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2026 Annual Council Issue

Every voice, one song

Annual council convenes in Ridgeland

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On the cover: *Eric Eaton of Chapel of the Cross, Madison, leads a procession out of the 199th Annual Council at St. Andrew's Episcopal School's north campus. Council was held January 30th and 31st in the school's Athletic and Recreation Center. To read more about this year's council, see page 5. Reports from council can be found in the table of contents above. Photo by Jeanie Munn.*

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Bishop's Journal

January 2026

2 – 10 Bishops' Pilgrimage to Israel



11 St. Alban's, Bovina

The first of the two Sunday visitations was with the parish family of St. Alban's, Bovina. On the Sunday on which we commemorate the Baptism of our Lord, we baptized two new members of this household of faith before confirming and receiving 6 others. Together, we grew in reflection on our Baptismal Covenant and how we are all part of the fabric of community that sustains our faith traditions and forms believers for generations to come. So grateful to the St. Alban's parish family for the wonderful welcome and hospitality on this my first Sunday visitation with them!



11 St. Mary's, Bolton

From St. Alban's, it was off to St. Mary's Church, Bolton, to first meet with the worshipping community and then to worship together, exploring and renewing our baptismal covenant together before Eucharist. St. Mary's has a reputation for great musical offerings - and yesterday was no exception, as we were joined by vocalist Jon Christopher Adams, Executive Director of Opera Mississippi, accompanied by Tyler Kemp. A festive Mardi Gras themed reception followed.



12 Bishop's sabbath

13 Staff Meeting

13 Zoom with Convocation Deans

13 Conversation with Bishop Colleague

13 Meetings with Staff Members

14 Mississippi Legislative Prayer Breakfast

14 Staffing – Interviews

14 Staffing – Interviews

15 Conversation with Clergy person

15 Board Meeting

16 Speak at MLK Chapel, St.

Andrew's Lower School

Started out this day sharing the story of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. with the Lower School at Chapel at St. Andrew's Episcopal School. Grateful for the privilege of helping these young students learn about loving one another and being the light. Beautiful singing and music, some birthday blessings, a little 2nd grade basketball fun...a great morning. Thanks to Allison Pleasants Gee for the fabulous photos! #episcopalschools



16 Meeting with Diocese of

Louisiana: Local Formation/ Iona Collaborative

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- 16** Lunch with St. Andrew's Head of School and Dean of St. Andrew's Cathedral
- 16** Meeting with Trustees re: Real Property Matters
- 18** Visitation: Church of the Redeemer, Greenville
A wonderful visitation at Church of the Redeemer, Greenville! This parish family is so welcoming and gracious in sharing with neighbors! Then it was off to Como, for the Celebration of the Rev. Canon Chip Davis' new ministry at Church of the



Holy Innocents!

- 18** Celebration of New Ministry: Church of the Holy Innocents, Como
- 19** Travel to Jackson; Bishop's sabbath
- 20** Staff Meeting
- 20** Meeting with Vestry
- 20** Meetings with Staff Members
- 21** Meeting with Chancellor
- 21** Meeting with Trustees re: Real Property matters
- 21** Meeting with Downtown Partners re: Mural Interviews with Potential Artists
- 22** Catching up on Correspondence
- 23** Bishop Coach Call
- 23** Meeting with Clergy person
- 23** Virtual Meeting with Postulant
- 23** Council Preparation: Videos

- 25** Visitations (Columbus, Starkville) Cancelled Due to Weather
- 26** Bishop's sabbath
- 27** Staff Meeting
- 27** Meetings with Staff Members
- 28** Budget Meeting with Finance Committee and Executive Committee
- 29** Council Preparation
- 30-31** 199th Annual Council

The Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi's Annual Council 2026 has come to a close. So very thankful to our host site, St. Andrew's Episcopal School, our host congregations - The Chapel of the Cross and St. Columb's Episcopal Church, our music leaders and those who made up our Diocesan choir, our Diocesan Altar Guild, our amazing and dedicated Diocesan staff (!!!), our A/V and tech team who nimbly pivoted to allow our North MS friends who still had impassable roads to fully participate in Council via Zoom, and to all of the people of the Diocese who have given so much of themselves for an intense but so important couple of days.

As we shared this precious time together, we delved deeply into our Baptismal Covenant - and what it means when we, in community together, promise to continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers (We

need our time of gathering together to be nourished in Word and Sacrament as communities of faith.); persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever we fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord (We recognize that when we sin, we also mar the image of God in ourselves for the neighbors who encounter us, and our need to seek forgiveness.); proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ (In our lips and in our lives, we tell the story of God's love.); seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves (Do we always seek and serve Christ in our homeless neighbor, our neighbor struggling with addiction, the neighbor with whom it appears that we vehemently disagree?); strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being (Committing ourselves to strive for justice for all of God's people first and foremost requires of us seeing the image and likeness of God in all of our neighbors - perhaps especially the neighbors with whom we perceive we do not agree.).

Right now in our world, I believe we need the ability to see each other as God's children, made in God's image and likeness, and able to stay in

productive conversation and cooperation with one another. That work of Christian cooperation starts with us.

An energy-filled time with our deacons (I'm so sad I didn't get a pic!), and Friday evening's groovin' with Dr. Zarr & The Funk Monsters rounded out a great weekend. Truly, thanks to all for helping to make this an amazing and spirit-filled time!



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WINTER 2025

WINTER SOLSTICE (GRADES 9-12) DEC. 27-JAN. 1

SUMMER 2026

ELEMENTARY (AGES 9-11) JUNE 1-6

SPECIAL 1 (AGES 40+) JUNE 8-13

MIDDLER (AGES 10-13) JUNE 15-20

JUNIOR HIGH (AGES 13-15) JUNE 22-27

PRIMARY (AGES 6-8) JUNE 29-JULY 2

MIXED AGES (AGES 8-14) JULY 6-11

SPECIAL 2 (AGES 18-39) JULY 13-18



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Every voice,

one song

Annual council convenes in Ridgeland

by Wil Oakes

photos by Jeannie Munn

Against the backdrop of a fierce winter storm, Episcopalians from all around the Diocese of Mississippi descended upon St. Andrew's Episcopal School's North Campus in Ridgeland for the 199th Annual Council of the diocese. Expanding on the previous year's theme of "Telling our stories," this year appended the subtitle "Every voice, one song."

The first motion of the meeting, from Canon to the Ordinary Reverend Gary Meade, was to allow a hybrid meeting format—some delegations from the north were still trapped amid ice from the once-in-30-year winter storm. Faithful even under the stress, those churches put in the time to participate in discussions and voting via teleconference. The diocesan family was in tact, even when separated by 100+ miles.

