

St. Thomas & Grace Episcopal Church

SPRING 2021 NEWSLETTER

Field Notes -

As I'm writing to you, the snow is melting, and the hope of spring is feeling almost tangible. It has been a long year since last Easter, and we as a community have changed, grown, and expanded in ways that we could not have imagined a year ago. At that time, we, along with the other buildings in the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont, closed our house of worship and turned to each other online in order to slow the spread of, and protect each other from, COVID 19. With vaccines rolling out I am hopeful that we will be able to resume worship together in person before too much longer, however that will be.

Over this past year I've been struck by the themes of loss, of deprivation, and the sorrow that comes from missing someone or someones. I wonder for us as members of this community, what has been lost? What do we miss? And at the same time, what have we found? What joy have we discovered? Do I rely on familiar patterns to distract myself from going deep? Do I take things for granted and forget to see them as precious/gift/worthy of praise? Peeling back ourselves to understand our true motivations, those narratives and desires that inspire our actions, is a part of the call to "put on the mind of Christ," which is the work of Christianity. This pandemic, among many things, has involved a forced peeling back of our society.

Both the Vestry and the Core Ministry Team have been wrestling with these questions over the past year. In the midst of shifting our worship online, setting up a phone tree to keep in contact with those members of our community who do not use computers, we have been exploring together some responses to the questions I've shared above. In addition, the Core Ministry Team, with the direction of Paul Gratz, participated in an in-depth study of spiritual gifts – the premise being that every person has a unique combination of spiritual gifts that can contribute to the ministry of the whole church community. In the coming year, I would invite any members of the parish curious to explore their spiritual gifts to reach out, so that we can expand this experience and energize our entire community for ministry.

My faith in Jesus reminds me of two truths that are at first glance a paradox. First, that the world is full of real cruelty, horror, death, and, at the risk of being overly dramatic, evil. Second, that Jesus has defeated evil and death forever. That life has the last word. Christian community has a beautiful way to acknowledge that the world has evil (through ministries of healing, feeding, pastoral care, and many others), and each one of us carries the potential for amplifying that life-giving love of Jesus and to speak it into the beautiful, loving, and hurting world.

With gratitude and blessings,
Rev. Rachel

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.

VESTRY MEETINGS ARE OPEN TO EVERYONE

**Normally Vestry meets on the second Sunday after coffee hour
(currently Vestry is meeting via Zoom – same link as church)**

Vestry members & Officers - 2021

Vestry email: vestrystg@googlegroups.com

Rena McDonough (2022, Senior Warden), 247-9253

George Howard (2023, Junior Warden), 802-370-6016 Missey Thompson (2022) 247-3055

Madine Reed (2024), 247-6877

Cassie Root, Secretary, 247-3791

Franci Farnsworth (2024), 247-6154

Ken Brown, 247-3194, Treasurer

Vestry Update

I am happy to report that the Vestry and Core Ministry Team have developed a mutual relationship of communication where we will be meeting and reporting to each other on a quarterly basis. The Vestry plans to address many specific, ongoing responsibilities of the Vestry such as the fact that Vestry is in charge of the fiduciary, Diocesan communications, and leadership. This includes the framework of the CMT activities and Franci will discuss these goals at our next meeting, March 14, 2021.

As the governing body of ST&G, the following are ongoing considerations for the wellbeing of our parish:

- What have we done well this year
- What did we say we would do
- How has the spirit moved us
- What changes have we experienced?
- What things have been left undone?
- What do we need to let go of?

At our annual meeting, January 24, 2021 we celebrated with Morning Prayer, a Litany of Thanksgiving up to the Collects, and a moment of reflection, and on to the subject of church business – appointment and election of officers, Budget statement by Ken Brown, Priest-in-Partnership report by Rachel, Senior Warden report by Rena, Junior Warden report by George, Altar Guild report by Barb Brown, and Communication report by Franci. Franci and Madine were elected to three year terms on Vestry; Missey was elected to the remaining year of Cassie's term because she stepped down from Vestry. The slate of delegates and alternates to Convention was approved: Delegates: Rena (representing Vestry), Cassie (filling the "attended last year" slot), and Ken McFarland (someone who has not attended Convention). Alternates: Franci, Bob, and Barb Brown.

