

St. Thomas & Grace Episcopal Church

MARCH 2020 NEWSLETTER

Field Notes - Spring Edition

They don't tell you about mud season when you're looking at houses in Vermont. . . . Jonathan and I have been settling in to our little mountain hollow for the past year, and we eased into things during the warm explosion of life in the summer, watched as the land transformed into a blaze of orange in the fall, and then watched again as snow blanketed the hills . . . and kept on coming! Now we're in a season I've never experienced before in my life. I've seen springtime, and I've seen snow melt, but never have I ever seen anything like mud season up here.

All of this melting has gotten me thinking about change. Going from the stable frozenness of winter into the fecundity of summer seems to necessitate a messy and complex season of change in the landscape. The ground quite literally shifts under our feet as the land welcomes a new way of being. Similarly over the past year we as a community at St. Thomas and Grace have done some shifting and settling—not only in welcoming me as your Priest in Partnership but also in continuing to dive deep into an understanding of what it means to be the church in a time of great change for organized religion. The Core Ministry Team and the Vestry have done foundational work to understand how each can respond to the needs of this community and how we can all support each other in living out the Gospel both within our beautiful walls and out in the world. Over the next few months we will try on ways of meeting together in the community, such as meeting in a local pub to talk about God. We will also continue to deepen our spiritual vibrancy by leaning in to our worship and rooting ourselves in a familiarity with Scripture. As with mud season, it's hard sometimes to believe that even though the ground is shifting it is still supporting us and we are not without traction. My prayer is that we will continue to lean into the muddy places of change that emerge in our lives together as followers of Jesus and as members of a worshiping community. God is still speaking in Brandon Vermont!

Rachel +

P. S. When I wrote about the changing seasons a few weeks ago I had no idea just how much change we would all be facing: as a society, as individuals, and as a church community. I share the grief of many of you at not being able to gather together or share space together on Sunday mornings. This is indeed a time of great sadness, loss, anxiety, and fear—and in the past weeks I have also been strengthened by the reality that it is simultaneously a time of hope, new life, and deep faith. From Zoom coffee-hour meetings to online worship and so many more things, we are reminding ourselves and each other that we, and not the building, are the Church. On that morning that changed history Jesus greeted Mary alive and out in the garden. It was just the two of them. Since that day Christianity has been shared from person to person in homes, on the streets, and in wild places. We still have the opportunity to share in this tradition of worship in our own homes, to speak the hope of resurrection to each person we encounter, and to meet God again in the wild places of life. Christ is reaching to all of us and walking with us through this time of loss and grief: walking with us always to bring us from sorrow into joy, from loss into hope, and from death into new life. May it be so.

VESTRY MEETINGS ARE OPEN TO EVERYONE
Normally Vestry meets on the second Sunday after coffee hour
(during the COVID-19 situation Vestry is meeting via Zoom)
April meeting will be Sunday, April 5 at noon

Vestry members & Officers - 2020

Rena McDonough (2022, Senior Warden), 247-9253 George Howard (2023), 802-370-6016 Cassie Root (2022), Secretary, 247-3791	Scott Beriau (2021), 247-8048 Missey Thompson (2021) Ken Brown , 247-3194, Treasurer
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Highlights from the Annual Meeting

The 2020 Annual meeting was held on February 9, postponed from the original January 19th date due to bad weather. Seventeen members were present to review reports from 2019, discuss the proposed budget, and elect Vestry and Convention delegates. Vestry: three-year term, George Howard; one-year term, Missey Thompson. Convention Delegates: Franci Farnsworth, Rena McDonough, Cassie Root. Convention Alternates: Barb Brown, Ken Brown, George Howard. 2020 Budget: Pledge total was \$27,300, considerably higher than last year, and it represents pledges from all active members. That's cause for celebration, so Vestry provided a cake!

