (315) 416-2323.

## St. Thomas' Episcopal Church

### Vestry Minutes

### November 24, 2024

*Present:* Debbie Barker, Martha Berry, Brooks Cato (presiding), Connie Harsh, Deborah Knuth-Klenck, John Orr, Jane Welsh, Ellie Weyter

*Absent:* John Bowen, Wynn Egginton, Kerry Linden, Rose Novak

#### *Call to Order*

The meeting began at 11:38 a.m. in the parish hall. John Orr opened the meeting with a prayer by St. Teresa.

#### *Clerk's Report*

The minutes of the October 24<sup>th</sup> vestry meeting were approved as submitted in final draft. Approval was moved by Debbie Barker; seconded by John Orr.

#### *Treasurer's Report*

John Bowen submitted the following report to the vestry members:

“The month of October was stable at treasury. There were no major issues or unusual expenses. Pledge income remained solid. There were modest losses in all endowment funds. **\$15,000** was removed from the Ramshaw Fund to support Christian Education. Just over **\$5,000** was spent from the Historic Preservation Fund on the tower entrance.

We found and corrected an error in Church Windows data entry of clergy and staff expenses. The Treasurer's Report now reflects the correct amounts in those expense lines.

The Budget and Finance Commission has been working on the 2025 budget. We are very close to a final budget for presentation to the Vestry in December. We will have a final projection for 2025 when all pledges have been received and expenses, particularly insurance, are known early next month.

Third Quarter Giving Statements were sent.

Grant awards from the Good Neighbor Fund will be sent within the next few days.”

Jane Welsh moved that the Treasurer's Report be received; Martha Berry seconded the motion. The Report was received as submitted.

#### *Rector's Report*

Brooks Cato was pleased to tell the vestry that he and Becca had met recently with an architect to begin the process of constructing their new house. They hope to be moved into their home roughly one year from the vestry meeting, or in November, 2025. On another note, Brooks stated that the office printer had to be replaced and they were now enjoying a new one that, in addition to the usual functions, has the capability of folding and stapling paper. Finally, Brooks wanted to let vestry members know that Leah had been making some headway with Godly Play education through online course work.

#### *Wardens' Report*

Martha Berry had nothing specific to report. She stated that she and Jane Welsh continue to attend the Budget & Finance Commission meetings and that they were finding them very enlightening. Jane Welsh had nothing to add at this time in the meeting.

#### *Commission Reports*

There were no reports submitted. The issues of advanced funding for HazMat and the Historic Preservation Architect would be addressed later in the meeting under the section on New Business.

#### *Old Business*

- *Safe Church Training:* Since the last meeting Brooks Cato had learned that some churches had set up a training day for anybody in the parish who needed to complete Safe Church Training. He is going to explore this for St. Thomas'.
- *Homelessness Task Force:* Brooks Cato reported that the task force is making progress. There will be more to report in the future.
- *Handicap Parking Spaces:* Brooks Cato reported that the quest for the designation of handicap parking spaces on Madison St. is a work in progress. There have been a series of phone calls and some confusion, but Brooks is keeping on top of things in the hope that this can be sorted out.

- *Good Neighbor Update:* As stated earlier by our treasurer, John Bowen, checks and letters will soon be going out to those who are receiving grants.

#### *New Business*

- *Budget & Finance Budgeting Process/Stewardship:* Brooks Cato announced that as of the Friday preceding the meeting, the church had received 50 pledges for
- **\$207,570.** Usually there are around 65 pledges, and the amount of funding now pledged is very close to the limit. It is hoped that if everyone pledges (who normally pledges) the pledge line will be at around **\$228,000.** On a second order of business, Brooks informed the vestry that Budget & Finance is very close to devising a balanced budget. The vestry will look at passing a budget at the December vestry meeting.

