



Tidings

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

The Rector's Column

After the wildly popular finance-focused edition of *Tidings* from February of 2024, we're providing a sequel this month with an updated look at all things financial. You'll also see much of the typical content included in this month's newsletter.

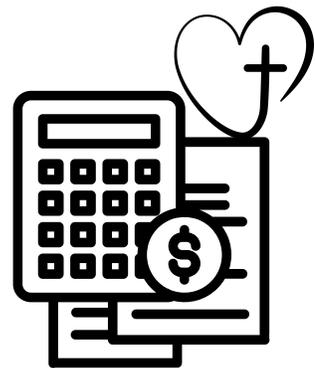
Talk about money can make folks nervous, and some of this stuff makes me itchy just thinking about it! Maybe that's as good a reason as any to talk about our church's finances with a healthy dose of transparency.

The following pages contain information that certainly sheds light on the inner workings of the budget, but I hope that same information does something more. I hope this information speaks to the work of ministry in our congregation. I hope you'll see a diligent and careful Budget & Finance Commission and Vestry. I hope you'll better understand how we come to our financial decisions and just how much your participation matters. I hope you'll come up with questions you'd like to know more about. And more than anything, I hope you'll see a faithful church meeting the challenges of our time.

Finally, I want to name a very important aspect of this entire conversation. As you'll soon see, thanks to an extraordinary Stewardship Season and the generosity of you amazing St. Thomas' folks, the Budget for 2026 is very nearly accounted for. Even so, we rely fairly heavily on outside funding through grants. In the long-run, it would be wonderful to wean ourselves off of those grants, but for now, we're delighted to have access to them to keep our annual budget funded.

In the meantime, grab a cup of tea, pull out the calculator (or sleep mask, if that's where numbers take you), and enjoy!

With gratitude,
Brooks+





Tidings

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Nave Gazing

Collection plates have been a part of the church for a mighty long time, preceded in some places by the alms box or the church coffers. Funding the ministry of the church has been a question since as early as the Apostle Paul when a significant aspect of his ministry included raising funds from his travels to support the fledgling church in Jerusalem. Paul was hardly the first, though. The scriptures of the Old Testament are full of commentary on how (and what) to give to support the religious work at the heart of their lives.

With that said, the passing of the plate today has become almost a trope in religious gatherings. Some even critique us for pulling in the masses only to pass the plate with a look of judgment and an expectation of turned-out pockets. I remember a time as a kid when I dropped a penny in the plate, and the grumpy couple in front of me jumped and glared at the sound of a child's mite clanking.

The way we collect funds to support the life and ministries of the church has taken many forms. Some places use woven baskets, presumably to give a loaves-and-fishes feel to the gesture. Some use velvet bags on the end of long sticks to gain access to those folks hiding closest to the wall (and farthest from the usher). I've even seen churches with credit card scanners positioned by the front doors! Regardless of matters of taste, it's a far cry better than selling indulgences or charging the old pew tax!

The Offertory -- that time when we pass the plate -- represents the offering of our lives' work and the recognition of the sacredness of that work. It also takes something fraught in our society and dedicates it to sacred use. The Offertory is as old as our services, as we've always needed ways to support the ministries of the church and the people set aside to do those ministries. There's even evidence of 3rd Century blessings for gifts of oil, cheese, olives, and fruit for one's bishop!

These days, St. Thomas' uses brass collection plates, which of course look lovely, a visual reminder of the precious gifts we offer to God: beauty, our lives' work, and a recognition that "All things come of thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee."

(Reprinted from February 2024)

Money Collections

Why does the church keep track of how much I give? (and what are those funny little envelopes for, anyway?)

There's a mundane answer to the first question: we keep track of how much money you give so that we can give you the information, so that you can then tell the IRS (if you choose to) and can get a break on your taxes if you itemize your deductions. That's all.

We won't haunt you if you get behind or pay more attention to you if you're ahead. As the person who collects and deposits cash and checks every week, I actually don't know how much you have pledged. (And don't want to.)

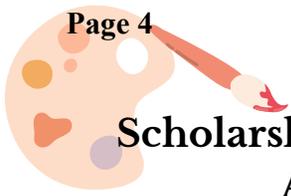
We do issue statements. The year-end one is the one that can be submitted to the IRS. The quarterly ones are just a service to parishioners who want to be reminded of where they stand for their own purposes.

So, what's with the envelopes? The envelopes are so that we can tell where cash comes from. If Alfred D. Fruitbat and J. Raccum Racocon each puts \$5 in the plate with no envelope, we won't know that those \$5 bills came from them, and we won't keep track of it for them. (Checks have signatures, so we automatically know where they come from.) But again, we don't actually care, unless you do.

Other churches may do things differently to be sure.

– Adger Williams





Scholarships for After School Art Program

Scholarships available for kids' after school art program starting in the Fall!

- Thursday (6-9 years old) or Friday (9-11 years old) from 3:00 to 5:00 pm
- There is a bus from HCS to the Arts Center
- No monetary commitment for kids that receive the scholarships
- Aimed at elementary aged kids with an interest in art
- First priority will be low-income families, but eligibility is not necessarily limited to low-income families
- Questions should be directed to Kathy Herold either by phone or email
315-368-4453
hamiltoncenterforthearts@gmail.com

Special Collections for Lent

Every Sunday in Lent, the Outreach Commission takes up a collection for different groups who serve our neighbors near and far. We'll share more information each week about the recipients, but we'll go on and give you a sneak peek of who we'll be supporting here:

February 22nd - St. Thomas' Migrant Discretionary Fund

March 1st - Volunteer Lawyers Project of CNY

March 8th - The Center

March 15th - International Refugee Assistance Project

March 22nd - Indivisible

March 29th - Hamilton Food Cupboard

Join the Conversation: Bible Study

Every Thursday Morning from 9:30 - 11:00, we're watching "Lord of the Rings"! We've just barely cracked into the second movie, so if you'd like to join us, it won't take too much to get caught up. If you think high fantasy with wizards, orcs, and magic isn't up your alley, give us a chance to change your mind. After 30 Academy Awards nominations, the trilogy took home 17 Oscars!

Upcoming Events



February 17, 5:00-6:30 pm: Pancake Supper

February 18: Ash Wednesday

12:00 pm & 5:30 pm: Ash Wednesday Services

Coffee Hour Hosts

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 to, and you can bring some goodies! If you have any questions, reach out to Linda Jenks at jewels2grams@gmail.com or 518-369-3384.





