



An Overview of

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SAINT THOMAS'S EPISCOPAL PARISH

NEWARK, DE

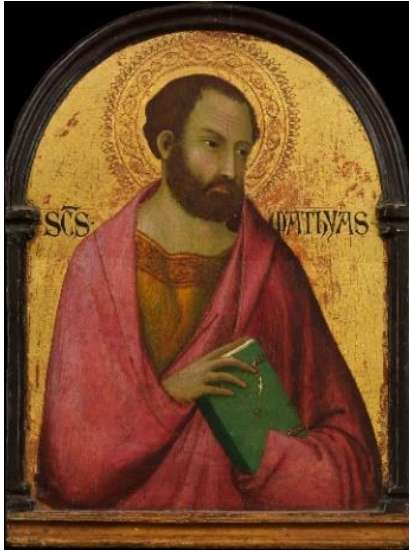
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2023



Rector's Report

February 24, 2024
Feast of Saint Mathias, the Apostle



Dear friends,

After the defection of Judas, the Apostles decided they should add someone to return their number to twelve. So they nominated two candidates, cast lots, and Mathias was chosen. We are told that he had been among the followers of Jesus for a long time, apparently working quietly but fruitfully, out of the spotlight. We hear nothing more about him after this, but it seems safe to assume that he kept on doing whatever work the Holy Spirit had called him into.

In 2023, we at St Thomas's did much the same – working quietly, occasionally being noticed for our efforts, in all things trying to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And, as is often the case, it was common that we only saw the Spirit at work “in the rearview mirror.” With the benefit of that hindsight, it is my duty and pleasure to remind you of some of what we did as God was at work among us.

I feel as if it is tempting fate to say that COVID was finally behind us – I was one of its casualties early in the year! – but there were signs that it continued to recede. In-person attendance at church on Sunday rose for the third year running, and the average of the combination of in-person and on-line attendance equaled that of the years just before COVID (and before live streaming). There was renewed interest in parish social events and attendance at them was strong. Most importantly, there was a shift in our focus from crisis management to thinking about the future.

It is also worth noting the dividends that COVID continued to pay. We made good use of technology, in the forms of YouTube and Zoom, to facilitate worship and meetings. Our presence on social media won compliments from the Diocese and interest from other parishes that wanted to learn from what we were doing. We continued to refine how we engage with our membership around parish business like the annual parish meeting, Vestry elections, annual giving, and volunteering for service in church on Sunday morning. Several new members reported giving us a “test drive” through our electronic presence

before turning up in person. In all of this, we discovered how community and evangelism can be enriched when we get creative.

Our worship continued to be the firm foundation on which our common life is based. We worshiped weekly on Sunday morning, Wednesday noon, and Thursday evening. We took worship into the parish hall on Palm Sunday and into the Grove at the end of the summer. We blessed chalk (on Epiphany), candles (on Candlemas), animals, backpacks (as school began), and countless prayer shawls and baby blankets. We added new liturgical vestments for funerals, feast days, Holy Week, and the "green" season after Pentecost, as well as a lovely new set in honor of Black History Month. We also gave a new home to some silver, paraments, and other items from Christ Church, Delaware City, helping to perpetuate the loving intentions of those who gave them. We added a modern language liturgy for use at 10:30 on selected Sundays. We heard new (as well as many familiar) voices reading lessons on Sunday morning. There were baptisms, confirmations, a vigil for Middle East peace, and Maundy Thursday foot washing, but not one funeral! There was much to give thanks for.

We took the Spirit-filled energy that was poured into us in prayer out into the community. Parishioners served lunches at Hope Dining Room, took food from events to the Newark Empowerment Center, and volunteered for Code Purple. Baskets in the parish hall for donations of clothing, shoes, and pet supplies seemed always to be full. Blue Hen Bounty continued to have steady traffic; and even better, a few of the regular BHB customers also attended other events at the church. On St Thomas's Day, we invited a group of Indian Christians to share a meal and some lovely presentations about their culture and religious life. I hope this is a connection we can sustain and expand. (Special thanks to Chandrikamma Thankappan for getting us started with that.) We also met with staff from Friendship House and our state representative to hear about homelessness and incarceration, and those discussions highlighted other issues – affordable housing, access to education and health care, economic justice – that parishioners care about and that may form the heart of our future social ministry efforts.

Action on one of those issues – economic justice and the racial wealth gap – was already underway by the end of the year. But to get to that, I must first note another very happy development. After Easter, we welcomed back the (now) Reverend Clay Brown as our Curate. By the generosity of the Diocesan Trustees, who are paying most of the cost of his presence with us, Father Clay will be at St Thomas's part-time for a period of three years. Among his interests in ministry is the church's response to racism and the role that economic opportunity can play in that. He proposed, and the Vestry endorsed, a plan to leverage our live stream and kitchen/coffee hour programs as training opportunities for those aspiring to start their own businesses or at least to have

stronger resumé. The first live stream intern was chosen before the year ended. When it is fully operational, as many as 12 people per year may pass through these programs.

Even more than in past years, we opened our doors to groups and meetings of all kinds. Use of our building by individuals and organizations far exceeded our expectations, and we began to see a word-of-mouth cycle sending new users our way. This was in addition to the familiar weekly activity of 12-Step meetings, girl scouts, dancers, and musicians. Our buildings and property are an asset, but one that only reaches its full value when shared. In support of that mission, we continued to work to maintain our buildings. Although I hesitate to say it (see above about tempting fate – this was also in my 2022 report), it seemed that the last of the roof leaks in the church was repaired successfully. A major project to replace the retaining wall of the boiler room stairway was begun and, as of this writing, is nearing completion. A renovation project in the church balcony produced a new “soft space” for children, which a few adults have been using as well. An expanded relationship with Weeding Wendy – as well as plenty of labor by parishioners – helped keep our grounds looking good. The physical St Thomas's is valuable only in so far as it serves our mission, but we do not take it for granted by any means.