At the organizational Vestry meeting, Rena was appointed to the Senior Warden post by Rachel and Vestry elected George as Junior Warden, Cassie as Clerk, and Ken Brown as Treasurer.

The Vestry continues to follow and stay up to date on the Diocesan protocols regarding Covid 19 regulations. In summation, under Rachel's leadership, I feel that our Vestry has done an amazing job in maintaining unity, a sense of family, and communication with parish members during this difficult Covid virus.

Vestry meetings are open to all members of ST&G, and our meetings are held on the second Sunday of each month following coffee hour. All are welcome.

~~~~~ Best always- Cassie Root, Clerk

### **Parish Family Updates:**

Rest in Peace Ellen Hayes was a lifelong member of ST&G and the oldest member at the time of her death on February 24 at the age of 99 years, 9 months. Barb and Ken Brown and Madine Reed represented ST&G at the funeral conducted by our Rev. Rachel. Memorial contributions (thus far \$350) will be placed in the St. Thomas & Grace Memorial Fund which will help ensure continuation of the Sunshine Card ministry that Ellen carried on for years.

Births In December, Braelynn Angela great-granddaughter of Madine Reed, born to her granddaughter Kirsten Reed and Rob Hance. In January, Sven Ankjaer Ross, grandson of Ken McFarland and Beate Ankjaer-Jenson; parents Monika and Seth and baby Sven live in Orwell. In February, Godrick Derek Reed, great-grandson of Madine, son of her grandson Tyler Reed and Rachel Grantham and Mark William Anderson, grandson of Madine, son of her daughter Terra and Max Anderson.

Moves Lillian Thomsen now lives at Wintergreen in Brandon. Elsie Bailey is living with her daughter in NH this winter and will move back to Vermont when warmer weather comes.

### **Core Ministry Team Update**

In January the parish said good-bye to Paul Gratz who has been part of our family since the first Sunday he served as "supply" during the Interim. The Bishop appointed him to the Core Ministry Team when it was first formed in March 2019 and he was a valued member of the team, helping the parish prepare for the transition to Rachel's ministry as Priest-in-Partnership and during the following year as we moved to online worship and focused on meeting the needs of our members during the pandemic. Everyone at ST&G benefited from Paul's dedication, especially that long drive from Bennington to be with us

regardless of the weather. We on CMT miss his wise counsel and technical support skills but value what we learned about our spiritual gifts and shared leadership in ministry.

We meet regularly, often twice a month, to plan for worship, assess pastoral care needs, and continue to explore models of shared leadership. We look forward to regular joint meetings with the Vestry during the coming year as together we set goals for the parish. Contact any of us with questions or pastoral care needs. Email: [stgcmt@googlegroups.com](mailto:stgcmt@googlegroups.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*

### **Here's what has been happening at ST&G since the October Newsletter:**

- Sunday worship (usually BCP Morning Prayer, Rite II) takes place via Zoom at 10 am followed by a “coffee hour” fellowship time which always runs at least a half hour and sometimes much longer if we get into interesting discussions of theology or our personal lives. We include notes from those discussions in the Coffee Hour Corner of the weekly Mail Chimp newsletter on Tuesdays.
- We held two outdoor worship services in person before the State of Vermont restricted all social and other multi-household gatherings (a decision with which the Diocese concurred). We had been planning for some kind of outdoor Christmas Eve gathering so we were all disappointed – while completely understanding the situation.
- In January, ST&G organized a drive-up collection of cash and food for the Brandon Food Shelf. It was overwhelmingly successful (over \$1300 and many bags and boxes of food).
- ST&G members and friends have continued monthly “first Sunday” silent vigils as public witness against racism, for social justice. The weather has cooperated and we’ve always had at least 8, often many more people involved standing silently in prayer or meditation, some holding signs.
