

VESTRY NEWS

With the new year, we say good-bye to two vestry members and welcome two. Jackie Murray and Robbie Robertson have both worked very hard for the last three years on the vestry and we should all thank them for their time and effort. Joining us are Vestry newcomers Stacey Lane and Karen Miller. Please join me in welcoming these two new members to the vestry.

Vestry has also made some changes in its members' responsibilities. Neal Culver, who has served as our Senior Warden for the last two years, has stepped aside to allow himself more time with Lutie. I have assumed the role of Senior Warden. Joann Collins has also replaced Charlie Stover as our Junior Warden. Both Neal and Charlie will remain on the vestry, and I thank them for the tremendous time and effort they have spent on behalf of the church. They have both spent countless hours keeping things running smoothly as we built new space and enjoyed growth of activities.

This year will bring lots of opportunities and work for the vestry as we move closer to our goal of selecting our new rector. The Search Committee has been working diligently in putting together our parish Profile, which describes our parish and our goals to applicants. We will soon be receiving names of potential rectors from the diocese.

This spring will also bring the start of work on our new Memorial Garden. We are looking for members to serve on the planning committee for this project. If you are interested in helping, please let me know.

—Peace, John Davis, Senior Warden

TIDINGS

JANUARY 2008

YEAR 2008 ISSUE 1

From our Interim Pastor A VISION FOR THE NEW YEAR

If you're like me, New Year's resolutions are usually gone and forgotten by the middle of February. But the other day I ran across an article in a photography magazine (of all places!), which is helping me form a vision I want to follow throughout the coming year. I'll share some of that article with you. It's by Helen Longest-Saccone, Editor, *Nature Photographer* (Winter 2007/08). Helen writes:

Recently I ran across this quote by Albert Einstein which stopped me in my tracks. He said, "It is every man's obligation to put back into the world at least the equivalent of what he takes out of it."

I thought about what "putting back into the world what I take out of it" entails, and began to make a mental list of all I take out. The obvious were food, clothing, home and fuel to heat that home, car and fuel to run the car, and all of the supplies I use in my personal and business life. In taking stock, I quickly notice that it requires an incredible amount of resources and services to keep my modern-day life running, along with the labor of an unknown number of people.

I take so much from the world; how can I put back the equivalent? I can't plant a forest, start an organic farm,

VISION. *continued on p. 4*

☆☆☆ HI, MYNAME IS ☆☆☆

This is what we usually say as we greet visitors to St. Thomas.

We are a friendly group and newcomers may meet many people. Of course, they cannot remember everyone's name when they return for another visit. To help visitors—and let's not forget new parish members—we now have name tags that we encourage everyone to wear so that we can be an even more welcoming faith family.

The tags are made to be worn around the neck (no damage to clothes), and will be easily stored on peg hangers in the hall in alphabetic order. The tags feature a beautiful mountain graphic and our names in LARGE print!

Wearing name tags will make parish growth easier, while it also helps our interim clergy, Bob and Jeannette Reese; our new rector, whom we hope to welcome later this year; our seasonal members; and occasional attenders feel more at home at St. Thomas. It's not as easy to recall everyone's name as it was when we were small. Wearing name tags is a simple solution that will allow us to greet others by name without hesitation.

☆☆☆ Hi, my name is . . . >>>



For a color version of this newsletter (if you are reading the b&w printed version), go to www.stthomasonline.org and click on the Newsletter dropdown menu, or request one by emailing Diana at diatoday@msn.com. Whether you are reading the printed or the on-screen version, please take a moment to tell John Davis that we're grateful for his time and for his company's willingness to donate the printing of this newsletter.

Rector Search Committee

Update, January 10, 2008

As you know, our seven-member committee searching for our new priest has been meeting since August 2007—a long time, it seems, without yet doing any interviewing, let alone making its recommendation to Vestry. We are following a detailed process prescribed by the diocese, a process chosen by those who have gone through this before. We must trust that they know best how to do this.

The process so far has led us through coming together as a group, sending out and tabulating a parish survey, and writing the results of that survey into a parish Profile, along with other required information. The Profile will be sent to candidates, and it will also serve as a welcome document to help with our church growth. It is beautiful, designed by Kerstin Davis, and will soon be posted on the St. Thomas website. Look for it there.

Besides names of candidates coming to us from the national and diocesan sources, names can be suggested by members of the congregation. When getting names of rector candidates, we are instructed to adhere to a very specific process, which is described in a letter that you will receive in mid-January. Please refer to those details for how to submit names, and for information about how confidential this process needs to be. We are also placing an ad in *Episcopal Life*, a magazine of the national Episcopal Church.

