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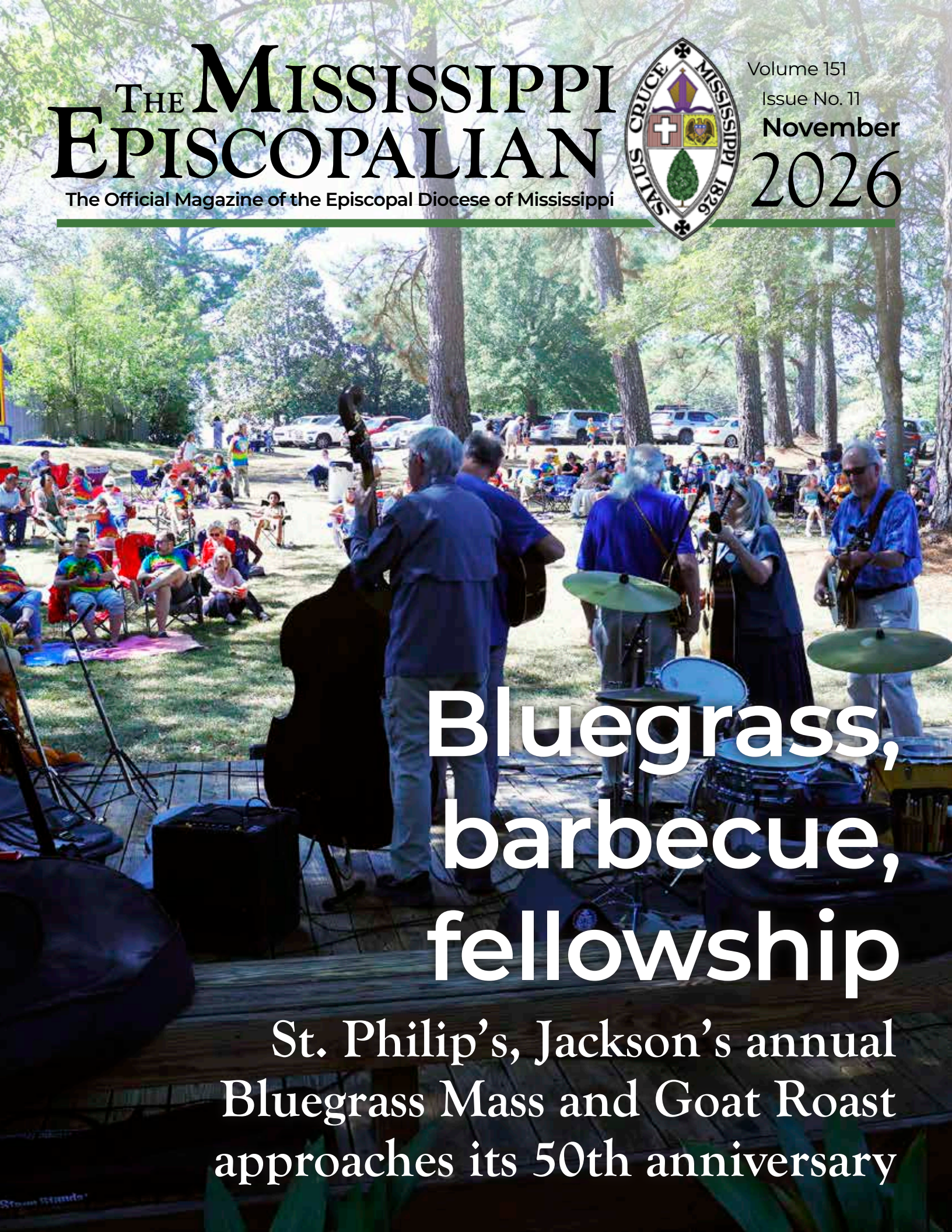

Bluegrass, barbecue, fellowship

St. Philip's, Jackson's annual Bluegrass Mass and Goat Roast approaches its 50th anniversary

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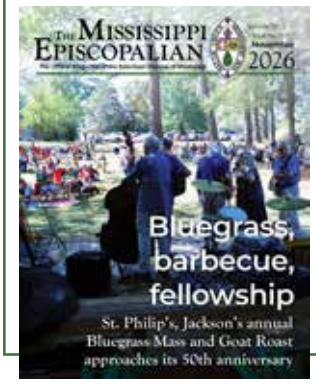

On the cover: *Crowds gather on the grounds of St. Philip's, Jackson to enjoy bluegrass music under the trees. The Bluegrass Mass and Goat Roast recently held its 46th event. A half century is right around the corner! To read more and see a few photos, see page 6.*

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Bishop's Journal

October 2026

1 Meetings/Office Day
2 Ministry Exploration Gathering
3 Ministry Exploration Gathering
3 Travel to West Point
4 Visitation, Church of the Resurrection, Starkville



Preached 8:00 and 10:30 am, received 1, and confirmed 2.