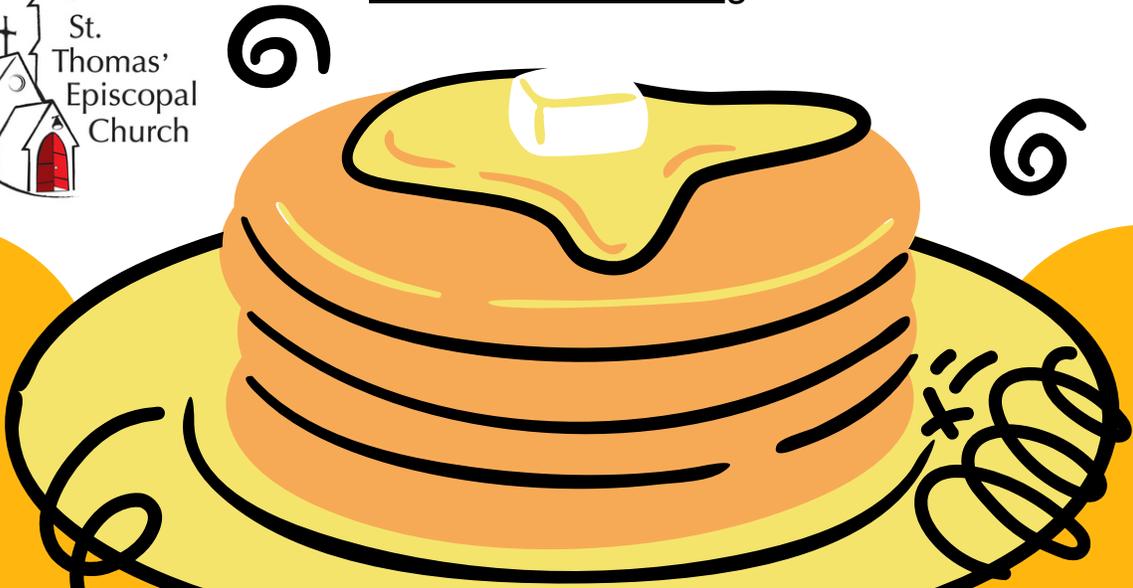
MARDI GRAS PANCAKE SUPPER

Tuesday, Feb 17
5:00-6:30 PM

The Parish Hall of St. Thomas' Episcopal Church
12 1/2 Madison St., Hamilton, NY

Enjoy food, fun, & good company!

stthomashamilton.org



The Outreach Commission

In this issue of *Tidings* about our finances. I just want to say that I'm proud to be a member of a church that has an outreach line in their budget. The amount in 2025 and '26 is \$7,500. The Outreach Commission, headed by Erin Loranty, decides how this is allocated each year. Four of the organizations that we give money to are organizations started by members of this parish: The Brackett Refugee Education Fund, the Community Action Program, Haiti Rehabilitation Foundation, and Community Bikes. The leaders of all of these organizations are grateful and feel affirmed by these grants. For the two organizations that operate overseas, our diocese matches the amount that we give to BREF and to Haiti Rehab.

Supporting others in need with funding is very important, but there's another kind of outreach which is more hands-on than writing a check: For example, when you help a neighbor, or assist at Friendship Inn, or help pack a box of flashlights, socks, and games for a family of four children deported to Guatemala. It seems to me that this is the kind of outreach which does at least as much for the giver as it does for the receiver.

– Liz Brackett



Opportunity to Support Immigrant Aid Agencies



Looking for a small and cozy way to support immigrant aid agencies? Check out this knitting pattern at the link below for a hat inspired by Norwegian resistance in the 1940s.

<https://www.ravelry.com/patterns/library/melt-the-ice-hat>

Free St. Thomas' T-Shirts

Thomas' T-shirts are available for FREE in the office. Feeling generous? Free will donations are accepted. Wear them with pride!



Treasurer's Report & Balance Sheet

Every month the treasurer sends two reports to the Vestry, the Treasurer's Report and the Balance Sheet. Together the two pages describe the financial condition of the church. This article is a brief effort to help turn those numbers into a picture we can all understand.

The Balance Sheet

The Balance Sheet is a monthly summary of all the church's financial assets and liabilities. The St. Thomas' Balance Sheet does not include the value of church buildings or contents. There are four columns recording balances for each account at the beginning of the current year, the end of the prior month, the activity (+ or -) for the current month, and the balance at the end of the current month.

There are rows for each of the financial accounts owned by St. Thomas' Church. At present, funds are held in three checking accounts and six investment accounts. St. Thomas' Church keeps two checking accounts separate from the general account, the Rector's Discretionary Account, and the Migrant Discretionary Account. Beneath the asset list is the liability section. This portion would list open accounts with vendors and loans or mortgages if there were any. Lower down the page is a list of named funds, established by the Vestry or donors committed to specific purposes, and columns reporting activity and balances for each. This list includes Memorial Garden Fund, Music Development Fund, Historic Preservation Fund, Good Neighbor Fund, and others.

The Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer's Report is the record of church operations. Late in every year the Budget and Finance Commission presents a proposed budget to the Vestry incorporating a best estimate of income and expenses for the operation of the church in the coming year. Every month the Treasurer's Report records monthly and year-to-date activity in a long list of income and expense lines. This is where pledge and other income sources are listed along with all the various expense lines including personnel, utilities, insurance, maintenance, and others. Columns also report, for comparison, prior year-to-date figures, and percent of budget consumed. This report allows the Vestry to see how the church is doing financially in near real time and give thanks or intervene as needed.

What does it all mean?

A quick glance at these two sheets shows that St. Thomas' Episcopal Church is an organization with about a million dollars in assets (not including buildings) taking in and spending over a quarter million dollars a year. Those are big numbers!

Let's look first at operations (Treasurer's Report). Income sources include pledges, gifts, plate, endowment, and grants. Pledges and other individual giving make up the greatest portion of St. Thomas' income. In 2025 annual giving (pledge and other) made up 86% of the budget. Endowment income was 9%, and grants from outside made up 5%. Total income, not including "Special Collections," was \$293,000. Remarkably, and thankfully, expenses in 2025 were \$293,000. St. Thomas' internal operation expenses were 89% of the total, while 8% went to Diocesan Assessment, and 3% to Outreach.

Continued on Page 8

Balance Sheet Investments and Funds

The Balance Sheet records both our checking accounts used for day-to-day income and expenses, and long-term investment accounts. Five of the investment accounts are held and advised by the Episcopal Diocese of Central New York in its Unified Investment Fund. The Good Neighbor Fund Account is held with a local firm. Funds in these accounts are largely gifts and bequests to the church set aside for income or future use. Some of these bequests have restrictions attached. When the Meggett and Moses Funds were established by their donors, the principle was to remain untouched and only the income dispensed to the church. The Good Neighbor Fund came unrestricted from its donor but intended to be dispersed in a short time frame to support underserved and needy communities in the local area.

Who is watching?

Copies of the Balance Sheet and Treasurer's Report are available to any parishioner. They are reviewed by the Budget and Finance Commission and the Vestry every month. The Vestry directs spending of funds. Policies are in place and followed for counting and depositing funds, directing expenses, and writing and signing checks. The Diocese requires an outside audit every two years and an internal audit on alternate years.

