

St. Thomas & Grace Episcopal Church

FALL 2021 NEWSLETTER

Field Notes -

Dear Beloved in Christ,

Another harvest year has come and gone and the world is turning toward that season of darkness, rest, and retrospection that comes in winter. This year, like the past one, has continued to bring challenges and difficult decisions for our community. The Vestry and Core Ministry Team have had to carefully balance the desire to be together and worship with the responsibility to keep each other as safe as we possibly can. Fortunately, we were able to resume worshipping together this summer.

As we continue to move forward together through the evolving realities of navigating a global pandemic, my hope is that we will be able to carry forward challenging questions about what it means to be the church in the world. I would encourage each of you to sit with meaning-making questions. Questions like, what have we lost over the past year? What has surprised us? Where have we felt energy? It is questions like these that will help us to metabolize the experiences of the last year and come through more resilient.

In November, we gathered together in Brandon for an agape meal during our regular worship hour on Sunday morning. This agape meal also included a congregational asset mapping exercise. Each person listed the assets that we can identify for the parish as well as the assets that each of us individually brings to our community. From this collection of assets we then mapped actions that draw from the gifts that we already have. There was a lot of positive energy in the room! This exercise is another step in the process of the work that has already been happening at St Thomas & Grace - the work of being the hands and heart of Christ in the town of Brandon.

As we move through harvest and toward the winter solstice, my prayer is that we will find the fullness of rest that Christ offers to us. The kind of rest that comes on the seventh day when God looks back in wonder over all that has been made. We together have done what we have done and we have left some things undone. This winter, I invite you to rest in this. To rest knowing that God has swept up all of it and will carry us in her arms as a parent.

With gratitude and blessings,
Rev. Rachel

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The mission of St. Thomas & Grace Episcopal Church is to share God's love and peace through worship, learning, and service, following the example of Jesus Christ.

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VESTRY MEETINGS ARE OPEN TO EVERYONE
Normally Vestry meets on the second Sunday after coffee hour

Vestry members & Officers - 2021

Vestry email: vestrystg@googlegroups.com

Franci Farnsworth (2024, Senior Warden) 247-6154 Missey Thompson (2022) 247-3055

George Howard (2023, Junior Warden) 802-370-6016 Madine Reed (2024) 247-6877

Rena McDonough (2022) & Treasurer 247-9253

Cassie Root, Secretary, 247-3791
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**View from the Vestry**

Since the Spring Newsletter, there have been a lot of changes at St. Thomas & Grace. In May, Ken Brown announced his plans to retire as Treasurer – a position he had held for over 40 years, first for Grace Church, then adding St. Thomas, and since 2008 for St. Thomas & Grace. In June, the Vestry elected Rena McDonough as the new treasurer effective July 1 recognizing that she would need to step down as senior warden at that time. Senior warden is a position appointed by the priest and at Rachel’s request I agreed to become senior warden. In July, the Vestry elected Barbara Ebling as assistant treasurer (replacing Rena in that role). Thus ST&G has spent the summer and fall in transition as Rena and I grow into our new leadership roles.

We have also been in transition back to in-person indoor worship since July 4. As was true in the rest of Vermont and the country, we had a few weeks this summer when it seemed like we were almost back to normal. We enjoyed simple “coffee hours” at the back of the church, discussing when it would be safe to return to the undercroft (and also how to meet the needs of the growing number of people for whom getting downstairs might be a challenge). We turned around two back pews so that it would be easier to sit and visit. But then Covid surged. We stopped offering food but continued to enjoy brief fellowship at the end of worship. As we head into the colder months, like so many other churches we are warning folks to dress warmly on Sundays because we’ll continue to open doors and windows to improve air circulation.

On September 12, Bishop Shannon MacVeigh-Brown made her first visitation to ST&G since her consecration in the fall of 2019. It was a joyous service which ended with social time at the Faith Community Garden. The Bishop attended the September Vestry meeting (on Zoom) which provided a good opportunity for us to get to know her, to introduce ourselves and our unique Vestry/Core Ministry Team leadership model, and to have her input as we discussed our annual stewardship initiative. She shared with us the financial challenges of the Diocese and the discussions underway about collaborating with the Dioceses of Maine and New Hampshire.

These past six months have seen a number of activities that we are proud to report. We held two outdoor worship service in May on the rectory lawn. In June, a number of people participated in a two-week Social Justice Bible Study, facilitated by The Rev. Susan McGarry, a retired priest now worshipping at ST&G. Responding to the regret that in-person worship meant the end of our dynamic coffee hour conversations about liturgy and theology, Rachel designed a three session Theology Talk program on Zoom which attracted people both within ST&G and other parts of the Diocese. Members and friends of ST&G continue to meet on the first Sunday of the month at 1 pm in silent prayer against racism and for social justice. And we completed our first year of hosting a drive-up collection of cash and food for the Brandon Food Shelf. Missey Thompson came up with the idea and led the effort last January and June; Cassie Root took it over for September and

plans to continue to lead this effort next year. Through these three collections, we helped raised over \$2000 in cash and carloads of food.