The weekend was full - hope-filled and joy-filled! Friday evening through the day on Saturday, we hosted our Diocesan Ministry Exploration Gathering - a time set aside to work with those who are discerning calls to lay or ordained ministry to learn more about the ways in which we may be called to serve.

Sunday, it was on to Church of the Resurrection, Starkville. The Bulldogs may not have won Saturday's game, but spirits certainly weren't dampened for two wonderful worship services. Between services, I was also able to join a very engaged lectionary Bible Study for a few minutes before meeting our baptism family and inspiring young confirmands from our Canterbury College Ministry. The beautiful music was such a gift. at the 10:30 a.m. worship service. Wonderful fellowship, an inspiring meeting with the Vestry, and a check-in with a discerner rounded out a great visit. Church of the Resurrection is in search of their next Rector - and this vibrant, strong, loving parish is well-positioned to continue its amazing ministry with the next spiritual leader.

4 Meet with Vestry
4 Meet with Discerner
4 Travel to Jackson
5 Conversation with clergyperson
5 Conversation with clergyperson
6 Province IV Bishops Call
6 Staff Meeting
6 Depart for New Haven, CT
7 Installation of Dr. Gabrielle Thomas as Dean, Berkeley Divinity School at Yale
8 Return to Jackson
9 Bishop's sabbath
9 Meeting with Vestry Officers
9 Meeting with clergyperson
10 Meeting with Vestry Persons
11 Visitation, St. Paul's, Meridian



Preached, 13 confirmed and 1 received.

11 Return to Jackson
11 Dinner, Forvis Mazars

continued on next page >>>

12 Bishop's sabbath
12 Dinner, Forvis Mazars
13 St. Andrew's Episcopal School – Professional Development Day (Presentation on "Welcome")
13 Meetings with Staff Members
13 Bishops' Roundtable
13 Vestry Meeting
14 Conversation with clergyperson
14 Conversation with clergyperson
14 Forvis Mazars – Staff Lunch
14 Conversation with Senior Warden
14 Conversation with Staff Member
14 Conversation with Bishop
15 Meeting with Staff Member
15 Meeting with clergyperson
15 Pride Eucharist



Pride Eucharist 2026. Thankful to the parish family of St. Philip's Church, Jackson, for hosting (and such beautiful music!!!), and to all who joined us for worship. And thankful for 50 years since the 65th General Convention of 1976 at which The Episcopal Church adopted a resolution affirming that homosexual persons are children of God with a full and equal claim upon the church's love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care.

16 Meeting with Iona Collaborative/SSW
16 Meeting with clergyperson
16 Meeting with Staff Member
17 Travel to Cleveland, MS
18 Visitation, Grace Church, Rosedale

Preached.

Today's visitations began at Grace Church, Rosedale! Lovely worship - and quick fellowship afterwards. Grace is the oldest church in Bolivar County and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

18 Visitation, Calvary Church, Cleveland



Preached, 10 confirmed and 1 received.

Sunday in the Delta! A far-too-quick meeting with the confirmands was followed by beautiful worship (with a packed house at Calvary), and a lovely lunch! Congratulations to our eleven confirmands, and welcome to new rector, Mary Jayne Ledgerwood!!

18 Meeting with clergyperson
18 Travel to Jackson
19 Clergy Conference
20 Clergy Conference
21 Clergy Conference



Clergy Conference 2026! So grateful to Les Hegwood, Marie Smith, David O'Steen and all of the people of St. Philip's Church, Jackson, for hosting us, to Dr. Peter Gathje, for a highly informative and engaging presentation on Christian Ethics, and to all of our clergy who come to take part in a time of renewal, growth and fellowship. We're back to the vineyard - where the plentiful harvest awaits!

21 Visitation, St. Catherine's Retirement Community



Preached.

I had the privilege of making a visitation to St. Catherine's Village, a retirement community in Madison, near Jackson. Mary Ann Cortright celebrated her 100th birthday during last Advent, and I had the privilege of meeting her then; she's met 9 of our Diocese's 11 bishops!

22 Meeting with clergyperson
22 Meeting of Trustees
22 Conversation with Seminary Dean
23 Bishop Coach
23 Camp Bratton-Green – Strategic Plan
23 Meeting with Discerner
23 Camp Bratton-Green Advisory Board
23 Meeting with Archdeacon
24 Travel to Church Hill
24 Cemetery Rededication and Commemoration of Enslaved Persons Baptized at Christ Church, Church Hill
25 Visitation, Trinity Church, Natchez
25 Visitation, Christ Church, Church Hill

Preached Church Hill and Preached Natchez.