As you can see, St. Thomas' Church runs a very lean operation. Its mission is supported almost entirely by the generosity of current parishioners rather than a large endowment. There was no "profit" in 2025, and a few recent years recorded significant deficits. But this does not tell the whole story. Keeping St. Thomas' "open for business" is as vital to the

community as it is to those who worship within its walls. St. Thomas' hosts Friendship Inn, free coffee on Tuesdays, hot dogs on the 4th of July, and a warm spot for respite and reflection anytime. St. Thomas' Church was the conduit for \$14,812 in Special Collection Funds, money collected for specific, and sometimes urgent causes. Outreach, from operations was \$7,500. In addition, the Good Neighbor Fund awarded \$133,160 in grants in 2025. Those grants enabled neighboring organizations multiply their impact on the lives of struggling people in our community. The Migrant Discretionary Fund received for distribution nearly \$20,000.

Without St. Thomas', Hamilton might well be Pottersville!

– John Bowen

Consider This

Working for social change, to me, means to make visible in time and place that which has already been accomplished in principle by God Himself. This makes it possible to struggle for a better world not out of frustration, resentment, anger or self-righteousness but out of care, love, forgiveness and gratitude.

– Henri Nouwen (1932-1996)
was a Dutch Catholic Priest,
Professor, Writer, and Theologian

Attendance 2016-2025

This chart (page 10) tracks attendance numbers from January 3, 2016 to the end of December 2025. The blue line is each individual Sunday's attendance. The solid red line is a rolling 52 week average attendance. The red dots are the end-of-year Average Sunday Attendance (ASA). The latter is the primary way the Parochial Reports of The Episcopal Church track attendance changes. Big spikes are typically Easter, Christmas (when it falls on a Saturday, Sunday, or Monday), and other big services like All Saints'. The chart also shows our typical annual rollercoaster of increasing attendance in the Spring and Fall and lower attendance in the Summer.

What might be difficult to see is the trajectory our attendance was headed in before Covid. If we look right before we stopped having church in-person, we had a 52 week rolling average of roughly 82 on a Sunday, and our attendance numbers initially jumped to an average of nearly 100 as we shifted to Zoom. From there, it should be fairly easy to see the many hits we took during that intensive stage of the pandemic. It should also be easy to see how much the first half of 2022 knocked us even further down. From 2019 to the end of 2022, our attendance dropped by almost half!

The years since, though, have brought some serious increases in attendance. Our in-person ASA for 2025 was 58. Assuming my arithmetic is right, that's almost a 30% increase over 2022. That's especially impressive to me as it shows growth in spite of the immense amount of losses we've experienced over the same period.

2025 was an incredible year for growth at St. Thomas'. We grew in attendance. We felt less of the annual rollercoaster with sustained attendance over the summer. We have a new household visit almost every week, and many of them even decide to come back! And on the pledging side (not to reduce rising attendance numbers to rising pledging numbers, but the connection is one to pay attention to), we ended up with 73 pledging households, a 10% increase over last year!

One other note: this chart does not reflect our Zoom attendance, but we do keep track of it, too. The Average Sunday Attendance on Zoom is 12 people! Most of those folks attend primarily on Zoom, and even the folks who are sometimes in-person use Zoom as an alternative when getting onsite just can't happen. It's perfectly reasonable to think of our total attendance number as 70 if we were to combine the in-person and Zoom attendance. At least for now, though, we can't use the combined total for the official Parochial Report. We do, however, get to pat ourselves on the back!



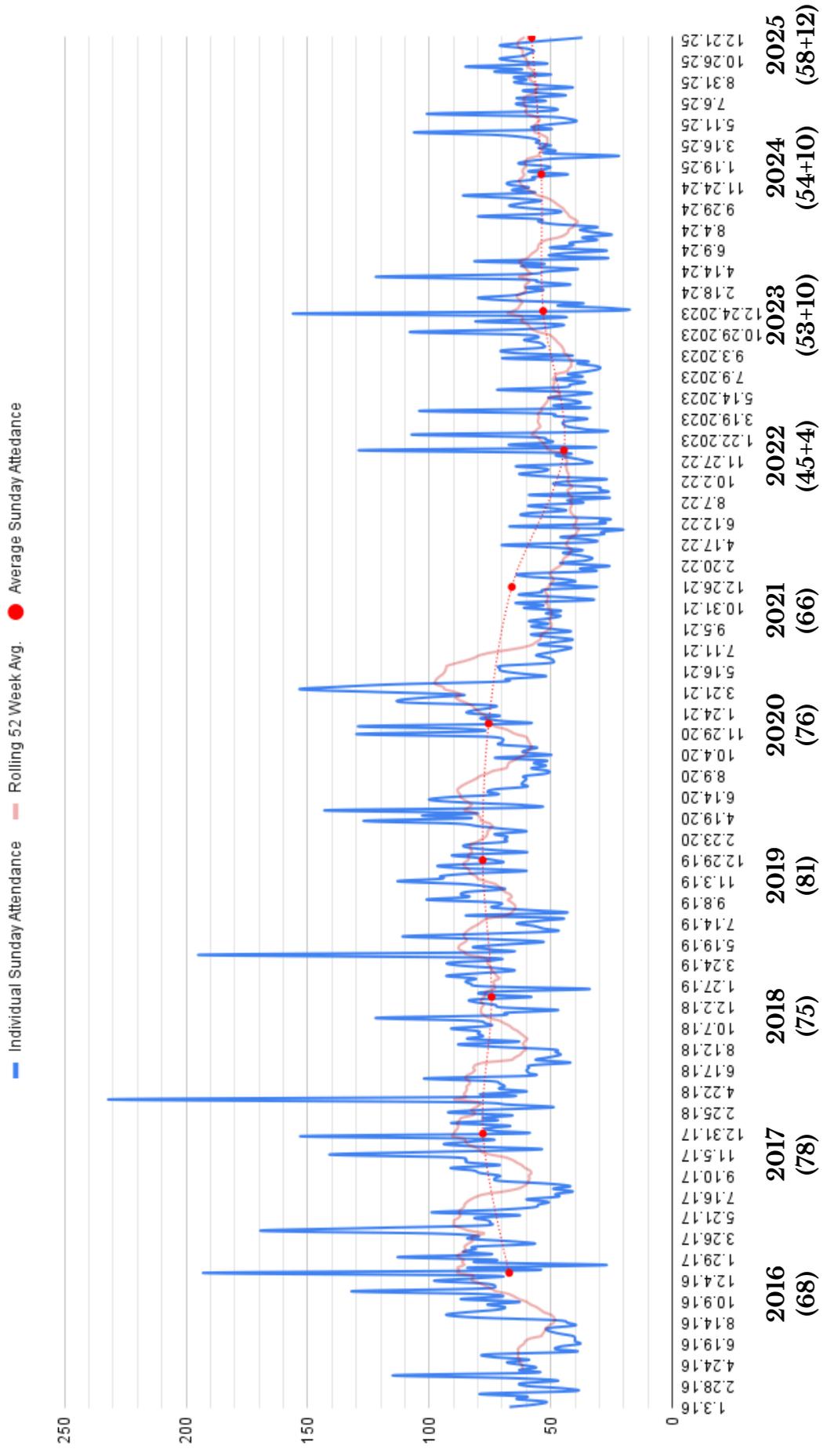
A Prayer

While we acknowledge our differences, let us also strive to learn the commonalities that unite us so we can stand together during our shared struggle.

