
THE EPISTLE OF ST. THOMAS

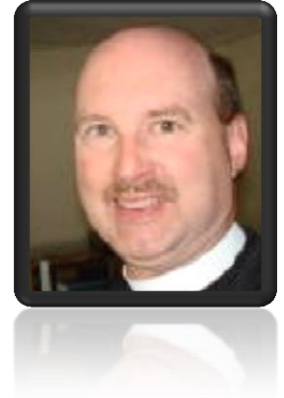
St. Thomas Episcopal Church
The Rev. Jeff Douglas

February 2017

Diocese of East Carolina
The Rt. Rev. Robert Skirving

A New Day Dawns

This poem by Walter Brueggemann, a pre-eminent biblical scholar, brings to the fore all our hopes, fears and anxieties that the dawn of the Christ child brings to our world.



Epiphany

*On Epiphany day,
we are still the people walking.
We are still people in the dark,
and the darkness looms large around us,
beset as we are by fear,
 anxiety,
 brutality,
 violence,
 loss —
a dozen alienations that we cannot manage.*

*We are — we could be — people of your light.
So we pray for the light of your glorious presence
as we wait for your appearing;
we pray for the light of your wondrous grace
as we exhaust our coping capacity;
we pray for your gift of newness that
will override our weariness;
we pray that we may see and know and hear and trust
in your good rule.*

*That we may have energy, courage, and freedom to enact
your rule through the demands of this day.
We submit our day to you and to your rule, with deep joy and high hope.*

In the season of Epiphany, we are on the lookout for signs of the new day dawning, the Day of the Lord, the reign of God, the kingdom of heaven. We read stories of the first signs of this new age: the visitation of the Magi to the Christ child, his baptism by John in the Jordan River, the calling of the disciples, the feeding of the five thousand, and the miracle at Cana.

We read of Jesus' instructions to his disciples about what God considers blessings in the Beatitudes and the costs of sacrificial love in his commands to love our enemies and turn the other cheek.

As we look in awe and wonder at the mystery of life, the beauty of creation teeming with many millions in the forms life takes on our planet, dare we look at ourselves with that same awe and wonder? We have the capacity to be the prism through which the light of gospel, the love of God, bursts forth in many colors revealing love and life in its infinite variety as it has been woven into the fabric of our universe. Each one of us is a gift of God. May we give ourselves wholly and willingly to each other and to our God, just as the Magi gave themselves wholly to the journey of seeking out the kingdom in our time, our home, in the face of the neighbor next door or the one from the opposite side of the world.

Be Blessed!

Jeff+



*"For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve,
and to give his life a ransom for many."*

- Mark 10:45

Episcopal Church Workers News

The annual meeting and dinner of St. Thomas' ECW was held on Tuesday, January 31st in our parish hall. It was a time to celebrate our projects and service in 2016 and to plan our efforts for the 2017 year.

Sarah Davis opened our meeting with a devotional that no doubt has stuck in many of our minds, and that I will share here. She related from her own upbringing in a small southern town, the experience of knowing a particular fellow in the community who was without one arm due to some sort of accident. While many families surely referred to this man as an example when telling their children to not stick their arms out the car window or when admonishing their young adult children about drunk driving or some other behavior risky to life and limb, Sarah related that *her* father used this man's example differently. He called her to take note of the fact that she indeed had *two* arms – then challenged her, asking what she was going *to do* about *that*. There were about fifteen of us two-armed folks seated around those tables in the parish hall who heard the message and I hope that we'll continue to think about our response. Many thanks to Sarah for delivering a stirring message with characteristic sincerity and wit.

After a fine dinner of two different lasagnas, green salad, bread, wine, and dessert, we began the business portion of our gathering.