Topics that came up during the open discussion include the history and needs of the rectory (see article by new member Ken McPartland elsewhere in the newsletter), the need for better exterior lighting at both the church building and parking lot behind the rectory (Vestry will act on these suggestions), a suggestion that maybe Vestry elections should involve multiple candidates, or at least a more deliberate process started much farther in advance (Vestry will discuss and come up with some recommendations well before there needs to be a nominating process next fall), and the concern that ST&G is not spending enough on "outreach." We raise funds through special offerings and a few special events (suppers, yard sale, holiday fair) but are we doing enough? Everyone agreed that it's important to know before a fundraising event what organization(s) or causes will benefit from funds raised.

From Senior Warden Rena McDonough's report: "What an exciting year for St. Thomas & Grace Church. . . . I look forward to working with Rachel in 2020. . . . I encourage all to continue to do the work God is calling us to do at St. Thomas and Grace Church. I would like to end with a quotation from Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook: 'remain open to new and creative ways to build the life and mission of your faith community.'"

From the Priest-in-Partnership's report: "Finally, on a personal note, these past six months have been exciting ones for Jonathan and me! After moving to Vermont [in the] summer and leaning into our first growing season, we jumped right into our wedding in Guilford, CT in October and started making plans for our honeymoon to Jamaica in January. We are so grateful for all of the love and support from each of you, and in particular your hugely generous wedding gifts to us. As we move through our first winter together in Vermont and our first year of marriage we continue to be grateful for the warmth of this community, and for your prayers and well-wishes."

CORE MINISTRY TEAM

It's been a year since the Core Ministry Team was formed. The CMT includes Rachel as well as Paul Gratz and lay members. (See the list of names and contact information below.) The CMT meets regularly; during the COVID-19 crisis we are meeting via our computers, using the Zoom conference tool. Our highest priority right now is making sure that we stay connected with everyone in the parish family and that everyone knows who to call if they have any need. Over the past year we have arranged for worship on Sundays when priests aren't available or scheduled. Core Ministry Team organized a service of Lessons & Carols the Sunday after Christmas and led the Ash Wednesday service. During this time when we can't worship in person we are publicizing worship opportunities through the Diocese and other churches and we are experimenting with various online methods of meeting together or worshipping. Although none of us like the fact that we can't worship in person, we also embrace this challenge of figuring out how to "be church" without traditional Sunday morning services. We know that God is in our midst.

CORE MINISTRY TEAM – Contact any member of CMT if you need anything!

Barb Brown, 802-247-3194 barbarabrown2@myfairpoint.net
 Franci Farnsworth, 802-247-6154 farnswor@middlebury.edu
 Rachel Field, 802-522-6730 rachelf2000@gmail.com
 Matthew Gibbs, 802-236-4630 Gibbs.matthew25@gmail.com
 Paul Gratz, 802-236-4429 lpgratz1@comcast.net
 Gert Sherwood, 802-465-8457 gertpoet@stansherwood.com
 Bob Wertz, 802-558-1564 bobw33862@gmail.com

Worshipping at Home – Some Resources

- *Lectionary page (to look up the lessons for the week): <https://www.lectionarypage.net/>
- *Sermons (you can look up a featured sermon or other sermons that relate to the week's lessons) <https://episcopalchurch.org/sermons/year-a>
- *National Cathedral, 11:15 A.M on Sundays <https://cathedral.org/online/>
- *Watch the YouTube videos Rachel has made: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A44Thqm40N8>
- * Explore the Internet: many larger churches are livestreaming worship or using Facetime, many clergy are producing YouTube videos with messages about prayer and worship during the COVID-19 emergency.
- * Hymns: Usually you can search the Internet for a familiar hymn by the first line or by the title and end up with numerous choices where you can listen to a recording, often with some kind of video. Play around with it!

Do you live in the Brandon area and need a Book of Common Prayer or Hymnal for home use?

Contact Franci Farnsworth if you'd like to borrow a BCP or Hymnal from the church; she has a box of them at her house and can deliver one to you. The BCP is also available [online](#).

New members of St. Thomas & Grace

Beate Ankjaer-Jensen and Ken McFarland moved from Fredericksburg, VA to Marble Street, Brandon in August 2019. A main draw was proximity to their daughter Monika and son-in-law Seth, who have a farm in Orwell. Over the years they have found much to like about the small towns, countryside, and people of Vermont, and all factors combined it seemed a good place for retirement.