The Bishop's office screens candidates, then our committee goes over applications and then follows up with phone and in-person interviews. Sermon reviews are part of what we will examine. The list of candidates is gradually brought down to one name for the vestry of St. Thomas to interview and decide upon. We are trying to move this process along with "God-speed." As we devote much of our time to this process, we ask for your prayers and patience.

—for the Search Committee, Jim Haaga, Chair

Errata:

You probably wondered about the Parish Survey results printed on page 2 of the October newsletter. The list was labeled "Our Parish Goals," but the list was actually a description of how we see our church family and where we would like to go in the future. This description came from the survey. The issue archived on the website has a corrected headline.

The goals from the survey are listed below.

Future Goals

from 2007 Parish Survey

1. Attract young families and develop youth programming
2. Expand our presence in the community
3. Continue and expand support of outreach
4. Promote individual spiritual growth

The breakdown of how we hope our new rector will implement these goals is on page 3 of the PISR (Parish / Institution Search Request), which will shortly be posted in both the national church database and on the St. Thomas website.

In addition, we noted the following requirement for our new rector:

Openness to conversation about possible shared ministry with local Lutherans

St. Thomas

TIDINGS

JANUARY 2008

Rector Search

2

2008 Goals

2008 Parish Goals

Set at Vestry Retreat, 9/15/2007

I. Parish Growth

1. Hire a part-time rector.
2. Invite people to church.
Obtain list of newcomers from Chamber of Commerce.
Send follow-up letters to those signing visitors' book.
3. Continue events which reach the general population: Dinners, Fun-day at Ray-Cort Park, Others?
4. Promote our website.
Explore ways to link to more on-line searches.
5. Expand on youth program. Publicize Godly Play.
Resume monthly youth events.
5. Advertise Simple Suppers. (October: Austin Rios)

II. Outreach

1. Publicize better our monthly gifts to local charities in our own bulletin, newsletter, and in *Times Journal*.
2. Develop additional uses for our new space.
3. Visitation Ministry to community home-bound.
4. Address needs of Spanish population.
5. Listen for other community needs; partnering with local nonprofits?
6. Continue participation in prison dinner; expand to twice a year (?)
7. Increase support of non-local charities, esp. David Johnson.
Hold a fund-raiser just for David's work to publicize his work, attract folks from community who know David, show DVD of his work & circulate emails.
8. Generate support for MDG's.

III. Education

1. Assess interest in EFM (Education for Ministry) class
2. Consider a Lectionary reflection group to include older youth. Sunday breakfast, followed by 30-minute reflection.

IV. Worship

Consider a mid-week Eucharist with healing service (perhaps followed by Bible study). Open to the community.

V. Congregational Development

"Get-acquainted" dinners
Newcomer dinners

I would like to thank you for your prayers for my brother, Gene Pitra. He lost his battle with non-Hodgkins lymphoma early Monday morning, January 7. He was 68 years old.

—God bless, Pat Sharkey

Please continue to keep Dave and Maggie Zurbrick in your prayers. Dave has cancer and is in hospice.

Please also keep Robbie Robertson in your prayers, as he copes with severe pain from sciatica.

Thank you for the ongoing prayers for my older brother, Billy Donovan. He was put on a ventilator twice in October and was not expected to live, but he beat all odds and pulled through. Perhaps this is, in part, because he has been out of touch with the family for about 15 years. I had sent him notes, cards, photos, and announcements to the last address we had for him, but we did not hear from him until Cambridge City Hospital moved him to a rehab hospital. A social worker convinced him to call me. (God bless social workers!) Once the contact was made, my youngest sister, Kathy, and I went to Cambridge on behalf of the rest of the family. It was a shock to see him. He has always been slim, at a height of 5 feet 6, but he was down to about 100 pounds. Billy had been working as a cab driver, but since April has been too weak to keep up with the job and with his bills. His landlord visited him in hospital on Thanksgiving, brought him clothes, and told Bill not to worry about his arrears (almost \$5,000). Instead, to get well, and pay the rent as he's able. (God bless the generous ones of this world!) The rehab hospital was wonderful; I have to say that Massachusetts indigent care is excellent. (God bless good social programs!) He is now on Social Security, and home, with home health services, at least for the time being.

Billy is stable but fragile. He has severe heart failure and COPD. He can walk, with his oxygen tank, up the stairs to his second-floor walk-up if he rests along the way. Right after he went home from rehab, Boston got hit with unusually cold, snowy weather even from them. Billy bought groceries at the store a building away from his, but couldn't push them in the shopping cart to his door because of snow. A woman stopped and put him and the groceries in her cab, dropped him off. Her taxi driver carried the groceries up to his door. (God bless angels unawares!)

