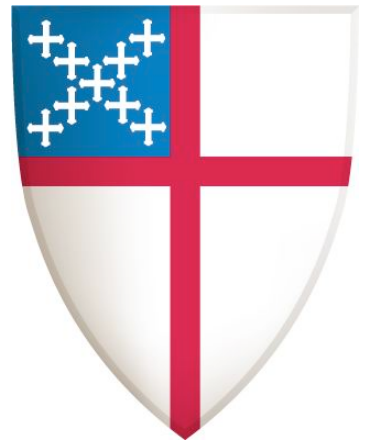


# The New Spirit

*Being a Light to the World: Worship • Youth • Discipleship*  
St. Thomas Episcopal Church, Battle Creek, Michigan  
December 2020



## Emmanuel: God with us! *By Fr. Brian Coleman*

Chances are, none of us have ever experienced a Holiday Season like the one we are about to celebrate. The word unprecedented seems to have lost its meaning after such a harrowing year. No doubt we will mostly be glad to close the book on 2020, with its global pandemic, racial injustices, political bitterness, and economic upheaval. But before we do, I'd like to encourage us to contemplate for a moment what we have lost, what we have been deprived of, how we have been asked to sacrifice personal freedoms, what we have suffered or seen others suffer. Basically, to "embrace the suck" as some describe the process of leaning into the challenges and misfortunes which have confronted us this year.

Why in the world would I want us to do that? Haven't we had enough unpleasantness? Can't we just move on and leave it all behind us? Yes! By all means, we can eventually do just that, but for the next few months we need to begin processing the pain and grief that has

accompanied 2020, and we can do that in the context of our faith and our experience of God.

It was a phenomenon in ancient Israel that in times of prosperity and good fortune the people forgot God, and claimed their success as their own. When adversity and misfortune came their way, however, they turned back and reengaged in their relationship with God. Every time they were afflicted they were reminded of their need for God and as their troubles multiplied they became aware of how far they had strayed. What was true for the Israelites, seems to be true for us, as well.



Psalm 107 is a meditation on this all too human tendency. The refrain of the psalm is repeated several times, "Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress."

So, the trials and tribulations that we have experienced over the past several months can be an occasion for us to "return to the Lord, who will have mercy and to our God who will richly pardon." We can recognize our need for renewal, mercy and grace especially in the midst of all the difficulties and challenges we face. In our loss we get an inkling of the fullness that God has in store for us. In despair, we dare to hope; in sorrow we are promised joy; and in death we look for the signs of resurrection and new life. This is the economy of God which Isaiah refers to in his prophecy, when the afflicted are brought good tidings, the brokenhearted are made whole, and the captive are set free. The vision promises "to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who

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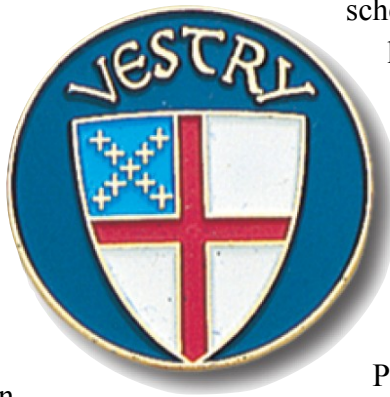
# Vestry News *by Bernie Squires*

The vestry met on November 20<sup>th</sup>. Since the church is closed, we met via Zoom. I will share some of the highlights of the meeting with you.

The nominating committee made up of Mike Regner, Lori Kiess, Doug Chapel and Bernie Squires met and started to discuss people who might want to run for a position on the vestry. Both Doug and I (Bernie) are eligible for another term and have agreed to run again. That leaves at least two or three positions open on the vestry. We have started to approach some people that we believe would be interested, but if you are interested in running for vestry, please contact one of the members of the committee.

The Outreach and Facilities team has been working hard on the outside as well as the inside of the church. Boilers are being worked on and the garth was cleaned up. They are also starting work on an inventory of all the new equipment we have acquired for streaming our services.

Work on the Rose window will begin in December instead of November. I know everyone is excited to see this work finished!



Parish Growth and Development folks have been busy getting ready for Renewal Works. It has been decided that we will do most of this important work via Zoom. Keep reading all the information provided by the team so that you can be involved.

Vestry members will again be contacting members of the church via the 'phone tree' to make sure you are all getting information on the holiday service

schedule and just to check in with you. All holiday services will be remote due to COVID 19, but Fr. Brian and Stephen will be working on many activities to keep us all in the holiday spirit!

The vestry approved the 2021 budget for the church. It has many cuts in it as income has gone down in the last year.

Pledge packets have gone out and we hope you will prayerfully consider your gift to St. Thomas. Both Fr. Brian and Stephen took a cut in pay this year so that we could balance the budget! We respectfully request that all pledge cards be returned to the church by November 29<sup>th</sup>.

Please contact a vestry member if you have any questions or concerns regarding the church and its operations!

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## REGULAR GIVING AT ST. THOMAS EPISCOPAL CHURCH

St. Thomas depends on regular giving to cover the cost of bills, compensation, programming, and maintenance throughout the year. It is easy to fall behind in pledging by missing a Sunday here or there, and it can be difficult to catch up. We accept online payments through *Realm*, which enables you to schedule donations through a checking or savings account or with a credit card. Scheduling your giving in this way means that your pledge makes it to church, even when you can't. It's a worry-free method of ensuring that your giving is consistent, timely and regular.