A big weekend in Church Hill and Natchez - at our two oldest Episcopal worshiping communities in Mississippi! On Saturday, we rededicated the cemetery and commemorate the lives of enslaved persons who were baptized at Christ Church, Church Hill.



From Trinity: A joyful Sunday at Trinity!

We were honored to welcome Bishop Dorothy Wells to Trinity Episcopal Church for a very special visit. Bishop Wells celebrated the Eucharist with our parish family, then blessed our new organ, a generous gift from St. Dominic Catholic Church in Mobile, Alabama. We are deeply grateful to our friends at St. Dominic for this gift, which will lift our voices in worship for generations to come.

After the service, we gathered in the parish hall for a luncheon, where the Bishop sat down and shared a meal with us. Thank you to everyone who helped make the day so warm and memorable, from our choir and altar party to the many hands who prepared such a wonderful spread.

Thank you, Bishop Wells, for being with us. We're grateful for your ministry and your presence in our community.

25 Travel to Jackson
26 Bishop's sabbath
26 Spiritual Direction
27 Staff Meeting
27 Ministry Architects
27 Meetings with Staff Members
28 Travel to Atlanta

continued on next page >>>

28 Meeting with Program Director, Candler Episcopal/ Anglican Studies

28 Candler Episcopal/Anglican Studies Advisory Board Meeting

28 Eucharist with Candler Episcopal/ Anglican Studies community

28 Vestry Meeting

29 Travel to Scottsboro, AL

29 Tour Scottsboro Boys Museum

29 Tour Jackson County Courthouse; lunch with Judge John Graham

30 Red Mass – Jackson County Judiciary and Bar Preached.

St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Scottsboro hosted the 14th annual Red Mass, in honor of the bench and bar in Jackson County, AL. Bishop Michael Curry had been invited to give the homily this year but was unable to attend – and I'm grateful that I was invited as the "second string." Being able to give thanks for the many hands – a sheriff and local citizens who protected the nine youths from the posse who had gathered to exact its own justice, lawyers who defended them, their mothers, who advocated for them, a judge who did turn to the Rule of Law, and a governor who ultimately pardoned them – was a gift. As I noted in my homily, justice may have been long-delayed, but justice was not ultimately denied. That the history has survived for us to study and reflect on it is important – and I believe that we're obligated now to continue to tell the story, to keep this sad history from ever being repeated.

30 Travel to Jackson



ST. PHILIP'S
JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

St. Philip's, Jackson's annual Bluegrass Mass and Goat Roast approaches its 50th anniversary

St. Philip's Episcopal Church welcomed the community for its 46th annual Bluegrass Mass and Goat Roast on Oct. 11, bringing together friends, families and visitors for a day of worship, music, food and fellowship.

The celebration began with a special Bluegrass Mass featuring the Vernon Brothers, whose music filled the church as attendees joined in joyful singing and hand-clapping. The service reflected St. Philip's longstanding tradition of welcoming all to share in worship and community.

Following the service, guests gathered in the church hollow to enjoy live music by the Red Hots and the Vernon Brothers while sharing a hearty meal of goat, pulled pork and all the fixings. Families spread out beneath the trees, children played throughout the grounds and visitors relaxed with friends as music echoed across the property.

Proceeds from this year's Goat Roast supported St. Philip's participation in an upcoming Episcopal Build with Habitat for Humanity, a collaborative effort among metro-area Episcopal churches to help provide a safe, affordable home for a local family.

"The Bluegrass Mass and Goat Roast has been a tradition for St. Philip's," said the Rev. Les Hegwood, rector. "It has grown into a community event that benefits Habitat for Humanity in Jackson. It is a joyful day that I hope all enjoyed."

The annual event once again showcased the hospitality, faith and fellowship that have made the Bluegrass Mass and Goat Roast a beloved fall tradition for generations of St. Philip's members and friends.