Having decided that the team approach for ECW leadership seems to work well, we will continue to operate this way in 2017. We are grateful to those *point persons* who have all agreed to continue to serve in 2017. They are:

Treasurer	Claudia Griffin
Valentines	Becky Johnson
Soup Suppers	Glenna Sullins
Easter, Thanksgiving, & Christmas food baskets	Gail Carter & Julie Shields
Luncheon & Bazaar	Martie Tayloe & Julie Shields
Bereavements/Meals	Lois Sawyer & Mary C Pierce
CPC Offering	Claudia Griffin
UTO Offering	Mary C Pierce

These leaders will need your help, so please step up as you may feel led or when you are asked!

We have received a new member to our ECW, who has already made her presence known as a worker amongst us! We are pleased to welcome Linda Blackburn!

In reflecting on how our missions funds were distributed in 2016, the decision was made to disburse some unspent budget funds from 2016 to the Ahoskie Food Pantry. After presentation and discussion of the 2017 budget offered by our able treasurer Claudia, our budget for 2017 was established by our corporate vote. We will continue to keep some funds in reserve for unforeseen needs, as has been proven to be wise in previous years. Anyone wishing to obtain a copy of the 2017 budget may contact Claudia.

Annual dues were received at the meeting and will continue to be received by Claudia, our treasurer, in the amount of \$10 or more, as you may see fit. Checks should be made payable to **St. Thomas ECW** and may be given to Claudia or left in her envelope on the church office door

Going forth in peace to love and serve the Lord! Thanks be to God!

Martie, of the ECW Team

ECW DATES TO REMEMBER

February 2-4	Diocesan Convention
February 14	Valentine Remembrances
February 28	Shrove Tuesday
March 1	Ash Wednesday
March 8	Soup Supper
March 15	Soup Supper
March 22	Soup Supper
March 29	Soup Supper
April 5	Soup Supper
April 9	Palm Sunday, Stock Easter Baskets
April 13	Maundy Thursday
April 14	Good Friday
April 16	Easter Sunday
May	Diocesan Annual Meeting
May 7	CPC Sunday
August	Trinity Annual Gathering
November 5	UTO Ingathering
November 15	Stock Thanksgiving Baskets
November 16	Annual Luncheon
December 3	Advent 1
December 18	Stock Christmas Baskets



SHROVE TUESDAY
FEBRUARY 28



ANNUAL PARISH Meeting

Remarks for the Annual Meeting, January 2017

Blessed By Our Limited Resources

At my first Vestry meeting for this term (in January 2014), Jeff asked Bubba to serve as senior warden. Bubba agreed but said to Jeff, “I thought you might have other options.” As Jeff was confirming and affirming his choice, Patsy commented that “we are blessed by our limited resources.” Patsy is absolutely right—St. Thomas’ is small, but it is strong, and we can proudly say we are blessed with our limited resources. This is always true but often especially evident at specific times, such as when we manage to pull off large, wide-reaching events, such as the Lobster Feast and ECW Bazaar, those staples of an Ahoskie autumn, in which we prove that our combined resources are enough to complete the work of what should be a much larger group.

As a parish, we clearly are blessed by our limited resources. Like the two events listed above, we have several moments in which we extend our reach beyond these walls to our local community—such as with the baskets organized and distributed thrice over through the ECW, our Soup Kitchens, the Food Pantry, even the fact our church provides a meeting place for an AA chapter—and well beyond county lines—such as Jeff’s Birthday Dinner and the Medical Mission it helps support. When our church is called upon, we ignore (and perhaps do not even grasp) the notion that our resources are limited, and we rally. My first year in this church was the fall that Hurricane Floyd pelted the area, and immediately our church sprang into action, using the parish hall to hold a clothes closet. (This same form of service was repeated just four years later with Café Isabel.) St. Thomas’ took a leadership role with area churches, with all of the churches then collaborating as Project Inasmuch (and with its work, and St. Thomas’ leadership, still seen each year in the annual community Christmas dinner). When there is a need announced and determined, our church marshals its resources and makes a difference. We rally and make sure our blessings are shared with all.

