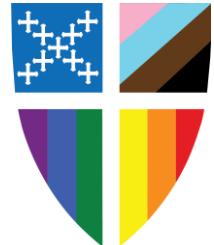




The Beacon

St. Thomas Episcopal Church



Give thanks and praise to God and share God's love.

February 2026

Volume 27 Issue 1

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- Joe Tulacz, Sr. Warden
- John Banks
- Susan Christensen
- Nancy Osborne
- Mark Pezzoni
- Mike Richardson
- Holly Spruance

Deacon – Mike Watkins

Parish Administrator –

JB Hoover

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Senior Warden's Message ~

Standing Strong as "We Are St. Thomas!"

Dear St. Thomas Family,

Our annual meeting on January 26th was a celebration of the spirit of the St. Thomas community. As we reviewed the year behind us and the many achievements of our parish and various ministries, we reaffirmed our commitment to St. Thomas and each other. As we heard many times at the annual meeting, St. Thomas has entered this transition period with strong connections—and we will emerge from this time stronger than ever.

I am pleased to be serving as the Senior Warden this year. I am very grateful to Cindy Jensen for her guidance and support as I take on this role. And to my fellow Vestry members, thank you. Following in Cindy's footsteps, I'll do my best to keep you all informed, with regular announcements on any updates or events.

As you all know, we are in the process of calling for a new rector, in a three-quarter time position. We are currently advertising on the Episcopal News Service and promoting on social media. As we eagerly await next steps and updates, we reiterate our gratitude to the Search Committee for their hard work and dedication.

Our Sunday worship continues with supply clergy. Each brings their own style and personality to the pulpit—and all of them share in expressing deep appreciation for the warmth and hospitality they receive at St. Thomas. Let's continue to welcome our guest clergy—and each other—as we come together each Sunday.

We also express our appreciation to Deacon Mike Watkins for the continuity he brings to our service each Sunday. We are also grateful for the familiar faces in our choir and among our ushers, LEMs, and lay readers. Together, we are St. Thomas!

Our faith community is what brings us together each week and what will hold us together through the months ahead of our transition—and well beyond.

Faithfully,

Joe Tulacz Senior Warden

Annual Meeting



The Annual Parish Meeting proved to be a well-attended celebration of our St. Thomas faith community. A dedicated team of regular providers of coffee hour treats did not disappoint. Treasurer Anne VanDerveer gave a comprehensive report of parish finances and presented a balanced budget for 2026, which was unanimously approved. Parish ministry leaders shared reports and received accolades for their service. The Vestry for 2026 was announced and voted upon. Vestry members are John Banks, Susan Christensen, Nancy Osborne, Mark Pezzoni, Mike Richardson, Holly Spruance and Joe Tulacz. Outgoing Vestry members Lucy Barnett, Chris King, and Cindy Jensen were acknowledged. Deacon Mike Watkins officially installed the Vestry. Mike Richardson and Nancy Osborne were elected as delegates to Diocesan convention with Adeline Hoover as alternate. Following her closing remarks, Cindy Jensen introduced Joe Tulacz as the new Senior Warden. Deacon Mike led the congregation in a closing prayer and Frank Moss graciously provided the blessing and dismissal.

In Memoriam

Long time parishioner Sally Schwartz passed peacefully on January 19 after residing in hospice care since the passing of her devoted husband Burt in 2024. Sally and her husband Burt were instrumental in



the Columbarium project for the courtyard. Sally will be inurned in the Columbarium joining her husband Burt just as they had planned. Grace and peace to these dear souls who blessed our St. Thomas faith community.

Rector Search

Good News! Our Parish Profile has been completed and approved by the Diocese. Besides describing our church's history, ministries and finances, this document gives prospective candidates a picture of our community.



Even better news! On January 12 the Diocese posted our opening in the Episcopal News Service, a weekly online publication. Let's all hope and pray for success as we enter this next stage of our search.

We'll regularly update you on our progress. And, if you have questions, feel free to discuss them with us. Your Committee consists of Tricia Crisafulli, Cindy Jensen, Maggie Meneghin, Tom Whitehead, and me.

Thank you for your support and your patience.