*Building Projects: Funding for HazMat & Historic Preservation Architect:* First, John Orr, referencing the detailed report that has been prepared by Crawford and Stearns, stated that there is an issue involving moisture with all three buildings on our property. It would cost **\$50,000** if we were to address this problem in all of the properties. After discussion, the Buildings Commission has decided to put other things into place to see whether we can handle some of this problem ourselves. Second, John informed the vestry that a HazMat (Hazardous Materials Assessment) must be performed before any work can be undertaken. HSE Consulting Services, LLC (of Cicero, NY), recommended by Crawford and Stearns, prepared a proposed HazMat Assessment for the rectory where the work will be started. Their proposal to perform asbestos inspection and sample analyses for the entire building comes to **\$10,130.** Third, John presented the proposed agreement submitted by Ted Bartlett (Crawford and Stearns) as to what services he will provide for the rectory. These include architectural drawings and discussions to discuss the development of the property, as well as recommendations on builders to provide services and site visits to oversee the quality of the work. The fee for this would be **\$9275.00.** Finally, John informed vestry members that no construction can be done for one year; however, quite a lot of preparatory

work regarding evaluation of the structure can be done while Brooks and Becca are still in residence.

Martha Berry moved that **\$20,000** be withdrawn from the Historic Preservation Fund (to pay for **\$10,130** for the HazMat Assessment and **\$9275** for Ted Bartlett's architectural and oversight services). Debbie Barker seconded the motion. The vestry voted unanimously to pass the motion.

On a completely different note, John Orr, who is a member of the Standing Committee for the Episcopal Diocese of CNY, reported that the diocese has been working on a new vision statement that will be made public soon. Additionally, the lease for the building currently housing the diocesan offices is up in 2027, with the result that the Bishop and her staff are looking for a new space. One question has to do with where to store the diocesan archives.

#### *Core Priorities: Gratitude (10 minutes)*

Brooks Cato informed the vestry that Millie Franklin has stepped down as head of the Parish Life Commission and Linda Jenks has stepped up to replace her. The vestry expressed their deep appreciation for all that Millie has done over her many years of service. She has not only organized many special events involving public occasions when required but, amongst her many talents, she has headed a Parish Life Commission that creates a space with lovely treats on Sunday mornings during which St. Thomas' shows its most welcoming nature. Second on his list, Brooks suggested that later in the Spring perhaps the parish could use one of its coffee hours to hold an "all-volunteer fair" so that newcomers could talk to persons who are involved in various areas of service and perhaps be encouraged to join in. After a brief conversation it was decided that it would also be a good idea to add the list of commissions to the Newcomer's Folder that is distributed at Sunday services.

#### *Announcements:*

- *Announcements:* Announcements of importance to the parish were made.
- *Next meeting:* The next meeting is set for December 22nd, which is the weekend before Christmas.

- *Prayer Leader:* Debbie Barker will be leading prayer at the opening of the next vestry meeting.

Jane Welsh moved that the meeting be ended; Debbie Barker seconded the motion. The meeting ended at 12:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Susan Cerasano, Clerk

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## **A Message from the Presiding Bishop's Office**

### **Presiding Bishop and President of the House of Deputies Release Joint Letter In Response to Immigration Policy Changes**

On January 21, 2025, the heads of the two legislative houses of The Episcopal Church, The Most Rev. Sean Rowe, Presiding Bishop, and Julia Ayala Harris, President of the House of Deputies, responded to recent policy changes regarding immigration. In it, the two reiterate The Episcopal Church's commitment to be persistent advocates for "compassionate and humane policies." Should you wish to read the letter in full, you may find it at

<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/publicaffairs/letter-from-episcopal-church-leaders-on-trump-administration-immigration-executive-orders/>

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## **A Prayer**

Just God, as you redeem the oppressed and value their lives, help us stand with communities in pain, reflecting your justice and compassion.

—Sojourners

## **Nave Gazing**

At the most basic level, a sanctuary is simply a holy place.

Beyond that, the word has taken on specific meanings, from the Roman sanctus shrines dedicated to members of their pantheon to the inner sanctum of the Holiest of Holies in the Jewish Temple. In Christian tradition, we've named our holy places sanctuaries for almost as long as we've had them. Like the Holiest of Holies, though, much of Christianity further defined sanctuary as a specific part of a church building. Technically speaking, the sanctuary is only the area inside the altar rail, but it's become common parlance to refer to the entire church's worship space as the sanctuary.

In time, sanctuaries began to be seen as havens where one could enter and weather whatever storm blew in. Running parallel to this, holy places very quickly became places for people seeking refuge from more than literal storms. It's difficult, perhaps impossible, to establish when sanctuaries became safe havens for those fleeing all kinds of trouble -- such as persecution, legal trouble, and invading armies -- but the phenomenon occurred all over the world and in almost all religions.