– Sojourners

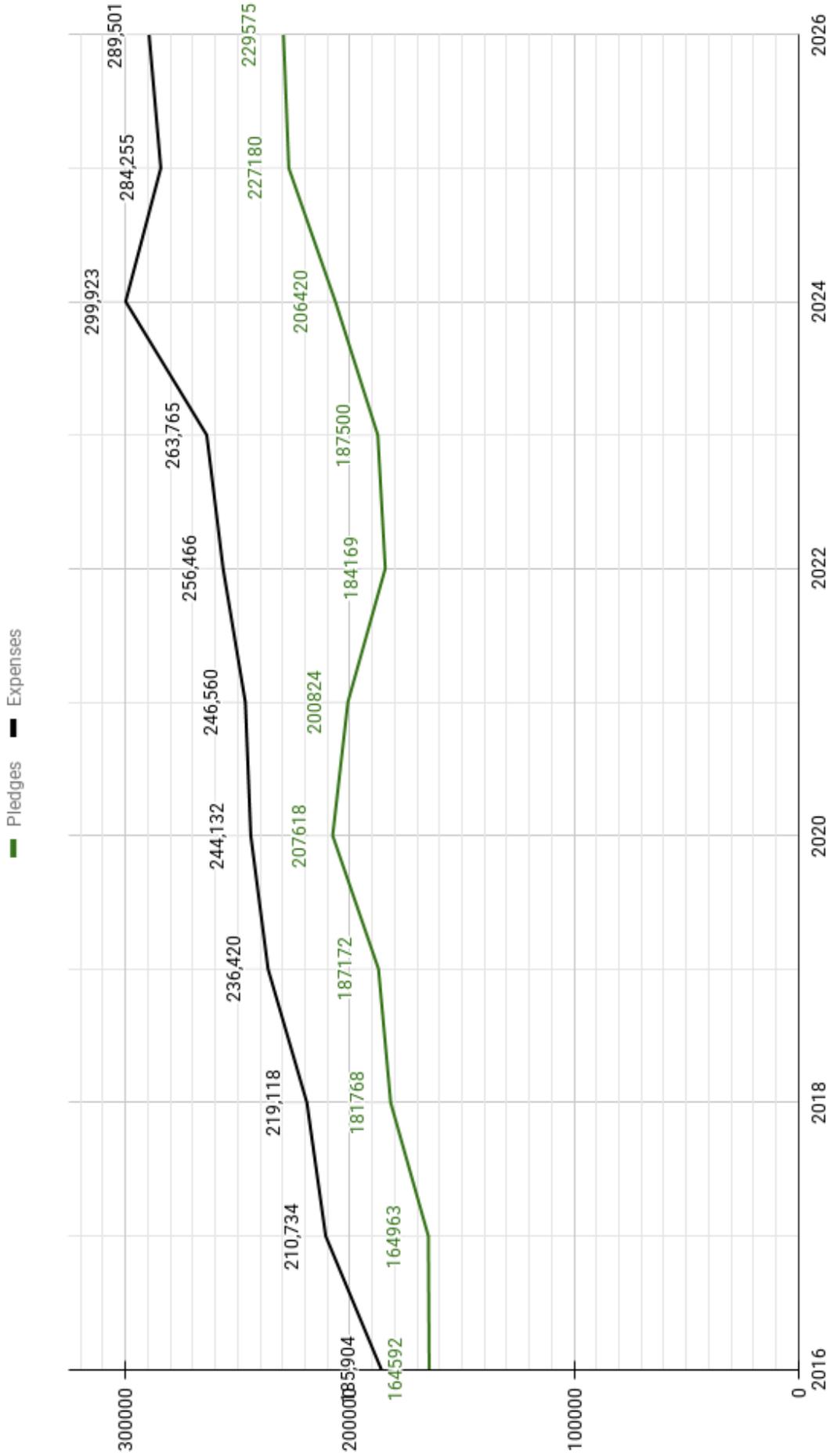
Attendance 2016-2025

Attendance 2016 - 2025



ASA (+ Zoom where applicable)

Pledges & Expenses: 2016 - 2026



Pledges & Expenses: 2016-2026

This chart (page 11) shows our pledges and expenses from 2016 to 2026. The impact of the pandemic on our pledges compared to the steady increase in expenses is still apparent. The pledge line highlights just how promising our trajectory pre-pandemic was in pledge amounts. Assuming that trajectory had held true, we likely would've kept up with the increase in expenses and maybe even surpassed expenses in pledges alone by last year, assuming we didn't make the staff changes made for 2024.

On the upside, the uptick in pledges since 2024 shows us headed back in the right direction, though admittedly behind where we would have been had the pandemic not happened. While we did see an increase in pledges this year, it's not as large of an increase as the previous two in large part due to a spate of losses of longtime parishioners. The incredible effort you all put into this year's pledge drive helped us stay positive. All that to say, is where we could have been and where we are diverged significantly due to the pandemic, and we're working our way back to a healthier and more sustainable pledge-to-expense ratio.

A look back at expenses reveals something kind of remarkable to me. Eight line items in our budget have either stayed the same or gone down since 2016. That's over a quarter of the line items on our expense side! Granted, one of those lines was for the Discretionary Account, which we moved off of the budget, and another was specifically for expenses associated with the Rector search, which I hope won't require funding any time soon.

Of the lines that went up, here are the ones that jumped by a notable dollar amount (\$1,000 or more) from 2016 to 2026:

- Clergy Expenses + \$31,107
[NOTE: this is figured subtracting 2017 from 2026 because the 2016 Clergy line did not reflect a full year's pay for a clergyperson]
- Rector's Utilities + \$1,083
- Staff + \$23,638
- Insurance - Property & Liability = +\$ 3,565
- Telephone = + \$1,350
- Fuel Oil / Natural Gas = + \$1,427
- Office Supplies = +\$2,500
- Parish Life = +\$2,000
- Music = + \$1,000
- Diocesan Assessment = +\$6,478
- Outreach = +\$1,500
- Special Collections = +\$1,000
- Maintenance was originally one line that we split into two, one for Buildings and one for Grounds = +\$8,000 combined

In other words, of the total increase in expenses of \$114,018, personnel accounts for \$74,803 (clergy and lay). Insurance and the Diocesan Assessment went up by considerably less than I would have assumed, and our Maintenance expenses went up more than I remembered, more than doubling. It's worth noting that these increases are not necessarily a bad thing. One thing increased Maintenance costs reflects is a growing dedication and care for the church's property which is quite the gift for future (and current!) members of our parish.