Duncan Murray, Chair

The Annual Christmas Pageant

Yes, it's February, but this is the first opportunity to share the photos of our annual Christmas pageant – an intergenerational production that truly warms our hearts. The costumes have been recycled over three generations and the story never changes, but the telling is always magical. Many thanks to Larry Wilson for the photographs, Tilda Rohde for her delightful narration, the choir who provided the company of angels, Lucy and Mason Duer (Mary and Joseph), the Star – Lucy Fisher, the cow – Eli Fisher, the shepherd – Cole Jones, and two precious sheep – twins VO and William. Mason and Lucy enlisted two of their friends to be the Inn Keeper and Angel.



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St. Thomas History

At the beginning of 2025 this editor asked parishioners to share their remembrances of their time at St. Thomas to include in a monthly history article. Well, the year seems to have gotten away from us with so much going on. However, there is a documented history of our St. Thomas parish. It was first written by founding member Ferne Hoffman and updated in 2022 by Cindy Jensen. Going forward, *The Beacon* will include excerpts from this history, and perhaps memories will be sparked and you will be inspired to share your remembrances.



St. Thomas was founded as a Parochial Mission in 1956 under the leadership of Fr. Perry Smith of St. Mary's Parish in Eugene. St. Matthew's was also founded at this time in the River Road area.

The first service was held on April 8, 1956 in the cafeteria of Washington Elementary School (3515 Harlow Road, built in 1950, closed in 2018, and razed soon after closure. Rebuilt as Bertha Holt Elementary School). Fr. Smith led the service that day and 105 persons were present. The congregation was served by Associate Rectors and Perpetual Deacons from St. Mary's. Fr. Steen Whiteside was called by St. Mary's to serve as vicar of St. Thomas in Sept. 1956.

St. Mary's authorized the purchase of five acres of farmland at the intersection of Coburg and Cal Young Roads. This land included a farmhouse. Plans were drawn up in 1957 for the present sanctuary.

Fr. Whiteside was called to be rector at St. Mary's due to the sudden death of Fr. Perry Smith. Fr. Ted
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Tainton was called by St. Mary's as Associate Rector and to serve as Vicar of St Thomas. Fr. Tainton arrived in December 1957; construction had begun on the present sanctuary which originally had been designed as a chapel of an eventually much larger church. During this time St. Thomas' faithful members worshipped in the school cafeteria with Sunday School classes in school classrooms, the rector's committee, choir practices, Altar Guild and Acolyte training, and meetings were held in members' homes.

The Lord was in our midst as we worshipped, prayed and planned for the growth of St. Thomas. We were truly blessed by Fr. Smith's dream and the spiritual and financial support from St. Mary's staff, vestry, and congregation.

The first service in the chapel was in August 1958, although the building was not quite completed. The farmhouse was used for Sunday School classes, ministry meetings and fellowship gatherings.

In January 1960, the Rt. Rev. James Carmen accepted the petitions from St. Thomas and from St. Matthew's congregations to become Diocesan Missions. Fr. Ted Tainton continued to serve as vicar and remained as Rector when St. Thomas became a parish. Fr. Tainton served St. Thomas for twenty-five years. He retired in 1982.

The first stage of the Education Building was built in 1961 and the second stage was completed in 1972. In that year St. Thomas was joined by the congregation of St. Matthew's whose church building had been lost to construction of the Belt Line highway. Sts. Thomas and Matthew became a parish in 1972. Later in 1979, the parish name again became St. Thomas when St. Matthew's returned to the River Road area and a new church building.

Note: The sketch of St. Thomas was done by an acolyte in the 1980s. Three of the trees in front of the church were cut down 35 years ago to limit tree debris and root damage to the parking lot.

Grace Notes



Prayer is perhaps the most grace-filled act we can engage in or experience. A reading of Bishop Akiyama's message in the January 22, 2026 Diocesan Digest resonated. The message from the Bishop reminded me of the Lenten study Rev. Ann led several years ago. It was a study group in which Sally and Burt Schwartz were involved and contributed to with thoughtful comments providing this editor with the opportunity to get to know these two gracious people on a deeper level. This small study group gained a greater understanding of the value of prayer, and the Bishop's comments reinforce that assessment. The following is an excerpt from Bishop Akiyama's message endorsing the power of prayer.

"Prayer time, either at a retreat or simply for 20 minutes in the morning at home, is essential for one's Christian formation and journey. In times when the world is chaotic, confusing and stressful we need to tend to our souls through prayer, silence, and solitude. By going deep into our souls through prayer we come in contact with the strength and constancy of the Holy Spirit. This communion is vital to the refreshment and invigoration of our humanity – our oneness with God in Christ."