We are supplementing his income temporarily, and looking into ways to bring him here with us or to a nursing home when/if he wants that. I cannot tell you how much your prayers have meant to me as I went through that week in Cambridge, and as I continue to find what to say to this man who was so close to me in my youth. Thank you and please continue to keep us all in your prayers.

—Diana Donovan



Enid Smith

The Rev. Deacon Enid Smith died at 6 A.M. on November 26, 2007, at Highland Farms Retirement Center in Black Mountain, NC. She was a blessing to St. Thomas church, particularly in the early days at the American Legion Hall, when Rev. Barry Kramer was serving, and after that, when she could.

Enid had been failing, and become blind during the last few months. Yet she came to the dedication of the education space downstairs, on Saturday, Nov. 24, thanks to Jackie Murray's transportation help.

Services for Enid Smith were held at two locations.

Thursday, 11/29/07 at Highland Farms Retirement Center Chapel, Black Mountain, NC, at 4:00 P.M.

Saturday, 12/1/07 at St. Thomas, at 11:00 A.M. Rev. Bob Reese and Deacon Alan Hertzell presided.

In December, Enid's son, David Smith, made a donation to a needy person in his mother's memory. He said that she had always taught him to be generous and to help those in need. So, in his grief, David wanted to bring joy to someone at Christmas-time. After some searching, M&M decided that the recipient would be Daniel Hinds, who has worked at the church under the influence of the Emersons, and who desperately needs dental care. Peg and George took cash to Daniel on Christmas, making his day unexpectedly joyous. The dental care will be done in upcoming months.

We will certainly miss Enid, but are glad that she was able to join us in Burnsville so recently. We rejoice that her generosity is being passed on, and we remember the family in our prayers.

St. Thomas

TIDINGS

JANUARY 2008

Who Is St. Thomas? [submitted by Tom Niehaus]

The Apostle Thomas (Hebrew or Aramaic for “twin”) was also called Didymus (Greek for “twin”). He was absent when the risen Lord appeared to the other apostles on the evening of Easter Day, and refused to believe that Christ had indeed risen until he had seen him for himself. But when he had seen Jesus he said to him, “My Lord and My God.” (John 20:19–29) Because of this episode he has become known as “Doubting Thomas.”

But we ought also to remember his words when Jesus announced his intention of going to the Jerusalem area, brushing aside the protests of his disciples that his life was in danger there. Thomas said, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” (John 11:7,8,16) If Thomas was skeptical, he was also sturdily loyal.

At the Last Supper, Jesus said, “I go to prepare a place for you. . . . And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.” Thomas replied, “Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way?” To this Jesus answered, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” (John 14:1–6)

Thomas is mentioned again (John 21) as one of the seven disciples who were fishing on the Sea of Galilee when the risen Lord appeared to them. Aside from this, he appears in the New Testament only as a name on lists of the apostles. A couple of centuries later, a story was circulating in the Mediterranean world that he had gone to preach in India; there is a Christian community in India (the Kerala district) that claims descent from Christians converted by the preaching of Thomas.

The tradition among Christians in India is that Thomas was speared to death near Madras, and accordingly he is often pictured holding a spear. Paintings of martyrs often show them with the instruments with which they were put to death.

A recently discovered work called the [Coptic] Gospel of Thomas is a collection of sayings attributed to Jesus. I know of no scholarly support for the notion that it is the work of the apostle Thomas, but some scholars think that some of the sayings may be authentic sayings of Jesus.

—written by James Kiefer

Poem

These things did Thomas hold for real:
the warmth of blood, the chill of steel,
the grain of wood, the heft of stone,
the last frail twitch of blood and bone.
His brittle certainties denied
that one could live when one had died,
until his fingers read like Braille
the markings of the spear and nail.
May we, O God, by grace believe
and, in believing, still receive
the Christ who held His raw palms out
and beckoned Thomas from his doubt.

—Thomas Troeger, 1984, Psalter/
Hymnal of the Christian Reformed Church

Prayer Almighty and ever-living God, who strengthened your apostle Thomas with sure and certain faith in your Son’s resurrection: Grant us so perfectly and without doubt to believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord and our God, that our faith may never be found wanting in your sight; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

VISION. *continued from p. 1*

or replenish oil supplies. So, what can I do? I decided to spend some time truly analyzing what it means to me to put back into the world the equivalent of what I take out of it.