- In December, ST&G sent Episcopal Relief & Development \$640 collected from parish members and friends over the past year.
- ST&G has a “Covid Memorial” on the front lawn of St. Thomas – green flags representing all of the Covid victims in Vermont along with an explanatory sign. Missey and Casey Sue Thompson created the memorial and perform the sad task of adding additional flags.
- A small group of ST&G parishioners has continued to meet to talk about antiracism topics. The next meeting is April 15, 6-7 pm. Some members have also participated in a Diocesan Book Study, St. Paul’s-Vergennes book group, and the Sacred Ground program organized by St. Stephen’s-Middlebury. Contact Rachel if you’d like to get emails about future meetings.
- In January, Danny Grubbs-Donovan, a Middlebury College senior, joined ST&G for the spring as “tech intern”. He provides tech support during worship two Sundays a month. In February, he led a coffee hour conversation about the challenges of “being church” during the pandemic and is doing some research in preparation for a report to the parish in April on how we can better use technology to reach more of the congregation or improve Zoom worship.
- During Lent, we have once again offered Wednesday Morning Prayer services at 8 am (on Zoom of course). And we are planning a service of Evening Prayer on Thursday, March 25.

### **Looking Ahead**

- Although we do not know when we will be able to gather outdoors or begin using the St. Thomas Church building again, we know that we’ll schedule outdoor worship as soon as it’s warm enough and allowed, some kind of big celebration the first Sunday we can worship in doors, some kind of worship related to our garden, and outdoor fellowship activities.
- Holy Week: Wednesday, 8 am, Morning Prayer. Maundy Thursday, 6 pm, a worship service on Zoom while we share a meal together with prayers. We will publish the Zoom link in the weekly newsletter, and you can always send an email to [stgcmt@googlegroups.com](mailto:stgcmt@googlegroups.com).
- Easter: ST&G will disperse and participate in Easter worship with other churches, in Vermont or around the world. We will have a festive “breakfast” via Zoom at 9:30 am before everyone heads “off to church”.
- Faith Community Garden (see separate article)
- Drive-up Collections for Brandon Food Shelf – after the very successful January event, we are now planning, in consultation with the Food Shelf, to make this a regular, three times a year,

outreach project. The next one will be in late May/early June and we'll do it again in September and January. Contact Missey Thompson if you'd like to be part of this high impact but relatively low time commitment effort.

## Gardens 2021

Well it's almost that time again....Garden time! Now that we've entered the month of March warm weather can't be too far away, right? Well, we've all lived in VT long enough to understand that warm weather and spring do not always go hand in hand!

Bob and I have been talking about plans for this year's vegetable garden and herb garden. Nothing finalized as of yet but we hope to give the gardens a more prominent place in St T/G life, and perhaps even utilize the herbs and flowers somehow in the Sunday service every now and then. We will continue to give to the food shelf and also have produce available for our church members. Hopefully this year (barring more road construction, pandemic or drought) the herb garden will be given an overhaul with more plants added that were instrumental (either in lore or in fact) in the Christian Church of old. This spring as usual there should be herb seedlings of the existing plants available to give away so please let us know if you would be interested in them. Otherwise they go into the compost bin.

We always welcome help in any form you can give, so please don't be shy about coming forward to help us in this area of church life. It's a fun way to connect with both friends and the earth while beautifying our church grounds and serving our community. We greatly appreciate all those who have helped over the past year watering, weeding and planting. Also thanks to those who gave monetary donations which went towards buying seed packets, plants, and organic fertilizer.

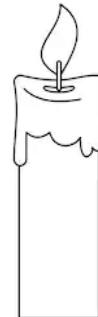
More information will be coming in a month or so.

~~~~~See you In the Garden!