February 18
Watch for announcements
regarding time and location of
the Ash Wednesday service.

Outreach

At the January meeting of the Outreach Committee funding contributions were considered for the support of community services. The committee considered a funding request from the



Community Counseling Center for financial assistance in support of the Center's new NOURISH program. The program is designed to provide monthly nutritionist-curated bags of shelf-stable items for CCC clients using an anonymous distribution model. The committee voted unanimously to award \$1000 to the CCC for this program.

The committee also agreed to spend the balance of the 2025 carryforward amount as follows:

- \$1000 St. John the Divine, Shepherd's Table pantry program
- \$1000 St. Matthew's Pray Big pantry program

The Outreach Committee is also considering hands-on projects that will allow parishioners to engage in direct community service experiences. Tricia Criusafulli is in communication with One Hope to learn of churches within its network that are working on projects in which St. Thomas parishioners could participate.

Ladies Book Group



With a new year comes a new set of books to read whether you are a member of the St. Thomas Ladies Book Group, or just one who enjoys reading along with their selections. Be sure to check out the 2026 book list posted on the Parish Hall Bulletin Board. Book Group members will gather in the Parish Library on Thursday, February 26 at 1:30 pm to review Frozen River by Ariel Lawhon. Interested readers are always welcome to join these lively book reviews and the ever present camaraderie.

CCC Annual Fundraiser



The Center for Community Counseling is holding their annual fundraiser on Saturday, February 21 at 6:30 pm at **Venue 252**. This event features comedian and piano entertainer Patrick Duffy, a popular cruise line and cabaret performer. Tables for eight are \$400 and single tickets are \$50. The evening event includes seasonal small plates, salads, fresh breads, and an array of beverages and spirits. The event will include a live auction and balloon sales featuring items worth at least \$25. The CCC is one of our St. Thomas Companions in Ministry. With our longtime association with the CCC, St. Thomas members are encouraged to consider supporting their main fundraiser that supports the CCC mission to provide counseling services to the underserved members of our community. Here is the link for information about the event and to purchase of tickets.

<https://ccceugene.org/purchase-ticket-or-sponsor-a-table-here>

February Birthdays

8 Eli Fisher



February Anniversaries

2 Tom and Linda Whitehead
15 Lucy and Paul Barnett

GrassRoots Garden



Merry Bradley, the ever faithful garden manager and communicator of garden projects and growth, is busy attending to winter refurbishing projects. Even in these cold dark days of winter, there is activity going on to encourage the winter season crops and prepare the garden beds and structures for the peak growing season ahead.

On Friday, February 30 Food for Lane County – the GrassRoots Garden parent organization – kicked off the Grilled Cheese Sandwich annual fundraiser to encourage dining at restaurants throughout the Eugene/Springfield area. A grilled cheese food truck was set up in the church parking lot with an array of costumed characters, the media, and FFLC representatives encouraging the early arrivals eager to enjoy a grilled cheese sandwich.

Winter Hours: T, Th, Sat, 9am-4pm. GrassRoots Garden is located at 1465 Coburg Rd., across from Safeway, behind St. Thomas Episcopal Church. For more information, contact Merry Bradley: 458-221-0652 or merrybradley@foodforlanecounty.org.

Reflections



It is no secret that this editor has a passion for immersing oneself in the natural world. Whether it

is on our forest hilltop or out exploring a natural setting, I am all in! During a recent trip to Palm Springs (where I had never been before but foolishly thought it was still the desert oasis my parents visited in 1944) I discovered the oasis is now a metropolis of several communities merged together. But thanks to our son, an ardent nature explorer in his own right, we found our way to the Joshua Tree National Park to explore the amazing rock formations and hike the Hidden Valley nature trail. This two mile stretch of trail traverses over rock cliffs and winds around groves of pinyon pine, yucca, and Joshua trees revealing a delicate balance between animal life and the fragile desert vegetation. As the message at the trail head says, “Working together we can find ways to assure the integrity of biotic communities everywhere.”

For me, being in nature where one can breathe free and the only sounds are those of the native environment, that is restorative. At the end of our hike through Hidden Valley, this quote from Robinson Jeffers is posted on a plaque:

Integrity is wholeness...
The wholeness of life and things,
The divine beauty of the universe.
Love that, not man apart from that.



**Valentine's Day is
Saturday, February 14**