Space and the patience of my readers (!) prevent me from going into much depth on some of our other activities, but many of them deserve at least a mention. We had a successful second running of the health fair. The Blessing of the Animals was expanded to include exhibitors and visits from some farm animals (thank you to Marilyn Prime) and a police dog. The farm animals returned for a live Nativity scene in December. We hosted a volume of the St John's Bible and were able to share it with some of our neighbors. Our collaboration with St Nicholas continued in our shared readers' group, joint Holy Week worship, and mutual advertising of events.

As in the past, St Thomas's took its share in the councils of the Church. Deacon Sheila, Ed Smith, Helen Spence, and I served on the Diocesan Council, and Helen served as its Vice President. At the diocesan convention in November, Father Clay was also elected to the Council. Teri Quinn Gray and I served on the Invite-Welcome-Connect working group. Cana Hartman continued to be a leading light in the Diocesan Youth Committee. Connie Cooper did good work as the secretary to three Diocesan bodies (Diocesan Council, the Standing Committee, and the Diocesan Trustees). Amy Keach served on the Diocesan Advance and Development Committee and I on the Diocesan Personnel and Compensation Committee. Cana Hartman, Kristin Sausville, and I wrote articles for the Communion (the diocesan magazine). The Wardens, Parish Administrator, and Treasurer took part in groups connecting with their counterparts in other parishes. St Thomas's seemed to be everywhere!

As always, I am very grateful to all who served in leadership positions, on committees, in ministries of all kinds, and who did big and small jobs that needed to be done. On behalf of the whole church, I thank those who worked behind the scenes and/or without being noticed. You kept us going. We were blessed to have the skill and devotion of Marc and Cana and Kenneth (who left us as sexton soon after the end of the year and was succeeded by Jonathan Mincey – please welcome him!), and of Deacon Sheila, Father Juan, and Father Clay. Many stars were added to many crowns this year.

For my own work, I can hit replay from what I said last year. I continued to come to the office, to preach, to plan and lead worship, to teach classes on Zoom and in person, to confer with my colleagues, to lend a hand with the set-up and clean-up of events, to check in with parishioners who were in difficulties of all kinds (or blessedly free of any difficulties, at least for the moment), and to cheer on the work of so many other faithful people at St Thomas's. There were weeks when my main accomplishment was an hour or two spent talking with someone over coffee or lunch, and weeks when I barely looked up from my computer as the demands of planning worship and classes and events swallowed the time. But whatever the weeks have brought, I have been proud and honored to be your spiritual leader, and I look forward to the good and holy work we will do together in the year to come.

That leaves me only with the duties to ask to you to remember and pray for those members of St Thomas's who died in 2023; to hold in your prayers all those whose needs, sorrows, and challenges we carry in our collective heart; and to offer deep gratitude to God for one another. Your prayers and good works sustain us as we all work together to build the Kingdom of God in Newark.

May 2024 bring you many blessings and may God continue to bless St Thomas's.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Howie +". The signature is stylized, with a large, sweeping initial letter that resembles a "K" or "H" followed by the name "owie" and a plus sign.

Senior Warden's Report

According to our parish bylaws, the Senior Warden serves a one-year term that can, under normal circumstances, be renewed once. Fr. Howie asked if I would serve one more year, and I agreed. I served this year as Senior Warden despite the fact that my Vestry term expired last year; our bylaws permit this with the understanding that as someone not elected to the Vestry, I have no vote. Last year I felt trepidation about following in the footsteps of excellent Senior Wardens, as well as figuring out how to carry out our mission while emerging from the height of the covid pandemic.

I'm happy and relieved to report that I think the past year finally started to feel normal again. The majority of us are worshipping in person (while maintaining bonds with those who join us via livestream), with attendance numbers rising throughout the year, and we're back to not just our normal calendar of events, but adding new ones as well.

The Vestry is the group charged with handling the parish's legal and business issues, as well as overseeing events and ministries. They continued their structure from last year of alternating each meeting's focus on strategic planning implementation and business (while not excluding the other — strategic planning-focused meetings still included business items as needed, and vice versa). The strategic planning discussions led to the January and February parish-wide meetings in preparation for the Annual Meeting in March as we discern our future. It is clear that the parish is hungry for both more worship and service opportunities, and I am excited to see how those play out and keep us vital in the coming years and decades.

I have continued with my goal from last year of being involved in as much of the Vestry and parish's work as possible. I have participated in the work of Communications, Events, Finance, Health, Liturgy, Outreach, Pastoral Care, Property, and Stewardship, as well as the Vision group working between the parish-wide meetings to hear what the parish is saying and figure out the next steps. I am still a part of the ecumenical group working to discern the future of campus ministry with the Methodists and Presbyterians. I have also had regular meetings with Katie Hughes, the Senior Warden at St. Nicholas's, regarding mutual ministry, and we have had valuable collaborations such as Community Day. I also continue to come in weekly to assist our parish administrator Cana Hartman, primarily regarding communications and events. This remains a highlight of my weeks. One noticeable accomplishment was the installation of video screens with a slideshow of announcements for our services and events.

On the technological front, this year I began editing and separately uploading the sermons from our services, both for those who missed the service and those who attended but would like to revisit the sermon later. These are available on the Sermons playlist on our YouTube channel. I also started our Graceful Waves podcast, for those who prefer them in audio format. This is available on many podcast services, with hopefully more to come.

I continue to handle the donations the parish contributes for the Clothing Bank of Delaware and Faithful Friends Animal Society, and have been amazed at the parish's generosity. There have been times when I took the clothing donations to the Clothing Bank and came back to the church, only to find another bag in the basket. Thank you all so much for your profound generosity and care for your community.

Faithfully submitted by Kristin Sausville

REPORTS OF GUILDS AND MINISTRIES

organized by
Ministry, Management, and Mission

MINISTRY: Worship

Altar Guild

The Altar Guild of St. Thomas's Parish is honored to be caretakers of our precious items of worship- candles and candelabra, communion silver, brass, communion pottery, linens, and other fabric arrays.

We strive to be unobtrusive and careful in our work as we support our clergy and companion parishioners in worship.

We make sure everything is ready for Sunday and weekday worship, as well as for baptisms, funerals, and weddings.