Nancy and Bob

Update on the Candles:

Last fall's stewardship letter included a small "candle" with the suggestion that folks send back a candle and a scriptural verse of hope along with their pledge forms. And many of you did! Rachel gathered the candles and verses all into a display that looked a bit like a fisherman's net that was her backdrop for our worship at the Annual Meeting on January 24. And those verses do bring light into our lives. As of March 1, ST&G had received 18 pledges towards the 2021 budget totaling \$21,330. Thanks to these commitments, careful budgeting, and stable return on ST&G's endowed funds, the budget is balanced once again this year.



❖❖ The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want. Psalm 23 ❖❖ Through him was the light of men. John 1:4 ❖❖ For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of the Lord. Ephesians ❖❖ I will lift up my eyes to the hills from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord. Psalm 121 ❖❖ Meet change with hope and courage! ❖❖ Let your light so shine before (all people) that they may see your good works and glorify your father who is in heaven. Matthew 5:16 ❖❖ I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. John 8:12 ❖❖ Put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. 1 Thess. 5:8 ❖❖ I can do all things through she who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13 ❖❖ Light shines in the darkness John 1:5 ❖❖

OUR OWN.....2021

O Lord, you have searched me and you know me, you know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from a far: you are familiar with all my ways. Psalm 139: 1-3

Here at St. Thomas & Grace we are acutely aware of the advanced age of many of our present members. Let's take a 'snapshot' view of some members of the past, years prior to Rev. Rachel being with us in 2020.

Some **OCTAGENARIANS** were: Grant Crotto, Ruth Crotto (almost), Rebecca 'Becky' Holmes, Jessie Denecke, Madelyn Buttles, Betty Smith, Bernice White, Sadie LaRock, Emma Hall Swenor, Curtis Crosby, Pricilla Petty, Muriel Fielder and Larry Venables.

Some **NONOGENARIANS** were: Mary McCollam, Ed Denecke, Grace LaRock Hayes, Beulah Carr, Eleanor Young, Dr. Frank Farnsworth, Janet June, Ginny McElroy Worn, Philip Ross Worn, Welland Horn, Esther Horn, May Bates, Ted LaRock, Nora Johnson Sampson, Grace Venables, Frances C. Brown/Close, Hilda S. Crosby, Ellen Hayes.

CENTAGENARIAN – Ada Valentine Hall Trombley was born February 14, 1907 and passed away March 27, 2011.

Remember this is only a 'snapshot' of the members at St. Thomas and at Grace. These were some of the ones who gained more advanced years but still worshipped, served and were a part of the life of this church community.

**** We have four **NONOGENAR/ANS** among us still, who were asked where they attended church when they were young, why they came to St. Thomas & Grace and what they most like about it?

Elsie Bailey was born and spent her younger years in Rama Rama, New Zealand. She attended Sunday School, as a child, in 'The Church of England at Rama Rama' which is how the church is known there; "as the Church of England and the town it is in". After marrying her husband Aderian, who had been stationed with the U.S. military in New Zealand, Elsie came to Vermont and Brandon. She said "he didn't really have a Church so he said he would take hers and they would raise their children in her Church, so for her to pick one". St. Thomas was the closest one there was to hers and actually almost the same. It was close by as well because Elsie and Aderian lived just over Conant Square from the church for many years. Elsie said "the people of the St. Thomas were very friendly and made her feel welcome, as a new comer to this country. And they still are and still do"!

Francis Fielder was born in Bristol, Vt. His family moved to Huntington soon after and he spent his early childhood there. As a youngster he attended the Baptist Church in Huntington. His family moved a few times and he ended up in Brandon. He and his wife Muriel were married by Rev. Shattuck of the Congregational Church in Brandon, at the Goshen Church which was formerly a Methodist-Episcopal Church. In later years they wanted a church to attend and because Muriel's sister Madine and brother Ken both were members at Grace Church in ForestDale, they went there. Frannie said "they enjoyed the church services, the people there and working on activities, so decided to make it their Church as well".

Lillian Olsen Thomsen was born a Lutheran. She attended Church, when younger, in the Lebanon Lutheran Church while living in Bristol, Ct. Her mother had been an Episcopalian. Lillian and her brothers and her dad, the Swedish Lutheran, attended the Lebanon Lutheran Church in Bristol, Ct.