Truth be told, now that I've looked at this level of detail, I'm really proud of the incredible effort St. Thomas' has put into getting our momentum back after the pandemic years. The Budget & Finance Commission and the Vestry have been diligent in fostering sustainable and healthy finances, and it shows. I'm grateful for their leadership and care, for you St. Thomas' people trusting the leadership to be good stewards of your gifts, and for the many contributions you each make (financial and otherwise).

A Winter Blessing



In the shadowed quiet of winter's light
earth speaks softly
of her longing.
Because the wild places are in tears.

Come, she cries to us.
Kneel down here
on the frosty grass,
and feel the prayer buried in the ground.

Bend your ear to my heart
and listen hard.

Love this world, she whispers.
Distill peace from the snow
and water the cities
with mercy.

Weave wonder from the forest
and clothe grief
with beauty.

Rest in the rhythm of the turning year,
Trace the bending arc
Rounding the curve toward justice.
And vow anew to do no harm.

The winter trees stand watch
haloed in the last gleams of the slanting sun.
Glory sings here.
Heaven echoes the call:
Repeat the sounding joy.

Make your life an answer:
Bow.
Praise.
Rise.

--Rebecca Ann Parker,
an American theologian, author,
and former President of Starr King
School for the Ministry

Blessings in the Snow

Photos By Brooks



– Photos by The Rev. Brooks Cato.

Bishops' Statements

On January 25, 2026, the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, The Most Rev. Sean Rowe, made the following statement:

Dear people of God in The Episcopal Church:

Like Jesus, we live in frightening times. His earthly ministry began, as we heard in today's Gospel reading, when John the Baptist was imprisoned by authorities who wanted to silence his preaching and prophesying.

Jesus knew what happens when earthly powers persuade human beings to fear one another, regard one another as strangers, and believe that there is not enough to go around. In Jesus' time, the power of these divisions motivated John's beheading and Jesus' own death on the cross at the hands of Roman authorities.

In our time, the deadly power of those divisions is on display on the streets of Minneapolis, in other places across the United States, and in other countries around the world. As has too often been the case throughout history, the most vulnerable among us are bearing the burden, shouldering the greatest share of risk and loss, and enduring the violation of their very humanity. But we do not grieve without hope. The Christian story is full of people who lived in frightening and brutal times, and who followed Jesus' call that we heard in church today. His proclamation turns us away from the fear born of sin and death and toward the kingdom of God, toward Christ's ministry of justice, reconciliation, and love. "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view," the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth (2 Corinthians 5:16), exhorting them to reject the divisions of their time in favor of being ambassadors for Christ.

This is God's call to The Episcopal Church now, and it is not an easy one. In the United States, we no longer live in a time when we can expect to practice our faith without risk,

and we are confronting what vulnerable communities of faith have experienced for generations. Our right to worship freely as one church, committed to the dignity of every human being, has been curtailed by the fear that too many immigrant Christians face when they leave their homes. Peaceful protests, a right long enshrined in the Constitution, are now made deadly. Carrying out the simple commands of Jesus—feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, visiting prisoners, making peace—now involves risks for the church and grave danger for those we serve. As Christians, we must acknowledge that this chaos and division is not of God, and we must commit ourselves to paying whatever price our witness requires of us.

In the coming years, our church will continue to be tested in every conceivable way as we insist that death and despair do not have the last word, and as we stand with immigrants and the most vulnerable among us who reside at the heart of God. We will be required to hold fast to God's promise to make all things new, because our call to follow God's law surpasses any earthly power or principality that might seek to silence our witness.

To those of you who are in the center of the storm, please know that I am praying for you as you embody the love of Christ in your ministries and communities. To those of you who are watching with concern and fear, I ask you to pray for those who have died in protests and detention, for those who witnessed their deaths, and for everyone who bears authority and responsibility in this moment, that they may exercise wisdom, restraint, and courage. Pray too, especially in the days to come, for the witness of our church in these times and for a hedge of protection around all the beloved children of God who live in fear this day.

The Most Rev. Sean Rowe
Presiding Bishop
The Episcopal Church

Continued on Page 15

Continued from Page 14

On January 31, 2026, 154 Episcopal bishops (including our current bishop, our previous bishop, our previous canon to the ordinary, the previous presiding bishop, and the current bishop suffragan of Armed Forces and Federal Ministries) made the following joint statement:

A letter to our fellow Americans.

We, the undersigned bishops of The Episcopal Church, write today out of grief, righteous anger, and steadfast hope.

What happened a week ago in Minnesota and is happening in communities across the country runs counter to God's vision of justice and peace. This crisis is about more than one city or state—it's about who we are as a nation. The question before us is simple and urgent: Whose dignity matters?

In the wake of the tragic deaths of two U.S. citizens, Alex Pretti and Renee Good, we join Minnesotans and people across the nation in mourning two precious lives lost to state-sanctioned violence. We grieve with their families, their friends, and everyone harmed by the government's policies. When fear becomes policy, everyone suffers.

We call on Americans to trust their moral compass—and to question rhetoric that trades in fear rather than the truth. As Episcopalians, our moral compass is rooted firmly in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is what we know. Women were shoved to the ground, children torn from their families, and citizens silenced and demeaned for exercising their constitutional rights. These actions sow fear, cast doubt, and wear us down with endless noise.

We cannot presume to speak for everyone or prescribe only one way to respond. For our part, we can only do as Jesus' teaching shows us.

A Call for Action

This is a moment for action. We call on people of faith to stand by your values and act as your conscience demands.

We urge the immediate suspension of ICE and Border Patrol operations in Minnesota and in any community where enforcement has eroded public trust. Because the rule of law is weakened, not strengthened, when power is exercised without restraint.

We also call for transparent, independent investigations of the people killed—investigations centered on truth, not politics. Justice cannot wait, and accountability is essential to healing.

We call on the elected officials of our nation to remember the values that we share, including the rule of law. Rooted in our Constitution, it ensures that law—not the arbitrary will of individuals—governs us all, protecting individual rights, ensuring fairness, and maintaining stability.

A Shared Commitment

Every act of courage matters. We must keep showing up for one another. We are bound together because we are all made in the image of God. This begins with small, faithful steps. As bishops in the Episcopal Church, we promise to keep showing up—to pray, to speak, and to stand with every person working to make our communities just, safe, and whole.