We source communion wafers and wine. We order and maintain candles. We make sure linens are clean and pressed and ready for use, and that silver & brass pieces are always polished and ready for service.

In 2023 we started the process for the re-remodel of the sacristy, which was becoming worn and difficult to use. We realized that the cabinets and countertop we chose just a couple years previously, while trying to be good stewards of the resources we were given, just were not of a quality that we felt would give good value to be useful for the years ahead. We fundraised privately to be able to obtain good pieces with quality installation and are almost to the finish line of the project.

Any questions should be directed to Sally Price or Martha Holyoke. We welcome new members and promise to provide helpful instruction and that you won't work alone.

Submitted by Sally Price

Liturgy Guild

Members serve at worship services on Sundays and other holy days, weddings, and funerals, as acolytes, liturgical sub-deacons, communion assistants, and lay readers. Around 25 parishioners serve in these capacities. New members are warmly welcomed in each area and receive training as needed. Please contact Larry Duggan (lgjd@udel.edu, 302-453-0564).

Submitted by Larry Duggan

Youth Acolytes

"The term "Acolyte" generally refers to anyone who performs ceremonial duties during a worship service...The Episcopal Church of the United States has acolytes of both genders who carry the processional cross, light altar candles, hold the Gospel book and assist with altar maintenance and other duties as requested by priests or acolyte wardens."
(<http://www.terrasanctaguildccom/acolyte.htm>)

Since the core of the Youth Acolytes at Saint Thomas is the Youth Confirmation Class for that year, with only 2 in the Youth Confirmation Class in 2023, the ranks of the Youth Acolytes were much depleted.

The Youth Acolytes were trained to serve as Crucifers, Servers, and Torch Bearers.

During the year, several "veteran" Acolytes have volunteered to assist during the 10:30 Sunday Services and major Holy Days. These were:

Laura, Audrey, and Joshua (all former St. Thomas Confirmands).

I would like to publicly thank all of the parents of Acolyte (Youth) Guild members for the support of their children in this ministry.

Submitted by Bob Rys

Music Ministry

Music has always been a source of joy and inspiration in our worship at St. Thomas. From the traditional hymns sung by a choir to the heavenly solos, both instrumental and vocal, every note has added to the beauty of our worship.

Our organist and choir director, Marc Cheban, has been a faithful servant in enhancing the worship life of St. Thomas. He brings out the very best in our choir members and soloists, providing musical opportunities that are friendly to singers of all levels of experience. He writes psalm settings and many other items of service music that we enjoy, adding to the richness of our worship experience.

We are grateful to Marc, all ensemble participants, guest musicians, and the congregation for their continued support. Our voices lifted in praise, we experience a "foretaste of heaven" each week as we sing together, waiting with anticipation for the day when we will join in singing around His throne for eternity.

Submitted by Cana Hartman

Flower Guild

The past year's attendance at the in-person worship at St Thomas has steadily increased after the disruption of the pandemic years. With it, we have seen an increase in flower donations, event requests, and opportunities to serve. We have been challenged by circumstances to find new sources of plants, flowers, and supplies and are grateful for the creativity of our members to adapt to those challenges.

We have also been reaching out to our parishioners for assistance when needed and are pleased to report that two of our younger parish members have agreed to help on special occasions this year. Coincidentally, both chose to honor both Mother's Day and a mother's birthday with their beautiful and creative arrangements. We again are thankful to the parish for their generosity and extend our invitation to join in this ministry.

Submitted by Wendy Campbell

Ushers

Ushers greet the congregation at in-person 8:00 and 10:30 services on a rotating weekly schedule, as well as at weddings, funerals, and other special services. Ushers hand out service leaflets, pass the collection plates, assist congregants with seating and provide directions as needed. Ushers also assist in parking cars when it is anticipated that attendees may be unfamiliar with our parking arrangements. Ushers help visitors find their way at St. Thomas. If you are interested in learning more about becoming an usher, please contact Amy Keach.

Submitted by Amy Keach

Technology Guild

Our YouTube channel is maintained by Kristin Sausville, sorting the services into playlists so it is easier for people to find specific services, and deleting inappropriate comments. This year, a playlist just for sermons was added; the livestream is downloaded, and a separate video of just the sermon is edited for upload to the Sermons playlist while leaving the video of the entire service intact and available. This was the basis for the creation of our new podcast, Graceful Waves. The audio from the sermons is extracted from the video via the CloudConvert service and uploaded to the Podbean service, where it is syndicated to other podcast services such as Spotify, Amazon/Audible, iHeartRadio, and Podchaser. It has also been submitted to Apple and Google and will hopefully be syndicated to those services soon as well. The podcast format is ideal for those who would like to listen to the sermons again for further reflection, but while doing other activities (walking, driving, etc) where watching a video is not practical. We are excited to keep growing our reach in the coming years.

Streaming Report – 2023

We continue spreading the Good Word by sharing our services to those who can't be with us in person. At present we have 7 people volunteering their time running our streaming equipment.

Fr. Brown has implemented an internship for local high school students in our area to learn how to stream. We have a Newark High student spending 12 weeks with us. We've added a wifi transmitter and receiver that allows us to stream video & audio in and around the church. We have streamed a service from the grove in 2023.

Future equipment wishes would be for a few additional wifi microphones with receiver. We did have a hick-up when our internet cable was cut accidentally during the basement steps rebuilding project. During that time, we recorded the videos and uploaded them later in the day. The wire had been temporarily repaired and a more permanent fix will be done once the construction by the basement steps is completed.

We welcome any and all to come up to the balcony to see our equipment and also to learn how to run the equipment.