The Revs. Will Compton and CJ Meaders, rectors of host parishes Chapel of the Cross, Madison and St.

Columb's, Ridgeland, welcomed those in the room and on the screens. They took a moment to thank their council co-chairs, Rebecca Haas and Renee Mader, and invited both Ridgeland Mayor Gene McGee and St. Andrew's Head of School Kevin Lewis to extend welcomes of their own.

"St. Andrew's lives daily into our Episcopal values as we welcome, we wonder, we worship, and we love," said Lewis. "We're delighted to once again host annual council, and hope you find our school to be a welcoming and warm place during your time with us."

No opening session of council would be complete without a bishop's address, and Bishop Dorothy Sanders Wells delivered an inspiring message anchored by a response to the recent intentional burning of Beth Israel Congregation, Jackson's only synagogue. That faith community, which was also firebombed in 1967 over its support for desegregation and black communities in general, has long stood shoulder to shoulder with Mississippi Episcopalians in difficult times.

Bishop Wells used those examples to remind us of the five "Will you..." questions in our baptismal covenant and to encourage us to seek unity over division and love over hatred.

"We believe in prayer in the Episcopal Church," she said, "and I ask you to be prayerful people that our hearts may be transformed; that rather than seeing one another as enemies or threats, we begin to see the image and likeness of the Creator in all of us, especially the folks with whom we think we disagree the most."

The bishop also alluded to inspirational Episcopalians from our diocese's past, particularly Bishop John Allin, who stood with Beth Israel in 1967 amid the tumult of the Civil Rights Movement. She concluded her remarks by inviting us to take that inspiration and draw courage from it.

"I ask us to pray that we can tear down the walls that separate us and help eradicate the hatred that divides us. We have big shoes to fill from those who have come before us. Now it is our time to pray that God can help us love one another as God loves us all."

That love flowed freely after the conclusion of the first session, as delegates and friends gathered at Georgia Blue in Madison for food, music, and dancing.

From there, proceedings continued, from the conducting of the business of the diocese to the year's biggest worship service to the joyous reuniting of friends. The ice that had enveloped much of the state only a week before continued to melt, a fitting backdrop to the warmth of friends and neighbors coming together, merging their many voices to sing a song in harmony. 

From top: Council choir leads the delegations in song during the opening service of Evening Prayer; Rev. CJ Meaders (left) and Rev. Will Compton welcome delegates and visitors during the opening business session; Rev. Canon Meade and Bishop Wells lend their voices to the chorus during worship



To watch the complete video of the bishop's address, visit msepiscopalian.com/bishops-address



Bishop Wells's 2025 Official Acts

100 Sermons and Addresses

15 Baptisms

229 Confirmations

32 Received

31 Reaffirmed

0 Ordinations to the Transitional Diaconate

1 Ordinations to the Priesthood

1 Ordinations to the Vocational Diaconate

247 Office Conferences and Appointments

120 Diocesan Conferences and Meetings

44 Other Conferences and Meetings
(Univ. of South, All Saints' School, House of
Bishops, etc.)

7 Other Calls

33 Community and State Conferences and
Meetings



Report of the Registrar 2025

Ordained to the Priesthood:

Gabrielle "Gabbie" Annelise Munn, 10/24/2025 by The Rt. Rev. Dorothy Sanders Wells at St. Columb's, Ridgeland

Ordained to Transitional Diaconate:

None

Ordained to the Vocational Diaconate

Adele Blair Ledford, 6/21/2025 by The Rt. Rev. Dorothy Sanders Wells at St. Andrew's Cathedral, Jackson

Dimissory Received:

Ezgi S. Perkins, 5/5/25 from the Diocese of Wisconsin
Patrick Perkins, 5/5/25 from the Diocese of Wisconsin
Jennifer S. Holder, 12/1/25 from the Diocese of Northwest Texas

Dimissory Issued:

Brian Ponder, 9/1/2025 to Diocese of Kentucky
Austin McGehee, 10/26/2025 to Diocese of New York
Jenny Newman, 11/1/2025 to Diocese of South Carolina
Chris Robinson, 11/15/2025 to Diocese of West Tennessee
Liz Goodyear Jones, 12/10/25 to Diocese of Central Florida

Changes in the Diocese:

Tami Roessler, 2/23/2025 to Non-parochial
Rick Roessler, 2/23/2025 to Non-parochial
Tami Roessler, 3/22/2025 to St. Alban's, Bovina; Christ Church, Vicksburg; and St. Mary's, Vicksburg
Joe Porter, 4/2/2025 to Advent Sumner
Duncan Gray, III, 6/1/2025 to Non-parochial
Marie Smith, 7/1/2025 to St. Philip's, Jackson
Karl Schaffenburg, 8/1/2025 to Incarnation, West Point
Austin McGehee, 8/31/2025 to Rhinebeck, New York
Taylor Moore, 9/15/2025 to St. Peter's, Oxford

Christopher Powell, 9/15/2025 to Non-parochial
Wayne Ray, 10/5/2025 to Non-parochial
Myron Lockey, 9/28/25 to Non-parochial
Brad St. Romain, 10/12/25 to St Thomas, Diamondhead
Jenny Newman, 10/31/25 to Non-parochial
Jennifer Holder, 11/2/25 to Ascension, Hattiesburg
Chip Davis, 11/30/25 to Holy Innocent's, Como
Katie Sorey, 12/31/25 to Non-parochial
Harriet Simmons, 12/24/25 to St. Paul's, Meridian
Andy Andrews, 12/31/25 to Non-parochial

Died:

The Rev. Kathleen Kirkland Potts, 3/11/2025
The Rev. Dcn. Susan Disharoon, 7/6/2025
The Rev. Julia Gilbert Moore, 7/6/2025
The Rev. Helen Whitener Tester, 8/3/2025
The Very Rev. James Beauregard "Bo" Roberts, 10/4/2025

Retired:

Penny Sisson, 1/6/2025 to reside in Oxford, MS
Jan Moore, 6/30/2025 to reside in Hattiesburg, MS
Billy Walton, 7/7/2025 to Retired

Licensed:

Jane Alexander (Western Louisiana)
Michael Barham (California)
Geoffrey Butcher (Kentucky)
Sarah H. Gaede (Alabama)
Hugh 'Scoop' Jones, (East Tennessee)
Jack Rogers (West Tennessee)
Brad St. Romain (Texas)
Morris Thompson (House of Bishops)

Peggy Jones, Registrar

Lay Worship Leaders

CANON 18 SECTION 1. The Bishop of this Diocese shall determine which of those categories of licensed lay ministers authorized by Title III, Canon 4, of the National Canons of the Episcopal Church are to be licensed in this diocese. Individuals shall not be licensed until they have completed that education and training required by Title III, Canon 4, and by such additional training as the Bishop may require.