BISHOP'S CORNER

with The Rt. Rev. Dr.
Dorothy Sanders Wells

Loving witnesses

Evangelism and God's love through the lens of *You are Special* by Max Lucado

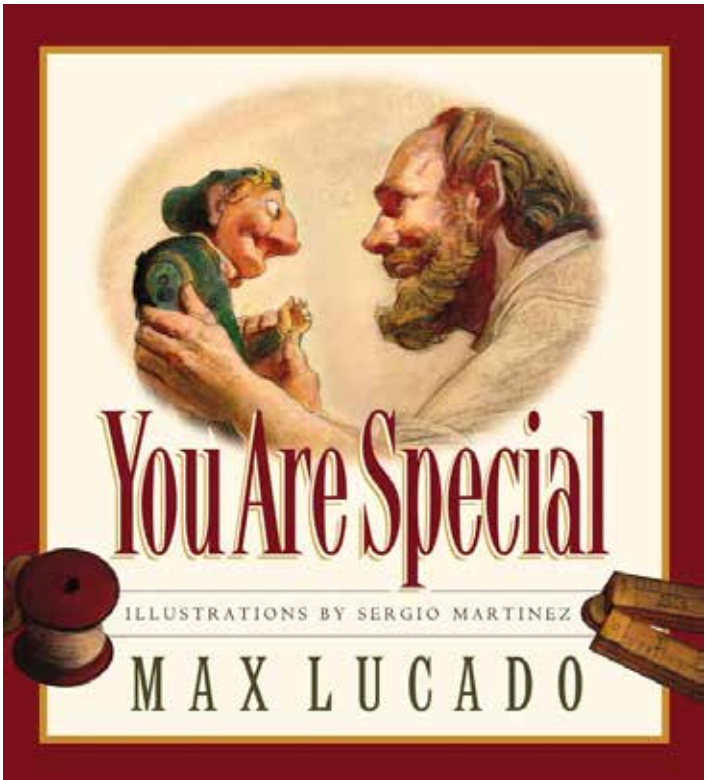
I've often thought that the mark of a great children's book is what that book also teaches to the adults who share it with children around them. Such is the case for me with a fabulous children's book entitled, *You Are Special*, by Max Lucado. In this book, we are introduced to a community of Wemmicks—wooden characters carved and given life by the woodcarver, Eli, who lives in a workshop just above the Wemmicks' village. The Wemmicks are, like humans, each unique—with their own gifts and skills and talents. And, also like humans, the Wemmicks have the free will to enjoy those gifts and skills and, as one might expect, comment on the other Wemmicks around them. The especially attractive and talented Wemmicks all seem to have been given star stickers by their neighbors; the especially awkward and differently-talented Wemmicks all seem to have been given dot stickers by their neighbors. The more star stickers a Wemmick receives, the more confident and self-assured that Wemmick becomes; and the more stars a Wemmick has, the more stars that Wemmick seems to attract from neighbors.

But the more dot stickers a Wemmick has received, the less confident and self-assured that Wemmick becomes—and the more dots the Wemmick seems to attract from neighbors.

[One might compare the stars and dots to our "thumbs up" and "thumbs down" on social media today.]

The story introduces us to a Wemmick named Punchinello. Punchinello perceives himself to be awkward and not liked. He has no stars; his neighbors have only labeled him with the dot stickers. The more dots he receives, the more dots he seems to attract. Punchinello's self-confidence has been eroded.

One day, Punchinello meets a Wemmick named Lucia who has neither dots nor stars; he asks her how their neighbors aren't able to leave their marks on her. Lucia tells Punchinello to go up to visit their maker, Eli, at his big workshop. It takes a while, but with Lucia's



encouragement, Punchinello finally musters up the courage to go.

To Punchinello's shocked surprise, Eli greets him by name when he arrives at the workshop. Eli explains that of course he knows Punchinello's name: He made him. Eli explains something else: He loves Punchinello—and all of the Wemmicks he has made.

The two speak for a while, and before Punchinello leaves, Eli asks him to come again. Eli assures Punchinello that the more he trusts Eli's love, the less all of the other Wemmicks' hurtful words will mean to him.