Realizing that we are blessed takes only a matter of looking around the church. While there are certainly things with which some of us are clearly associated, there are not members of this church who do simply one thing (even Jeff occasionally branches out from just being Rector). In fact, while some places of worship have to make a point about how they have “active members,” at St. Thomas’ we can simply think of our members, for we know that being part of this family means being involved wholeheartedly. At St. Thomas’, our limited resources are our enthusiastic and dedicated members, and we reveal our blessings with how completely we embrace the church’s mission, through tasks great and small. When I think of St. Thomas’, like many of you, I’m sure, I think first and foremost of

people, and I have many powerful but simple images of how blessed we are: a smile across the aisle while singing Alleluia, sharing recipes for soup during Lent (as Jeff likes to say, we have the only Lenten Suppers in which the parish can gain weight), Colin making sure the plants are watered, Ernie (and once Stan) washing dishes, Jamie and Becky hosting the Russian singers (and taking a hit on their liquor cabinet but not their hospitality), and countless others that I am sure are going through your heads as I speak. We see and meet needs, both officially and unofficially. The ECW may host an event, but the church men are also part of it. If someone is unavailable, people step up and take part, making sure each element is covered.

With any church service, there are those whose job is not to be noticed. There are a variety of metaphors—"little elves," helpers, stagehands—for these roles that are really only noticed if something goes significantly wrong. Luckily for St. Thomas', we don't then notice them so very often, but we certainly should thank them. This starts with the Yard Crews, who look after church grounds, and it certainly has to include the Flower and Altar Guilds. It is virtually mind boggling to consider the percentage of our church who take part in these groups. When I was a member of Christ Church in Raleigh, I was aware that their Altar Guild for one week's rotation might well come close to our attendance some Sundays here, but I do assert that, regardless of the size of the team, none show more care and dedication than those at St. Thomas', nor did or will the wafers of Christ Church ever compete with our bread, provided each and every time by Julie.

These groups provide the silent ministry for our worship, making sure all the elements (including "The Elements" for Eucharist) are prepared and ready and in place before the service ever starts. I once served on the discernment committee for someone considering the Diaconate, and he likened being a Deacon to being a cheerleader at the front of the church's pep rally (for several reasons, I was not thrilled with this metaphor); I suggested the Deacon, instead, was the janitor prepping the gym before and cleaning it after that pep rally ended. So, too, do these groups get to serve in that Diaconate role of prep and clean up. Alongside these noble groups, we have those who participate in the quiet ministry—a more visible role during the service, but one that still is primarily only noticed when something goes awry. Our services need those quiet servants, starting with the ushers and the acolytes, including choir and lay readers/chalice bearers. While sometimes multiple hats (or robes?) are donned, each group is necessary, and St. Thomas' remains blessed with all of these resources.

In the past year, we have balanced joy and service, such as our second concert from the singers of LYRA, where we could enjoy tremendous artistry and offer a gift to the community. This is typical of the St. Thomas' output. Our Lessons & Carols service, similarly, is a very obvious such gift to the community, but so too is the Book Guild, which now actually boasts more members from outside our parish than within. This year has been marked by the sadness of two funerals and one committal for a parishioner's mother and marked by the joy of one baptism and the confirmation of three youths. And while the refurbishment of the kneelers might seem trivial at first, they actually represent St. Thomas' in many ways. These are classic kneelers, prepared for the church by many members who have gone before us, and refurbished through our memorial fund, and they will now serve our parish for many years to come. At once, the past supports, comforts, and even provides for our future worship.

The fact is that St. Thomas', despite being blessed, does face the reality of having limited resources. In 2013, a Pew Group survey announced that 60% of all churches were now seeing under 50 people each

Sunday. I joked at the time that St. Thomas' was a trendsetter then—we've been matching and even undercutting those numbers for years. And while we are strong, we are a small parish. When I tell others about our services, they are surprised at how small we are but how active St. Thomas' is. For "we few, we happy few" do not let small, and even dwindling, numbers stop us or even slow us down. That said, I have to admit that I worry at times about St. Thomas' in the long run. Even the short run has hiccups. As Ernie's report details, several months of the year have witnessed a financial shortfall, with a gap between giving and bills. December, as it often does, has made up that gap, but we cannot make a routine out of robbing Peter to pay Paul, as Ernie has had to do with the careful—and clever—shuffling of funds from one source to another. The fact this has occurred more than once might not be a loud alarm bell, but it should give us reason to look seriously at our budget and spending plans in balance with our expected giving.