CENTRAL CONVOCATION

Brandon, St. Luke's: Eleanor H. Smith.

Brandon, St. Peter's: Jerry M. Chambers, Ross Hartford, Diane Jackson, Cheryl Kirchner, Lisa Maisel, Harry Perdue.

Canton, Grace: Bobby B. DeLaughter, Marian Durfey, Percy Durfey, Jr., Holly D. Wallace.

Jackson, St. Andrew's: Marilyn Beach, Ann Homer Cook, William Howard, Jr., Margaret McLarty.

Jackson, St. James': Mary Jane Duncan.

Jackson, St. Mark's: LaWanda Washington.

Jackson, St. Philip's: Jill Cole Bullard, Pam David, Fonda Devrow, Chad R. Espeland, Julie Breland Goforth, Lester Hailey, II, Anne Mollere, A. Frederick Parker, Ralph E. Sebrell, Pat S. Sebrell.

Madison, Chapel of the Cross: Ray Balentine, Charles C. Barlow, Jr., Lena Barlow, Bill Buhner, Margaret Buhner, Ellen Fisher Durst, Eric Eaton, Patricia Evans, Rebecca Herren, Stanley Herren, Sloan McKellar, Pamela Manor, Ruby Medlin, Kenny Parker, Robert Pooley, Debbie Sones.

Ridgeland, St. Columb's: Marion Gordon Stewart, III.

Terry, Good Shepherd: Kathryn Hardy, Anna Lee, Edward J. Peters, Wava Peters.

COAST CONVOCATION

Diamondhead, St. Thomas: Joy Jennings.

Gautier, St. Pierre's: Nathan Dale Ledford, Ben Thornton.

Gulfport, St. Peter: Ann E. Milstead.

Long Beach, St. Patrick's: Laureli Latimer, Douglas MacCullagh, Jason M. Trumble.

Pascagoula, St. John's: Chester Dobrowski, Robert McDonald.

Picayune, St. Paul's: Patrick M. Rutherford.

COLDWATER CONVOCATION

Olive Branch, Holy Cross: Darlene Stanley.

Oxford, St. Peter's: Barbara (Babs) B. Fowler, Donald Newlin, Mary A. Nichols, Ed Sisson.

Southaven, St. Timothy: Barbara H. Jones, John Clayton Karcher, Judith R. Riley.

DELTA CONVOCATION

Cleveland, Calvary: Lee Aylward, Steven Craddock, Keith Pettway.

Greenville, St. James': Ashley Hines, Dotti Lowe.

Greenville, Redeemer: Charles F. Strange.

Greenwood, Nativity: Cameron Abel, Billy B. Bowman, Pam Powers, Charlot Ray.

Indianola, St. Stephen's: David B. Allen, Frederick W. Barrier, Woods Eastland, Thomas G. Gresham, Walton Gresham III, Evan Griffin, Richard G. Noble, Joseph Seldon Van Cleve.

Leland, St. John's: Dot Meeks.

Sumner, Advent: Donna Bryant.

Yazoo City, Trinity: Kay Mills.

OLD RIVER CONVOCATION

Natchez, Trinity: Kathleen M. Bond, Adam T. Gwin, Bruce M. Scarborough.

Port Gibson, St. James: Kathryn Bilbro.

Vicksburg, Christ Church: Brenda Benway, David Benway, Michael J. Chaney, Betsy Harbaugh, Janie Harrison, Jim Miller, Sharon S. Miller, Bryan S. Owens, Corrine H. Stockton.

Vicksburg, St. Alban's: Carolyn Gent Burton, Richard Price, David Pruet, Dawn Rickard, Elizabeth Selby, Thomas L. Skinner, Harvey, Smith, Jr., Sarah Ann Tompkins.

Vicksburg, Holy Trinity: Victoria K. Abraham, Beverly Rice, Patricia P. Smith, Garrett A. Wallace.

Vicksburg, St. Mary's: Linda Tolliver.

SOWASHEE CONVOCATION

Collins, St. Elizabeth's: Don Corban, Debbie Hux, Sandi Kegerreis.

Columbia, St. Stephen's: John E. Hales, Ann Atkinson Simmons.

Hattiesburg, Trinity: Chris Creech.

Laurel, St. John's: Eugene M. Harlow, Byron Myrick, Jennifer Jo Myrick, Ollis Keith Rushing.

Meridian, Mediator: Nancy Boyd Boswell, Ann Glazar, Louise K. Rawson, Michael Van Veckhoven, Katie Watkins.

TOMBIGBEE CONVOCATION

Aberdeen, St. John's: David Houston, III.

Columbus, Good Shepherd: Geoffrey Fish.

Columbus, St. Paul's: Douglas N. Crowe.

Tupelo, All Saints': Nathan Duncan, Albert F. White.

West Point, Incarnation: Rufus Ward, Jr.



The Rev. CJ Meaders with his daughter, acolyte Ava Meaders, on the floor of council. Photo by Jeanie Munn.

The Rev. Patrick Sanders (left), rector of St.-Peter's-by-the-Sea, Gulfport, has a moment of fun for the camera while waiting to process behind the Rev. Les Hegwood, rector of St. Philip's, Jackson. Photo by Jeanie Munn.



Council elections



Treasurer: Melissa Calcote, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Meridian, Sowashee Convocation



Trustee of the Diocese: Mike Strojny, St. Mark's, Gulfport, Coast Convocation



Trustee of the University of the South (Sewanee), Clergy: The Rev. Andrew McLarty, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Columbus, Tombigbee Convocation



Executive Committee: The Rev. Jane Bearden, St. Patrick's Episcopal Church, Long Beach, Coast Convocation



Executive Committee: The Rev. Jennifer Southall, St. Peter's Episcopal Church, Oxford, Coldwater Convocation



Executive Committee: Geoffrey Lewis, St. Peter's-by-the-Sea, Gulfport, Coast Convocation



Executive Committee: Linda Tolliver, St. Mary's, Vicksburg, Old River Convocation



Standing Committee: Susan Lee, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Indianola, Delta Convocation



Standing Committee: The Rev. Tom Fanning, Chapel of the Cross, Madison, Central Convocation



**Disciplinary Board: Eric Eaton,
Chapel of the Cross, Madison,
Central Convocation**



**Disciplinary Board: Davis Frye,
Chapel of the Cross, Madison,
Central Convocation**



**Disciplinary Board: The Rev. Will
Compton, Chapel of the Cross,
Madison, Central Convocation**



**Disciplinary Board: The Rev. Mary
Howard King, St. John's Episcopal
Church, Aberdeen and All Saints'
Episcopal Church, Inverness**