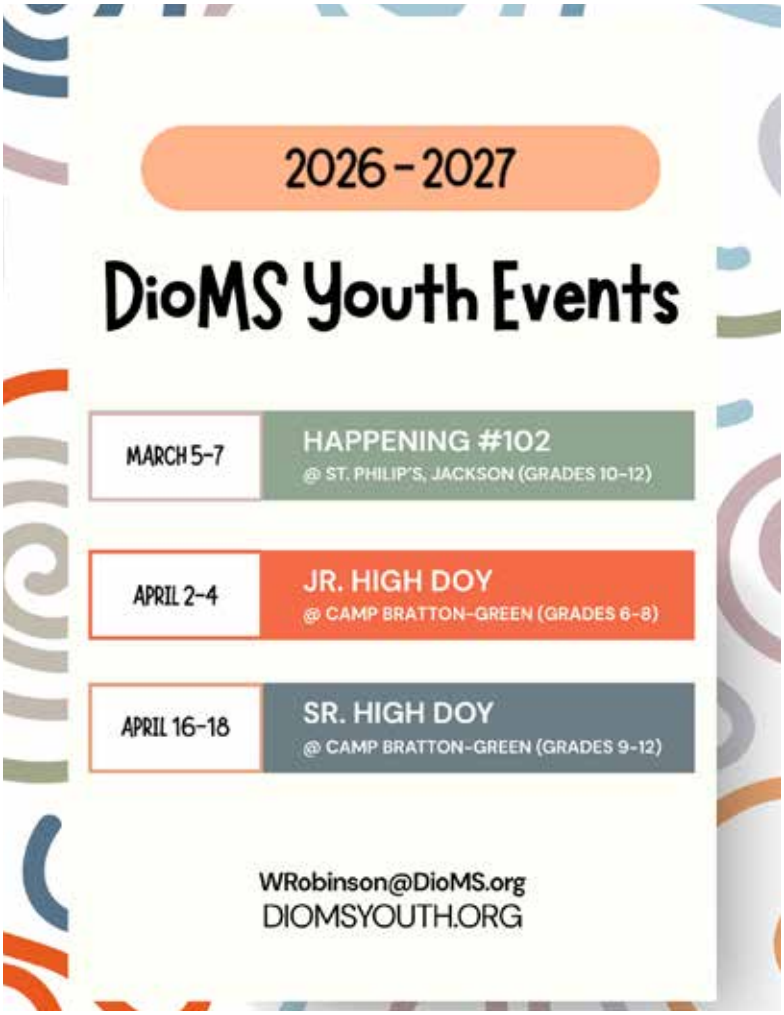
And even as Punchinello leaves Eli's big workshop, the dots begin to fall off.

Such, to me, is the story of God's love for us: The more we turn to God in prayer, and the more we trust that we are indeed God's beloved, the less we concern ourselves with how the world might see us. We trust that we are God's and loved by God—and that's what matters.

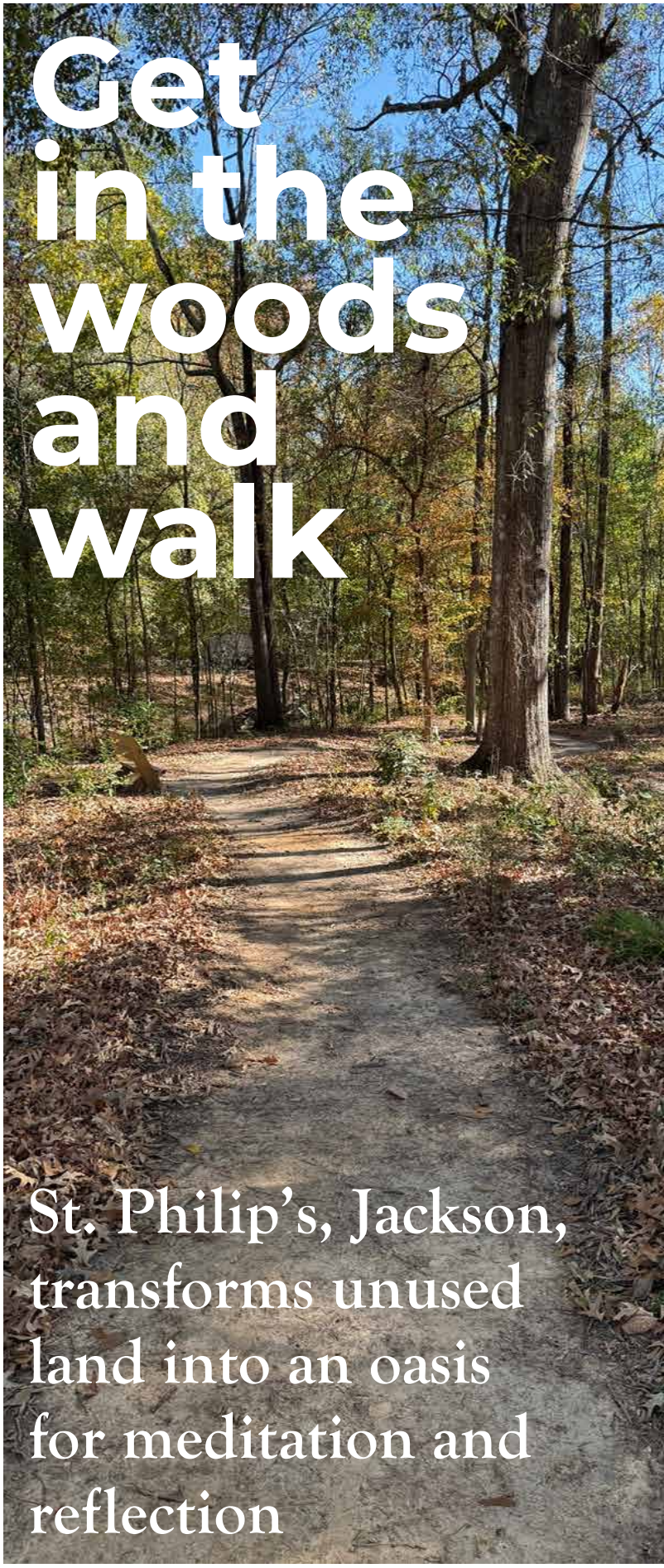
From early in Genesis, we learn that we are made in God's image and likeness. We learn throughout the Old Testament that God is a loving and forgiving God who keeps God's promises and gives us many chances—even gives us new names when a fresh start is warranted. This loving God sent his Son to live among us and to teach us through loving, patient example the depths of God's love. That Son would surrender himself to death on a cross in love for us. Having the knowledge that we are loved by our Creator—unconditionally, immeasurably—is the greatest of gifts given to us.