Over the following weeks, I asked the Creator the meaning of this, as well as the best way for me to give back to the world. I walked and thought, and began to feel that this obligation goes deeper than simply replenishing some small percentage of the goods I consume. What about the love and friendships that sustain me? What about the beauty of each day? What about the gifts I receive from people known and unknown? What about the gift of life itself?

Each day I depend on scores of people from around the world—people I will never meet—to invent, design, and make the goods, and provide the services that sustain my life. There are untold natural resources used in providing me with shelter, food, personal items, and transportation. The list of products I consume is long.

After much deep thought, I have come to the conclusion that the only way I can put back into the world at least the equivalent of what I take out of it is to show my gratitude to (the Creator, and) to Mother Earth, and to the people who sustain my life. This brought up the question: How do I show my gratitude to people I will never meet and to the earth?

For me, the answer is that I need to live in a loving state and to give thanks each day. Sharing with others is an important part of this equation and a means by which I can show my gratitude.

I remember well a scene from when I was 22 years old. Someone I had just met provided me with help. When I asked what I could do in return, I was told. “. . . The only way to repay this kindness is for you to help someone else.”

Perhaps throughout the coming year I will uncover specific ways to give back to the world a more significant measure than what I take out each day. To become a more giving person out of thanksgiving for what I have and continue to receive is a vision worth pursuing.

May the light of love fill your life and be with you throughout the coming year.

—(The Reverend) Bob Reese

CLEAN TEAM HELPS MAINTAIN OUR BEAUTIFUL NEW BUILDING

St. Thomas Church rented the American Legion Hall for many years. Some cleaning services were provided, but parish members cleaned the kitchen after use; we emptied the trash, swept, and refilled paper products. We also maintained the lower level: office, nursery, and bathroom—a relatively small area.

Since St. Thomas moved into our wonderful new building in December 2006, and completed the lower level in November 2007, it has become apparent that the task to clean our new space is much larger than at the Legion Hall. Still, we all want to have a clean worship space and preserve the beauty of all parts of the building.

The vestry has approved hiring a cleaning person to do a deep, thorough cleaning of the entire building once a month. We still need our clean teams, though.

In 2007 there were 4 teams of three to four people each, who cleaned the upper level. Each team managed the cleanliness of the church for two weeks at a time, and did a rotation every other month. So, for example, the same team might do the first two weeks of January, March, May, July, Sept., and Dec. Such a rotation usually involved one work session of about two hours each week for two weeks. Tasks included sweeping, mopping, vacuuming, trash removal, restocking paper products and soaps, and cleaning the kitchen and bathrooms.

In 2008 fewer people signed up to serve on clean teams. There are only two people on each of the 4 teams. With professional cleaning once a month, there will be less work required for each team. We expect about one hour each week, for each two-week stint, especially if more people will sign up.

As the saying goes, “Many hands make light work.” We sure can use some extra helpers. Can you lend a hand, regularly or on a substitute basis? If so, please call Margie Haaga at 675-9040. Thanks so much for considering this area of need at St. Thomas.

—Margie

Audit Committee

Last fall, St. Thomas had its first official, formal audit in a long time, or maybe ever. John Ster presented results to the church annual meeting at the end of October. No problems were found. Tighter systems for a growing church were recommended, to avoid confusion in the future.

John Ster was the Audit Committee chair, and did the most work on it. Nancy Byrd, George Emerson, and Jim Haaga worked with John. The Finance Committee (Tom Bailey, Charlie Stover, Neal Culver, and Bob Reese), or maybe the vestry, will decide if there should be an audit every year.

The upshot of the audit is: Your church money is in good hands!

COFFEE HOUR AT ST. THOMAS: FOOD, FUN, AND FELLOWSHIP

Isn't coffee hour great? This time together after worship is part of what makes St. Thomas special. It gives us time to catch up with each other and it's a great welcome for visitors. When our parish was smaller, coffee hour was simple, with a plate of cookies and pretzels or chips. In the last three or four years coffee hour has expanded and become much more lavish (and yummy).

You may not realize that all the food is provided by members of the coffee hour teams. Folks look at the involvement on the coffee hour team as a ministry to the parish. As attendance and food items have increased, so has the cost, as well as the time needed to prepare for, and clean up after, coffee hour.

In the past, each team usually had four or five members. Teams I, II, and III cover the first three Sundays of the month (two per team). Team IV organizes the monthly potluck luncheon (only one person on the team). Team V covers 5th Sundays—four per year—and special events/holidays that are not on Sundays (only one person on the team).

For 2008 only eight people signed up for the coffee hour teams. Yipes! Since the tasks are too great for this small number of volunteers, we are faced with some choices.