**General Convention Deputy: The
Rev. Annie Elliott of St. Andrew's
Episcopal School, Central
Convocation**



**General Convention Deputy:
The Very Rev. Stephen Kidd
of St. Mark's, Gulfport, Coast
Convocation**



**General Convention Deputy: The
Rev. Gabbie Munn of St. Columb's,
Central Convocation**



**General Convention Deputy: The
Rev. Marie Smith, St. Philip's
Episcopal Church, Central
Convocation**



**General Convention Deputy: Gray
Fowler, St. Peter's Episcopal
Church, Coldwater Convocation**

Council elections



General Convention Deputy:
Geoffrey Lewis, St. Peter's-by-the-Sea, Gulfport, Coast Convocation



General Convention Deputy:
Margaret McLarty, St. Andrew's Cathedral, Jackson, Central Convocation



General Convention Deputy: Katy Pacelli, St. Peter's-by-the-Lake, Brandon, Central Convocation



General Convention Alternate:
The Rev. Geoff Evans of St. James', Jackson, Central Convocation (first)



General Convention Alternate:
Very Rev. Anne Maxwell of St. Andrew's Cathedral, Jackson, Central Convocation (second)



General Convention Alternate:
Leigh Grady, St. James' Episcopal Church, Jackson, Central Convocation (first)



General Convention Alternate:
Ed Sisson, St. Peter's Episcopal Church, Coldwater Convocation (second)



General Convention Alternate:
Sarah Smith, St. Andrew's Cathedral, Jackson, Central Convocation (third)

Something deep & powerful & frightening

One man’s personal journey with the Church, from estrangement to reconciliation

by Ed Oliver (originally published June 2025)

In 1968, when I was twenty years old, I left the Catholic Church and began a twenty-year hiatus from Christianity and in some ways from God. It had been made clear to me that in the eyes of that Church the man I had been created to be was “unacceptable;” that the ways I expressed my love for another person were mortal sins and that my only hope for salvation was celibacy. Since I was already deeply in love and in a committed relationship with another man, I chose him and my true self over the church.

Over the next decade, my anger towards “Christians” and towards God grew to an actual hatred of organized religion and a deep bitterness, sadness, and woundedness where God was concerned. The little boy who loved Sunday School and said prayers every night; the shy, introverted and shamed teenager; and the young man who loved the liturgy, music and seasonal celebrations of the church were gone. In their place was a man who went through the next two decades with a hole in his soul, attempting to fill that hole with work; romantic “encounters;” and a repertoire of sarcastic remarks, jokes, and stories about the absurdity of religion.

Who needed the church and organized religion anyway. I had fled Mississippi as so many of my gay generation had done and was enjoying a wide circle of friends, a successful career and all of the benefits of living the “Rocky Mountain



A young Ed Oliver, around the time of his separation from the Church.

High” in Denver. There were restaurants and bars and discotheques; skiing and hiking; operas, symphonies and concerts in Red Rocks Amphitheater and an endless supply of handsome and available men. Who needed boring sermons, judgmental and self-righteous people who condemned you and televangelists threatening you with Hell's fire just for being who you were.

Then in 1980 a dark and menacing force began to surface in the gay community, striking down young, beautiful and talented men as they shrank into cadaverous figures reminiscent of the inmates of the concentration camps of Nazi Germany. As the months and years went by thousands and thousands of gay men suffered cruel and untimely deaths, often rejected by their families and depending only on their partners and friends. It did not have a real name at first except for Gay-Related Immune Deficiency until science discovered the true nature of the disease and named it AIDS. By that time it was affecting other people with no connection to the gay community. I stopped counting when twenty-two friends and acquaintances had died.

For completely unrelated reasons at forty I moved back to Mississippi and what I found here was appalling. Yes, there were young gay men dying of AIDS but there were no care teams, support groups or assistance of any kind. There as not even a hospice until Whispering Pines Nursing Home opened a few beds to men in the last stages of the disease, most of whom were bedridden or nearly so. I did find there a place to volunteer but it was generally just to sit at the bedside and listen to the sad stories of men who had been abandoned by their families; who had no place to live; and men who were afraid they were going to Hell. Nice work, Christians.

By that time I had begun working with and become friends with a woman, Carol, who had been reared as a Southern Baptist but who had left that denomination and was attending an Episcopal Church. She had a beloved brother who was dying of AIDS with whom she was very close and she, like thousands of other sisters, was devastated.

Shortly after her brother's death Carol told me that her church, St. Andrew's Episcopal Cathedral, was forming an AIDS Care Team and she asked if I would want to join. At first I thought she was kidding...a church... a church in the

South... was going to minister to gay men dying of AIDS? I had actually heard of dying men being surrounded on their death beds by family and church members begging for them to repent and be saved before they died. There was even one such case at Baptist Hospital in Jackson where that happened to acquaintance of mine.

I went to the organizational meeting of the St. Andrew's AIDS Care Team and was met by genuinely kind and concerned people who were not out to convert anyone but only to provide what services they could to those in the Jackson area who, in fact, were dying. There seemed to be no judgement, no condemnation, no ulterior motive in these people; just a genuine desire to show compassion and love. I had fallen through the looking glass.

There were a few people for whom we began to deliver meals, visit, do laundry, take to doctor's appointments and pick up medicine and I grew to respect and even like some of the team members. But, hey—a few weeks of that could not dispel decades of suspicion, anger and resentment.

Not too long after the formation of the team, a member of the team who was HIV+ developed full blown AIDS and died very quickly. It was a shock to everyone and Carol asked if I would like to attend his funeral at St. Andrew's the next week. I had been to a few AIDS funerals in the past, both in Denver and in Mississippi and they were universally awful. The family of origin and the family of affiliation sat on opposite sides of the funeral home as most AIDS funerals were not allowed in churches and the minister would address only the family of origin with no mention of the deceased's real family and who he really was.

I agreed to go as a sign of respect for “Bill” and I rode with Carol. When we pulled up in front of the Governor's Mansion I was in disbelief. The entire compliment of four clergy were vested, there was a crucifer, torches, a full choir and a crowd of people. As a team Member I had never been inside the nave but only attended two meetings in the parish hall and as we sat in our pew I was impressed by the architectural beauty of the place, the stained glass windows, the beautiful music and the homily that actually addressed “Bill” for who he was, how much he would be missed and how much he was loved. This had to be a cult, I thought.

When it came time for communion, I did not want people to have to stumble over my legs or step on my feet,

so I followed Carol up to the altar and took the bread and wine for the first time in twenty years. When I got back to my seat there was a lump in my throat and tears in my eyes. (My eyes sting and my throat tightens even as I type the memory.) Something had happened... something deep and powerful and frightening. Consequently, I did not go back for six months.