A native of Bergen, Norway, Beate was baptized and confirmed in the Lutheran Church. She has lived in Scotland, Spain, and Hawaii as well as in several North Carolina and Virginia cities. She has also had various jobs, but for the past twenty years she has been responsible for the buildings and grounds (especially the gardens) at the Gari Melchers Home and Studio in Falmouth, VA, where she used skills gained from degrees in historic preservation and library and information science. Very recently she has taken a part-time position with Addison County Health as Emergency Preparedness Specialist, clearly at a moment of great public need.

Ken has always lived in North Carolina and Virginia apart from time in the Navy. His degrees in history have supported his work, mainly in historic property management and museum education. Before retirement he was employed at Stratford Hall, the 18th-century Lee family home. His first Episcopal service was at St. John's Church, Richmond, VA, where Patrick Henry gave his "Liberty or Death" speech. He was baptized and confirmed at St. Matthew's Church in Hillsborough, NC. There he served on the vestry and as junior warden, helping to look after the 1820s sanctuary in a parish dating to 1752.

St. Thomas and Grace Gardens

The gardens at St. Thomas and Grace will be active and vibrant once again this coming summer. With the road construction mostly completed it will be easier to tend, harvest, and deliver vegetables and herbs to the Senior Center. There is always enough produce for church members and their families. We again will have a signup in the Undercroft for the watering schedule. Thank you all for helping out.

The herb garden will get a major tidy-out this spring as the head "Gardener" has a new shoulder that works and is pain-free! Any help from parishioners is always welcome, and as we all know, "many hands make light work." New slate markers designating herb varieties will be incorporated into the garden as will an information sheet indicating how the herbs were used in churches/monasteries in the past. (More about this later.) The four original quadrants of the herb garden were laid out for culinary, medicinal, household, and dyer plants and we hope to bring those back into good shape this summer.

Some new ideas about celebrating the gardens are being discussed. Stay tuned for more!

~~~~~Nancy Rowe and Bob Wertz

**From Forward Day by Day (March 4<sup>th</sup>):** A wise pastor of a new rural church put a sign above his church door so the congregation could read it as they departed after a service: "The church is now leaving the building". In this time when our church buildings are closed, we must always remember that THE CHURCH IS ALIVE AND WELL in our community.

### **MISSION**

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.

## Greetings to everyone connected to St. Thomas and Grace, Brandon, VT, from Wildwood, FL.

The winter of 2019/2020 was certainly a different one for me (as well as for all of you), in the fact that I was spending time from late November until what I thought would be April 1st in Wildwood, FL. Now I am looking at May 1<sup>st</sup> for my return to Vermont and possibly later, due to the fast-paced, changing/challenging conditions everywhere between Vermont and Florida. This is not a completely bad thing with nights in the 60's and *spring* days since mid-February, anywhere from 75 to 90+ degrees and no snow, sleet, or cold March winds. **But** with God's help and a lot of hand sanitizing and distancing we will all be okay.

Thank you to Rachel, the Vestry, and the Core Ministry Team, all of whom have worked so hard at keeping St. Thomas and Grace informed and involved in so many ways.

Here in Wildwood I looked for an Episcopal Church of course, and there were a few in the area. There were large and small churches, some nearby and some at a greater distance. Then I found a small (very small) church with only about twenty members: "Grace Anglican Church." How could I go wrong with a name like that! It is an old house renovated into a church, outside of town, painted white, with a parking area quite small. My first thought on driving into the driveway was "where do they push the snow?" Then I laughed at myself: "you dummy!" I can tell you this happened to me more than once this winter. ***You can take the girl out of Vermont but you can't take Vermont out of the girl.***

Entering a new setting, a different church, during Advent was a little unnerving to say the least. For Christmas Eve everyone, all fourteen of them including the priest, Rev. R. Wayne Ogg, were very welcoming, even making a "coffee mug" with my name on it. The feeling was somewhat like our own former "Grace Church" *except* at Grace Anglican-Wildwood things are a little—no, a lot different. They have a traditional service from the 1928 Book of Common Prayer and hymns from the 1940 Hymnal! These are accompanied by "tapes" of the music as they have no organ. Readings are the longer, complete, older version, all done by the priest on Christmas Eve, by readers on Sundays.

The church building, as I said, was a house purchased by a small, devoted group of people who weren't really into attending the larger churches in and around Wildwood and The Villages. Those are beautiful churches but very large and more impersonal. Anyway, Grace Anglican formed because of this small group and their prayers and devotion and physical labor along with their financial support. This literal handful of people, with the guidance of Rev. Ogg, took an old house and turned it into a delightful place of worship with light-colored wood (not sure what kind) for the altar, railing, podium, and chairs with cushions, plus curtains covering the windows that make it friendly and homey.

The people at Grace Anglican Church range in age from very elderly to one family with young children. They come from several towns around the area and are mostly not from Wildwood. Their choice to worship in this place, in this way, is evident. Rev. Ogg formerly worked in the Boston area and only became a priest after retiring and moving to Florida. Does all this sound familiar?

As everywhere else in the country these last several weeks, there have been no church services and little or no *toilet paper* to be found in the stores!

Thanks go out to Bishop Shannon and Bishop Curry for their on-line services as well as to Bob Wertz for coordinating our own on-line Wednesday Lenten Prayer gathering by Zoom. While isolating from C-19 we can still gather apart but together in prayer in this way in Brandon, Sudbury, Goshen, or Florida. It may not be the best way but it works for now!

From me to you, peace and love until we gather once more in our own St. Thomas and Grace house of worship, St. Thomas Church, Brandon. Following is a prayer I found in *White Ribbons of Prayer*: ***Lord, we understand that faith is not about everything turning out okay. Faith is being okay no matter how things turn out. Amen.***