We are committed to making our communities safer and more compassionate:

- So children can walk to school without fear.
- So families can shop, work, and worship freely.
- So we recognize the dignity of every neighbor—immigrant communities, military families, law enforcement officers, nurses, teachers, and essential workers alike.

You may feel powerless, angry, or heartbroken right now. Know that you're not alone.

Each of us has real power: community power, financial power, political power, and knowledge power. We can show up for our neighbors, support small businesses and food banks, contact elected officials and vote, and learn our rights so we can speak up peacefully without fear.

Continued on Page 16

Choosing Hope

This crisis is about more than one city or state—it's about who we are as a nation. The question before us is simple and urgent: Whose dignity matters?

Our faith gives a clear answer: everyone's. Safety built on fear is an illusion. True safety comes when we replace fear with compassion, violence with justice, and unchecked power with accountability. That's the vision our faith calls us to live out—and the promise our country is meant to uphold.

In the face of fear, we choose hope. By the grace of God, may this season of grief become a season of renewal. May courage rise from lament, and love take root in every heart.

<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/publicaffairs/from-presiding-bishop-sean-rowe-death-and-despair-do-not-have-the-last-word/>

<https://diosohio.org/a-joint-letter-from-154-bishops-of-the-episcopal-church-whos-dignity-matters/>

Worth Repeating

If an act of injustice doesn't provoke anger in me, it could be seen as indifference, passivity. It's injustice that motivates us to do something, to take risks, knowing that if we don't, things will remain the same.

—Digna Ochoa (1964-2001)
human rights lawyer in Mexico

A Prayer

God our light, remind us that we are never far from you, however dark things may seem. Guide us in love to share your light with all who hunger for it.

—Sojourners

On the Lighter Side



Prayers of the People as of February 10th

For those in need:

Judy Azud, Danielle Bikowsky, Ian Blanchard, Emily Carroll, Holly Crouch, Nan Dietrich, Aster Dinku, Joan Fales, Lee Foreman, Stephen Foss, Marcia Gage, Lisa Gee & her children, Laura Ginter, Kaia Harding, Amanda Harlan, Michelle Heavner, Mike Hicks, David Hollis, David Hughes, Kathy Hynes, Barb Kershaw, Pat Osowski, Diny Rupp, Joe Rupp, Patricia Tayntor, Paula Tayntor, Marilyn Thie, Tom Tomsik, Lisa Trivedi, Ed Vantine, Becky Vinopal, Christine Watkins, Wanda Warren Berry, Amy Williams, Deb Willis, Dana Wratten, Shirley W., the Blum Family, the family of Danica Jones, Sarah & her family, Jerry & Roseann Fitzgerald, Anthony & Vincent Pacillo, Adam, Ally, Aurora, Carol, Frank, Jan, Janice, Joni, Kate, Kathy, Kim, Kristi, Margaret, Micaela, Nick, Nova, Paula, Rick, Scot, and Susan.

For the Departed: Rich Fenner

February Thanksgivings

Birthdays:

Rebecca Cato (02/08), Cillian Brockway (02/10), Juniper Axtell (02/11), Mea Martineau (02/15), Joshua Knapp (02/17), Alyssa MacKinnon (02/18), Anna-Marie Kuiper (02/19), Charles Jerome (02/22), Vivianna Linden (02/27).

Baptism Anniversaries:

Susan Geier (02/02), Emily Hutton-Hughes (02/13), Gwyneth Davies (02/13), Scott Rivington (02/218 Jana Laxa (02/23).

Marriage Anniversaries:

Luke & Lauren Marshall (02/23).



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!



St. Thomas' Episcopal Church Vestry Minutes December 21, 2025

Present: Debbie Barker, Martha Berry, Brooks Cato (presiding), Connie Harsh, Kate Hooks, Jana Laxa, Kerry Linden, John Orr, Jane Welsh

Absent: Mike Loranty, Valerie Morkevicius, Rose Novak

Zoom: John Bowen

Call to Order

The meeting began at 11:42 a.m. in the parish hall. Debbie Barker opened the meeting with a prayer.

Clerk's Report

The minutes of the November 23rd vestry meeting were approved as submitted in final draft. Approval was moved by Debbie Barker; seconded by Jane Welsh.

Treasurer's Report

John Bowen reported the following: "The Balance Sheet for November remains stable with small increases in investment account balances. The NBT checking account balance, as of today (12/21/25), is approximately \$209,000; even with \$119,000 in Good Neighbor Fund grant checks going out a healthy balance remains. There are no unexpected expenses or windfalls in the November Treasurer's Report. Utility bills were paid in early December, explaining the lack of activity in those lines. The Budget and Finance Commission spent the bulk of its time in November and December preparing the 2026 proposed budget." Martha Berry moved that the vestry receive the Treasurer's Report; Kerry Linden seconded the motion. The Report was received as submitted.

Rector's Report

Brooks Cato opened his report by noting that he needed to have the speaker fixed on the laptop that is used at vestry meetings because, currently, the volume of the sound on the machine is inadequate.

He then announced that a recent wedding at St. Thomas' had been a rip-roaring success. One arrangement of a musical piece had been written for the wedding and it was terrific.

Wardens' Report

Jane Welsh commented that she was excited about the upcoming Christmas season and the services that were planned for it. Debbie Barker wanted to thank the choir members and their director, Dianne Adams McDowell, for all that they do to make the services at St. Thomas' wonderful.

Commission Reports

- *Rectory Building Project:* Brooks Cato shared some preliminary information with the vestry. He stated that he had been in touch with contractors and the painters who completed the work on St. Thomas' Church, as well. He had heard back from Brian Treffeisen and others, who are interested. Nothing had been nailed down at the time of the meeting, but Brooks is hoping to have more to report at the January meeting.
- *S'mores:* Brooks Cato announced that the St. Thomas' "S'mores Giveaway" on the evening of Hamilton Village's holiday celebrations had been a tremendous success. On that occasion 150 S'mores were given away by Leah Brockway and the volunteers that helped her. Additionally, the get-together to make Advent Wreaths had gone well. Four families attended and completed the project.
- *Commissions—Flower Guild:* Jana Laxa was pleased to announce that Marieke Kuiper and Anna-Marie Kuiper have joined the Flower Guild and that both were available to assist with the decoration of the church for Christmas, scheduled for the following day.

Old Business

- *Directory Update:* Brooks Cato reported that, after much consideration (and an additional contact), the original firm that began taking photos of parishioners will return on Tuesday, January 27th to complete the process. Sign-up sheets will be on the table at the entrance to the church.