For Christians, we inherited the concept of sanctuary as a place of sacred protection from Ancient Judaism. First Kings contains a passage that established just such a sanctuary for fugitives who clung to the sacrificial altar. Notice that this was not intended solely for the innocent or unjustly charged; sanctuary was for those in any kind of legal trouble, even the guilty. The Book of Numbers expands the idea further, creating the original six sanctuary cities where those charged with murder were allowed to flee. Again, guilt was not the immediate concern, safety was. Trials and judgments would be made later, but the immediate claim of safety protected individuals from those seeking vengeance.

In early Christianity, the practice of seeking shelter in sacred spaces continued, and it was codified into law in England as early as the 4th

Century AD. The legal recognition of sanctuary became widespread in time, and even in places where it held no legal standing, sanctuary was generally respected out of a deference for sacred places. If you've ever seen *Les Miserables*, the beginning relies heavily on a criminal claiming sanctuary for protection from the law. This, by the way, is the reason we have instantly recognizable red doors: they were effectively the medieval equivalent of giant neon signs flashing safety for any one in need.

Legal recognition of sanctuary existed for well over a thousand years in England until it was abolished by King James (yes, that King James) in the 1620s. Many still claimed and respected sanctuary, though. There has long been a power struggle between churches and governments, like the controversy that arose between Thomas Becket and Henry II. The question, "Who has the responsibility, power, and authority to try cases involving the church?" sparked many historical debates, and sanctuary absolutely remained a controversial topic. With that said, however, respect for the practice often outweighed whatever legal status it had at the time.

Today, we are most familiar with sanctuary in reference to sanctuary cities within the United States, or, if you've been reading recent headlines, sanctuary as it applies to immigration arrests. Prior to January 21 of this year, churches had something similar to sanctuary status primarily in relation to the access Immigration and Customs Enforcement had or did not have to church property. Some argued solely for the worship space while others claimed any church property -- including areas outdoors -- as sacred and therefore able to grant asylum. Our legal system did not explicitly call this sanctuary, but it considered religious buildings to be "sensitive locations" along with schools, hospitals, and public demonstrations. While the categorization along with other locations and the name of the practice were different, the protection of sensitive locations was essentially a modern application of the tradition of sanctuary.

A recent political change, though, has removed the barrier protecting sensitive locations. In other words, we now have only a sliver of the legal standing for sanctuary we once had. Religious

organizations including but certainly not limited to The Episcopal Church are pushing back to reclaim this long-standing aspect of how we practice our faith, though the dwindling separation of Church and State promises to make this an arduous task. It's worth the reminder, though, that the concept of sanctuary existed long before legality had a say and has persisted throughout the millennia regardless of the degree of legal recognition. People will continue to seek sanctuary in religious buildings, and time will tell if the sanctuary religious organizations offer will be respected.

To end on a lighter note, one of my favorite stories about sanctuary is that of Dame Elizabeth Grey who sought sanctuary after the War of Roses two separate times. The second of these is more notable. Having learned her lesson about the discomforts of living in a drafty, old church building once already, she moved herself and her children into Westminster Abbey with a mighty load of royal furniture, clothing, and so many chests that her servants tore holes into the abbey's walls for the sake of expediency. Seeking sanctuary is and has been many things, but Dame Elizabeth Grey believed there was no reason it had to be uncomfortable!

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### A Quote

"The capacity to respond [bravely] . . . doesn't drop from the sky, nor is its significance measured by a week's worth of media coverage. That kind of boldness is preceded by countless, smaller decisions that summon bravery. Its ultimate significance is determined by how we live after a moment passes."

—The Rt. Rev. Mariann Edgar Budde

## **Sermon from the Third Sunday after the Epiphany: Luke 4:14-21**

**The Rev. Brooks Cato**

**January 26, 2025**

Earlier this week, The Rt. Rev. Marian Edgar Budde, Bishop of the Diocese of Washington and overseer of the National Cathedral, Bishop Budde preached a sermon. It wasn't terribly exciting. It wasn't fun. I mean, it was church. She was honest and true and faithful. If you haven't watched the whole thing, that's your homework. Go and watch and judge for yourself if she was nasty or faithless or using her pulpit to berate.

