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Into the world in peace

In its third year, the diocesan Young Adult Retreat finds its footing, fills a ministry gap

Letter from the editor



Thanks again for reading *The Mississippi Episcopalian*—if we have your postal address, you should have recently received the printed council special edition with information about what happened at our 199th Annual Council in Ridgeland as well as all of the most popular articles we

published in 2025. I hope you'll find that meaningful and I hope you'll keep an eye out for our regular online issues (like this one) that will continue to come out each month. The next printed edition will be for Council 2027 and will come out in February or March of next year.

We continue to look for submissions about the amazing things that have been happening at churches throughout the Diocese of Mississippi, so I'd love to put out a renewed call for submissions. We want stories about your outreach, liturgy, music, buildings, community engagement, or whatever off-the-radar topics might be interesting in our pages. If it's Episcopalian, we're interested! So send anything you think we might be into to msepcopalian@dioms.org.

And, as always, thank you for your support, for your love of our diocese, and for reading *The Mississippi Episcopalian*.

Wil Oakes, Editor and Art Director

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Bishop's Journal

February 2026

- 4** Staff Meeting
- 4** Meetings with Staff Members
- 4** Interview with Episcopal News Service
- 4** Site Visit at Church of the Creator, Clinton
- 4** Board Meeting
- 4** Guest Speaker, Brotherhood of St. Andrew Webinar (National) Spoke
- 5** HIV Commission meeting
- 5** Meeting with Mississippi Two Museums
- 5** Standing Committee Meeting
- 5** Interfaith Dialogue – speaker Spoke
- 6** Virtual Meeting with Postulant
- 8** Visitation: Christ Church, Vicksburg



Received 1
 Wonderful visitation today with the parish family of Christ Church, Vicksburg. Welcome to the newly confirmed and received - from Christ Church, Vicksburg and Christ Church, Church Hill!

- 9** Site Visit: Tougaloo College

- 10** Staff Meeting
- 10** Meetings with Staff Members
- 11** Meeting with Clergy person and Community Ministry Partner, Clinton, MS
- 11** Meeting, Becoming Beloved Community Steering Committee
- 12** Meetings with Staff Members
- 12** Meeting with Clergy person
- 13** Meeting with National Park Service Park Superintendent
- 14** Church of the Nativity, Greenwood – community ministry fundraiser
Lunch with Clergy person
- 15** Visitation, Church of the Nativity, Greenwood
Preached 8:00 a.m. service



confirmed 10, and received 1
 This weekend has been full, at Church of the Nativity, Greenwood. Yesterday, I had a chance to stop in at the Sip and Shop fundraiser for the church's St. Nicholas ministry supporting children in foster care. And today, two worship services filled our hearts. We welcomed the newly

confirmed and received, with breakfast between the first and second services and a delicious lunch following the second service. So grateful to the Nativity parish family for a great visitation! Now...on to Starkville, for visitation #2 today!

- 15** Travel to Starkville
Visitation, Church of the Resurrection



This evening's visitation was at Church of the Resurrection, Starkville. It was wonderful to be greeted by a full church of worshippers from the parish family and the Canterbury College Ministry! Welcome to the newly confirmed!!



Dinner with the Canterbury College Ministry at Mississippi State followed our evening worship! What a great group of young persons!! Truly a terrific evening of ministry!!

- 16** Bishop's sabbath
- 17** Staff Meeting
- 17** Meetings with Staff Members
- 18** Meeting with Mission Committee, St. Mark's Church, Raymond re: accessibility
- 18** Ash Wednesday – St. Mark's Church, Raymond Preached
- 18** Ash Wednesday – Church of the Holy Trinity, Crystal Springs Preached
- 19** Call with Bishop Colleague
- 19** Meeting with Clergy person
- 20** Mission Mississippi Gathering

21 Commemoration for Absalom Jones, with United Methodist Conference, Millsaps College Presented

- 21** Meeting with Happening #100 staff
- 22** Visitation, St. Stephen's Church, Indianola



Preached
So grateful to the parish family of St. Stephen's Church, Indianola, for a wonderful visitation today on this first Sunday in Lent! We were graced with beautiful violin

music by Libby Perry! And we enjoyed a delicious barbecue lunch after worship! A great day in the Delta!