Continued from Page 18

New Business

- **2026 Budget & Stewardship Progress:** Brooks Cato informed those present of the happy news: by the opening of the vestry meeting 71 pledges (including 10 new pledges) had been returned for a total of \$226,415. John Bowen submitted the following list of key elements concerning the 2026 Proposed Budget. He writes, “The proposed 2026 budget includes: 1) 2.6% cost of living increases for clergy and staff as recommended by the Diocese; 2) increases in health, property, and liability insurance; 3) a change in Parish Administrator hours; 4) an increase in Diocesan Assessment in proportion with parish income; and 5) our best estimate of 2026 utility expenses. [He noted that one place, left blank at the top of the budget form, was for the insertion of the final number of pledges, once this is known.] The budget will be balanced with a pledge income of \$230,000.”

John Orr wondered why the costs of electric, water, and sewer is down in the proposed budget. John Bowen rehearsed the steps that the Budget & Finance Commission had gone through to arrive at its estimate. Then, Brooks Cato described the meeting that he and the wardens had shared in which they decided to reconfigure childcare duties, a rearrangement that also changes how Leah Brockway will divide her time. In the future, Leah will not be working with the Sunday morning programs. Instead, either two students, or a rotation of adults along with Zja’Kyla Brumfield (our Colgate student-helper), will be covering childcare on Sunday morning. Rather than offering a Godly Play Program (which is not called-for at the moment), Leah will be working on a Family Life Ministry (a more useful endeavor) that will offer, once per month, a special activity for families, such as the recent S’mores Giveaway or the Advent Wreath project. This reconfiguration alters Leah’s weekly in-office hours from 30 hrs./week to 25 hrs./week. Additionally, Leah will receive 3 hrs./month, with pay, to plan and execute one event/activity for the Family Life Ministry.

Jane Welsh affirmed that this new arrangement seems to be a definite improvement. Martha Berry added that it also reflects, more accurately, how Leah will need to divide her time in order to shape this new ministry. Moreover, many vestry members thought that the new structure would help to support a ministry that would better benefit our existing St. Thomas’ families, especially those with children. Jane Welsh moved that the vestry approve the proposed 2026 Budget. John Orr seconded the motion. The 2026 budget, including the restructured position that Leah will occupy beginning in January, carried unanimously. Brooks Cato noted that kudos were due to the Budget & Finance Commission for their efforts in creation of the 2026 budget. The vestry seconded this sentiment, proposing that their grateful thanks be transmitted to the Commission in recognition of their excellent work.

Executive Session: There was no need for the vestry to enter Executive Session.

Announcements

- *Announcements:* Announcements were made, including the dates for closure of the parish office surrounding the Christmas holiday.
- *Next meeting:* The next vestry meeting is set for January 25th.
- *Prayer Leader:* Jana Laxa volunteered to offer prayer at the opening of the January meeting.

Debbie Barker moved to end the meeting; Jane Welsh seconded the motion. The meeting ended at 12:21 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Susan Cerasano, Clerk

**Sermon for the Third Sunday
after the Epiphany:
Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27:1, 5-13;
Matthew 4:12-23
January 25, 2026
The Rev. Brooks Cato**

By the church's rendering of time, it was six years ago today on the Third Sunday After the Epiphany in 2020 when I preached about meeting ICE for the first time. It was a mild encounter, slow and oppressive with no teargas or beating. Just a handful of agents on the driveway, a family hiding inside, and a community gathered to serve humanity. That family came to love us and what many in our congregation did for them and still do. That family was deported last year, child citizens and all. My, how things've changed.

We're so worried about ICE that emergency announcements about this weekend's storm were cautioned not to say the word "ice" because that might confuse people into fearing for immigration raids. You guys, y'all, yins, that's absurd. We can't describe one of the greatest dangers this storm brings because of the incredibly violent and frightening mission terrorizing normal people. That's as damning a statement about the tactics of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement as I've heard yet. We can't even talk about the weather.

ICE is more active and more militarized than ever before; human targets are more afraid and less obvious. No one really knows if they're in ICE's sights, and not everyone taken by ICE was in their sights to begin with. The proportion of innocents taken over the past year is appalling. Only 5% of ICE detainees have violent criminal records. At one point, 70% of detainees had no criminal convictions, and in some places, as few as 3% had any criminal record at all. That might be a backwards way of looking at this. 70% with no convictions, 95% with no violent record, and in some places, as many as 97% with no record at all.

One of the most appalling aspects of the manner in which these things are being done is how reality ends up sitting kinda right next to what Jesus taught, "just out of phase" as Doctor Who would describe it. Jesus told his disciples to cast their nets and fish for people. Catch as many as you can

with love and kindness and hope! Teach them the Gospel, show them the peace of God, feed the sheep, tend to the sick, visit the imprisoned (guilty or not, for what it's worth). ICE is also fishing for people, and they cast as broad a net as Andrew and Peter, but what they do with their catch couldn't be more different. Catch as many as you can with cruelty and anger and fear! Reports from inside American concentration camps tell of detainees forced to eat on their knees with hands bound behind their backs. ICE has stopped paying healthcare providers that tended to the sick. Even those with the constitutional authority to visit the imprisoned are turned away at the gates. See what I mean? It almost feels intentionally blasphemous. They're so close yet so very far from what Jesus would have them do. And that is nothing less than a perversion of the faith. Jesus didn't want us fishing for people to torture them. He wanted us fishing for people to care for them. In case you're wondering what being Christlike looks like, a story recently emerged of two women detained by ICE who, while being taken to an impromptu holding center in Minneapolis, administered first aid to an ICE agent having a seizure. My Lord, that's an incredible, almost impossible witness to Christ's love. Where would Jesus stand? I wonder.

The Psalmist pleads with God: "hide not your face from me." We can ask God to show us the divine face, but ICE continues to hide their faces under the auspices of necessary anonymity, an anomaly in both law enforcement and federal employment. See, every other law enforcement agent in the nation is required to have their name and badge number visible, and every other federal employee's name, position, and salary is public record. We can beg to see God's face, but ICE's remain sacrosanct.

Look at the fish these faceless terrorizers caught last week. An old man in his boxers supposedly mistaken for someone already imprisoned elsewhere. A ten-year-old, a five-year-old, a two-year-old -- one of them used as bait to catch a parent. But don't worry, the Border Patrol chief said, "we are experts at dealing with children." Take a step back for a moment. First, why would an agency supposedly going after the worst criminals consider themselves experts at dealing with children? And second, ICE is an arm of the current administration. Consider the administration's record of "dealing with children." Roughly 99% of the Epstein Files continue to be hidden from public view. The US Justice Department significantly cut

Continued from Page 20

programs combatting child sex trafficking. The US hamstrung efforts to prevent international child sex trafficking. Perhaps they are experts at dealing with children.

