



# THE EPISTLE OF ST. THOMAS

St. Thomas Episcopal Church  
The Rev. Jeff Douglas

Diocese of East Carolina  
The Rt. Rev. Robert Skirving

December 2019

## The Labyrinth of Life



Putting up the Christmas crèche. Decorating our homes. Putting up all the holiday lights. Buying and trimming the tree. Buying, wrapping and sending all the gifts. All these are a welcome distraction from hubbub of our fast-paced lives. They remind us of our need for connection, relationship – the feeling that we are part of something larger than ourselves as individuals. That feeling is surely part of what makes the holiday season special. We want to be with our family and we pray that it will be a happy, harmonious time when old rivalries, grudges and spats can be put aside so that we can enjoy one another and celebrate our relationships. We want to celebrate our friends, new and old, and exchange (if not actual gifts) the gifts of good company, story telling, joking and laughing together. We want to celebrate being alive together.

And we want to look back and remember... the good times we shared, the loved ones we lost and the ones we have gained also. We look back on the obstacles and opportunities that life presented us with during the past year. We reflect on the choices made or not, the paths we took and those we avoided and those we were forced to take in the circumstances that directed our lives: the weakening parent, the dying friend or our own health crisis. We want to look back and give ourselves the gift of perspective that only time can really give. We want to look back and give ourselves hope for the future. We pray that the future will be a time of old grudges let go, our wounds soothed if not completely healed. We take this time in the dark to look forward toward a brighter day, a new day, a new beginning.

I have been enamored by the image of the labyrinth as a metaphor for life the past few months. As one whose faith rests on the idea that the arc of history may be long, but it is bent toward justice, I have been forced to give up any idea that history is linear and that we march forward making progress and perhaps taking a few steps back occasionally but always moving forward. Lately, I think our lives walk the labyrinth, moving toward the center (God) but in a winding, almost circular pattern, that often folds back on itself as we have opportunities to address the recurring issues that divide and separate us as family and as a nation.

Until we take on the hard work of loving each other unconditionally, giving each person the respect that being a beloved creature of God demands; until we engage in forgiveness, not demanding retribution or revenge for the wrongs done to us; until we actively engage in reconciliation – not giving up on the demands that love makes but trying to remain connected, in relationship despite our differences, our lives will bend and circle back until perhaps we do.

This Advent and Christmas I invite you to travel down a different path, to choose a different way, the way of Jesus. It is the intentional path of reconciliation: learning to love and forgive yourself and the people in your life. I invite you to let go of the hurts and pains of the past that are the first steps toward peace and fulfillment. I invite you into an intentional life of giving and thanksgiving that is the key to true joy.

As we travel hither and yon this season, from shop to shop, party to party, family gathering to family gathering, I invite you to take an intentional journey to seek the Christ this season. See him not only in a child's eyes wide with the wonder of Christmas morn. See him in the face of relative you don't want to see and open your heart to their pain. See him in the face of the neighbor you won't speak to and start a conversation. Be generous not only in the gifts you give but give more than expected to those who do not expect anything. Be gracious and forgiving when it is not easy and the light of Christ will be in your eyes come Christmas morn. A GPS may get you to the shops, the parties and gatherings, but only Christ, who is the Way, can truly get you back to the center for Christmas.

Happy Advent & Merry Christmas,

Jeff+

## A Sacred Path for Advent

Advent is the season when we prepare for, anticipate, and await the coming of Jesus.

As spiritual discipline, we may study the scriptures with an expectant focus.

We may focus on serving others, that we might seek and serve Jesus in them.

We may engage in an intentional prayer ritual to make ourselves ready for Jesus's coming.

As a companion to your chosen Advent discipline and as a service to the community, the Episcopal Church Women of St Thomas will be offering "A Sacred Path for Advent".

With Light as your guide, come and walk the labyrinth

in the churchyard facing Church Street on Wednesday evenings during Advent.

From 5:30 until 6pm please join us, dressed for whatever the outdoor conditions may be, and we will guide you in the ancient tradition of walking a labyrinth as a discipline for encountering God.

If you choose, you may join us afterwards inside the church for a service of Evening Prayer at 6 pm, lasting about half an hour.

Come and walk with us... "A Sacred Path for Advent".

St. Thomas Episcopal Church  
Vestry Minutes  
November 19, 2019

Present at the meeting were Rector Jeff Douglas, Treasurer Ernie Carter, Senior Warden Buddy Jones, Charles Sawyer, Becky Johnson, John Davis, Bill Blanchard, Linda Blackburn, and Clerk of the Vestry Carolyn Peele.

**Opening Prayer and Minutes:** The Rector opened the meeting with prayer. The minutes of the October meeting were approved.