- 23** Bishop's sabbath
- 24** Staff Meeting
- 24** Meetings with Staff Members
- 24** Interfaith Dinner – Millsaps
- 25** Executive Committee Meeting
- 25** Meeting with Aspirant
- 26** Meeting with Clergy person
- 27** Bishop Coach Call
- 27** Tougaloo College Archives – site visit
- 28** T.W. Lewis Lecture Series – Galloway UMC Presented
- 28** Travel to Coast
- 28** Meeting with Vestry, Church of the Redeemer, Biloxi

Bishop's visit at St Pierre's, Gautier

Please join us in congratulating the following individuals on their milestones:

Confirmed: Roland Hutton Jr., Deanna Hutton, Roland Hutton III, Sabrina Hutton, and Ryan Deland

Received: Carmen Olson

Reaffirmed: Beau Metts and Kat Metts



Two oblates added at the Community of St. Joseph's Annual Retreat

The Community of St. Joseph held its annual retreat at the Solomon Episcopal Convention Center in Louisiana on the weekend of February 13th. Two novices were accepted as oblates by Brother Vincent Ignatius, Superior and Founder of the Community: Shari Penton and Robert Brandon, who attend St. Pierre's Episcopal Church in Gautier.

The Community is a Benedictine Religious Community in the Episcopal Church, headquartered in Natchez, that includes consecrated brothers in traditional religious vows, as well as single and married lay and ordained oblates. All oblates and vowed brothers choose a saint's name to add to their own name for use in the Community. Shari chose St. Monica, the mother of St. Augustine; Robert chose St. Michael, the Archangel.

To learn more about The Community of St. Joseph, log on to csjms.org.

—Rev. Scott Lenoir



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

Camp Bratton-Green
CBG
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Into the world in peace

In its third year, the diocesan Young Adult Retreat finds its footing, fills a ministry gap

by Wil Oakes

Statewide youth offerings are a point of pride in the Diocese of Mississippi. Through DOY weekends, Happenings, Camp Bratton-Green, and more, kids and teenagers have so many ways to engage with other Episcopalians and grow in their faith. Once those kids enter college, Canterbury groups become spiritual resources for some. Others engage as youth leaders in the programs they graduated from. But some drift away.

That was the problem set before a group led by Kristin Tompkins in 2023—how to establish strong diocesan programming for young adults, loosely defined as college age through late 30s, that will keep them engaged once their days of capture the flag and pie-in-the-face bingo are behind them.

What's grown from that initiative is the Young Adult Commission (YAC), which recently hosted its third annual Young Adult Retreat, an opportunity that brings people together to relax and refresh, to hear talks, have group discussions, and participate in worship together.

The first three gatherings have been intimate, with between 8-15 participants taking over Bratton-Green for a weekend. The most recent retreat, which was held February 27th – March 1st, felt like an inflection point. Gracey Belote of St. Andrew's Cathedral, Jackson, was one of the first people Thompkins brought into the group in 2023, and she could certainly feel a change in the air this year.

"The first two years were really very experimental in terms of exactly what we were offering and how we were curating it," says Belote. "We didn't have a total sense of exactly what it was or what it was going to be. But now I think we have a much stronger footing."



Brent Benvenuti and his daughter Emma at the recent YAC Young Adult Retreat.

Other early recruits included Brent and Callie Benvenuti of Trinity, Pass Christian. Rev. Rufus Van Horn of Epiphany, Tunica, was a founding member. Chip and Cathy Davis, who direct Gray Center, were also instrumental in getting the young adult program off the ground.

Alongside Belote in planning this year's retreat were the Rev. Gabbie Munn, Curate of St. Columb's, Ridgeland, and Tompkins's daughter Merritt, who graduated from Ole Miss in 2025. All three are long-time "camp people," but despite the retreats being held at Bratton-Green, all efforts have been made to give them their own identity.

"We wanted to make sure the programming we were offering was not just one more opportunity for camp people to get together, and it just be kind of an insider's club," says Belote. "We're getting good feedback from

people saying that it was really nice that this feels like its own thing. It's not just like an adult version of Happening or an adult version of DOY."

The retreats have, as a result, drawn a healthy mix of people who came up in the diocesan youth programs as well as those who didn't, and a variety of ages from college students to professionals in their 30s. In February, participants came from as far north as Oxford all the way down to the Coast.

The theme of the retreat was "Into the world in peace," pulling from the language of the post-communion prayer. Three speakers expounded on that theme:

- Mac Chaney, who spoke on personal faith and the connection between one's personal faith and their actions in the world.
- Ronnie Martin, who spoke on finding personal peace and how to connect with that and respond to the world.
- Reverend Canon Gary Mead spoke on actually going out into the world and carrying faith with us.

Each talk was paired with an opportunity for large group discussion as well as smaller conversations for reflection.