If you have any questions or suggestions please contact Bob Gilley at bobgilley@gmail.com

YouTube Statistics for 2023

- Current Subscribers 321
- Total Views – 9,874
- Highest view for a single video – 213 views
 - The "Welcome to St. Thomas" video was the most viewed
- Lowest views for a single video – 60 views
- Content Type
 - Live Stream – 8,250 or 83.6%
 - Recorded Video – 1,624 or 16.5%

- Top device used to view stream – Most people are watching on a cellphone or tablet
 - Android – 3,301
 - Windows – 2,455
 - iOS – 2,380
 - Macintosh - 833
 - Roku OS - 223
 - Amazon Fire OS - 145
 - Smart TV - 117
 - Chrome OS - 83
 - WebOS - 35
 - Apple tvOS - 34
 - Tizen - 4
 - Linux - 2
 - Chromecast - 2
 - KaiOS - 2
- Geography
 - Unites States
 - India
 - Poland
 - Phillippines
- Three top cities
 - Newark, DE
 - Brookside, DE
 - Philadelphia, PA

Submitted by Kristin Sausville and Bob Gilley

Lay Eucharistic Ministry

11 regular people from St. Thomas, visit with and take Communion to, members of St. Thomas who can no longer get to church. We do this once a month and we go out in teams of 2, to retirement homes, and regular homes to bring news from St. Thomas, as well as the Eucharist. If you would like to become a visitor, contact Marilyn Prime OR Father Howie.

Submitted by Madeline Johnson

MINISTRY: Pastoral Care

Newcomer Welcome

This group takes a loaf of homemade bread and personal welcome note to people who have newly attended a service at St. Thomas's. Would you like to be a deliverer of bread or a baker of bread? We have both on this team! You get to choose.

Leader is Madeline Johnson

Transportation Ministry

Members of this ministry provide rides to parishioners who are in an emergency situation. We do not, at present, have enough drivers to offer transportation to scheduled appointments or regular church services. However, we hope to build a list of parishioners willing occasionally to provide these more frequently needed rides. If you volunteer to be included on this second list, parishioners in need will know that they can contact you directly to ask about the possibility of a ride on a particular date. It can be hard to live without transportation. Your occasional help would be a blessing.
Leader is Joan Bennett

Meals Ministry

St Thomas's faith family provides meals for parishioners who, because of illness or other difficult situations, need this temporary help. When informed by a priest of the parishioners' need, the ministry leader contacts the recipients to learn their food preferences and to plan delivery. A Sign-up Genius containing this information is then emailed to the congregation so that people can volunteer to prepare and deliver the requested meals. The leader's responsibility here is to organize the food train and then allow ministry members to make (or purchase) and deliver the meals requested.

A leader is currently needed for this ministry. Please let any member of Vestry if you would like to be on the list of people able to contribute a meal and/or to learn more about the leader's role.

Note and Cards Ministry

St. Thomas's has a caring history of connecting with parishioners through sending cards and notes on special occasions such as birthdays and anniversaries in addition to sending condolence and sympathy cards in times of sadness and loss. In doing so, we share God's love through life events.

Approximately twenty-five cards and notes acknowledging individuals are sent out through the mail each month. This is a small ministry that brings great joy and support to our Parish family. Much of the monthly writing, addressing, and mailing can be done from home at one's convenience.

Questions, suggestions, interest, and participation are always welcome and encouraged.

Respectfully Submitted in Peace and Blessings,
Marilyn Prime

Prayer Shawl Ministry

In this mostly invisible ministry, members knit or crochet prayer shawls for parishioners and others who are ill, injured, or bereaved. We also make baby blankets for newly baptized infants and children. Instruction is provided for knitting these simple but special shawls and blankets. Members can purchase their own yarn or choose yarn from a ministry stash. This year we are considering restarting in-person knitting get-togethers.

Leader is Barb Eldred

MINISTRY: Religious Education

Children's Ministry

I am excited to report that St Thomas Children's Ministry continues to be an active ministry, fostering a community of "wondering believers". This year, we continued our partnership with St. Nicholas Episcopal Church, to inviting their families with children to join us for children's worship and special events. Our mission in Children's Ministries remains the same: to give our children a safe, loving place to discover and experience the living and present God. We strive to give our children new and exciting ways to discover more about God and who God is calling to them to be. The goals of the St. Thomas Children's Ministry team are:

- To provide a comprehensive, collaborative multi-age program with a curriculum that is developmentally appropriate, multi-sensory, and hands-on
- To involve the whole family of the child in mutual ministry
- To be an active part of the overall St Thomas community and mission
- To partner with neighbor churches whenever possible

In 2023, regular weekly children's worship was offered from January to July and then from September to December. Sunday School met in-person at St. Thomas three or four Sundays a month, gathering at 10:00 for feast and fellowship/ opening activity and beginning the lesson/worship at 10:15. Children aged 4 to grade 6 were invited to participate. Our main framework is a worship schedule that mimics the liturgy of the Episcopal Church: greeting and opening prayer, liturgy of the word, response in the form of art and prayer, and feast and fellowship. Weaving God's Promises was the main curriculum used this year. This curriculum is taught in a three year cycle and includes interactive activities that allow children to explore and to respond to scripture and liturgical practices as we move through the church year. Every last Sunday of the month was Family Church Sunday. On these days, children attended the full service with their families and on these days especially, families were invited to fulfill service roles in the church.

In addition to regular weekly children's worship sessions, Children's Ministries also sponsored family fellowship events, service projects, and other special events. Some of these other events/activities included kids' activities for the annual parish meeting, mini-VBS on Good Friday, Trunk or Treat, hosting a breakfast for the congregation, a holiday cookie exchange, a holiday family party, assembling Go Bags for Newark Empowerment Center, and making Get Well packs for college students who may come to Blue Hen Bounty.

A core of three volunteers has led the weekly sessions this year: Belinda Young-Payne, Madeline Johnson, and Brandi McGough. In addition, Chrissy Ballard has graciously been a regular volunteer in our nursery, which serves the youngest of our members. Our team needs additional volunteers to serve as lead teachers, classroom helpers, and special event hosts. Leading education and worship involves an average commitment of one-two Sundays a month and an hour or two of preparation the week you are the lead teacher. Leading a family fellowship event, service project or special event could involve one time or many times, depending on your interests and would of course, include helpers as needed. This ministry is an act of both giving and receiving. The children and youth teach and inspire us as much as we do them. Training is available for all positions. We ask that as many people as possible be Safe Church trained. If you feel called to be a part of children's ministries in any way or have questions about volunteering, please speak to Belinda Young-Payne (volunteer coordinator of children's and youth ministries).