It is also time, possibly sadly, to consider our church in the context of the Albemarle Deanery and the Diocese of East Carolina. Our blessed limited resources do include a full-time rector. In fact, St. Thomas' Ahoskie is the only church in our area with a full-time rector—Sunbury, Gatesville, Williamston, and now Windsor all sit without such a luxury. Ironically, this comes at a time when St. Mark's in Roxobel is once again seeking to have services (and on the heels of our joining with our friends in Windsor to hold joint services at Grace Chapel in Lewiston). Bishop Skirving has at his first two conventions urged us to reconsider the traditional view of the church and how it is both served and staffed, and we may well be at that point in our region. Who'd have ever predicted Ahoskie could find the "last rector standing"? With multiple churches facing the uncertainty of from where their clergy leadership might come, I humbly suggest St. Thomas' consider prayerfully how its own future might be intertwined with our fellow parishes and their needs. Bishop Skirving has suggested "one parish, one priest" may have to be a thing of the past, and while we can happily point to our "one priest" keeping us in line with our memories and traditions, is that the future of St. Thomas', or the Diocesan view of the church, and is it sustainable? I ask not because I have answers (though I always have ideas and opinions) but because it seems to me we are past the point of being able to disregard the question. Instead, I think we should make sure the blessings we have in our limited resources are used in the best and most effective ways they can for the continued success of St. Thomas' and the Episcopal Church as a whole.

Finally, in a moment of personal indulgence, I offer you my gratitude for allowing me to serve as your Senior Warden this past year. I thank Jeff, Ernie, Mike, and all of the Vestry for making that which I have been asked to do run smoothly and efficiently. Even more importantly, I thank all of you. I appreciate your help and your patience with me, and I thank you all for being who you are, have been, and will always be. Patsy was right to say St. Thomas' is blessed with its limited resources, but, more specifically, I have been blessed to be able to serve you. Thank you and Godspeed. Peace.

Bless because Christ
has blessed you,

Serve because Christ
has served you,

Love because Christ
has loved you.

St. Thomas' Episcopal Church
Minutes, Vestry Meeting
17 January 2017

The Vestry, Rector, and Treasurer of St. Thomas' Episcopal Church met on Tuesday, 17 January, 2017 at 5:30 PM at the Parish House.

Present: (New members) Buddy Jones, Martie Taylor, and Dr. Charles Sawyer; (Current members) Brenda Hewitt, Claudia Griffin, David Simons, Mick Steczak, Ernie Carter (Treasurer), and Jeff Douglas (Rector).

Prior Minutes. After an opening prayer by the Rector, the minutes of the 20 December meeting were reviewed, approved, and accepted.

Claudia Griffin: Sr. Warden
Mike Steczak: Jr. Warden
Brenda Hewitt: Clerk
Ernie Carter: Treasurer

After a short discussion concerning the Parish Hall rental policy, it was updated to no longer rent half-days. It will be for whole day only. Full-day rent will be \$175, \$50 deposit, and \$75 if using the kitchen.

Treasurer's Report. Due to the Annual Parish Meeting being held two days prior, please refer to the Treasurer's report.

The Vestry reviewed, discussed, approved, and accepted the Treasurer's report from the Annual Meeting.

Service. The Soup Kitchen will be held on 17 & 26 January.

Delegates to the Diocesan Convention February 2-4, 2017, are Beth Douglas, Hugh Davis, and David Simons.

The Rector's birthday dinner to benefit the Medical Mission will be February 24.