1. If more people in the parish step forward and join a coffee hour team, we can continue this great tradition of hospitality.
2. If not, we can drastically scale back coffee hour to a simple, limited offering of snack and beverage, but continue to have fellowship and good discussions.

Either way, we need substitutes to fill in as needed when members are absent. Subs can either bring food, set up, and then clean up, or they can specify which tasks they can handle—for example, available to clean up but not to bring food.

Please pray about this opportunity to serve, and if you feel so led, contact John Davis at 682-6043, or look for a sign-up sheet on Sunday Jan. 20.



Help! Give Us Your Vision

Ongoing Monthly Local Outreach

Ministry and Mission committee is *seeking your input* on where you want the 2008 monthly local outreach donations to go. We would love you to come to a meeting, which is always announced beforehand. Or speak to us and let us know your thoughts.

This year the monthly grants will be more than twice what they were in 2007; they will be \$450 each, compared to \$200 each. Please email Diana Donovan at diatoday@msn.com or tell a vestry member or mention your ideas to Diana, Niehauses, Haagas, Maryallen Estes, Diantha Stevenson, Eloise, or Donna Jean Dreyer. They're the ones who come to M&M most often. Thanks!

New Idea #1—Special Use of a Monthly Local Grant

In 2008 we will allocate the amount of one month's local outreach grant—\$450—to be divided into four separate mini-grants.

Anyone from the congregation may use one of these mini-grants for outreach in a way they think best. Once granted, that grantor will report to the congregation on the experience. One of the four grantors will be a child. Tom Niehaus is coordinator. *Please consider being one of these grantors.* Ask Tom for details ☺

New Idea #2—One-Time \$2000 Grant

Vestry has budgeted a one-time grant in the amount of \$2000 to go to one local recipient sometime in 2008. The idea is that this grant will make an even bigger difference to someone who will use it wisely. In addition, St. Thomas will do publicity to let the community know that the grant has been given by this little church on the hill. The grant will thus help with the goal of being a Godly presence in the area. *Please contact M&M committee members with your ideas: We want to do the best we can with this grant.*

Day of the Dead Cultural Exchange All Saints/All Souls Celebration

On November 2, 2007, the upstairs space at St. Thomas was transformed into a café with excellent homemade Mexican food, a slide show of Cherán (the home area of many Yancey County Mexican residents), and a display of grave decorations in Mexican tradition. All available tickets were sold, and Emily Turner, at Centro de Enlace, tells us the Comité netted a little over \$500, which they will use to pay driver fees, gas, and insurance for the Taxi Hispano project.

Anglo and Latino folks mingled in the dining room and in the kitchen. Many of those involved in our 2007 ESL class and/or the June 2007 Baptism/Confirmation event attended. Staff and board members of Centro de Enlace and the Comité Hispano worked with Diantha and other St. Thomas members to pull this off.

This event segued nicely into our Anglo tradition of All Saints/All Souls Day. On Sunday November 4, we read the names of almost a hundred loved ones during worship, and provided space for photos of ones we wished to remember visually. The photo table led to an impromptu sharing of stories, and requests that we do the same in 2008.



Profile: Carol & Tom Bailey

Carol and Tom met while attending the same high school in Cincinnati. Carol's family had moved to Ohio when Carol was a teenager after living in Alabama, Texas, and Kentucky. Tom was born in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, where his father was a coal miner. The family relocated to Cincinnati in 1952, when Tom was 14 years old. Tom and Carol were married soon after graduation from high school; he was 19 and she was 17. They have remained happily married for nearly 52 years.

In the early years, Tom attended the University of Cincinnati while working full-time pasteurizing milk at a local dairy. He began working at a small Savings & Loan at age 24 and retired some 42 years later as Vice President and Chief Real Estate Analyst for a major regional bank.

Carol stayed home and raised their three sons, Thomas, Andrew, and Patrick, and daughter Katy. When Katy started school, Carol decided to complete her education and earned a degree in Fine Arts with honors from Miami University of Ohio. She continued her education at Miami by earning a master's degree in art education. She then taught art and served as the Department Chair at Lakota High School for 23 years before retiring in 1999.

Carol's mother was a Southern Baptist and her father was a Mormon. Neither parent was particularly religious, but they occasionally sent the children to various churches, usually Baptist. When Carol was in high school, she decided she wanted to belong to a church. She visited several and chose the Episcopal Church. She was baptized at age 16 and has regularly attended the Episcopal Church since then.