Submitted by Belinda Young-Payne

Youth Ministry, CREW

In 2023, CREW (Christians Ready Equipped and Willing), the youth group of St. Thomas, ranging in age from 12 to 17 maintained a presence but was less active than usual. This slow-down was due to several factors, the most significant of which were a reduced availability of adult volunteers and scheduling conflicts among our youth and families. Several of our teens, however, remained active church events by serving in the nursery and in weekly worship services as well as volunteering at diocesan and parish-wide events such as the Health Fair, Pride Day, and the annual December holiday party.

My hope for 2024 is that we can identify a time for a regular monthly meeting for a snack/meal and some combination of prayer, service, games and/or crafts, beginning in September 2024. I would also like to reissue the invitation to family members and friends from the congregation to guest host additional activities and outings. A list of potential activities for which we could use hosts can be found at <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0C4CAA62CAB9-stthomas5>.

If you have questions or would like to volunteer to help with general leadership, please contact Belinda Young-Payne.

Sunday Morning Adult Ed

In the course of 2023, we gathered on Sundays to study:

“The Unjust Steward” (a book about the Church’s approach to money)

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church

The Desert Fathers and Mothers

The Religious Experience in America

The Nativity through the Eyes of Artists

On Wednesdays, a group met for Bible study. Book groups met at St Thomas's and on Zoom jointly with St Nicholas. And for several weeks, an evening group met for a refresher on the Anglican way of Christianity.

Adult Education at 9:15 on Sunday mornings hosts discussions of special topics, in person and on Zoom. Parishioners interested in suggesting topics and/or leading sessions on a topic that interests them are welcomed.

Lectionary Bible Study

On most Wednesday mornings, our Bible Study group meets to study and discuss the Lectionary readings for the upcoming Sunday. The meetings are very informal, with readings and discussions which are wide-ranging, lively, informative, and enjoyable. Our meetings currently range from four to six regular attendees.

Since we follow the Lectionary schedule, each week's lesson is a stand-alone unit. Thus, anyone can attend as his or her schedule permits, without the need to “catch up” for missed meetings. The readings are printed, and ready for us when we arrive, thanks to Cana Hartman. We encourage others to join us as their schedule allows, and we'd love to see others attend. The different points of view from attendees often offer new insights to the others. Now that we have resumed a Wednesday noon Intercessory service, it follows nicely after our Bible Study.

We benefit from fellowship and increasing faith. Our preparation mid-week readies us for our worship at Sunday's service. Having recently heard the readings makes it easier for us to follow when they are read on Sunday morning.

This meeting is included in the weekly listing of events. Please join us!

Respectfully submitted,

Carol Palermo

Novel Theology

Novel Theology is a St Thomas Parish event that began during Susannah Rohman's Ministry somewhere around 2005. She was our Assistant Deacon at that time.

Our late friend, Bettie von Frankenberg kept it going, then Phyllis Rawling, followed by Susan Hechter, and possibly another leader for the upcoming 2024-25 (fingers crossed)!

Cana has Zoom set in place for us if you would like to join in that way. We are having in-person meetings in the Classroom at present. Our dates are usually the 3rd Sunday of the month. May is our last meeting for this season.

The book content is not Romance, nor Mystery oriented as a rule. Now and then we make an exception. More often the subject deals with family life, or past and or current situations in the news including wars, and figures who positively affect other community and worldly members. They are not always religious in nature, but often have related ties.

Our group members select the books to read and discuss. We met on the 3rd Sunday of the month, this year, at 9:10am via Zoom and in the Classroom in-person.

Hope you will join us!

Submitted by Susan Hechter

2 Saints Readers

People from St. Thomas and St. Nicholas get together, on Zoom, to discuss books that they have chosen. In 2023 we read, enjoyed and discussed:

An Invisible Thread by Schroff and Tresniowski

The Book of Longings by Sue Monk Kidd

Tattoos on the Heart by Father Greg Boyle

The Other Wiseman by Henry Van Dyke

If you would like to discuss with us, watch your email for the next book, date and time for discussion. The emails go out to both congregations and anyone who would enjoy doing that, can connect with us by Zoom. For more information, contact Madeline Johnson.

Submitted by Madeline Johnson

MINISTRY: Fellowship

Overflowing Cup Café

There has long been fellowship following each service at St Thomas, but recently there's been a resurgence of this time of warmth and connection, thanks to our new feature: The Overflowing Cup Café. This is the brainchild of Fr Clay Brown, and is a part of his New Underground Railroad Initiative (NURI), explained in another place in this annual report. But, I wanted to speak to the fellowship aspect of this enhancement.

Now, every Sunday when you walk in, you are greeted with the aroma of freshly brewed coffee mingled with laughter and heartfelt conversations. It's a time to unwind, share stories, and build deeper connections with fellow parishioners.

The tables are adorned with homemade treats—delicate pastries, buttery scones, and warm muffins—prepared by the talented Hymena Oliver (we are so blessed by her culinary gifts and sunny personality). The mouth-watering aromas and the gentle hum of chatter create an inviting ambiance, welcoming both old friends and newcomers.

During Coffee Hour, we learn about each other's lives beyond the pews. New faces find comfort in the friendly smiles and genuine interest of long-standing members. We discuss everything from the week's sermon to family milestones, from community outreach projects to gardening tips. It's a space where bonds are forged, where we celebrate joys and offer solace during trials.

The Overflowing Cup Café doesn't just offer delicious treats; it provides a time and space to nourish our souls. As we linger over our drinks, we discover shared interests, hidden talents, and common struggles. We exchange contact info, plan playdates for our children, and organize volunteer efforts. In this warm embrace of fellowship, we find strength, encouragement, and a sense of belonging.

So, if you haven't joined us yet, consider this your invitation. Come, pull up a chair, and let the aromas envelop you. Whether you're seeking companionship, spiritual discussions, or simply a warm cuppa, The Overflowing Cup Café is a place where hearts connect and community blossoms.