One new addition at this year's retreat was especially well received. A wellness center from Jackson came to lead yoga, breathing exercises, and a "sound bath" (think meditation aided by the sound of gentle, harmonic gongs ringing). In the midst of some serious soul-searching, the post-lunch relaxation session set a great tone for the afternoon.

Looking ahead, the leadership group has several areas of expansion in mind. The retreats will continue on their trajectory, hopefully increasing steadily in size. YAC wishes to strive for greater collaboration with the college Canterbury groups around the state. And, eventually, if demand dictates, perhaps two retreats per year instead of one could be in the offing.

The kinship and fun shared between these Episcopalians as they transition to adulthood will surely be the throughline in whatever YAC does next. With any luck, the diocese will hopefully start to see more of the momentum generated by its youth programs carrying forward into the lives of its young adults.

The next YAC retreat will be in early 2027 at Camp Bratton-Green. If you are interested in participating or learning more, sign up for YAC's emails by visiting msepiscopalian.com/yac.



Hayden Hershfelt, Gracey Belote, and Rev. Gabbie Munn prepare to screen print t-shirts at the retreat.



Gathering God's people

In its third year, Bratton-Green's annual Culpepper Cookout looks toward new goals in fellowship and fundraising

by Wil Oakes

Camp Bratton-Green's Culpepper Cookout was started with a three-part mission. By bringing crowds of rib-hungry Episcopalians and friends to the shores of Rose Hill Lake, organizers hoped the weekend would serve as an annual reunion for generations of camp lovers, an opportunity to showcase the camp to folks who'd never visited before, and, with any luck, a fundraising platform to help improve the facility.

When it comes to providing good times, CBG never disappoints. How much money could be raised, however, wasn't clear at first. And yet, year one put \$15,000 in the Alumni Association's coffers, and after year two the total had surpassed \$35,000. It was enough to fund the first project the association had planned—a full overhaul of camp's aging



challenge course (also often referred to as a ropes course), one of the most popular activities for kids and adults alike during the summer.

That project is now underway and the new course will be ready for use when summer camp begins June 1st. The work is not simply meant to modernize—the new design will make it more user-friendly for the guests at camp's special sessions for adults with disabilities.

The Rev. Chris Robinson, former rector of Redeemer, Biloxi, and now of St. George's in Germantown, Tennessee, is one of the event's organizers as well as a former CBG Permanent Staff member who spent two summers running the ropes course in the 2000s. He understands well the importance of these new features.

"Our ministry at camp serves people with a wide variety of abilities and so the new challenge course is being designed with accessibility front and center," he says. "Removing the obstacle of tree climbing or having to haul someone to the platform and replacing it with a simple walk up a ramp will allow people of all ages and

abilities access to the exciting elements that will be added!"

Having met that goal in just two years—faster than anyone predicted—the organizing committee had the opportunity this year to look toward what's next. The answer: cabins.

"This year, the funds raised by the Culpepper Cookout will be directed to the construction of new cabins," says Robinson. "Returning from the pandemic we renovated Cabins A, B, C, 1, 2, and 3, but determined that Cabins 4 & 5 were not salvageable."

Fewer beds to offer as well as an ever-shortening summer vacation schedule have put limitations on how much revenue camp can generate each summer, but the more important issue is making sure no one who wants the Bratton-Green experience gets turned away. Also, the new cabins are planned to be designed as multi-purpose facilities. In addition to being used for summer camp, they will be adaptable to different types of gatherings during the rest of the year. That



From left: Audrey Ford, Caroline Brandon, Graham Ford, and Sarah Steinberger hang balloons in front of Bratton-Green's Chapel of the Holy Family to decorate for the 2025 Culpepper Cookout.

flexibility will make camp better able to fill the void that has come with the loss of the conference center across the road.

The Alumni Association, via the cookout, aims to lead the way on not just preserving but expanding what CBG can be.

“This is the only fundraiser for CBG,” points out Audrey Ford, another of the cookout organizers. “Of course, people give throughout the year, but this is the main event. Since CBG is the only diocesan-wide space for

at least a week, here came dessert. Wow! I’m pleased to report that some months later I think I’ve finally shed the pounds I gained that glorious spring day.”

More than a chance to eat some tasty ribs, the event is meant to embody the spirit of its namesake, the Rev. Chuck Culpepper, who loved camp and its people so well.