For years, we've talked about things that are core to our faith. There's Jesus, obviously, at least I hope it's obvious that Jesus is at our core. There's loving God and loving neighbor. There's sorting out the truth by judging the fruits of people's actions. But one of those core lines we've heard more than a few times comes from Fr. Steve, my friend down in Chenango County. As long as I've known him, he's said, "If you think being a Christian is easy, you're doing it wrong." Some of y'all've heard me say that and pushed back, which I understand. The way our nation has come to be, Christians hold a unique place in the theistic hierarchy of America. It's not one I would've chosen, but it's there nonetheless. We've become the unofficial religion of the state, and because of that aggrandized position, we've forgotten what it means to be Christian. Being Christian has come to mean getting angry over what's on somebody's coffee cup or who gets to read stories at your local library. Being Christian has come to mean outrage over fabricated slights. That's easy. It's easy to get angry over inconsequential things that come with no risk for us. We've had it so easy that we had to make up persecutions to garner attention. But y'all, it's easy to cosplay as the persecuted when you're not.

What being Christian actually means is looking to the truly persecuted and extending love, mercy, shelter, and food no matter the cost to you. Being Christian actually means visiting with the persecuted in their reality and feeling the pang of remorse as you return to the safety and comfort of your own reality. Being a Christian actually means standing between the persecuted and their

oppressors, come what may, even when what may come is dangerous. Being a Christian means changing your ways when you realize you've gone astray, which means admitting you were wrong or acted out or, maybe most painful, got duped, and then taking responsibility not just for the harm you caused but also the consequences now laid at your feet. And being a Christian means doing all of this with plowshares in place of swords (or guns for that matter). That's hard, some might say naive, but that's exactly what we're called to do: embody compassion and mercy with every step.

We've also talked about how Christianity's upside-down. What I mean is that our world works in certain ways. The rich and powerful get what they want. The pursuit of wealth justifies any act. Exploitation is the obvious means to any end. The poor, the alien, the queer, the brown, the unusual, the smelly, anything out of the supposed ordinary... they're all problems. Billionaires demand deference, politicians wield cruelty, and regular people suffer. Some even say a fat pocketbook is evidence of what a good Christian you are and with that, Christianity and exploitative capitalism have become intertwined. That's how our part of the world works, and because it does work this way, those who benefit from it think it should work this way. And they've got enough money and power to try and keep it this way.

Actual Jesus-following Christianity, though, is upside-down because it says power and wealth and being normal shouldn't matter. They do, but they shouldn't because the measure of a Christian is in doing kindness, acting with mercy, and seeking justice, not in expanding a pocketbook or collecting powerful friends. Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the prisoners, tend to the sick, you've heard this. Those aren't suggestions. Those are mandates. There's a great line that takes it a little further. It says, "The only way to get into Heaven is with a letter of recommendation from the poor." But the world as it is outlaws feeding the hungry, preys on illness, deports the alien in our land, and on and on. You know all too well how the world is broken; God knows we're all getting more familiar with that by the day. But Christianity is broken, too. Some are only realizing this for the first time now, some can't see it yet, but many of us have seen it for a long time. A caricature of Christianity has aligned itself with hate, cruelty, disdain, and ever-growing dangers. And now a bishop of our church receives calls for deportation and death threats simply for



preaching the Gospel. And she did it just like the long line of prophets all the way up to Jesus himself did it. She had the conviction to speak truth to power. She did it with a great love for those she sought mercy for. And she did it without concern for her own self-preservation. Y'all, that's as Christian as Christian witness gets.

Look at the reactions preaching the gentle guidance of Jesus has garnered. Sure, there's condemnation, threats, fear. But there's also been conversion. I don't even mean conversion just to get folks in pews. I mean conversion of hearts. I saw a comment section -- not exactly the place to go to find hope in humanity -- I saw a comment section full of people saying things like, "I've always been distrustful of religion, but if this is what religion is, sign me up" or "I'm an atheist, but sermons like hers make me appreciate Christians that actually act like Christ." Upside-down mercy and compassion with the guts to beg for sweeter fruits for everyone; it's world-altering and it gives hope where there was none before. We don't claim we're already there or that no one else is capable of doing this, but we do commit to it. In our baptisms, we prioritize mercy, respect, and the dignity of every human being. To paraphrase the section of the Gospel of Matthew that the bishop quoted, "the crowds were astounded at her teaching." Bp. Budde astounded the world with grace and the message of Christ. And now it's our turn.