Now, I know some will write off what I say on account of being “too political” or bad interpretations of scripture or liberalism disguised as Christianity. I get that. So, consider instead the over 100 clergy arrested in Minneapolis while kneeling and reciting the Lord’s Prayer in protest. Or consider the bishop of New Hampshire’s instructions to his clergy to get their affairs in order and update their wills to prepare for a time of new martyrdom. Or consider the Presiding Bishop’s direction to be “an engine of resistance.” We’re no Jesus, and we shouldn’t seek out danger, but our baptismal vows to join him in his death and resurrection mean we’ve committed to stand where he would’ve. Be honest with yourselves and consider where Jesus would stand. Take any one of the horrendous moments of the past week and imagine Jesus in the picture. Where would he stand? Is he with the ones shooting a man on his knees multiple times, or is he with the ones being taken or killed? Before you answer, remember that when armed forces came to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and one of his followers lopped off a guard’s ear, Jesus made him stop, put the sword away, and healed the injured man.

I want to turn our attention, yet again, to one of those old prophets. Isaiah says the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; God increased their joy; the yoke of burden, the rod of the oppressor was broken. Look, we haven’t gotten to the broken yoke just yet. While the great storm blows, it’s hard to remember light. But we know it’s there on the other side of the clouds. We know there’s still joy to be found. We know our calling to be as clear as the coldest winter day. We know joy is an act of resistance in and of itself. It can be hard to find joy, but it’s there, even if only in the hope that one day this’ll all be finished and seen for the awful reality it truly is. There will come a time when no one will admit to supporting these atrocities. Would that everyone was already against them. But we’re not there yet. Our work now is to resist where we can, seek joy where we can, serve who we can, and brace ourselves for the moments we’re called into joyful, purposeful, peaceful resistance. Because that’s where Jesus would stand.

Worth Repeating

Advocacy is not just a task for charismatic individuals or high-profile community organizers. Advocacy is for all of us; advocacy is a way of life. It is a natural response to the injustices and inequality in the world.

– Alice Wong,
“Disability Visibility: First-Person Stories
from the Twenty-First Century” (2020)

Looking for Contributors

Interested in adding something to our monthly newsletter? We’re looking for contributors to spice up *Tidings* and add some variety! Pictures, poems, articles, book reviews, insights -- anything that’s brought you closer to God. Please make submissions to the Church Office by the 20th of each month, and we’ll consider them for publication.

A Prayer

God, through the joy of good works done in good company, fill us with purpose and hope every time we gather at your table.

– Sojourners

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Immigrant Rights & Advocates Training

Level 2

Free and open to all
Prior Know Your Rights training is helpful but not required.

**Thursday, February 19, 2026
6:00 - 8:00 PM**

Madison Hall - 100 E. Main St. (Rt. 20) in Morrisville

Accessible parking, entry, and elevator.
On-street parking or use the parking lot across Rt. 20.

Immigration “Know Your Rights” (KYR) trainings inform people about their constitutional and legal rights and offer approaches for encounters with immigration officials such as ICE. Learn how to assert your rights effectively, and how to protect yourselves and others. Workshop led by local organizers trained by the NY Immigrant Coalition (NYIC) and the Syracuse Immigrant & Refugee Defense Network (SIRDN).

**Hosted by Eaton Dems & Friends
Sponsored by Madison County Democratic Committee,
Cazenovia Pride, Anti-Racism Coalition of Cazenovia,
and Cazenovia Call-to-Action**



Proclamation of the Abolition of Slavery in the French Colonies, 27 April 1848 (François-Auguste Biard, Wikimedia, date: 1849)

FEBRUARY 1 - 28, 2026

BLACK HISTORY MATTERS

ABOLITION

PRESENTED BY
NATIONAL ABOLITION HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM

PO BOX 55 5255 PLEASANT VALLEY ROAD PETERBORO NY 13134
NAHOFM1835@GMAIL.COM
315-380-1890

VIRTUAL PROGRAMS AVAILABLE AT:
WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/@ABOLITIONHALLOFFAME
WWW.NATIONALABOLITIONHALLOFFAMEANDMUSEUM.ORG

BLACK HISTORY MATTERS 2026 IS A FREE-TO-WATCH VIDEO SERIES ON OUR **YOUTUBE CHANNEL**. THE BLACK HISTORY MATTERS SERIES WAS FOUNDED IN 2021 IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE UPSTATE INSTITUTE AT COLGATE UNIVERSITY.

- Feb. 1 Introduction to Black History Matters 2026
- Feb. 2 The Birth of Abolition: An Overview of the Abolition Movement in the U.S.
- Feb. 6 Curse of Ham: Abolition and the Role of Religion
- Feb. 9 Abolitionists and the End of Slavery in New York State
- Feb. 13 Roads to Freedom: The People Who Made the Underground Railroad
- Feb. 16 Abolition Beyond America: Global Movements in the 18th and 19th Century
- Feb. 20 Women and the Battle to End Slavery
- Feb. 23 The Afterlives of Slavery: Prisons, Policing, and Punitive Systems Beyond Abolition
- Feb. 27 "Come to Peterboro: Lodestar for Freedom!"
- Feb. 28 Conclusion

SCHMITT
DANCE
STUDIO PRESENTS

ROCKSTARS

OF
2026

UNLEASH THE
POWER OF DANCE!



SUNDAY,
MARCH 1ST
2:00 PM

Earlville Opera House Theater
18 E. Main St. Earlville, NY

\$10 ADMISSION

Cash or check accepted at the door
Proceeds go to the Earlville Opera House

GET READY TO ROCK!

SDS Annual Dance Recital

SchmittDance@gmail.com

sites.google.com/view/schmittsistersdance



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 in the pews. 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

Online Donations

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 if your contribution is meant to honor your pledge, please write "pledge" in the "Gift note/designation" line. The link to the online donation form listed above can also be found on our website on the home page and more details on the "donate" page.

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 |

February Schedule of Servers

| FEBRUARY | LECTOR | LEM | USHER | ALTAR GUILD | FLOWER GUILD | NEWCOMERS | COFFEE HOUR HOSTS |
|----------------------|---|----------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 | 1st: Martha Berry 2nd: Wynn Egginton | Debbie Barker | Ed Page | Kim Cataldo & Wynn Egginton | Sally Orr | Colleen McNeerney | Gina Sakal & Jana Laxa |
| 8 Rite One | 1st: Barbara Bowen 2nd: Maureen Fox | Susan Cerasano | Ed Page | Kim Cataldo & Emily Hutton-Hughes | Sally Orr | Colleen McNeerney | Susan Beattie & Deany Wood |
| 15 | 1st: Linda Jenks 2nd: Kerry Linden | Wynn Egginton | Ed Page | Jane Welsh | Sally Orr | Linda Jenks | Lorantys |
| 22 | 1st: John Orr 2nd: Joan Ford | Barbara Bowen | Ed Page | Colleen McNeerney | Sally Orr | Linda Jenks | Sheila Hathaway & Kate Hooks |



February 2026

Quidnys

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