**Administration and Finance:** The Treasurer gave a report on the Lobster Feast. The proceeds totaled \$6,029.33. This amount might increase slightly after the sale of lobsters in the freezer. Lobsters will be sold at \$8.00 each or two for \$15.00. The Vestry voted unanimously to distribute the proceeds as follows: two-thirds to the Food Pantry (about \$4000), one sixth to the Rector's Discretionary Fund, and one-sixth to the Diocesan Ocracoke Hurricane Relief Fund.

The Treasurer went over the financial statement for the past month. The current checking balance is \$9,812.10. White and Woodley have been paid \$10,700 for the air conditioner repair and replacement. Due to a computer glitch there was no current report from the Raymond James Investment account. The Treasurer's report was accepted.

The feedback from the November 10 social and stewardship meeting at the Johnsons was very positive. The attendance was good, as was the food and fellowship. Many parishioners participated in the discussion as to how to best address our financial situation.

There was a lengthy ongoing discussion as to how we as a Vestry and as a Parish can better balance our income and our expenses. There were a number of suggestions as to how and where we can cut operational expenses and how we can generate more revenue. The decision was made to raise the rent on the Parish Hall from \$225+refundable \$50 deposit to \$275+ deposit, effective January 1. The new rent rate will not apply to those who have already engaged the Parish Hall for next year. There was discussion of cutting back on full custodial services from twice a week to once a week, with maybe just cleaning the bathrooms later in the week. Since so few children use the nursery it was suggested that we could perhaps do away with the nursery attendant at Sunday Worship Service. We could raise revenue by being better stewards and encouraging others to do so. The Treasurer reported that several parishioners have already increased their pledges for the coming year.

The Rector commented that even when small churches cluster, which seems to be the wave of the future, it is not always a solution to financial problems.

The Rector announced that each parish has been asked to give at least 10% of its net disposal income to the Diocese. The Treasurer reported that this was about the percentage we have given in the recent past. There was discussion, but no final decision about our pledge for 2020 was made at the meeting. [An email vote on this matter was taken among the Vestry later in the week.]

**Outreach:** Soup Kitchen was held on November 19. (No Soup Kitchen on November 28, Thanksgiving Day.)

**Worship:** The Rector announced that Worship Service on November 24 will begin at 11:00, due to the fact that he will be conducting a Baptism at St. Mary's at 9:00 and will be unable to get back to St. Thomas' by 10:30. There was some discussion of permanently changing the time of Worship Service. The issue will be taken up at the Annual Meeting in January. Adult Sunday School will start at 10:00 on November 24.

**Education:** The study of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the Adult Sunday School series on Modern Saints will conclude on November 24. Adult Sunday School will NOT meet on December 1, following the Thanksgiving holiday. The next topic TBA.

**Pastoral Care:** There were updates on the health status of parishioners Bea Vaughan and Cheryl Steczak, who is recovering nicely from surgery. There have been several unsuccessful attempts to get in touch with the Shotwells, now living in the Triangle area.

**Buildings and Grounds:** (No report, other than completion of air conditioning project.)

**Other:** The Nominating Committee, composed of out-going Vestry members Buddy Jones, Martie Tayloe, and Charles Sawyer, will be selecting new Vestry members. There are four vacancies to be filled (due to resignation of member David Shields.) The committee asked for and received several suggestions. The new slate will be presented at the next Vestry meeting, and will be voted on at the Annual Meeting on January 12.

The Rector asked for recommendations for delegates to the annual Diocesan Convention in Wilmington, February 6-8. Beth Douglas has volunteered to serve as a delegate. Another delegate and one alternate are needed.

The time and place of the December Vestry meeting will be announced. The tentative date selected, the third Tuesday, is December 17.

**Calendar:**

Thurs. Nov. 21 – ECW Luncheon and Bazaar

Tues. Nov. 26-Sat. Nov. 30 - Rector away

Sun. Dec. 22, 5PM – Lessons and Carols

Tues. Dec. 24, 5 PM – Christmas Eve Service

Tues. Dec. 24, 7 PM – Christmas Eve Service at St. Mary’s

Wed. Dec. 25 – Operation Inasmuch Christmas Dinner, Ahoskie Baptist Church

Sun. Dec. 29 – Morning Prayer/Carol Sing

The meeting was adjourned with the Lord’s Prayer.

Respectfully submitted,  
Carolyn Peele, Clerk of the Vestry



SANTA CLAWS

## *Frozen Lobsters For Sale*

**\$8 each or \$15 for two**

*Perfect for serving up Lobster Salad,  
Lobster Rolls, Lobster Bisque & More!*



*A Festival of Nine Lessons  
& Carols*

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2019

5:00 PM

ST. THOMAS EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*424 West Church Street, Ahoskie*

Admission is free.