Tom's mother was very religious, a member of the United Church of Christ. Tom was baptized and grew up attending church with his mother, but when he and Carol were married he converted to the Episcopal Church. All of their four children were raised as Episcopalians.

When they moved to Burnsville they asked their new neighbor if she knew where St. Thomas Episcopal Church was located. That neighbor just happened to be the Senior Warden at the time—Margie Haaga. The very first service they attended was the annual parish picnic held at the Haagas' in 2004.

Tom and Carol have a rich and busy life in retirement. Carol spends a lot of time painting and making jewelry in her studio, and has had a one-woman show at the TRAC Gallery. She has worked in galleries locally and in Weaverville. Tom enjoys woodworking, photography, and tending to their BIG lawn. Both Baileys have become active at St. Thomas. Carol particularly enjoys cooking for parish events, and Tom has served as treasurer for nearly three years. They have eleven grandchildren and one great-grandchild. So you can bet that when they are not at church on Sunday, they are visiting or hosting family.

—Julie Niehaus



Tom and Carol Bailey

2008 Valentine's Day Fundraiser

Annual Valentine Dinner: Friday, Feb. 15, 6:00 P.M.

For Your Heart—*From Your Heart* is the theme for this year's annual Valentine's Dinner to be held at St. Thomas.

☛ *For your heart* refers to the fact that we will be serving a heart-healthy meal in observance of National Heart Month (February). As always it will be gourmet food. Pat Sharkey is choosing the menu and preparing the food. The musicians, many of whom played last year, are already practicing. ☛

☛ *From your heart* means that the proceeds from the dinner will go to Reconciliation House for their fuel fund. Fuel costs have gone up 40 percent since last year. The cost of the dinner is \$25 per person, an increase of only 25 percent over last year. All costs of the meal will be paid by the Ministry & Mission Committee of St. Thomas, so 100 percent of ticket money will go to fuel fund. ☛

This dinner is always a sellout. Tickets go on sale at Design Gallery and Luxo Garden Shop on February 1. ☛

Sign-up sheets for tasks to help pull off the event are available at the church. If you have questions, call Julie Niehaus, coordinator: 682-6074. Or email Diana Donovan, diatoday@msn.com, or contact anyone on the M&M committee. ☛

St. Thomas

TIDINGS

JANUARY 2008

Christmas Dinner at the Prison ☛ Serving the Least of These, December 2007

On Tuesday December 4, members of St. Thomas, Trinity EC in Spruce Pine, and the Avery Baptist Association served a Christmas dinner for 120+ men at Mountain View Prison in Avery County. We provided tasty, homemade food and a program that included music and encouraging words to folks who have no freedom and eat bland institutional foods every other day of the year.

The men followed our singing by singing to us—songs they had written! In addition, we found new friends among the women of the Avery Baptist Association. We hope to work with them next year too. As always, we givers received much more than we gave. Thank you, St. Thomas, for helping pay for some of the costs of this ministry. —Margie Haaga

Dec. Donations

8

Valentine's

Donations We've Made

Mexican Habitat Trip

An ingathering in December and subsequent gifts gathered \$928 toward Deacon Bill Thomsen's planned trip with Habitat for Humanity to Mexico. This is one of their intensive trips. They intend to build 40 houses in 40 days. An article in the Mitchell-Yancey Habitat newsletter tells of a similar trip they sponsored in 2007 to Louisiana. (Copies are on the table at the back of the church.) This generosity is an example of how St. Thomas folk put their money in places that help change our world for the better. ♥

Trip to Dominican Republic

Next month, Jim and Margie Haaga, and Tom Niehaus, will head off to the DR with a group organized through St. Paul's in Wilkesboro, where Thomas Morris (formerly of Trinity, Spruce Pine) is

now rector. Part of the 2008 M&M budget is helping with a few of the costs of this trip. We look forward to reports when the trip is complete. ♥

Christmas Cards for Prisoners

In early December, St. Thomas agreed to buy Christmas cards, sign them, and mail them to about 60 prisoners. Diana bought UNICEF cards, so that the card money would also help some in need. Mike Foster, Jackie Murray, and Diantha Stevenson signed the cards, and Diana mailed them. Margie Haaga reports that 20 or so were returned because recipients had been paroled or released. So if we do this next year, we might ask if the lists have been updated. Some thank-you's were received by grateful prisoners. One prisoner writes:

... I cannot contain the joy which I feel at this moment. Thank you ... It was truly a Godsend. ♥

Donations to the Needy

In December, M&M put out the call in response to news that DSS had 50 families not yet sponsored. St. Thomas members donated \$320 toward gift cards for 15 of these needy families. We gave gift cards because of privacy concerns. Diantha Stevenson gave gift cards from Wal-Mart, Ingles, BiLo and Old Navy. Next year, if we do this, she suggests we include the G.O. store, since money goes further there. ♥