Eventually Carol told me that there was an Inquirer's Class starting up in the spring on Sunday afternoons in the Chapel of St. Andrew's. She didn't insist that I go and told me that if I did go and didn't care for it, I need never go back. The rest, as the cliché goes, is history.

I basically threw myself into any group or ministry I could until one day about two years later I realized that I had been at church or at some church-related meeting or function five of the last seven days. I told myself I could not make up for twenty years of spiritual neglect in two years' time.

I have been a member of St. Andrew's now for thirty-four years. There were some disconcerting "situations" in the beginning such as when I first started serving chalice and heard "through the grapevine" that some parishioners would not come to me for communion because I was gay and probably had AIDS. For the most part, however, I have found genuine loving and caring people who love me just as I am and see no need for conversion or forgiveness for me just being who I am.

The only other echo of the past was after my father died in 1997 when I felt the call to be a Vocational Deacon in the church and asked the Dean to put together a discernment committee to guide me through the process to determine if the call was genuine or just a reaction to grief. I knew that at the time I would not be eligible for ordination because of the canons of the church but I wanted my church family to affirm or not that God was calling me to collared ministry.

The discernment committee submitted their findings to the Vestry. There were two parts to the report which was far from ordinary—a unanimous vote of 8-0 that my calling was, in their opinion, genuine; but by a vote of 6 for-2 they could not recommend to the Vestry that I be referred to the bishop because of my sexuality. I was not naïve enough to think that ordination was possible at the time but, still, I wanted my "family" to think me worthy of a collar.

As time has passed, much about the issues of sexuality

and the Episcopal Church have changed. The church now ordains gay and lesbian deacons and priests and blesses and sanctifies the Sacrament of Marriage for same sex couples. In some small way I would like to think that my story has made that possible. 🙏

His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be visible through him. John 9:2-3



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Farewell Bishop Gray!

Nativity, Water Valley sends their vicar off with a bang

Originally published July 2025

On Pentecost Sunday, June 8, 2025, the congregation at Nativity, Water Valley, gathered to say farewell to a VIV (Very Important Vicar). Bishop Duncan M. Gray, III, has served in that post since 2022 as part of a semi-retirement. His wife, Kathy, has also taken on leadership roles in the church in the altar and flower guilds.

The Gray family was transported from church to a lovely reception via “Beethoven,” a 1974 Volkswagen bus owned by church member Liz Reynolds.

The reception, attended by many family, friends, and local community figures, featured food by Six Peas Catering and church members. Music was offered by The Mississippi Choral Artists from Oxford, who performed a moving rendition of “We Shall Overcome,” and Effie Burt, a locally renowned jazz and blues artist who performed an original song she wrote for the occasion. The musical portion of the program ended with church members Eddie Wood and Dawn Denham performing “God Be With You 'til We Meet Again”.

The Church had previously presented a processional cross, inscribed in honor of Gray, and new communion vessels in honor of Kathy Gray at the June 1 service. An original painting of the Nativity stained glass window painted by church member Hannah McCormick was presented to Duncan and Kathy at the June 8 reception. 🏡







Fellow pilgrims

Cursillo sparks questions, holds surprises

by Annie Oeth (originally published November 2025)

Going into Cursillo, I had questions. Every prospective Cursillista does.

What's it like? Are there trust falls and a ropes course? Will it be an epiphany or just a weekend away for worship and fellowship?

Future Cursillistas should know that there's not a great deal of information out there about what to expect. When I asked friends at my home parish about their experiences, they said, "Well, you'll just have to find out for yourself."

Pre-Cursillo 139, that was frustrating. Post Cursillo 139, I get it.

Cursillo, short course on Christianity, is light on details because each one is different. Each Cursillista is unique. The blend of Cursillistas, cha-chas and rectors change with every Cursillo, so the chemistry and interactions are never the same. And then there is the Holy Spirit, which moves in ways we can't predict.

While every Cursillo will have study, worship, prayer and singing, each is a weekend unlike any other.

Every Cursillista needs to come to Cursillo with an open mind and open heart and be ready to be surprised, because there will be surprises. If I revealed what those are, then they wouldn't be surprises. Spoiler alert: At no time was there a trust fall or a ropes course.

I came into Cursillo expecting to make friends, and I

did. When my fellow Cursillistas and I run into each other, there are hugs, and we look forward to the times we meet for Fourth Day and Ultreya. With friends who have taken part in earlier Cursillos, there is now a bond that fellow pilgrims share.

Many of the surprises that a Cursillista will find are within themselves. For me, it was how, after a weekend away from television, internet and my cell phone, that I wanted the quiet of study and worship.

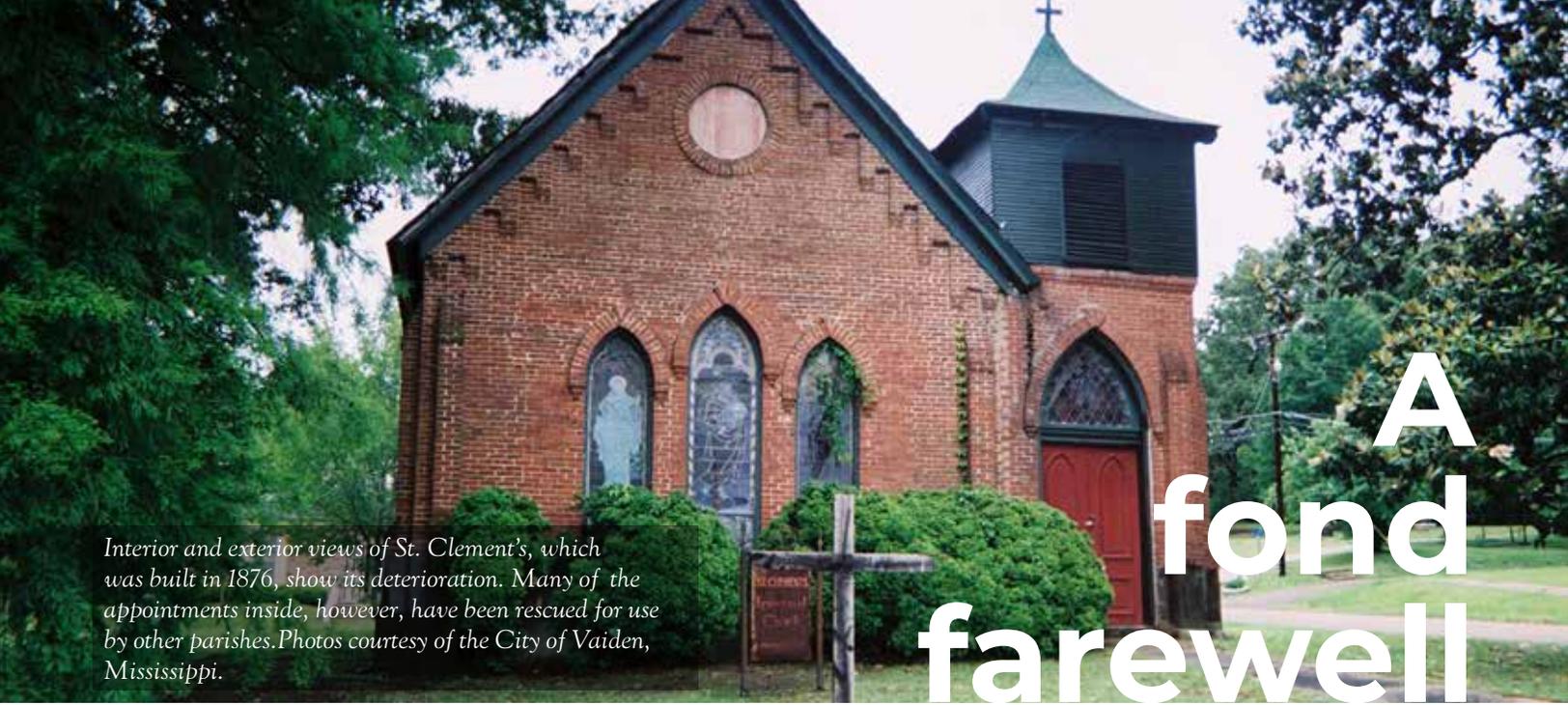
A month later, and I'm reading the Daily Office most days and looking forward to that time of study, praise and prayer. At work, I'll find a quiet spot for a prayer at lunchtime. I now look for less noise and more peace, less scrolling and more real-life connections.