And one of the greatest gifts we can give to one another (like Lucia) is pointing one another to that love. There are certainly times that we can serve as a guiding star, a lodestar, to someone else who at least for the moment is having a hard time recognizing God's love. When we look back at our lives, we can likely recall persons who loved us enough to point the way to God's love. This time of year—with All Saints, Thanksgiving, Advent and Christmas near—we celebrate those lodestars who have pointed the way to Christ for us, reminding us always that we are God's beloved, and surrounding us with a cloud of loving witnesses, both in this world and the next, to bear us up and shape our lives. May we become those lodestars, too, for neighbors in need of our reminder of God's love.





Get in the woods and walk



St. Philip's, Jackson, transforms unused land into an oasis for meditation and reflection

St. Philip's, Jackson, sits on seven acres of lovely land in north Jackson. Three of those acres provide the space for the church's buildings and grounds. The other four are covered in woods and grassy areas. Parishioner Lester Hailey's remembers neighorhood kids riding their bikes around through the woods on dirt paths over little hills and valleys and beside a small creek. Over the decades, though, the woods by St. Philip's had become overgrown with vines and poison ivy. Hailey wondered for years what the church could do to better utilize the land.

The first step toward new life for the woods came when Hailey was approached by Jackson real estate agent and community activist Locke Ward, who has a passion for cleaning up sites around the city.

"He goes around and just cleans up anything," says Hailey. "And he called me and wanted to know if he could clean the woods. He grew up riding bikes back there just like so many others, and thought it would be nice to do so. He got two guys with two pieces of big machinery and just cut it down to where it's just trees and got all the undergrowth down."

With the woods cleared, Hailey started thinking about next steps, and approached the Reverend Les Hegwood, rector of St. Philip's, about creating a walking path as a resource for the church and the wider community.

"Lester and I and Dick David and some other members who have a heart for walking trails and this beautiful property that we have, we came together," says Hegwood. "We agreed upon a plan."

Eagle Scout Philip Browning, a parishioner nearby at St. James, Jackson, got engaged as part of his Eagle Scout Service Project and was instrumental in creating the path and building benches along the way.

Now, woods that had sat mostly untouched since the 1980s are a place for meditative walks, breaks from the office, or simply a chance to be outside in nature without having to leave the city.

Hegwood uses the trail frequently.

"Walking as a mystical practice resonates with something that I've been doing in my own spiritual practice for a really long time," he says. "I'm a backpacker since I was 16, and when the going gets tough, I go and get in the woods and I walk."

Hegwood and Hailey hope the community will make



use of the path for similar purposes. In the near-term, there are plans for practical additions like signage to welcome the public, a native land acknowledgment, and the planting of native plants along the path.

Neither sees the project as complete, however. In the early dream phase are potential additions like a labyrinth, extensions to the trail itself, and other ways to further incorporate the woods with the existing courtyard and adjacent EYC room.

"This place, this campus, lends itself to contemplative work," says Hegwood. "It's somewhat of an oasis in the midst of what's mostly suburban and urban. It just has that vibe all the way around."

The trail has also created, in a sense, a new liturgical space. Shortly after it was cleared last year, the church set up a walking Stations of the Cross that parishioners utilized throughout Lent. Plans are in place to do so again this year.

But Hegwood emphasizes that St. Philip's is dedicated to being a resource for all, not just parishioners or even just Episcopalians.

"All are welcome in that space," he says. "St. Philip's has to be in deep relationship and engagement with our immediate neighbors, and I think this is a physical way to do that. Anytime we can welcome people onto the campus, we want to do that and make it attractive and accessible to them."



Faithful Departed

Please submit Faithful Departed notices to your church for submission.

Helen Henry Rogge, 97, communicant of St. Andrew's, Jackson, died on July 4, 2026.