CONTACTS (all phone numbers listed are area code 828):
Interim Rector: Bob Reese, home: 225-6477; email: revsreese@mac.com
Deacons: Jeannette Reese, Bill Thomsen
Senior Warden: John Davis, 682-6043 email: johnd@data-tech.com
Junior Warden: Joann Collins, home: 675-5645; email: mjcllms@juno.com
Other Vestry members: Neal Culver, Charlie Stover, Stacey Lane, Karen Miller
Treasurer: Tom Bailey, home: 675-0141; email: wtbailey3@verizon.net
Building Fund Treasurer: Charlie Stover
Buildings and Grounds: John Davis and John Sterr
Stewardship: Joann Collins, home: 675-5645; email: mjcllms@juno.com
Adult Formation: Jane Stover; Simple Suppers: Joann Collins
Pastoral Care: Alice Johnson, 682-3957; email: alicewjohnson@gmail.com
Healing Ministry: Maryallen Estes, Margie Haaga, Jim Haaga, Alice Poltrock
Prayer Chain: Diantha Stevenson, 682-3188; email: dwstevenson@trconline.net
Ministry & Mission: *Please volunteer?* Diana Donovan, 675-5918; email: diatoday@msn.com, in the meantime
Visitation of the Homebound: Maryallen Estes, 682-7264; mbestes@webtv.net
Please send requests for announcements to Joann Collins.

St. Thomas

TIDINGS

JANUARY 2008

Christmas 2007

Scenes from a Christmas reading, December 2007

9





St. Thomas

Hispanic Ministry in the Episcopal Church

In October 2007 our diocese sponsored a three-day conference on Hispanic ministry called *Primeros Pasos* (First Steps) in Winston-Salem. The main speaker was Tony Guillén for the national office of the Episcopal Church.

Here are some of the basic demographic figures: The census of the year 2000 reports 38 million Hispanics in the USA. At present they outnumber African Americans. Their average age is 25, versus U.S. average of 35. A 1999 figure says they are 70 percent Roman Catholic and 30 percent Protestant, and that each year in the U.S. there are 600,000 Hispanics leaving the Roman Catholic Church. Even with that number, they are also growing in numbers in the Catholic Church, because of their high birth rate.

Hispanic ministry is the fastest growing part of the Episcopal Church (ECUSA). This includes Province IX, Central America and the Caribbean—where ECUSA has tripled in size in fifteen years in the Dominican Republic, and doubled in size in the last six years in Honduras. In California there are ECUSA Hispanic parishes that have 10 to 12 services on Ash Wednesday.

Factors in Hispanics interest in the Episcopal Church:

1. Our sacramental services,
2. Our social service outreach,
3. Our welcoming atmosphere,
4. The fact that immigrants are open to new things,
5. Their presence is valued, as in “we missed you last Sunday,”
6. They are given opportunities for ministry, and
7. They like being asked to be a reader in services.

Religious festivals are a major draw for Hispanics, for example, Day of the Dead on Nov. 2; Virgin of Guadalupe on Dec. 12; Ash Wednesday; Holy Week; and Las Posadas in December, which is a series of up to nine “visits” by Mary and Joseph to homes in the community looking for a room in the inn.

Baptisms are also a major event, as are *Quinceñeras*—celebrations to welcome 15-year-old girls into adulthood with an event paid by the community and costing almost as much as a U.S. wedding. *Quinceñeras* are often held in parishes.

Penney Bradshaw, an immigration lawyer, spoke at the conference. She said that a root cause of illegal immigration is the fact that there are not enough temporary work visas to the U.S.; and the wait for green cards is up to 15 years. Some solutions to this problem could be (1) to initiate a guest-worker program, and (2) to change the U.S. laws to allow a shorter process to citizenship.

In the next newsletter, I will give examples of Episcopal parishes in North Carolina that have long-standing ministries to Hispanics. For example, at the missions of St. Mark’s and St. Timothy’s in Wilson, NC—35 miles east of Raleigh and near I-95—there has been a Spanish service every Sunday since 1996. They have baptized 500 Hispanics in the last five years.

—Tom Niehaus

TIDINGS

Community Works 2007 Report

What do Equal Exchange, an affordable housing corporation started by a church, and Community Works have in common? All are for-profit corporations doing good in the world. Equal Exchange uses volunteers in churches all across the country to sell coffee grown by small farmers in the Americas, Africa, and Asia. Community Works, a sub-chapter S corporation, is a business incubator on a shoestring. We help poor families, especially recent immigrants, start their own small businesses right here in Yancey County. Money for goods and services moves directly to poor people with an entrepreneurial spirit.