~~~~~Madine Reed

St Thomas Rectory (Ken McFarland has been doing some research on the Rectory)

The St. Thomas and Grace rectory was initially the home of famed early Brandon resident, John Conant (1773–1856), his wife Charity (1772–1851), and a growing family. A skilled carpenter, Conant built their house in 1802, possibly as a wood-frame dwelling that was later clad in brick. Among the children growing up here were daughter Cynthia Conant (Merriam) and sons John Adams Conant and Chauncy Washington Conant. All three would ultimately live in neighboring homes on a section of street known early on as Conant Square.

John Conant was a strongly committed Baptist, manifesting this in various ways including the building of a Brandon meeting house in 1800; he also took a leading role in constructing Brandon's current Baptist church in 1832. It may have been then, when brick was being made for the church, that John Conant's house received its brick exterior. With its common bond brick pattern plus windows set in recessed arched openings, the Baptist church bears clear similarities to the rectory.

It seems the greatest of ironies that Baptist-raised sons John A. and Chauncy played key roles in building St. Thomas's *Episcopal* Church, with construction beginning in 1860. Presumably daughter Cynthia also joined them in a denominational switch. At least she aided the cause, as in 1860 she was providing a home for Joshua Newton Fairbanks (1829–1871), the first rector to serve the newly built St. Thomas. There is irony too in that St. Thomas's was set directly opposite their recently-deceased Baptist parents' home.

A legal connection came in February 1871 when John Adams Conant conveyed the John and Charity Conant property to the parish, "in consideration of my love and affection for the Episcopal Church, and the interest I feel for the prosperity of St Thomas Church." However, since the church already had a "parsonage" on Seminary Street, it appears the Conant dwelling may have been used for rental income or other St. Thomas purposes through the rest of the nineteenth century. No rector seems to have been in residence there until The Rev. Charles Blake Carpenter (ca. 1870–1956) moved there in 1908, almost concurrently with the 1909 sale of the first parsonage-rectory, a building soon razed to build a new high school.

Since Mr. Carpenter's time many members of the clergy have served St. Thomas's while residing in the old Conant home. Fascinating stories can surely be told of this later period spanning over a century, perhaps in a future newsletter.