*The public is cordially invited to attend.*

## DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

- 4 Martie Tayloe
- 5 John Davis
- 8 Jack Tayloe
- 10 Sheila Liverman Forbes
- 18 Ray Bradshaw
- 18 Norfleet Hoggard
- 22 Bill Blanchard
- 22 Michael Douglas
- 31 Anna Bradshaw

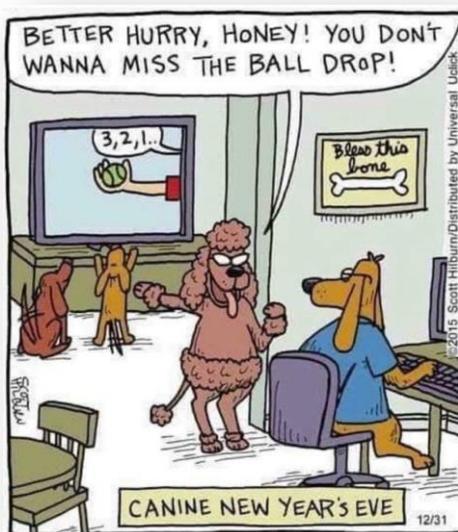


*“O God, our times are in your hand: Look with favor; we pray, on your servants, **Martie, John, Jack, Sheila, Ray, Norfleet, Bill, Michael, Anna**, as they begin another year. Grant that they may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen their trust in your goodness all the days of their lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”*

## DECEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

- 7 Fred and Sue Liverman
- 11 Jack and Lindsay Vaughan
- 27 Mike and Cheryl Steczak
- 29 Kenny and Amy Braswell

*“O God, you have so consecrated the covenant of marriage that in it is represented the spiritual unity between Christ and his Church: Send therefore your blessing upon, **Fred and Sue, Jack and Lindsay, Mike and Cheryl, Kenny and Amy**, that they may so love, honor, and cherish each other in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.”*



## St. Thomas Episcopal Church – Schedules for December 2019

### Acolytes

- 1 OPEN
- 8 Charles Sawyer
- 15 Jerrie Taylor and Cecelia Jones
- 22 Bill Blanchard
- 29 Hugh Davis and Alexis Urquhart-Harrell

### Altar Flowers

- 1 Hon. and Mrs. Tom Newbern
- 8 Mr. and Mrs. David Shields
- 15 Dr. and Mrs. Julian Taylor
- 22 Flower Guild
- 29 Flower Guild

### Altar Guild

Carolyn Peele and Patsy Jones

### Food Pantry (Note-Wednesdays)

- 4 George Owens
- 11 Jim Shotwell
- 18 Peggy Vann
- 25 CLOSED

### Lay Readers

- |    |          |                   |             |
|----|----------|-------------------|-------------|
| 1  | 10:30 AM | Holy Eucharist    | Colin Jones |
| 4  | 6:00 PM  | Evening Prayer    | Colin Jones |
| 8  | 8:00 AM  | Morning Prayer    | OPEN        |
|    | 10:30 AM | Holy Eucharist    | John Davis  |
| 11 | 6:00 PM  | Evening Prayer    | John Davis  |
| 15 | 10:30 AM | Holy Eucharist    | Sarah Davis |
| 18 | 6:00 PM  | NO EVENING PRAYER |             |
| 22 | 10:30 AM | Holy Eucharist    | Hugh Davis  |
| 24 | 5:00 PM  | Holy Eucharist    | Sarah Davis |
| 25 | 6:00 PM  | NO EVENING PRAYER |             |
| 29 | 10:30 AM | Holy Eucharist    | Buck Suiter |

### Ushers

Fred Liverman and Bubba Peele

### Yard Work

- 1 Julian Taylor and Jamie Johnson
- 8 Colin Jones and David & Julie Shields
- 15 Colin Jones and David & Julie Shields
- 22 Mac Griffin and Johnny Griffin
- 29 Mac Griffin and Johnny Griffin

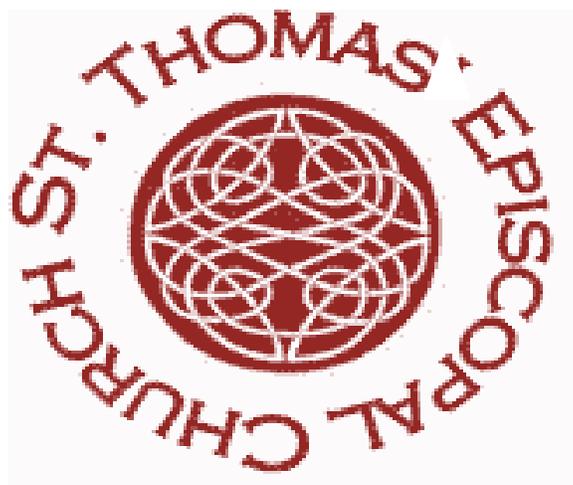


### Hospitality Committee

**Johnny and Claudia Griffin**  
Lindsay and Jack Vaughan  
Mac and Sarah Griffin  
Brenda Hewitt



St. Thomas Episcopal Church  
P. O. Box 263  
Ahoskie, NC 27910



**A Place to Belong ... A Place to Believe**