“We hope that by hosting an ever-broader gathering of God’s people in this holy place, some of them might be called by the same spirit that called Chuck into the ministry of Camp,” says Robinson, “so that they might be transformed



From left: Rev. Canon Gary Meade, Rev. Gabbie Munn, and event organizer John Jordan Proctor judge entries in the 2025 Culpepper Cookout BBQ competition

our youth, this fundraiser is the one thing meant to raise funds for the youth of our diocese state-wide. I think that’s impressive and noteworthy!”

Diocesan support has been crucial for the cookout and the cookout has been a great introduction to camp for Bishop Wells and her staff. The Rev. Gary Meade, Canon to the Ordinary, was invited to be a judge of the barbecue contest last year.


Being asked to serve as one of the judges was an honor,” says Meade. “In fact, it was also an opportunity to stuff this still relatively new Mississippian with delicious food until I could be stuffed no more.”

As it turns out, being a judge is itself a bit of a challenge.

“Judges are encouraged, of course, to take only one bite of each entry,” he says. “Right—some were so good that, like potato chips, I couldn’t stop at just one. And then when I was convinced I wouldn’t need to eat again for

by service as surely as they help transform others.”

The importance of Bratton-Green as a way for the church to reach the youth of the diocese makes the Culpepper Cookout, even as it enters only its third year, an essential event.

“Camp Bratton-Green not only connects many in our diocese with a rich history,” says Meade, “but also provides essential formation, encouragement, and connection for the young leaders in our Episcopal Church. My prayer is that many future generations will continue to find CBG a safe haven of joy, care, learning, growth, and deepening faith.” 

The 2026 Culpepper Cookout will be held Saturday, May 23, at Camp-Bratton Green. You can get tickets and rent lodging for the weekend at msepiscopalian.com/culpepper.

Faith, education, and gratitude

A personal reflection

by Linda Tolliver

The month of February brought some of the most meaningful moments as Mississippi College celebrated its bicentennial, giving special recognition to its first African American graduates who are a part of the college's history. There were moments that filled my heart with gratitude and humility as I reflected on the journey that brought me there.

Mississippi College's bicentennial celebration highlighted an important part of its history—the courage and perseverance of its first African American students who enrolled and graduated during a time of great social change. To be included in that recognition was greatly moving and profoundly meaningful to me.

My journey in education grew from the opportunities I received and the privilege of teaching in elementary school. I later earned my Master's degree from Mississippi College in 1985, which strengthened my commitment to education and lifelong learning.

During the final five years of my career, I returned to study again to earn certification in Gifted Education. Teaching gifted students allowed me to encourage creativity, and a love for learning.

The recognition from Mississippi College was a wonderful honor, made even more meaningful as I was sharing these moments with people who had supported me. On Thursday, February 12, 2026, Mississippi College hosted a "Meet and Greet" event and discussion honoring its African American graduates. Each graduate was recognized with a poster displaying a photograph and personal information. My poster displayed my senior picture from 1975, which was the year I graduated. I was so very proud that the poster highlighted my work in

the Episcopal Church. Laguna Social Tribe had a table featuring my accomplishments, recognizing that I was the first African American young woman to join a social tribe. On Sunday, February 15, 2026, my family hosted a special luncheon with family, friends and members of my church community gathered to celebrate this honor with me.

Seeing my priest and deacon present meant more to me than words can express. Their presence reminded me that none of our achievements happens alone. We are strengthened by faith in God, by prayer and the encouragement of those who walk with us.

My faith and the support of my church family have always been central to my life as an educator. In the classroom, I hoped not only to teach academic lessons, but also to model compassion, perseverance, and integrity for my students.

As I reflect, I am grateful to God and all who supported me. Teaching was never just a career for me—it was a calling and a blessing. It has been the honor of my life. I now look forward to the next chapter of my journey, trusting God to guide me in new ways to encourage and share His love. 🌟

Linda Nell Hodge Tolliver is a retired educator and a graduate of Mississippi College. She was the first female acolyte at St. Mary's, Vicksburg, where she still attends to this day. She was also the first black woman to serve as co-president of the Diocese of Mississippi Altar Guild, and was recently elected a member of the Executive Committee of the diocese.

Tolliver, second from right, with fellow alumni as well as president of Mississippi College Blake Thompson (second from left).



iHonduras!