Started in 2002 by a grant from the Lutheran Hunger Fund, Community Works helps the Haves in our society buy services from the Have-nots. You make a social investment in reducing poverty by opening a door to decent wages for people who are working to pay taxes and put bread on the table for their families.

All of us middle-income people have discretionary income. We choose to spend our dollars at Wal-Mart or the mom-and-pop store. When we buy locally, we are making a social investment along with our consumer choice. Next time you look for landscaping, grass cutting, and regular yard work, call us at 828-678-9479.

Over the years, Community Works has been most successful at yard work, now connecting Pedro and Maria with their own full-time seasonal business. We have had a stall in the local Farmers’ Market selling trout; we’ve done housecleaning, and have sold handwoven Zapoteca rugs from a family of weavers, enabling them to stay in their village in Oaxaca, Mexico.

Track Record

Over the years \$77,800 has gone into the pockets of 125 people, or bought equipment and supplies for the businesses. Economists calculate the local impact of a business by multiplying the income by 2.5 times, making the total good done in the community \$194,500. When we tithe 10 percent for benevolence, we have done well. However, when we use the other 90 percent of our income wisely to buy from poor people, we make a ten-fold difference. We passed a milestone in 2007 when Pedro and Maria’s business became full-time, seasonally. Our 2007 gross income was \$20,000. Another \$10,000 has been earned over the years by the Bazan family in Mexico for their beautiful rugs.

—Eloise Kaeck

St. Thomas Parish Family is a joyful, warm and ever-widening circle of God's people prayerfully committed to serving Jesus in our community and our world. Through prayer, study and intellectual discourse on God's Word we seek Truth. Through Eucharistic fellowship we celebrate the gift of abundant new life. Through mutual care of one another and vigorous service to all of God's people and creation, we proclaim God's love and hope in Jesus.

St. Thomas TIDINGS

JANUARY 2008

A Welcome Story

11

Bloopers

Church Bulletin Bloopers

The following sentences appeared in church bulletins or were announced in church services.

1. Bertha Belch, a missionary from Africa, will be speaking tonight at Calvary Methodist. Come hear Bertha Belch all the way from Africa.
2. Prayer & Fasting Conference: The cost for attending the Fasting and Prayer Conference includes meals.
3. The sermon this morning: "Jesus Walks on the Water." The sermon tonight: "Searching for Jesus."
4. Our youth basketball team is back in action Wednesday at 8 P.M. in the recreation hall. Come out and watch us kill Christ the King.
5. Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale. It's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Don't forget your husbands.
6. The peacemaking meeting scheduled for today has been canceled due to a conflict.
7. Remember in prayer the many who are sick of our community.
8. Smile at someone who is hard to love. Say "Hell" to someone who doesn't care much about you.
9. Don't let worry kill you off—let the Church help.
10. Miss Charlene Mason sang "I will not pass this way again," giving obvious pleasure to the congregation.
11. For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.
12. Next Thursday there will be tryouts for the choir. They need all the help they can get.
13. Barbara remains in the hospital and needs blood donors for more transfusions. She is also having trouble sleeping and requests tapes of Pastor Jack's sermons.
14. The Rector will preach his farewell message, after which the choir will sing: "Break Forth Into Joy."
15. Irving Benson and Jessie Carter were married on October 24 in the church. So ends a friendship that began in their school days.

—courtesy of Carol Thomas (more next issue)

A Cute Story

A lady was visiting her sister. On Sunday morning she got up and asked her sister to attend church at the local Episcopal church with her. "Oh no, I can't go to church. I don't wear dresses anymore because of my legs and my not being able to wear pantyhose." So the lady went to church alone.

When she walked into the church, the pianist got up and greeted her with open arms, making her feel so very welcome. "Well, I would have brought my sister who just lives up the road, but she wouldn't come because she can't wear dresses anymore."

"Not to worry!" said the pianist. "Tell her to wear slacks and come."

So the next Sunday the lady again asked her sister to come to church, and told her she could wear slacks. And come to church they did.

When they walked into the church, *all* the ladies were wearing slacks that day! Apparently the pianist had called the women of the church asking them to.

The year was about 1995. The lady is Barbara Walters; her sister is Helen Marsh. The pianist is Maggie Zurbrick. The church is St. Thomas Episcopal Church.

—Pat Sharkey



St. Thomas Episcopal Church

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