In that passage from Nehemiah, there's something kind of beautiful going on. After half a century in exile, the people return to find little more than ruins. They know they need to rebuild, but before they can muster the motivation, a prophet stands on the rubble and reads the words of their faith. They weep at the sound of good news and reassurance, and then they feast. But they don't just feast, they remember the poor for whom nothing was prepared, and they feast with them, too. They're literally standing in the rubble of what their once-great city used to be and still their minds go to those in the greatest need. Over in Corinth, Paul says we're all one great human body, and if any part of this body suffers, the entire body suffers. If you're sitting here this morning, you are fortunate and your body is hurting whether you realize it or not. Many parts hurt right now, and we're connected, with sinew and bone and muscle and heart through every piece of this aching human body. And because of their pain, we've got upside-down work to do.

But what can we do? Have y'all heard the idea of "mutual aid?" If you haven't, it's all about supporting individuals by supporting your community, knowing what your gifts are, and figuring out how you can use those to contribute. It's not one-to-one barter or a direct exchange of this for that. It's supporting your community with your gifts. And that can be just about anything. Don't think you can do much but you know how to knit? Make hats and gloves and cozy socks. Know how to cook? Make a big pot of soup and freeze individual servings, or if you know where people are gathering, take it hot and steaming straight to 'em. Know how to shovel snow? Clear sidewalks. Got an old camping cot? Maybe you wanna keep it in your basement with a set of warm blankets at the ready. Don't be discouraged if you think your gift isn't dramatic enough. We're not all bishops in the nation's capital, but we need hearts and bellies and crow's feet and dentures and bum knees and, after the Autumn we've had, even a whole slew of messed up wrists. We need every part to keep this body whole, and we need every part to keep this body living with stubbornness and the faith to sustain us in a world that sees empathy as sin and compassion as treason.

Jesus says he's come to bring release to the captives, to let the oppressed go free, to bring good news to the poor. Now, I've been a little poor, and I remember what good news sounded like. Good news sounded like that one weekend mom checked out a camcorder from the library so we could make home videos. Good news sounded like a brand new sweater on sale enough that I wouldn't have to wear a sister's hand-me-down and face the cruel scrutiny of my classmates. Good news was the occasional non-stale loaf at the Day Old Bread Store. Good news didn't sound like handouts; it sounded like a break from fighting against everything. Do y'all know what happened after Jesus said all those wild, Jesus-y things? The crowd got so angry they ran him out of town and tried to throw him off a cliff. Preaching and living this upside-down life is dangerous. And for what it's worth, good news isn't good because you like it. It's good because it brings relief to other people, especially the ones that need it the most. You can watch deportations

and call it good news. You can see children targeted in schools, an active increase in the number of captives, cruelty rejoicing in others' pain, faces scoffing at the gentle Word of God, you can see all that and call it good, but calling it good doesn't make it so. We know what's good by their fruits.

Instead, when you judge the actions of this world, use Christ's fruits as your guide. Is it merciful? Is it loving? Is it peaceful and gentle and just? Does it promote empathy and compassion and self-sacrifice? Does it move you to love your neighbor? I have no illusions that this is easy. But no one said being a Christian was easy. This is hard work, and make no mistake, it is work. The world's not gonna turn itself right-side up while we stand aside and wait. It's time we push back against the pseudo-Christianity that wields so much power. It's time we take Bp. Budde's model and remind the world that Christianity is an open heart not a cudgel. It's time we reclaim the power in mercy, compassion, and love. It's time we made loving our neighbor a true priority. And it's well-past time we spread that good news, that people of faith are here for you, to love you, to care for you, to stand with you, to fall with you not because we benefit from it but because we remain broken until you are made whole. That is the Gospel of Christ, and that, that is why we are here. May that always be abundantly clear.

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### A Prayer

Creator, when all seems hopeless, grant us the strength to wait on you.

—Sojourners

## Sermon from the National Prayer Service on January 21, 2025

**The Rt. Rev. Mariann Edgar Budde  
Bishop of the Diocese of Washington**

*"O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on Earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*Jesus said, "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell – and great was its fall!" Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes."*

—Matthew 7:24-29

Joined by many across the country, we have gathered this morning to pray for unity as a nation – not for agreement, political or otherwise, but for the kind of unity that fosters community across diversity and division, a unity that serves the common good.

Unity, in this sense, is the threshold requirement for people to live together in a free society, it is the solid rock, as Jesus said, in this case upon which to build a nation. It is not conformity. It is not a victory of one over another. It is not weary politeness nor passivity born of exhaustion. Unity is not partisan.