Another surprise is the love experienced and the connections among everyone there. We're still unable to fully fathom the love of God, but Cursillistas do get a better understanding of it.

Post Cursillo, worship at my home parish is deeper, and connections to my church family are stronger.

A weekend at Cursillo goes by fast, and it is surprising how we were wanting it to last a little longer. Each of us has jobs, homes and families we love, but the time at Camp Bratton Green at Cursillo recharged us and refreshed us in unexpected ways.

Those who come into Cursillo with questions will likely still have questions. Cursillo can whet your desire to learn more about Christ, and those on the Cursillo path often learn enough to know they want to learn more. 



Interior and exterior views of St. Clement's, which was built in 1876, show its deterioration. Many of the appointments inside, however, have been rescued for use by other parishes. Photos courtesy of the City of Vaiden, Mississippi.

A fond farewell

Originally published May 2025

Conversations between the Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi and the Town of Vaiden have been ongoing for some time now, contemplating a conveyance of St. Clement's Church to the Town for its use as a community center. Because worship and other ministry at St. Clement's ended years ago, its conveyance would not result in the displacement of a worshipping community. Rather, giving prayerful consideration to a conveyance to the Town was a reflection of the Diocese's stewardship of an historic property and exploration of how to best care for it without allowing it to fall into complete ruin. By placing the building in the hands of a party interested in ensuring its preservation in the community, we would also ensure the preservation of its history.

The Trustees of the Diocese and the Standing Committee voted in favor of the conveyance. In furtherance of the conveyance, Bishop Wells officiated the deconsecration (secularization) of St. Clement's on Friday, April 25, at 11:00 a.m. Some of St. Clement's appointments—pews, hymn boards and the presider's chair—were gifted to Chapel of the Cross, Rolling Fork, continuing their holy use in that church as it is rebuilt after having been hit by a devastating tornado in 2023.

We are grateful for the interest of the town of Vaiden in continuing the use of this property to enhance the life and work of the town, and prayerful that the property will continue to serve that community for years to come. 

The deconsecration of St. Clement's, Vaiden, brings the opportunity for preservation and new life



Let there be

light

Bratton-Green gets a ‘glow up’ thanks to the work of the CBG Alumni Association

by Rev. CJ Meaders (originally published June 2025)

The Camp Bratton Green Alumni Association is an organization of members who love CBG and seek to fulfill our mission to enhance the CBG experience and provide support for its needs. We depend completely on the gracious charity of our members, and, over the years, we've done some amazing things together! In fact, the CBG Alumni Association has a proud legacy of supporting camp for over 20 years.

For example, last year the Alumni Association built a Gaga Pit (ask your kids and grandkids) which is the largest in the state of Mississippi! In addition, each year the Alumni Association identifies projects to enhance CBG and rallies volunteers at our Work Weekends. Past projects have included: replacing wooden benches at the outdoor chapel and elsewhere, creating a beginner's disc golf course near the Arts N' Crafts shack, and stripping and waxing tile floors.

This year, we are excited to share the completion of our Annual Project to upgrade the lighting at Camp

Bratton Green! Our original plan was to upgrade the lighting in the Chapel of the Holy Family to more energy efficient LED lighting. Thanks be to God we were able not only to upgrade the lighting in the Chapel but also the exterior lighting surrounding all central buildings on campus because of a gracious offer from Entergy power to cover most of the expense. So, if you are fortunate enough to spend an evening at CBG this summer, you'll be sure to notice brightness of CBG campus which could only be exceeded by the brightness of a camper's smile!

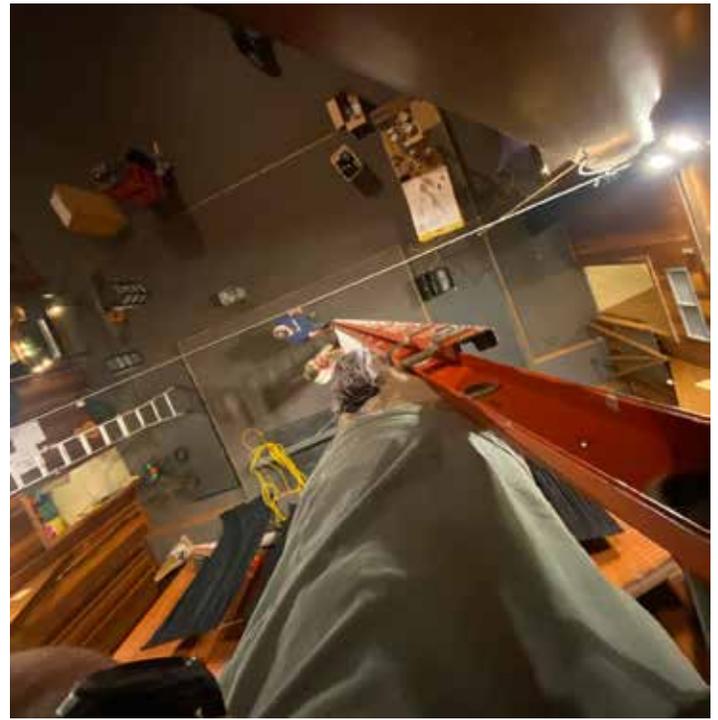
In addition, we were also able to support the directors of each CBG camp session this summer by offering 1k toward their supply budgets. This will help the directors get the supplies they need to have as much fun as possible each day at camp! Finally, we recently also extended an Amazon Wish List to the Permanent Staff to boost their budget for activities as well!