Respectfully submitted,

Brenda Hewitt
Clerk



February 2017

Monthly Planner

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday																																																																																					
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<p style="text-align: center; color: red; font-size: 24px;">12</p> <p>Epiphany VI</p> <p style="color: blue;">Ben Benhart</p> <p>Morning Prayer 8am</p> <p>Adult SS 9:15am</p> <p>Holy Eucharist 10:30 am</p>	<p style="text-align: center; color: red; font-size: 24px;">13</p> <p>Ahoskie Rotary Club Meeting 12pm</p> <p>Book Guild 5pm</p> <p>Boy Scouts 7pm</p>	<p style="text-align: center; color: red; font-size: 24px;">14</p> <p style="text-align: center; color: red;">Valentine's Day</p>	<p style="text-align: center; color: red; font-size: 24px;">15</p> <p>Evening Prayer 6pm</p> <p>Choir Practice 6:30pm</p>	<p style="text-align: center; color: red; font-size: 24px;">16</p> <p style="color: blue;">Jamie Johnson</p> <p>Soup Kitchen 5pm</p> <p>AA Meeting 8pm</p>	<p style="text-align: center; color: red; font-size: 24px;">17</p> <p style="color: blue;">Joe Henry Jenkins</p>	<p style="text-align: center; color: red; font-size: 24px;">18</p>																																																																																					
<p style="text-align: center; color: red; font-size: 24px;">19</p> <p>Epiphany VII</p> <p>Holy Eucharist 8am & 10:30am</p> <p>Adult SS 9:15am</p>	<p style="text-align: center; color: red; font-size: 24px;">20</p> <p style="color: red;">President's Day</p> <p>Rev. Jeff Douglas</p> <p>Dame Julian Prayer Group 5pm</p> <p>Boy Scouts 7pm</p> <div style="background-color: #90EE90; text-align: center; padding: 2px; margin-top: 5px;">Office Closed</div>	<p style="text-align: center; color: red; font-size: 24px;">21</p> <p>Vestry Meeting 6pm</p>	<p style="text-align: center; color: red; font-size: 24px;">22</p> <p>Evening Prayer 6pm</p> <p>Choir Practice 6:30pm</p>	<p style="text-align: center; color: red; font-size: 24px;">23</p> <p style="color: blue;">Bea Vaughan</p> <p>Soup Kitchen 5pm</p> <p>AA Meeting 8pm</p>	<p style="text-align: center; color: red; font-size: 24px;">24</p> <p>Rector's Birthday Dinner 6:30 pm</p>	<p style="text-align: center; color: red; font-size: 24px;">25</p>																																																																																					
<p style="text-align: center; color: red; font-size: 24px;">26</p> <p>Last Sunday after Epiphany</p> <p style="color: red;">Clyde and Ann Hughes</p> <p>Holy Eucharist 8am & 10:30am</p> <p>Adult SS 9:15am</p>	<p style="text-align: center; color: red; font-size: 24px;">27</p> <p>Ahoskie Rotary Club Meeting 12pm</p> <p>Boy Scouts 7pm</p>	<p style="text-align: center; color: red; font-size: 24px;">28</p>																																																																																									

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

- 2 Cassandra Brooks
- 2 Tommy Tucker
- 3 Mitzi Benhart
- 3 Julie Lambert
- 5 Mollie Carter
- 7 Henry Jones
- 12 Ben Benhart
- 16 Jamie Johnson
- 17 Joe Henry Jenkins
- 20 Jeff Douglas
- 23 Bea Vaughan
- 26 Hinton Carter