Rather, unity is a way of being with one another that encompasses and respects differences, that

teaches us to hold multiple perspectives and life experiences as valid and worthy of respect; that enables us, in our communities and in the halls of power, to genuinely care for one another even when we disagree. Those across our country who dedicate their lives, or who volunteer, to help others in times of natural disaster, often at great risk to themselves, never ask those they are helping for whom they voted in the past election or what positions they hold on a particular issue. We are at our best when we follow their example.

Unity at times, is sacrificial, in the way that love is sacrificial, a giving of ourselves for the sake of another. Jesus of Nazareth, in his Sermon on the Mount, exhorts us to love not only our neighbors, but to love our enemies, and to pray for those who persecute us; to be merciful, as our God is merciful, and to forgive others, as God forgives us. Jesus went out of his way to welcome those whom his society deemed as outcasts.

Now I grant you that unity, in this broad, expansive sense, is aspirational, and it's a lot to pray for – a big ask of our God, worthy of the best of who we are and can be. But there isn't much to be gained by our prayers if we act in ways that further deepen and exploit the divisions among us. Our Scriptures are quite clear that God is never impressed with prayers when actions are not informed by them. Nor does God spare us from the consequences of our deeds, which, in the end, matter more than the words we pray.

Those of us gathered here in this Cathedral are not naive about the realities of politics. When power, wealth and competing interests are at stake; when views of what America should be are in conflict; when there are strong opinions across a spectrum of possibilities and starkly different understandings of what the right course of action is, there will be winners and losers when votes are cast or decisions made that set the course of public policy and the prioritization of resources. It goes without saying that in a democracy, not everyone's particular hopes and dreams will be realized in a given legislative session or a presidential term or even a generation. Not everyone's specific prayers – for those of us who are people of prayer – will be answered as we would like. But for some, the loss of their hopes and dreams will be far more than political defeat,

but instead a loss of equality, dignity, and livelihood.

Given this, is true unity among us even possible? And why should we care about it?

Well, I hope that we care, because the culture of contempt that has become normalized in our country threatens to destroy us. We are all bombarded daily with messages from what sociologists now call “the outrage industrial complex”, some of it driven by external forces whose interests are furthered by a polarized America. Contempt fuels our political campaigns and social media, and many profit from it. But it's a dangerous way to lead a country.

I am a person of faith, and with God's help I believe that unity in this country is possible – not perfectly, for we are imperfect people and an imperfect union – but sufficient enough to keep us believing in and working to realize the ideals of the United States of America – ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence, with its assertion of innate human equality and dignity.

And we are right to pray for God's help as we seek unity, for we need God's help, but only if we ourselves are willing to tend to the foundations upon which unity depends. Like Jesus' analogy of building a house of faith on the rock of his teachings, as opposed to building a house on sand, the foundations we need for unity must be sturdy enough to withstand the many storms that threaten it.

What are the foundations of unity? Drawing from our sacred traditions and texts, let me suggest that there are at least three.

The first foundation for unity is honoring the inherent dignity of every human being, which is, as all faiths represented here affirm, the birthright of all people as children of the One God. In public discourse, honoring each other's dignity means refusing to mock, discount, or demonize those with whom we differ, choosing instead to respectfully debate across our differences, and whenever possible, to seek common ground. If common ground is not possible, dignity demands that we remain true to our convictions without contempt for those who hold convictions of their own.

A second foundation for unity is honesty in both private conversation and public discourse. If we aren't willing to be honest, there is no use in praying for unity, because our actions work against the prayers themselves. We might, for a time, experience a false sense of unity among some, but not the sturdier, broader unity that we need to address the challenges we face.

Now to be fair, we don't always know where the truth lies, and there is a lot working against the truth now, staggeringly so. But when we do know what is true, it's incumbent upon us to speak the truth, even when – and especially when – it costs us.

A third foundation for unity is humility, which we all need, because we are all fallible human beings. We make mistakes. We say and do things that we regret. We have our blind spots and biases, and we are perhaps the most dangerous to ourselves and others when we are persuaded, without a doubt, that we are *absolutely right* and someone else is *absolutely wrong*. Because then we are just a few steps away from labeling ourselves as the good people, versus the bad people.