Carole Anita Miles, 78, communicant of St. Andrew's, Jackson, died on July 29, 2026.

Dr. Richard "Dickie" Leroy Yelverton, 91, communicant of St. Andrew's, Jackson, died on September 12, 2026.

Henry Louie Rainer, Jr., 77, communicant of St. Andrew's, Jackson, died on October 2, 2026.

Elizabeth Simms Hise, 84, communicant of St. Andrew's, Jackson, died on October 3, 2026.

Margaret Rice Keeler, 87, communicant of St. George's, Clarksdale, died on October 13, 2026.

Virginia Abel Miller, 80, communicant at All Saints', Tupelo, Died October 29, 2026.

Jason Daniel Niblett, 47, communicant of Trinity, Natchez, died on October 31, 2026.

Deployment Report

Churches seeking full or part-time clergy

Redeemer, Biloxi
St. Alban's, Bovina
Redeemer, Brookhaven
St. James, Greenville
All Saints, Grenada
Ascension, Hattiesburg
St. Mark's, Jackson
Trinity, Natchez
Resurrection, Starkville
Epiphany, Tunica
Holy Trinity, Vicksburg
Church of the Nativity, Water Valley

Churches seeking supply clergy

Good Shepherd, Columbus
All Saints, Jackson
Calvary, Michigan City
St. James, Port Gibson

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Submission deadlines (always available at msepiscopalian.com/submissions)

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January 15, 2027

March 2027 issue
February 15, 2027

April 2027 issue
March 15, 2027

May 2027 issue
April 15, 2027

June 2027 issue
May 17, 2027

Diocesan Calendar

December

1 Deadline for Submission of Budget Requests
1 Deadline for Submission of Reports to Annual Council
1 Voluntary Proportionate Giving % Due
1 Small Churches Collaborative, 2:00pm, Zoom
4 Deadline for submissions to *TME-News*, 12:00pm
6 Bishop Wells visits Trinity, Hattiesburg
9 *TME-News* published
10 Finance Committee, 11:30am – 2:30pm, Allin House
11-12 A. C. Marble School convocation, Solomon Center
13 Bishop Wells visits St. John's, Laurel
15 Deadline for Pre-filed Nominations for Annual Council
15 Deadline for Submission of Resolutions for Annual Council
15 *The Mississippi Episcopalian* January deadline
17 Executive Committee meeting, 12:00 – 3:00pm, Allin House
17 Standing Committee, 1:30 – 5:00pm, Zoom
18 Deadline for submissions to *TME-News*, 12:00pm
20 Bishop Wells visits Grace, Canton
23 *TME-News* published
24-26 Allin House closed for Christmas
25 Christmas Day
27-1 Winter Solstice, Camp Bratton-Green

January

1 Allin House closed for New Year's Day
3 Bishop Wells visits Holy Trinity, Crystal Springs
3 Bishop Wells visits Good Shepherd, Terry
5 Small Churches Collaborative, 2:00 - 3:00pm, Zoom
8-9 A. C. Marble Convocation, Online
8 Deadline for submissions to *TME-News*, 12:00pm
10 Bishop Wells visits St. Paul's, Hollandale
13 *TME-News* published
15 *The Mississippi Episcopalian* February deadline
17 Bishop Wells visits St. James', Greenville
18 Allin House closed for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
22 Deadline for submissions to *TME-News*
24 Bishop Wells visits St. John's, Aberdeen
24 Bishop Wells visits St. Bernard's, Okolona
24 Bishop Wells visits Mississippi State University, Starkville
27 *TME-News* published
29-31 200th Annual Council, Vicksburg

February

2 Small Churches Collaborative, 2:00 - 3:00pm, Zoom
7 Bishop Wells visits St. John's, Pascagoula
10 Ash Wednesday
10 Bishop Wells visits Holy Trinity, Crystal Springs
10 Bishop Wells visits St. Mark's, Raymond
10 *TME-News* published
12-13 A. C. Marble School convocation, Solomon Center
14 Bishop Wells visits Holy Innocents, Como
15 *The Mississippi Episcopalian* March deadline
21 Bishop Wells visits Nativity, Water Valley
24 *TME-News* published
28 Bishop Wells visits All Saints', Grenada