We'd like to give a HUGE thank you to all our members whose donations have made this all possible. Because of your continued generosity, the CBG Alumni Association is poised to continue its mission to enhance CBG well into the future. If you'd like to be a part of our efforts, you can find out more about us at cbgalumni.org. 🌟

Thanks and have a great summer out at CBG!

Rev. CJ Meaders

Former President, CBG Alumni Association



Facing page: Bratton-Green's central campus, featuring the warm glow of ultra-efficient LED lighting on its walkways. From top left: Volunteers had to scale treacherous heights to reach the aging light fixtures in the ceiling of the Chapel of the Holy Family; the (not for the faint) bird's eye view from the apex; the new brightly (and efficiently) lit chapel interior; the exteriors of the Rec Pavilion, Admin Building, and Dining Hall illuminate the pool area facing Rose Hill Lake.





Breathing deep



A conversation with St. Andrew's Cathedral Canon for Music Jessica Nelson

Originally published December 2025

Jessica Nelson holds degrees in music and liturgy from Millsaps College (2005) and Seabury-Western Theological Seminary (2009) and the Colleague Certificate from the American Guild of Organists. She has directed the Mississippi Conference on Church Music and Liturgy, served on the board of the Association of Anglican Musicians, and served two triennia on the Episcopal Church's Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music. Prior to her call to St. Andrew's, Jessica was organist/choirmaster at All Saints' Episcopal Church in Tupelo and taught on the faculties of the University of North Alabama and Northeast Mississippi Community College. She is the editor of Church Publishing's 2022 *Ponder Anew: Conversations in 21st Century Church Music*, a collection of essays, interviews, and sermons focussed on the changing landscape of church music. Her published works are available from St. James Music Press, Paraclete Press, and Selah Publishing. She sat down with TME editor Wil Oakes to discuss church music, organs, and the joy of taking part in liturgy.

TME: So, for starters, tell me how you found your way to a career as an organist.

JN: So, my undergrad degree is in piano performance, and I took organ as a second instrument, just because I thought that if I could learn enough to play hymns, I could substitute places and earn money. I was not good at it. I was not disciplined. I never practiced. But then I wound up going to seminary for a sacred music degree, and was the organ scholar there in the chapel at Seabury, and played maybe 10 to 12 services every week and just really grew to love it a lot. And people think that organ and piano are so similar, but, you know, aside from the keyboard, they're really not. The piano is a percussion instrument and organ is a wind instrument, so you just approach them in completely different ways, but they're a lot of fun to play.

TME: Tell me a bit about the organ at St. Andrew's.

JN: Our organ is an Aeolian Skinner, and at the time it was built, they were the most important, the best American builder based out of Boston. There aren't very many in Mississippi, I think just maybe one or two others. This one was originally built in the 60s and

replaced an instrument that I think was acquired from a movie theater—we had a theater organ! and then this replaced that in the 60s. In the early 90s, it was revised, which means that a builder came in and did a lot of once a century kind of maintenance, and replaced a lot of the mechanical portions. It got a new console at that point.

TME: And the console is the part you actually play?

JN: Yeah, the console is just the keyboards. And what you see is just the tip of the iceberg. The organ is all over the building, including under the floor—the pipes you see, the pipes you don't see, like all kinds of wiring and tubes and whatnot. So the console was replaced them, and some digital stops were added at that point as well.

TME: So it's partly mechanical and partly electronic?

JN: Some organs are totally mechanical. Those are called tracker organs. So when you press a key, it activates a series of levers which goes directly to the pipe. Our organ is electropneumatic, which means that it's based on electrical impulses. So if I press a key or press a button, it's like synapses firing, which eventually get to the pipe and allow it to speak.

TME: It's cool to think about the pipes being under the floors and all around the building. Almost like the entire building is the instrument.

JN: We don't actually have any pipes under the floor, but the blower is under the floor, and you access it through the sacristy. And when you turn the organ on and you hear the blower come on, it's like the whole building is like sucking up its breath, getting ready to sing.

TME: Oh, that's interesting you use that word. It's like it's another member of the choir.

JN: Absolutely, because organs mimic the human voice better than any other instrument. If you play a piano, the note starts decaying immediately. If you play guitar, the note starts decaying immediately. And that doesn't mean that they don't have their place, but if you play the organ, the note sustains and supports congregational singing. They're awfully expensive, of course, but they're these feats of engineering and architecture and music, and without them, not only would the church not sound the same, it literally wouldn't look the same.

TME: Tell me about what it's like for you personally playing at services.

JN: Without being super cheesy about it,

accompanying hymns, I think is my most important job here. Helping the congregation sing. Which is good, because it's like my favorite thing in the whole entire world to do. When you've got this room full of people that are all breathing in at the same time, you know, that's pretty incredible.

TME: Do you get feedback from the congregation often?

JN: Yeah, that's always really lovely to hear. You know, when somebody tells me that something is their favorite hymn or they sang it at some special service, like a funeral or a wedding. I love it when people come and tell me things. Love it. I let kids come play the organ after church—there's nothing they can do to break it that can't be easily fixed!

TME: What are some of your very favorite hymns or even just pieces to play?

JN: My favorite hymn of all time is “King of glory, king of peace.” I really love Bach. I mean, that's super predictable. I really love promoting new works by living composers, by women and people of color and other underrepresented folks.

TME: Can we get some recommendations?

JN: For sure! 

The subtitle of this article has been updated to reflect Nelson's new title at St. Andrew's Cathedral.

Hear some of Jessica's music suggestions on either Apple Music or Spotify!



Apple Music
[msepiscopalian.com/
tme-jams-apple](https://msepiscopalian.com/tme-jams-apple)



Spotify
[msepiscopalian.com/
tme-jams-spotify](https://msepiscopalian.com/tme-jams-spotify)

Deployment Report

Faithful Departed

Please submit Faithful Departed notices to your church for submission.