The truth is that we are all people, capable of both good and bad. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn astutely observed that “The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties, but right through every human heart and through all human hearts.” The more we realize this, the more room we have within ourselves for humility, and openness to one another across our differences, because in fact, we are more like one another than we realize, and we need each other.

Unity is relatively easy to pray for on occasions of solemnity. It's a lot harder to realize when we're dealing with real differences in the public arena. But without unity, we are building our nation's house on sand.

With a commitment to unity that incorporates diversity and transcends disagreement, and the solid foundations of dignity, honesty, and humility that such unity requires, we can do our part, in our time, to help realize the ideals and the dream of America.

Let me make one final plea, Mr President. Millions have put their trust in you. As you told the nation yesterday, you have felt the providential hand of a loving God. In the name of our God, I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now. There are gay, lesbian and transgender children in Democratic, Republican and independent families who fear for their lives.

And the people who pick our crops and clean our office buildings; who labor in our poultry farms and meat-packing plants; who wash the dishes after we eat in restaurants and work the night shift in hospitals – they may not be citizens or have the proper documentation, but the vast majority of immigrants are not criminals. They pay taxes, and are good neighbors. They are faithful members of our churches, mosques and synagogues, gurdwara, and temples.

Have mercy, Mr President, on those in our communities whose children fear that their parents will be taken away. Help those who are fleeing war zones and persecution in their own lands to find compassion and welcome here. Our God teaches us that we are to be merciful to the stranger, for we were once strangers in this land.

May God grant us all the strength and courage to honor the dignity of every human being, speak the truth in love, and walk humbly with one another and our God, for the good of all the people of this nation and the world.

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## A Prayer

God, open our hearts and hands to those in need, reminding us that all we have is a gift, meant to be shared in justice and generosity.

—Sojourners

# *This Is My Wish For You*

**Comfort** on difficult days,  
**Smiles** when sadness intrudes,  
**Rainbows** to follow the clouds,  
**Laughter** to kiss your lips,  
**Sunsets** to warm your heart,  
**Hugs** when spirits sag,  
**Beauty** for your eyes to see,  
**Friendships** to brighten your being,  
**Faith** so that you can believe,  
**Confidence** for when you doubt,  
**Courage** to know yourself,  
**Patience** to accept the truth,  
**Love** to complete your life.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

## Free Coffee

St. Thomas' has free coffee in the Parish Hall every Tuesday, 9:00-11:00 am. Stay and enjoy a cup or take one to go! All are welcome.



# SCHMITT DANCE STUDIO



## DANCE OPPORTUNITIES

### UPCOMING ADULT LINE DANCE NIGHTS

\$10 6:00-7:30 PM

**February 7th.** More dates to come!

### REGISTRATION IS STILL OPEN

#### FOR ALL DANCE CLASSES

**Classes for all ages!** Students are welcome to try out the first class for free.

**Join us in the Earlville Opera House Theater for our Winter Show on February 22 at 11 AM.**

### CONTACT US FOR DETAILS:

SchmittDance@gmail.com

Facebook.com/SchmittDance

**12 E Main St., Earlville, NY**

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## A Prayer

God of wisdom, grant us the insight to discern the truth in all that we do.

—Sojourners

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## Coffee Hour Host

If you would like to host a Sunday Coffee Hour, there is a sign-up sheet in the Parish Hall. Parish Life can make the coffee or teach you how, and you can just bring some goodies! If you have any questions, you can reach out to Leah in the office.

# Schmitt Dance Studio's Winter Show

MUSIC- SPARKLE- DANCE

**FEBRUARY 22, 11:00 AM**

**EARLVILLE OPERA HOUSE THEATER**

**18 E MAIN ST. EARLVILLE**

**\$5 ADMISSION**

*Thank you for coming to our winter  
dance performance!*



## Make an Online Donation

You can make a donation to our parish online with the link below. You will receive an email confirmation of your gift, and the Diocese will forward your gift and contact information to our parish for acknowledgment.

<https://cnyepiscopal.org/give/give-to-my-parish/>

When you go to the link above, you will fill out the donation form. In the Parish section, select "Hamilton: St. Thomas' Episcopal Church" and in the "gift note/designation" line be sure to type pledge, deficit appeal, or wherever you'd like your donation to apply.