Submitted by Cana Hartman

Hospitality Ministry

Hospitality Ministry is for one-time events such as wedding and funeral receptions. Members set tables in the Great Hall, prepare and set out coffee/tea/juice/water along with food items donated by parishioners, and clean up afterwards. Training is provided; volunteer to serve as frequently as you like and are able.

Leaders are Sally Price and Madeline Johnson

Events Ministry

One issue that causes people to hesitate with bringing forth new ideas is the concern that the burden will then be upon them entirely to bring the event to fruition. Very few of us have the time and wherewithal to put on events by ourselves. This is where the Events Ministry comes in. The Events Ministry is there to help parishioners who have an idea for a special parish event to plan and carry out the event by putting together smaller commission groups to bring these events to life. New members as well as ideas are always enthusiastically welcomed — this work is easy and fun when more people are participating in it and sharing the labor.

This was the first full year of activity for our Events Ministry, and it was a full one indeed! We held an Easter egg hunt, welcome celebration for Fr. Clay, picnic with outdoor worship, Community Day, Blessing of the Animals, Trunk or Treat, Live Nativity, and St. Thomas's Day dinner. For some of these, we opened our doors to the wider community via social media advertising and targeted in person promotion (for example, leaving flyers at veterinary clinics for the Blessing of the Animals), with great success. The St. Thomas's Day dinner in particular was special for the connections we made with a local Indian church that we hope to build on in the coming years.

Planning for these events was made easier by dividing up the work. Cana Hartman, Kristin Sausville, Philippa Sunnergren, and Belinda Young-Payne effectively split up tasks such as promotion, volunteer coordination, decoration, food, and community outreach.

We hope for an even more active 2024! We have already held the Epiphany dinner and Shrove Tuesday pancake dinner, and look forward to Palm Sunday, Good Friday mini VBS, Easter egg hunt, the Bishop's visit, Pentecost picnic, summer movie night, Community Day, Blessing of the Animals, Live Nativity, and St. Thomas's Day dinner. We'd love to have you join us in planning these!

Faithfully submitted by Kristin Sausville

MANAGEMENT

Stewardship Campaign 2023

Our **Annual Giving** campaign was held in October 2023. Annual Giving is when parishioners are asked to pledge their financial gifts for the coming year. Our parish budget is based on our gift giving. Our Vestry determined that the goal for this year's campaign was \$290,000 and we collected \$243,627 in pledges. Thank you to everyone who submitted a pledge. WE are the church – WE are created for Good Works – WE are how good works happen! Let your good works shine forth in all you do, all you give, all you are. Thank you for continuing support as we work to do all we can in the love of Christ.

Submitted by Joy Lynam

Counters of the Offering

The St Thomas's Counters Ministry is responsible for counting the weekly plate donations. Counters work one Sunday a month. We are currently looking for two more counters to replace a team that has moved on to more responsibilities. If you think you might want to help with this ministry, please contact Teresa Coons (610-585-1238 or tlcoons411@comcast.net).

The counters work in teams of two, generally on Sunday after the 10:30 service. Sometimes the count is done on Monday or Tuesday to accommodate counters schedules. Recently many parishioners have opted to take advantage of Automatic Payments, stock transfers or having some of their RMD payments sent directly to the church to take advantage of the tax regulations. This practice has reduced the amount of time the counters need to complete the weekly plate count so counters are usually done in 45 minutes.

Submitted by Teresa Coons

Parish Office

As your parish administrator, my unwavering goal centers on **Inviting, Welcoming, and Connecting** our faith family—both within our immediate congregation and extending throughout the wider community. While this mission finds expression in our service booklets, emails, and social media presence, it is the cherished face-to-face interactions that keep me smiling every day.

Our church office is open from Monday to Thursday from 9am-noon, welcoming a diverse array of visitors throughout the week. From those seeking assistance to individuals coming to sit in the sanctuary for quiet prayer, from visitors exploring our **Blue Hen Bounty** to dedicated members performing behind-the-scenes tasks essential for the church's smooth functioning, I strive to extend a warm welcome to all.

A heartfelt tribute to our vigilant copy editor, **Joan Bennett**, whose eagle eyes have rescued countless sentences from error and whose ideas have elevated our communications. **Kristin Sausville** keeps me motivated with her invigorating brainstorming sessions and weekly check-ins of my sticky note mosaic of to-dos. And to my faith family members—your willingness to step in, whether for mailings, special projects, or simply moral support, keeps our office humming with grace.

While on a roll of gratitude, I must acknowledge our dear friend **Jean Moore**. She not only introduced me to the inner workings of the parish office but also fostered an atmosphere of friendship—she radiated with the spirit of **Invite, Welcome, Connect**. Jean's subtle yet gregarious embodiment of these principles inspires me.

A highlight of the past year, with the help of **Kristin Sausville** and **Sue Houghton**, I have been able to create slideshows to run on the monitors throughout our building. These reels showcase all of the excitement happening around St Thomas. Every time I refresh the file, I am in awe of how vibrant and alive our parish is! Page after page, it is uplifting to see how we show God's love: welcoming everyone, actively participating in our community, and fostering fellowship and spiritual growth among our faith family.

In 2024, I intend to focus on cultivating a welcoming, user-friendly, and all-embracing experience for newcomers. You may see dashes of experimentation, as we explore fresh approaches. Your feedback and innovative ideas will be invaluable as we extend a supportive hand to those embarking on their journey with us. Christ welcomes everyone equally, whether they are visiting for the first or thousandth time, and the goal is to make this love and acceptance evident.

Submitted with gratitude by Cana Hartman

Finance Ministry

The Finance Committee meets monthly, typically the Tuesday before the vestry meeting, at 6:30 pm. We monitor income and expenses on an ongoing basis. We are grateful for every donation, small and large, which helps further the reach of the parish. Everyone is welcome to attend the Finance Committee meetings.

Please see any member of the Finance Committee with questions.