In the Time of COVID-19

As this newsletter is being written, Vermont is under a "Stay Home – Stay Safe" order from the Governor until April 15. Bishop Shannon has closed all church buildings at least until the Stay Home order is lifted, which means that St. Thomas & Grace is planning for Holy Week and Easter without being able to worship together in our church building. The public schools are closed for the rest of the school year and staff are exploring how to provide continued education at a distance.

Here's what's going on at ST&G:

- Core Ministry Team and Vestry continue to meet via Zoom. Vestry meetings are open to anyone (contact Rena if you want to join).
- Weekly Updates via the ST&G e-mail list with information about worship resources are available online, including church services, updates, and a "message." We hope to begin posting this information on the ST&G website as well.
- Our Lenten prayer breakfast continues via Zoom at 8 a.m. on Wednesdays. Join us during Holy Week (a Zoom link will be sent to the ST&G email list or contact Bob Wertz (bobw33862@gmail.com)).

- The Core Ministry Team hosted a coffee hour via Zoom on March 29 (13 people participated).
- The Core Ministry Team is planning a Good Friday observance at 11:30 a.m. on Good Friday. Details will be sent out to the ST&G list.
- On Easter at 12:30 p.m. there will be a "festive brunch" Virtual Coffee Hour. A Zoom link will be sent to the ST&G list during Holy Week, with a reminder Easter morning.
- Our Priest-in-Partnership, Rachel, has produced a YouTube video on Meditation and promises more, helping us learn how to worship in our homes. To view the video, go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A44Thqm40N8>.

The Core Ministry Team has been calling and e-mailing parish members to be sure they feel connected to the parish family and to offer whatever assistance might be needed. Feel free to contact any member of the Core Ministry Team or the Vestry if you need anything: shopping for groceries, other errands, someone to talk with, help with chores that need doing that you can't do (someone will figure out a way to help).

Bishop Shannon has invited her diocesan family to join her for Morning Prayer and Compline daily, and Sunday worship (every day at 8 a.m. and 8 p.m., and Sunday at 11 a.m.). Go to <https://zoom.us/j/531110497> (or dial by phone: [646-876-9923](tel:646-876-9923) , code 531110497#).

LOOKING AHEAD

Here are some of the ideas being discussed for the time when life returns to a "new normal" and we can once again use our buildings and have group gatherings:

- First Sunday back in our church building: We will use the palms that have already been delivered to Barb Brown and have a festive procession into the church building (if it's nice weather) and, regardless of the weather, around the church inside.
- We will plan another public supper, to build on the success of the Harvest Dinner we had last fall.
- Our youth will finally be able to plan an event with Rachel. Some of the ideas under discussion are a field trip to Rachel and Jonathan's farm in Randolph, a rock-climbing outing in Rutland, and/or some kind of service project.
- We will continue a discussion started last fall about planning a "Trail Magic" event at Brandon Gap, setting up in the parking lot to provide food and fellowship for people hiking the Long Trail.
- We can plan for some kind of outdoor worship service.
- We will participate in the Brandon Days celebrations that are being planned by the Brandon Recreation Department and Chamber of Commerce.
- We will finally hold the "parish history" event we've talked about for a few years.

ST&G Google E-mail Group: If you are not currently receiving e-mail announcements via the parish ST&G Google Email Group and would like to, please contact Bob Wertz (bobw33862@gmail.com). This is the main link by which ST&G communicates important information to members and friends of St. Thomas & Grace.

St. Thomas & Grace Episcopal Church

***JOIN US ON SUNDAYS WHEN WE
ONCE AGAIN CAN WORSHIP
TOGETHER IN THE HISTORIC
ST. THOMAS CHURCH***

8 a.m., Holy Eucharist, Rite 2 (no music)

10:00 am, Holy Eucharist, Rite 2

(family-friendly with music, play area in the back of church for younger children)

Telephone: 247-6759

Check out ST&G on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/St.Thomas.Grace>

Website: www.standg.org

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