The joint meeting of the Vestry and Core Ministry Team originally scheduled for July was postponed due to the leadership transition and it was a struggle to find a good date in the summer when everyone was available. We finally met together in mid-October for a Mutual Ministry Review facilitated by The Rev. Cn. Susan Ohlidal, Canon Missioner for Local Ministry. We talked a lot about ways that we could improve communication, build trust, and do what is needed to support the mission of ST&G. We are still reflecting on what we all learned and our next steps, but we are reassured that Susan commented that what she heard was consistent with all church groups at our stage of adopting a new ministry model. She encouraged us to set some concrete goals and schedule another MMR in about six months.

Plans are underway for an in-person Christmas celebration on Christmas Eve – time and other details still to be determined. Our annual meeting has been scheduled for Sunday, January 16 in conjunction with our morning worship that day. Our winter Food Shelf collection will take place on a Saturday, probably in late January or February, and will be announced through our weekly email newsletters and local media.

As we look ahead to next year, we just sent out our annual pledge request. We ask that you prayerfully consider how you can support St. Thomas & Grace as the Episcopal Church in the Brandon area and our mission “to share God’s love and peace through worship, learning, and service.”

Franci Farnsworth, Senior Warden

**Update from the Junior Warden** – Building-related project and other updates from summer and fall.

- After many years without change, the Vestry voted to increase the hourly rate that is paid to our cleaner Bob Bell. He now also does some basic cleaning in the Rectory every month, as well as cleaning the Sanctuary and Undercroft. Junior Warden George Howard bought and installed electronic mouse and bat chasers in the Sanctuary, which should help Bob with that problem
- The Vestry voted to install a church mailbox on the porch of the Rectory. The box was donated by Missey Thompson and installed by George. It is working well.
- The front door of the St. Thomas building has been re-stained by Brian Coolidge.
- Brian Coolidge has completed the painting of all of the white woodwork at the rectory. It looks great.
- Tom Wolff, our new carpenter, has replaced the two rotten wood frames on the windows on backside of the rectory, and Brian will paint and caulk those in due time.
- George is meeting with a local electrician about replacing several light bulbs ( at a considerable altitude) in the church altar and sanctuary areas.
- Nick Coolidge has agreed to do the snow removal, at the church and rectory, this coming winter, at the same hourly cost as last year (NGC Maintenance).

### **Introducing Susan McGarry**

*The Rev. Susan McGarry is a retired priest who lives in East Middlebury and has a farm in Pittsford, so it's not surprising that she has chosen to worship at St. Thomas & Grace when she can. We asked her to provide some background information so we could get to know her better.*

I began my life in New Haven, Connecticut where my parents (John Joseph and Jean Morgan McGarry) were both studying at Yale University, my father to be a doctor, my mother in a masters of nursing program. I don't remember any of this. Shortly after my birth we moved to Darien, Connecticut where my father became

the assistant in a medical practice. I don't remember that either. My first memories are of a house in East Longmeadow, Massachusetts where my mother, my sister Sharon (two years my senior), my great grandmother, and I sojourned in a house together during transitions in all of our lives. My parents had divorced when I was 2. There in East Longmeadow, actually at my grandparents' house, I remember my mother walking once without crutches or a wheelchair.

My mother had Multiple Sclerosis. Being a medical professional, she knew what she was facing. Her disease became severe quickly and she planned a move to Florida where she would not have to deal with snow. We visited when I was 3 and moved to Sarasota when I was 4 into a small house where Sharon and I grew up. My mother was an extraordinary woman, of courage, fierce love, wisdom and determination. The M.S. progressed inexorably. It, poverty, and a side issue of physical abuse dominated our young lives. Throughout, Sharon and I threw ourselves into academics, sports, and music. We both graduated Sarasota High School, shortly after our schools desegregated for the first time in Sarasota history. Sharon matriculated at Duke University in 1969 and I at Oberlin College in 1970 as the Vietnam war dominated college life all over the country. I was a science major. I also joined the Christ Episcopal Church and shortly after my mother's death in 1972, became very involved there. Part of my involvement was participation in the "Women's Ordination Now," movement in the Episcopal Church. After the Philadelphia and Washington ordinations of the first 17 women as priests in the Episcopal Church, and after the trial of my priest for letting several women priests be celebrants at our altar, I began to perceive in my prayers my own call to ordained ministry in the Episcopal Church. So, in spite of my BA in biology, I applied to and was accepted at the Episcopal Divinity School for seminary scheduled to begin in 1975. Ironically, I was supported as a postulant for ordination by the same bishop (John Burt) who tried my priest, Peter Beebe.