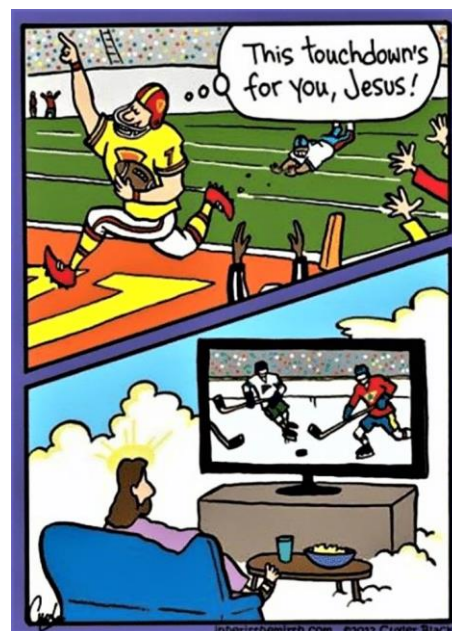
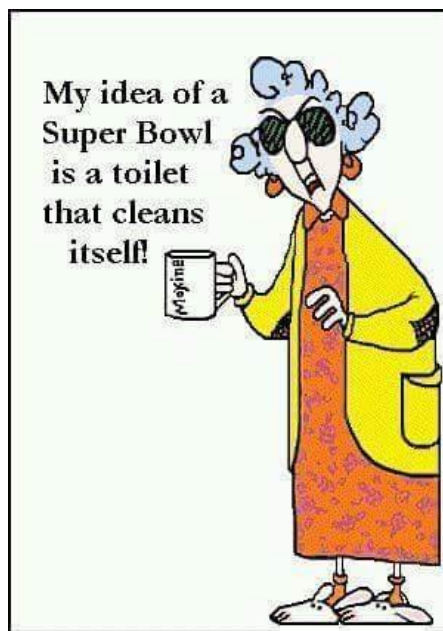


*“O God, our times are in your hand: Look with favor; we pray, on your servants, **Cassandra, Tommy, Mitzi, Julie, Mollie, Henry, Ben, Jamie, Joe Henry, Jeff, Bea, Hinton**, as they begin another year. Grant that they may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen their trust in your goodness all the days of their lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”*

FEBRUARY ANNIVERSARIES

- 26 Clyde and Ann Hughes

*“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 **Clyde and Anne**, 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 February 2017

Acolytes

- 5 Bill Blanchard and Robbie Outland
- 12 Hugh Davis and Alexis Urquhart
- 19 Gretchen Simons and Mac Griffin
- 26 Mary Outland and Christiana Vaughan

Altar Flowers

- 5 Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Burgess
- 12 Mr. and Mrs. Ken O'Herron
- 19 Dr. and Mrs. Colin Jones
- 26 The Rev'd and Mrs. Jeff Douglas

Altar Guild

Linda Shotwell, Lois Sawyer & Hugh Davis

Food Pantry (Note-Wednesdays)

- 1 Dicky Hoggard
- 8 Jim Shotwell
- 15 Peggy Vann
- 22 Bubba Peele

Lay Readers

- | | | | |
|----|----------|----------------|-----------------|
| 1 | 6:00 pm | Evening Prayer | Claudia Griffin |
| 5 | 10:30 am | Holy Eucharist | Hugh Davis |
| 8 | 6:00 pm | Evening Prayer | Hugh Davis |
| 12 | 8:00 am | Morning Prayer | OPEN |
| | 10:30 am | Holy Eucharist | John Davis |
| 15 | 6:00 pm | Evening Prayer | John Davis |
| 19 | 10:30 am | Holy Eucharist | OPEN |
| 22 | 6:00 pm | Evening Prayer | OPEN |
| 26 | 10:30 am | Holy Eucharist | Colin Jones |

Ushers

Dicky Hoggard and John Davis

Yard Work

- 5 Bubba Peele and Clyde & Ann Hughes
- 12 Bubba Peele and Clyde & Ann Hughes
- 19 Julian Taylor and Jamie Johnson
- 26 Julian Taylor and Jamie Johnson

FEBRUARY 2017						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
29	30	31	1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	1	2	3	4

Open

Buck Su



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

Mr. Al Vaughan
1107 Swordfish Way Sandpiper Clay
Kitty Hawk, NC 27949