Faithfully submitted,
Amy Keach
Treasurer

Property Ministry

The property ministry sees to the maintenance of our building and grounds. Volunteers help with repairs ranging from trimming shrubs to replacing light bulbs, coordinate repairs with professionals, and members also mow the lawn and tidy the parish cemetery. Parishioners skilled in carpentry and simple repairs, as well as folks who can mow the grass about once a month can be very helpful. The Property Committee meets the first Thursday of each month at noon. If you are interested in participating in the ministry, please contact Amy Keach or Sue Houghton.

“Step Up Together” campaign

In the fall of 2022, the Property Committee hired Miller Dodson to assess the building for a professional Reserve Study to help us estimate what systems will need to be replaced and when. When the engineer visited the church, he expressed concern about the failing retaining wall along the stairwell to the boiler room. It was repaired in the past and that repair was no longer holding the wall in place. A small group of parishioners including an engineer and a builder explored our options. Considerations ranged from locking up the boiler room to rebuilding the wall. It was determined rebuilding the wall would be the least expensive. Quotes were obtained and we asked the diocese for help. The Advance & Development Committee offered the following assistance:

- \$15,000 Grant
- \$25,000 Challenge Grant matching \$1 for each \$1 donated between April and October
- \$3,750 Challenge Grant matching \$0.75 for each \$1 donated between November and January
- \$41,250 Loan to be paid over 20 years

The parish rallied! We hoped to raise \$30,000 over six months and it turns out we raised just over 39,000 in 10 weeks. The A&D Committee agreed to amend our Challenge Grant conditions due to the success of the campaign. At year end we had received nearly \$41,000 for the project which helps reduce the amount of the loan we will obtain when the work is complete.

To celebrate, a Step Up Together coffee hour was held in the fall and parishioners signed a large “thank you” card which was delivered to the diocesan office. Thank you to everyone who helped with the various steps of the project and to those who donated. Many people came together to help.

Faithfully submitted,
Amy Keach

MISSION

Blue Hen Bounty

Blue Hen Bounty is now in its 8th year of operation here at St Thomas's. We provide nutrition and hygiene products mainly to UD students and staff, but no one is turned away.

Many individuals and groups help stock the pantry but there is always a need for more. Thanks to all of you who have answered our numerous requests for various items or with donations to our BHB account here at St Thomas's. We also have access to some limited funds available through UD.

We are in the process of partnering with The Food Bank of Delaware which will give us access to a larger variety of items. Once we learn the process of ordering from their warehouse, we will be asking for additional volunteers to help pick up these items from the Food Bank Center off Rte 896 and to help monitor the number of clients we serve which is a requirement as a Food Bank partners. Look for email requests later this spring.

Submitted by Teresa Coons

Hope Dining Room

Hope Dining Room is a lunchtime program - now 51 years old in Newark. Every weekday, a different church in Newark makes lunch at Kingswood Methodist Church and serves it to whoever comes. We have guests who are homeless, some who need to stretch their budgets by having a free, hot meal at lunchtime, and some who are just lonely and like to eat with other people. St. Thomas and St. Nicholas provide a team of people, on the third Monday of every month, to make lunch, serve it, and clean up the kitchen. If you would like to volunteer to help, look for a Signup Genius, that comes out the 2nd Monday of every month and sign yourself up! Bring a ball cap and an apron. We would LOVE to see you!

Respectfully submitted by Madeline Johnson

Code Purple

Code Purple is a program run by Friendship House (which runs the Empowerment Centers in Newark and Wilmington). If the night-time temperature is forecasted to be below 20 degrees, Friendship House calls a Code Purple. 5 churches in Newark alternate hosting the homeless for dinner, a safe warm place to stay, and breakfast in the morning. We have done it twice this year: Sunday, January 14, and Friday, January 19 (during a snowstorm). Each of those nights, we had 13 guests, who enjoyed dinner, card and board games, a safe warm sleep on our air mattresses with blankets, and breakfast the next morning. Members of St. Thomas and of the St. Nicholas congregation, helped with the meals, chaperoning, cleanup and MANY helped with the washing of the blankets! It's a TEAM effort and MUCH appreciated by our homeless friends. If you would like to help with this program, watch your email, for a Sign-Up Genius when the forecast is blustery and sign up for a shift that is convenient for you. THANK YOU, St. Thomas and St. Nicholas!!!

Respectfully submitted by Madeline Johnson

Annual Bazaar

At the request of patrons and vendors, the Bazaar Ministry returned to holding a three-day event in 2023, after hosting a successful one-day Mini Bazaar the previous year. The annual Bazaar is a popular and time-honored tradition at St. Thomas. The event features unique crafts, homemade soups, a bake sale and cookie walk, a White Elephant sale, Saturday luncheon offerings, and several partnering vendors. This past year, we added an accompanying Pie Sale Fundraiser (from Desserts by Dana). The Bazaar and Pie Sale garnered around \$6,000. Those proceeds are being distributed among our various Outreach organizations.

The annual Bazaar exemplifies the meaning of the proverb "Many hands make light work". The Bazaar Ministry is indebted to members of the congregation who donated beautiful crafts, baked goods, and soups. We are also appreciative of the many parishioners and friends who gave of their time and talents to ensure the Bazaar's success, especially Paul and Wanda Lyons, Teresa Coons, Donna and Rick Rotandi, Sue Houghton, Myrt Davies and LuWanda Lockhart (St. Nicholas), Scott Sunnergren, Cana Hartman, and Father Howie.

The annual Bazaar planning committee meets monthly between March and November. We are always seeking new members and new ideas. If you are interested in helping us to continue this St. Thomas tradition, please contact Phillippa Sunnergren: (302) 643-2111, phil@sunnnergren.com.