March

1 Annual Parochial Report Due
1 Credentials of Delegates/Alternates to Annual Council Due
2 Small Churches Collaborative, 2:00 - 3:00pm, Zoom
7 Bishop Wells visits St. Mark's, Raymond
9-16 Spring House of Bishops,
Camp Kanuga, Hendersonville, North Carolina
10 *TME-News* published
12-13 A. C. Marble School convocation, online
15 *The Mississippi Episcopalian* April deadline
21 Palm Sunday
21 Bishop Wells visits St. Mary's, Lexington
24 *TME-News* published
26 Good Friday
26 Bishop Wells visits Chapel of the Cross, Madison
27 Bishop Wells visits St. Philip's, Jackson
28 Easter Sunday
28 Bishop Wells visits St. Andrew's Cathedral, Jackson
31 Bishop Wells visits St. Andrew's Middle School, Ridgeland
31 Bishop Wells visits St. Andrew's Upper School, Ridgeland

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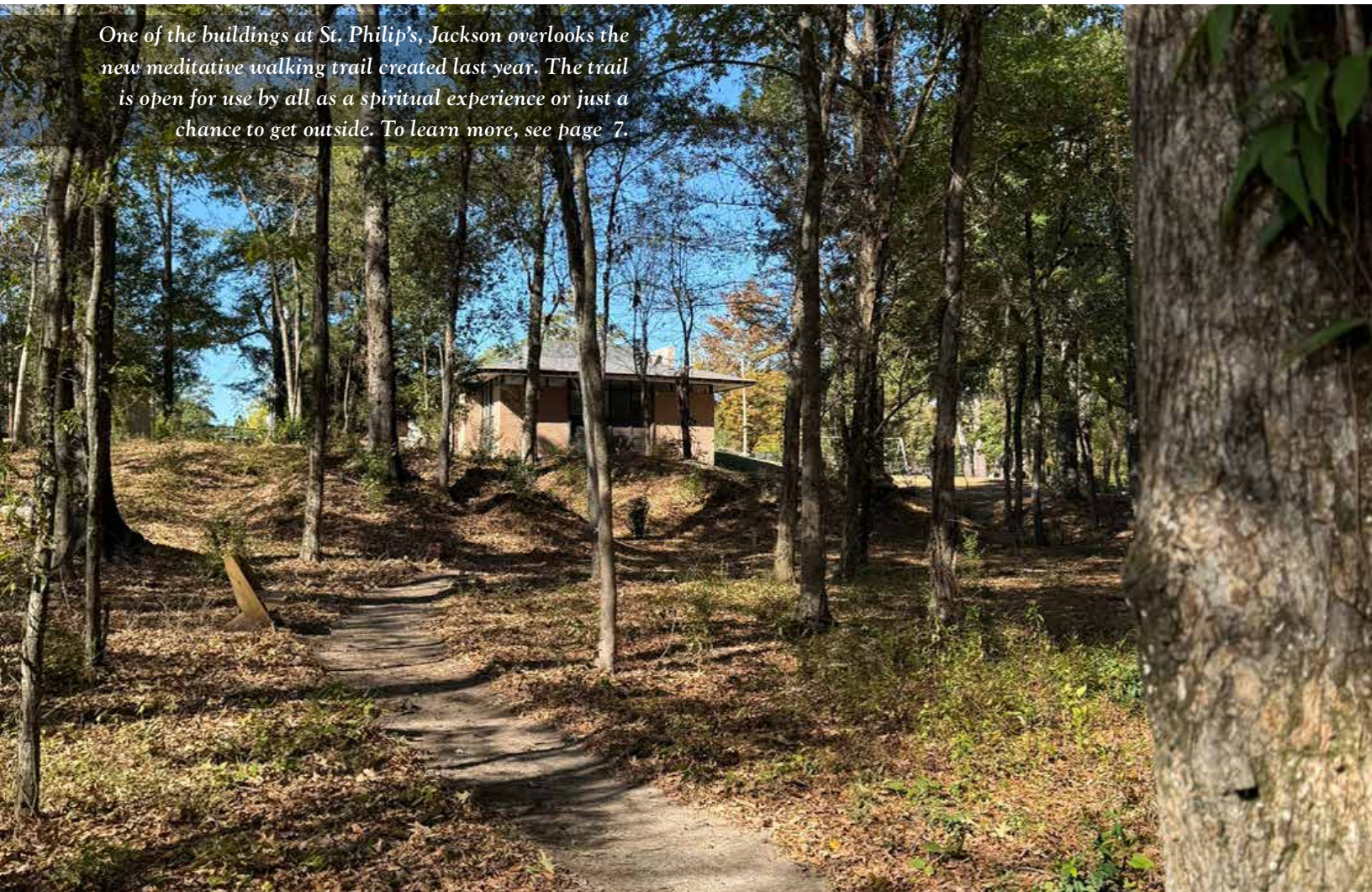

One of the buildings at St. Philip's, Jackson overlooks the new meditative walking trail created last year. The trail is open for use by all as a spiritual experience or just a chance to get outside. *To learn more, see page 7.*