Churches seeking full or part-time clergy

Redeemer, Biloxi
Redeemer, Brookhaven
Calvary, Cleveland
Ascension, Hattiesburg
Trinity, Natchez
St. Paul's, Meridian
Resurrection, Starkville
Holy Trinity, Vicksburg
Church of the Nativity, Water Valley

Churches seeking supply clergy

Good Shepherd, Columbus
Christ Church, Holly Springs
All Saints, Jackson
St. Christopher's, Jackson
St. Mark's, Jackson
St. Matthew's, Kosciusko
Calvary, Michigan City
St. James, Port Gibson
Church of the Good Shepherd, Terry
Holy Trinity, Vicksburg
Church of the Nativity, Water Valley

Questions about deployment should be directed to
The Rev. Canon Gary Meade, Canon to the Ordinary,
gmeade@dioms.org; 601-948-5954 x114.

Jean Smith Vaughan, 79, communicant of St. Philip's, Jackson, died January 23, 2025.
Jeffrey "Jeff" Alan Klingfuss, 70, communicant of St. Philip's, Jackson, died January 30, 2025.
Patricia "Trish" Allen McBride, 81, communicant of Holy Innocents', Como, died February 12, 2025.
David Huff McBride, 87, communicant of Holy Innocents', Como, died February 25, 2025.
Mary Ann Everett, 76, communicant of St. Philip's, Jackson, died March 5, 2025.
Marilyn Akins Brookes, 80, communicant of St. Philip's, Jackson, died March 22, 2025.
Linda Joyce Noble Gilliland, 87, communicant of St. Philip's, Jackson, died April 9, 2025.
Janella "Jan" Magee Evers, 86, communicant of St. Philip's, Jackson, died May 5, 2025.
Grace Dove Duckworth, 80, communicant of St. Philip's, Jackson, died July 10, 2025.
Jon Rayner Meyer, 77, communicant of St. Philip's, Jackson, died August 10, 2025.
Billie Rhe Kern Pudas, 99, communicant of St. Elizabeth's, Collins, died August 24, 2025.
Herbert "Herb" Watson Jones, 87, communicant of St. Alban's, Bovina, died September 19, 2025.
Birdie Shaw Warren, 31, communicant of St. Philip's, Jackson, died October 1, 2025.
Judith "Judy" Ann Dunn Barnes, 77, a founding member of St. Alexis, Jackson, long time parish administrator at Chapel of the Cross, Madison, and member of St. Philip's, Jackson, died January 16, 2026.

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Diocesan Calendar

February

- 20-22** Staff Training for Happening #100, St. Andrew's, Jackson
- 22** Bishop Wells visits St. Andrew's, Jackson
- 22** Bishop Wells visits St. Stephen's, Indianola
- 27-1** Young Adult Retreat, Camp Bratton-Green

March

- 1** Annual Parochial Report Due
- 1** Credentials of Delegates/Alternates to Annual Council Due
- 1** Diocesan Undergraduate Scholarship Applications Due
- 1** Bishop Wells visits St. Pierre, Gautier
- 3** Small Churches Collaborative, Zoom, 2:00-3:00pm
- 5** Beloved Community Monthly Gathering, 12:00 noon
- 5** Finance Committee, Allin House, 11:30am – 2:30pm
- 6-8** Happening #100, St. Andrew's Cathedral, Jackson
- 8** Bishop Wells visits St. Peter's, Brandon, 8:00 and 10:30
- 12** Executive Committee & Cathedral Chapter, St. Andrew's, Jackson, 10:30am – 3:30pm
- 15** Bishop Wells visits St. Patrick's, Long Beach
- 16** The Mississippi Episcopalian April deadline
- 17-24** Spring House of Bishops, Camp Allen, Navasota, TX
- 20-21** A. C. Marble School, Solomon Center
- 26** Trustees, Allin House, 1:00-4:00pm
- 27-29** Jr. High DOY, Gray Center
- 27-28** Commission on Ministry
- 28** Standing Committee, 9:30am-3:30pm
- 29** Palm Sunday
- 29** Bishop Wells visits St. Paul's, Columbus
- 29** Bishop Wells visits St. Mary's, Lexington

Submission deadlines—next six months
(always available at
msepiscopalian.com/submissions)

April 2026 issue

March 16, 2026

May 2026 issue

April 15, 2026

June 2026 issue

May 15, 2026

July 2026 issue

June 15, 2026

August 2026 issue

July 15, 2026

September 2026 issue

August 17, 2026

April

- 2** Beloved Community Monthly Gathering, 12:00 noon
- 3** Good Friday
- 3** Bishop Wells visits Chapel of the Cross, Madison
- 4** Holy Saturday
- 4** Bishop Wells visits, St. Philip's, Jackson
- 5** Easter Sunday
- 5** Bishop Wells visits St. Andrew's, Jackson
- 7** Small Churches Collaborative, Zoom, 2:00-3:00pm
- 8** Bishop Wells visits St. Andrew's Upper School, Ridgeland
- 8** Bishop Wells visits, St. Andrew's Middle School, Ridgeland
- 10-11** A. C. Marble School
- 10** Bishop Wells visits St. Andrew's Lower School, Jackson
- 12** Bishop Wells visits Trinity, Pass Christian
- 15** The Mississippi Episcopalian May deadline
- 17-18** Small Church Conference, All Saints, Grenada
- 19** Bishop Wells visits St. Peter's, Oxford
- 21** Bishop Wells visits Canterbury USM, Hattiesburg
- 24-26** Sr. High DOY, Gray Center
- 25** Spiritual Renewal Retreat, St. James', Jackson
- 26** Bishop Wells visits St. Stephen's, Batesville
- 26** Bishop Wells visits St. Timothy's, Southaven
- 30** Trustees, Allin House, 1:00-4:00pm

May

- 1-3** Cursillo #140
- 3** Bishop Wells visits, St. James', Jackson
- 5** Small Churches Collaborative, Zoom, 2:00-3:00pm
- 7** Beloved Community Monthly Gathering, 12:00 noon
- 8** Sewanee Commencement
- 10** Bishop Wells visits St. Andrew's, Jackson
- 11-15** Walking in History
- 14** Ascension Day
- 14** Bishop Wells visits Ascension, Hattiesburg
- 14** Standing Committee, Allin House, 11:30am-3:30pm
- 15-16** A. C. Marble School, Solomon Center
- 15** The Mississippi Episcopalian June deadline
- 20** Seminary of the Southwest 75th Commencement
- 23** Culpepper Cookout, Camp Bratton-Green
- 25** Allin House Closed for Memorial Day
- 31** Bishop Wells visits, Chapel of the Cross, Madison



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Youth participants at the 199th Annual Council wait on the bleachers of St. Andrew's Episcopal School's Athletics and Recreation Center with leaders Whitney Robinson, Diocesan Missioner for Children and Youth Formation (top left), and Nathan Oakes (top right). To read more about council, see page 5.