## Flowers for the Altar

Just a reminder that if you would like to honor or remember a loved one with flowers on the altar, you can do that by making a donation to the Flower Guild (\$35 is recommended). Write a check to St. Thomas' Church and in the memo write Altar Flowers. Envelopes for flower donations are provided at the back of the church. You may either place the envelope in the collection plate during the Sunday morning service or mail or drop off your check in the Parish Office no later than the Wednesday prior to the Sunday you want your loved one honored or remembered so that the name(s) can be included in the bulletin. You can also fill in a date on the flower calendar in the Parish Hall.

Thank you.

—Rose Novak & Jana Laxa for the Flower Guild

## AA Meetings in Hamilton

TIME	NAME	LOCATION / GROUP	ADDRESS / PLATFORM	REGION
Monday, 7:00 PM	<u>Hamilton on the Green</u>	<u>Hamilton on the Green</u> First Baptist Church	First Baptist Church 27 Broad Street	Hamilton
Wednesday, 7:00 PM	<u>Colgate University</u>	<u>Shaw Wellness Institute</u>	113 Broad Street	Hamilton
Friday, 7:00 PM	<u>Hamilton on the Green</u>	<u>Hamilton on the Green</u> First Baptist Church	27 Broad Street	Hamilton
Sunday, 3:00 PM	<u>12 ½ Group of AA</u>	<u>St. Thomas' Parish House,</u> First door on the right	12 ½ Madison Street	Hamilton



## Prayers of the People as of January 31<sup>st</sup>

**For those in need:** Danielle Bikowsky, Michael Clough, Holly Crouch, Aster Dinku, Meredith Ewbank, Joan Fales, Lisa Gee and her children, Kaia Harding, Amanda Harlan, Caroline Hsu, Kathy Hynes, Angela Jones, Deborah Knuth Klenck, Pat Osowski, Joe Rupp, Patricia Tayntor, Paula Tayntor, Ed Vantine, Becky Vinopal, Christine Watkins, Ellie Weyer, Deb Willis, Dana Wratten, Deb, Bill, & their family, Brigid and her family, Jerry & Roseann Fitzgerald, Anthony & Vincent Pacillo, Charles & Susan, Adam, Chris, David, Elizabeth, Jan, Janice, Kate, Lee, Mary, Meral, Nichole, Nick, Sarah, Scot, Tara, Dan, Richard and The Rev. David McDowell-Fleming.

**For the Departed:** Bruce Bates, Marlene Probe, Edmund Bradley, SSG Joey Page, Cindy Decker, The Rev. Jeff Knox, Davide Sturges, Debbie Klineman.

## February Thanksgivings

### Birthdays:

Rebecca Cato (02/08), Cillian Brockway (02/10), Juniper Axtell (02/11), Samuel Owens (02/12), Sicily Catania (02/14), Mea Martineau (02/15), Emma Dudrick (02/16), Joshua Knapp (02/17), Anna-Marie Kuiper (02/19), Charles Jerome (02/22), Adrien Catania (02/26), Vivianna Linden (02/27).

### Baptism Anniversaries:

Susan Geier (02/02), Emily Hutton-Hughes (02/13), Gwyneth Davies (02/13), Scott Rivington (02/18), Jana Laxa (02/23).

### Marriage Anniversaries:

Lauren & Luke Marshall (02/23).

## On the Lighter Side



**Winter at St. Thomas'**  
*Peace & Joy*



**St. Thomas' Episcopal Church**  
**Scheduled to Serve**  
**February 2025**

DATE	LECTOR	LEM	USHER	ALTAR GUILD	FLOWER GUILD	NEWCOMERS
February 2	OT Maureen Fox NT Emily Hutton-Hughes	Amy Jerome	Ed Page	Jane Welsh	Sally Orr & Jana Laxa	Linda Jenks
February 9 <i>*Rite One</i>	OT Lynn Staley NT Kristin Strohmeier	Susan Cerasano	Ed Page	Jane Welsh	Sally Orr	Linda Jenks
February 16	OT Barbara Bowen NT John Orr	Maureen Ghent	Ed Page	Colleen Mc Nerney	Sue Geier	Linda Jenks
February 23	OT Kerry Linden NT Vivi Linden	Debbie Barker	Ed Page	Colleen Mc Nerney	Sue Geier	Linda Jenks



**Qidings**  
February 2025

St. Thomas' Episcopal Church  
12 1/2 Madison St.  
Hamilton, NY 13346  
Address Service Requested