Photos from this year's Honduras Medical Mission, where care continues in San Joaquin more than 40 years in





To see a video of the medical clinic at San Joaquin, visit msepiscopal.com/honduras



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
St. Thomas, Diamondhead
All Saints, Grenada (after 4/5/26)
Ascension, Hattiesburg
St. Paul's, Meridian
Trinity, Natchez
Resurrection, Starkville
Holy Trinity, Vicksburg
Church of the Nativity, Water Valley

Pages Clemens Whites, 62, communicant of Nativity, Greenwood, died August 3, 2025.
Solon Alexander Scott, Jr., 88, communicant of Nativity, Greenwood, died February 1, 2026.
Allan Percy Durfey, Jr., 88, communicant of Grace Church, Canton, and Diocesan physician for many years, died February 2, 2026.
Michelle Favrot Heidelberg, 78, communicant of Trinity, Hattiesburg, died February 25, 2026.
Kenneth "Ken" Williams Davies, 81, communicant of St. Pierre's, Gautier, died February 28, 2026.
Sarah Quackenboss French, 85, communicant of Nativity, Greenwood, died March 1, 2026
William Wesley "Wes" Guy, 70, communicant of St. Pierre's, Gautier, died March 9, 2026.

Churches seeking supply clergy

St. Stephen's, Batesville
Good Shepherd, Columbus
Holy Trinity, Crystal Springs
Christ Church, Holly Springs
All Saints, Inverness
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
Church of the Good Shepherd, Terry
Holy Trinity, Vicksburg
Church of the Nativity, Water Valley



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

Diocesan Calendar

March

- 17-24** Spring House of Bishops, Camp Allen, Navasota, TX
- 20-21** A. C. Marble School, Solomon Center
- 26** Trustees Meeting, 1:00–4:00pm, Allin House
- 26** Standing Committee, 1:30–5:00pm, Zoom
- 27-29** Jr. High DOY, Gray Center
- 27-28** Commission on Ministry
- 29** Bishop Wells visits St. Mary's, Lexington
- 29** Palm Sunday

April

- 2** Maundy Thursday
- 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 Cathedral, Jackson
- 7** Small Churches Collaborative, 2:00pm, Zoom
- 8** Bishop Wells visits St. Andrew's Middle School, Ridgeland
- 8** St. Andrew's Upper School, Ridgeland
- 10-11** A. C. Marble School, Online
- 10** St. Andrew's Lower School, Jackson
- 12** Bishop Wells visits Trinity, Pass Christian
- 15** The Mississippi Episcopalian May Deadline
- 17-18** Small Church Conference at All Saints, Grenada
- 19** Bishop Wells visits St. Peter's, Oxford
- 21** Bishop Wells visits USM Canterbury, 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 Meeting, 1:00-4:00pm, Allin House

May

- 1-3** Cursillo #140, Gray Center
- 1** Diocesan Undergraduate Scholarship Applications Due
- 3** Bishop Wells visits St. James', Jackson
- 5** Small Churches Collaborative, 2:00-3:00pm, Zoom
- 7** Beloved Community Monthly Gathering, 12:00 noon
- 8** Sewanee Commencement
- 10** Bishop Wells visits St. Andrew's Cathedral, Jackson
- 14** Ascension Day
- 14** Bishop Wells visits Ascension, Hattiesburg
- 15-16** A. C. Marble School, Solomon Center
- 15** The Mississippi Episcopalian June Deadline
- 20** Seminary of the Southwest 75th Commencement
- 23** Culpepper Cookout, Gray Center
- 25** Allin House closed for Memorial Day
- 28** Standing Committee, Allin House, 1:30-5:00pm
- 31** Bishop Wells visits Chapel of the Cross, Madison

June

- 1-5** Living Our Vows Residency, Roslyn Conference Center, Richmond, VA
- 1** Completion of your Annual Audit
- 2** Small Churches Collaborative, 2:00-3:00pm, Zoom
- 4** Beloved Community Monthly Gathering, 12:00 noon
- 7** Bishop Wells visits Incarnation, West Point
- 11** Finance Committee, Allin House, 11:30am-2:30pm
- 15** The Mississippi Episcopalian July Deadline
- 18** Executive Committee Meeting, St. Andrew's Cathedral, 11:30am-3:30pm
- 19** Allin House closed for Juneteenth
- 20** Ordination of Deacons, St. Andrew's Cathedral, 10:30am
- 21** 62nd Commemoration Service for slain civil rights workers, Philadelphia
- 21** Bishop Wells visits St. Christopher's, Jackson
- 28** Bishop Wells visits Good Shepherd, Columbus

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

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April 15, 2026

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July 2026 issue

June 15, 2026

August 2026 issue

July 15, 2026

September 2026 issue

August 17, 2026

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September 15, 2026



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Young adults gathered in the Dining Hall at Camp Bratton-Green to hear a talk. The Young Adult Retreat, put on by the Young Adult Commission, is in its third year. To read more about this event, see page 5.