After Lillian was married to Earl A. Thomsen they attended the Episcopal Church and raised their sons Carl and Marcus. Earl had been a Lutheran when younger but decided to change to Episcopalian in his late teens. When they moved to Brandon they took to their roots and attended the Good Shepard Lutheran Church in Rutland for a time. After being in Brandon for a while they thought they should worship in the town they were working and living in. Lillian was a kindergarten teacher at Neshobe School in ForestDale. St. Thomas suited the both of them and they became regular, active members. Then, for a few years, Lillian was worshiping at the Lutheran Church in Proctor. For several reasons this became difficult and Lillian came 'home' to St. Thomas and Grace.

After moving to Brandon, Lillian's Dad frequently called 'his little girl', (she only had brothers). One day her Dad told Lillian that he and her Mom were moving. Lillian asked "where?" and he said "Brandon, Vt". So they started house hunting. Robert and Lila Olsen ended up living on Park St. Ext., next door to Lillian and Earl! The Olsen's became a part of St. Thomas & Grace as well when they became Brandonites.

The thing Lillian has loved the most about St. Thomas & Grace was "the warmth and caring of the people of the congregation, from when she first attended until today. It's not only for herself she sees the caring but for the reaching out to the community at large".

Douglas 'Bud' Austin – Bud said he attended Sunday School and then church in Essex Fells, N.J. where he grew up. It is located just south of Coldwell in Essex County northern New Jersey. He was confirmed in 1936, went in the Army after school and came home to live with his parents. After getting married he still lived in

Essex County, N.J. He didn't stray too far at any point. Holy Spirit Episcopal Church was his church in Bloomfield, N.J.