Faithfully submitted,
Philippa Sunnergren, Barbara Graham, Carol Palermo, Connie Malin
Helen Spence, Susan Hechter, and Rue Manning

Health Ministry/Annual Health and Wellness Fair

The Health Ministry sponsored the Second Annual Health and Wellness Fair at the beginning of September as an event to reach our parish community and the wider Newark community. We offered Flu shots provided by Hillcrest Pharmacy along with a variety of health and wellness informational tables. There were around 17 different groups offering educational information and aTAcK addiction provided a Naloxone training session. We learned some valuable lessons from our inaugural event in 2022 and felt this event reached a wider audience. Whilst our attendance was still less than we would have hoped, we received positive feedback from our vendors and visitors. One vendor was able to take school supplies for eight homeless children and also connect their families with several other organizations that were at the Health Fair. We hope to build this event over the next few years to be something that provides for the needs of our own parish community and also becomes a much larger outreach event for St Thomas. We are planning the 2024 event to be on Saturday September 7th and already have several vendors committed, including Hillside Pharmacy and aTAcK Addiction. If you would like to be involved please contact Philippa Sunnergren 302 643-2111, phil@sunnnergren.com

New Underground Railroad Initiative (NURI)

NURI Background

A modern approach for individual Episcopalians to utilize small but new underground railroad-like initiatives, to help propel those who have been marginalized by society into non-abated lifestyles. The mission statement is simple.... close the racial wealth gap, and open doors that have been systemically closed, so that others can grow into positions of self-sustainability.

Our New Underground Railroad Initiative (NURI) will use apprenticeships to counter generational trauma by enabling young people, with pastoral oversight from our Curate, to increase their own earning capacity while helping the parish to feed Christ's sheep.

Strengthened by their sojourn here, as their ancestors were strengthened by stops along the underground railroad, our interns will become able to lead their own and their descendants' generations out of the racial wealth gap.

This will be accomplished by short-term apprenticeships in (1) live stream and film photography of church services/events and (2) food/culinary services at a parish Café will develop technical, economic, and social understanding and skills that can significantly increase marginalized adolescent and young adult's lifetime earning capacity, positioning our interns to help close American society's racial wealth gap.

Unlike other workforce readiness courses, NURI does not prepare students for minimum wage employment, which cannot pay for adequate food and housing, much less begin to close the racial wealth gap. Our interns, while gaining technical skills, will prepare for success as small business owners. Guided by the school district's vocational coordinator, school

counselors with knowledge of students' families and socio-economic situations will recommend seniors in their schools' programs that match our initiatives.

A mental health professional, employing such concepts as "Trauma Informed Awareness," will interview the students and identify those ready for this experience. Parents will give informed consent.

Overview of the 2023 NURI Initiative Outreach

- January 2023 – Expressed Interest in the diocese for churches to address racial justice and reconciliation through congregational support led to the visualization and development of an innovative conception of a New Underground Railroad Initiative ("NURI").
- February – May 2023 Small group discussions occurred on the congregation's readiness for innovative type outreach initiatives. Discussions occurred of the "NURI" concept in light of this parish's outreach mission goals.
- May- September 2023 – a "NURI" mission statement was structured for St. Thomas, taking into consideration the many soft socio-economic barriers to progress encountered by marginalized people, including families with children who have special needs. In September, we worked on fine-tuning initiatives, startup cost, and functional timeline to start.
- October 2023 – In October, we began to develop training materials and initiative guidelines for apprenticeships in two areas of need at St. Thomas's—(1) livestreaming worship services and (2) hosting an inviting café to foster fellowship for old-timers and newcomers in the aftermath of Covid. The vestry voted to commit funding in the amount of \$1000.00 from the 2023 budget to create the Café space.
- Bargaining for discounts, we purchased high-quality cafe furniture and repurposed space in the church hall. Announcements of the livestreaming and Culinary/Food Service preparation apprenticeship opportunities sent to high schools and other organizations led to a meeting with the regional vocational counselor for the Christiana Public School District, which, in turn, led to the best methods for identifying possible candidates in the schools.
- November 2023 – Our Overflowing Cup Cafe opened its test period to see if people would come. So far, it is being received with a lot of enthusiasm, including from newcomers, and many compliments on the innovative freshly baked pastries and breakfast sandwiches.
- December 17, 2023 – Our first livestream intern, a student from a local high school, began the program. His father was in attendance.
- February 2023 – A new partnership was formed with the New Castle County Vocational Technical School District to offer internship opportunities for our first Cafe intern.
- Plans for continuing the project – We hope that the handbooks created and tested by the Apprenticeship Coordinators will enable volunteers to take over the job of guiding the interns in future years. With a successful record, we hope to interest community foundations in donating the cost of the interns' stipends/scholarships in the future and to interest other churches in trying out the "NURI" initiative.
Contributions & grants for congregation-based NURI outreach & mission

Community Property Usage

St. Thomas's physical church is more than just a place of worship. Our community is proud to share our beautiful building and property with the public in many ways. One of our most prized possessions is our lovely grove, which is perfect for picnics, Easter egg hunts, and movie nights. Our grove is a wonderful place for families and friends, and UD students alike to spend a beautiful afternoon enjoying the crocus. We also welcome various community groups to use our building for events. You can use our building for anything from a small meeting to a large banquet. We believe that sharing our building with the community is a way to give back and to promote a sense of togetherness.

While we suggest donations to help us maintain the building, our goal is not to profit from it. Last year, it was my personal goal to increase building usage, and consequently generate more building donations. The 2023 line in the budget was \$2500, my goal was \$3000, and I'm so pleased to share that both goals were smashed: we received over \$5700 in building donations! This was not without hard work. Thank you to everyone who helped with set-ups, clean-ups, and accommodated our guests with hospitable hearts. My goal for 2024 is \$5000. Do you think we can surpass it? This is a ministry that relies on word-of-mouth recommendations and invitations, so I need your help.

We want to let everyone know that St. Thomas has an amazing building and we want to share it with everyone. Sharing our space is a great way to connect with our community and promote a sense of unity. We want to encourage people to visit outside of worship services, and experience the beauty of the stained glass and the grove. Our church is dedicated to loving our neighbors and spreading the love of God in our community, and this ministry is one way we achieve this goal. Feedback and suggestions are always welcome on how we can better serve our community by utilizing our property. If you have an idea for an event or activity that you think would be a good fit for our building, please let us know. We are always open to new opportunities to bring people together in a safe, welcoming space.

Submitted with optimism by Cana Hartman



**St Thomas's
Episcopal Parish**
Newark, DE

StThomasNewarkDE.church