My seminary education was academically thrilling and inspiring though probably unexceptional. Because I was serving in an inner-city church what was Anglo/Hispanic, I travelled to Costa Rica one of my seminary summers to study Spanish in a missionary language school. That began the practice that became a habit throughout my life paving the way for summer study at the Goethe Institute in Munich and two years in Jerusalem all to hone my language skills for academic study. I left seminary with a "special competence" in New Testament, knowing I wanted to study more. The rest is 40 years of ministry, a PhD in Ancient and Biblical Studies, the adoption of my daughter (from China) and son (from Vietnam), some love, some loss, and lots of philosophical musing about life, love, God, and Jesus. Perhaps I will get an invitation to expand on that at another time. Faithfully, Susan

### **Around the Parish ... Around Brandon ... Around the Diocese**

. Once again, the Faith Community Garden provided vegetables and herbs for both parish members and the Brandon Food Shelf throughout the growing season. This year the cross erected during Lent and some chairs meant that the garden was also a spot for quiet rest and meditation. Nancy Rowe and Bob Wertz head up this ministry and this summer were assisted in maintaining the garden by Julie MacIntyre, Stan Sherwood, Madine Reed, Missey Thompson, and Franci Farnsworth. Nancy and Julie spent many hours restoring the herb garden on the front lawn of the church building.

. 15 members and friends are involved in our Prayer Ministry. Anyone can send an email to [praystg@googlegroups.com](mailto:praystg@googlegroups.com) to request prayers, with as much or as little information about the need as they want to share. The email goes to everyone who has signed up to be involved in praying for the specific needs and people mentioned. Contact Bob Wertz [bobw33862@gmail.com](mailto:bobw33862@gmail.com) for more information

. On July 4<sup>th</sup> we opened our doors for in-person worship for the first time since March 2020 – 27 people gathered for a celebratory Eucharist.

- . Last spring, Rena McDonough completed the Diocesan training program and joined Bob Wertz and Franci Farnsworth in the ministry of being officiant at Morning Prayer services.
- . ST&G members are involved in various Diocesan activities. Matthew Gibbs serves on a discernment committee. Bob Wertz has just been elected to Diocesan Council and has recently finished a three-month long series of Abenaki language lessons on Zoom (along with others in the Diocese). Franci Farnsworth and Rev. Rachel have volunteered to co-facilitate a Sacred Ground Circle organized by the Diocese next year.
- . Our town of Brandon came back to life this summer. The three-year long construction project was over, new businesses opened, and visitors returned. On a couple of Sundays we had visitors at church. We are connected a bit to the business community through member Barbara Ebling, who owns *The Bookstore* right across the street from our church. Barbara facilitated book orders for our Social Justice Bible Challenge book study last spring and for the St. Paul's, Vergennes book group as well.
- . Every first Sunday ST&G's Silent Vigil Against Racism draws an average of 10 members and friends who stand silently in prayer, some holding signs. One Sunday we were joined by a towns person who participated from across the street. We welcome newcomers and visitors to join this ministry (contact Ken McFarland to get on the mailing list to receive reminders and updates: [kennethm.mcfarland@gmail.com](mailto:kennethm.mcfarland@gmail.com)).

### **Core Ministry Team**

The Core Ministry Team meets with Rachel on a regular basis to review pastoral care needs, plan for worship and liturgy, and talk about the spiritual health of the parish. CMT members are all part of the prayer ministry and individual members are involved in many different activities including outreach to parishioners who don't use email many of whom are no longer attending church, pastoral care phone calls and visits, greeting card ministry, updating parish records, worship planning, Bible studies, Diocesan programs, and leading worship.

Email: [stgcmt@googlebroups.com](mailto:stgcmt@googlebroups.com).

*Barb Brown, 802-247-3194 Franci Farnsworth, 802-247-6154 Rachel Field, 802-522-6730*

*Matthew Gibbs, 802-236-4630 Bob Wertz, 802-558-1564*

### **Tidbits from *The Brandon Union* newspaper, Friday April 28, 1939, page 4 (courtesy of Madine Reed)**

#### St. Thomas Adds New Stained Glass Window

The beauty of the interior of St. Thomas Church has just been enhanced by the installation of stained glass in the rose window and in the two lancet windows in the tower. The windows are the gift of Miss Emma S. Mora who has already done much for the enrichment of the church. The rose window bears an "Agnus Dei" motif, the Lamb of God being surrounded with the symbols of the Passion and the legend, "Behold the Lamb of God". The lancet windows below carry traditional Christian symbols.

At a meeting of the officers of the local branches of the Woman's Auxiliary of the Episcopal Church held last Saturday at Rutland, St. Thomas' Auxiliary was represented by Mrs. Milton June (Janet), Mrs. H. F. Rich (Dorothy) and Mrs. Carlos Gipson (Florence). Grace Church was represented by Mrs. R.A. Reynolds (Lena), Mrs. Grant Crotto (Ruth), Mrs. Charles DeGarmo (Kathleen), Mrs. Andrew Trombley (Emma) and Miss Mary McCollam.

The annual convention of the Woman's Auxiliary of the Diocese of Vermont will be held at Rock Point, Burlington on May 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>. The delegates from St. Thomas Auxiliary will be Mrs. Milton June (Janet), Mrs. Carlos Gipson (Florence), and Mrs. H. F. Rich (Dorothy). From Grace Church the delegates will be Miss Mary McCollam and Mrs. Welland Horn (Esther) with Mrs. Grant Crotto (Ruth) and Mrs. Charles DeGarmo (Kathleen) as alternates.

# *St. Thomas & Grace Episcopal Church*

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