Visiting Brandon, Vermont in later years with his second wife, Bud became acquainted with Ralph Humiston, at 'The Adams Motor Lodge' and thus looked at and bought the property on McConnell Rd. where he now has his home. Once living in Brandon, Bud started attending St. Thomas Church, then being informed about 'Grace Church' by Bill Braun(formerly of The Adams fame) Bud came to Grace Church. He called it 'home' until its' closing. "Grace Church was just different in a good way says Bud. Friendly and welcoming." Bud also stated "he is just happy to still be here"!

~~~~~In faith and love, Madine

## Parish History

by Ken McFarland

### St. Thomas' at the Hill Block: 1840s-1860s



P8629 Centre Street, Brandon, Vt.

Early 20<sup>th</sup>-century view of St. Thomas' first fixed place of worship, located on 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the building set between the Smith Block and abutting the town cemetery (not visible). Note covered exterior door and stairway to viewer's left. Photo courtesy Blaine Cliver.

This parish's early days have been well documented, the story opening with the mid-1830s formation of an Episcopal worship group at the Forestdale home of Royal Blake. Beginning in 1839, Forestdale worship is also referenced in annual diocesan convention reports. Lay readers mainly provided services at the newly named St. Thomas', but by 1841 sufficient parochial growth allowed for engaging a priest, The Rev. Josiah Perry. Clearly a dedicated church structure was needed in Brandon, and in his report of a June 8, 1843 visit Bishop Hopkins noted "a good progress made in the erection of a place of worship..." The ground chosen was at the southeast corner of a property facing Center Street, long owned by members of the Hill family and the site of a blacksmith shop (now Crosby's).

As well, St. Thomas' partnered with the Town of Brandon with the lower floor serving as town hall, while the upper level would be home to The Rev. Mr. Perry's parishioners. This split ownership

arrangement lasted for several decades, though not without problems. For example, the 1847 St. Thomas' annual convention report noted that on four occasions "the evening service has been omitted in consequence of disturbance from meetings in the room below the Chapel."

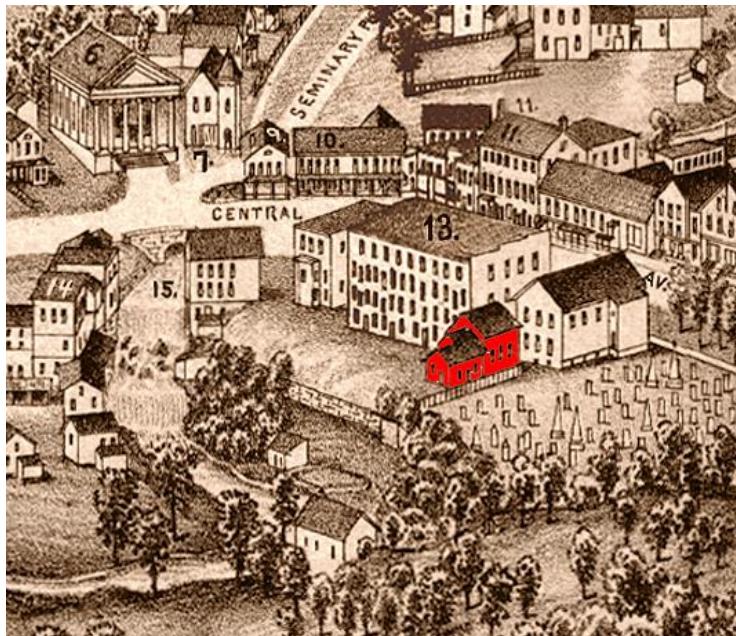
Coming years brought ups and downs, seeing the arrival and departure of several rectors, along with periods of vacancy in the position. Similarly, parishioner numbers waxed and waned, though in general developments were positive. Excitement marked consecration of the new Grace Church in Forestdale in 1853, but it was a building which also reminded worshipers in Brandon of their own sanctuary's shortcomings.

By the late 1850s, however, C. W. and J. A. Conant had joined a swelling number of Brandon parishioners, becoming key players in unfolding events. By 1860, The Rev. J. Newton also had arrived bringing new vibrancy, while the total number of adult and children members had swollen to 148. Clearly being limited to an "upper room," as it was sarcastically termed in the 1860 diocesan report, was woefully inadequate for such numbers.

St. Thomas & Grace people know the outcome. A new decade saw construction of the Hopkins-designed Gothic sanctuary, which opened for worship in 1863. Just before that transformative moment, the Bishop reported a May 13 evening service, noting with true understatement, "The little Church was crowded," and recording eight adult baptisms and sixteen confirmations.

Vestry members wasted little time in ridding the parish of their "upper room," selling it to F. J. Farr in August 1863. Having just built their own new structure, town officials followed suite, selling Farr the lower floor. Widely known for his musical talents, Farr was to open a barroom and billiards parlor at the site. Given his dance band fame, we might guess the former St. Thomas' space also saw more than a few gala evenings.

The Hill Block building saw a variety of uses over coming decades until its sad loss to fire in 1943. That said, it continued to be called "old town hall" for many years. Amusingly, the author has yet to spot a reference to "old St. Thomas'," perhaps reflecting parishioners' happiness to leave the place as a relic of their past.



Section of 1890 panoramic map showing former St. Thomas' and town hall building. Exterior stairway is clearly evident abutting the town cemetery. No. 13 is now the Smith Block. Building in red was the blacksmith shop. Courtesy Blaine Cliver.

# *St. Thomas & Grace Episcopal Church*

**JOIN US FOR WORSHIP ON SUNDAYS via ZOOM at 10:00 a.m.**

*(the link is sent out on Fridays each week)\**

**HOLY WEEK:** # Wed, March 31, 8 am, Morning Prayer

# Thurs, April 1, 6 pm, Sharing a Meal with Worship #

Saturday - listen to the Exsultet sung by Rachel (BCP p. 286-87)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfAltsG\\_xC8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfAltsG_xC8)

**EASTER – April 4:** # 9-10 am (join anytime) Festive Zoom Breakfast before joining Easter Worship online with the celebration of your choice, around the Diocese or the world (links will be in the Friday Worship Bulletin on 4/2)

# For LINKS see weekly newsletters or email [stgcmt@googlegroups.com](mailto:stgcmt@googlegroups.com)

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