To set up an automatic recurring gift, scan the QR Code on this card with your smart phone camera. You will be directed to your Realm account and will be asked to login with your email and password. Then you can follow these easy steps:

1. Choose your gift amount.
2. Select "Pledges" from the drop down menu.
3. Select the frequency of your gift
4. Select the start date for your gift (you can also add an end date, should you wish).
5. Choose your payment method, or set up a new one. (Payments from Checking and Savings Accounts are preferred. Credit Card payments incur an additional 3% transaction fee.)
6. Click the "Give" Button.



# RenewalWorks and Transformation

by Dr. Michele Reid

According to Merriam-Webster, to renew is “to make like new, restore to freshness, vigor, or perfection,” to regenerate or revive or rebuild, or to replenish. In November’s *NewSpirit*, the RenewalWorks Team discussed St. Thomas’s upcoming RenewalWorks initiative in the context of parish vitality as well as our own individual spiritual journeys as parishioners.

In this December article, we are concentrating on the purpose of this renewal work: *transformation*, and what it might look like for us as a congregation. As Christians, St Paul calls on us to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:12). After an exhausting 2020 and the heartbreak of the pandemic, RenewalWorks offers us a valuable Lenten opportunity as a church family to contemplate our own unique spiritual journeys in order to discern where God’s path is leading us collectively, despite the uncertainties and what often seem like the overwhelming challenges of this particular time.

RenewalWorks provides us with an outline for exploring how we can come together to remind ourselves of our strengths and accomplishments, to identify where we want to improve, and to revive our mission and goals in 2021 with a newfound vitality and commitment. It is an opportunity to reinvigorate and be inspired anew with our church’s spiritual purpose and direction to better serve each other as well as our neighbors and fellow pathfinders in the Battle Creek community.

Now the RenewalWorks Team wants you! All parishioners are urged to complete the anonymous Spiritual Life Inventory in late January, which will be open for three weeks, and to consider volunteering or participating in the upcoming workshops. Let’s be *transformed* during Lent. More information on RenewalWorks can be found at [renewalworks.org](http://renewalworks.org), or contact one of us:

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# Advent

## *A season of carols (and hope)*

When we think of the seasons of Advent and Christmas, familiar carols and favorite holiday songs are a constant soundtrack to our memories and everyday activities. These songs of the season are powerful influencers in how we experience these days of expectant hopefulness, how we engage with others, and how we experience the holy in our midst. It is safe to say that Advent and Christmas 2020 will be vastly different - we won't be able to engage in the ways we've become accustomed; the ways we cherish; the manners through which we most readily find meaning and value.

But there will still be the music - always the music! Whether in your car or home, the grocery store, or simply in your memory, the music IS there - a familiar comfort to shake loose a cherished memory, to buoy the weary spirit, to create a sense of community. Those of us involved in the music ministry of the church miss collective music making tremendously, however we are grateful to still be able to offer our traditional Advent and Christmas choral services, albeit in a different manner this year. I hope you will note these dates/times and plan to join with our broader faith community virtually:

Choral Evensong for Advent  
Sunday, 6 December - 5pm

A Festival of Lessons & Carols  
Sunday, 20 December - 5pm

Additionally, I will be offering a new series called "Advent - Carols and Hymns of Hope". These short video presentations will give some historical background about beloved Advent hymns, include their connection to scripture, and include the playing/singing of those hymns - and words will be included so you can sing along at home. These will be published weekly and found in all the church's media formats. — Dr. Stephen White, Director of Music

Gloria in excelsis deo!

# December Happenings

## 2 - iBelieve Class, 6:30 p.m.

*Currently exploring the Apostles' Creed using Peter L. Berger's book Questions of Faith, a Skeptical Affirmation of Christianity.*

## 6 - Choral Evensong, 5 pm

*This service will be live-streamed to the St. Thomas website, YouTube Channel and Facebook page.*

## 9 - Preaching Circle, 6:30 p.m.

*meets online via Zoom.*

## 12 - Saturday Breakfast Program 7 - 10 a.m.

*St. Thomas volunteers on the second Saturday of each month to serve breakfast to the needy. To volunteer please contact the parish office.*

## 16 - The Good Book Club, 6:30 p.m.

*Thematic Bible study meets in the Lounge and virtually on Zoom*

## 17 - St. Thomas Vestry, 6 p.m.

*meets via Zoom.*

## 20 - Lessons and Carols

*This service will be live-streamed to the St. Thomas website, YouTube Channel and Facebook page.*

## 21 - The Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle

*Our Patronal Feast Day*

## 23 - Reading the Spiritual Classics, 6:30 p.m.

*The Seven Storey Mountain by Thomas Merton is our text for the month. Meets in the Lounge and virtually on Zoom.*

## 24 - Christmas Eve Worship, 5:30 p.m.

*This service will be live-streamed to the St. Thomas website, YouTube Channel and Facebook page.*

## 25 - Christmas Day Worship, 10 a.m.

*This service will be live-streamed to the St. Thomas website, YouTube Channel and Facebook page.*

## Looking ahead:

## Wednesday, January 6 - Feast of the Epiphany

## Sunday, January 10 - The Baptism of Our Lord

*Opportunity for baptism, renewal of baptismal vows, please speak to Fr. Brian as soon as possible if you would like to schedule a baptism.*

*For a complete list of events visit our up-to-date, online calendar at [www.StThomasBC.org](http://www.StThomasBC.org)*

## Sign up for Realm email and in-app notifications.

*For more information contact the parish office and ask for help setting up your profile and settings.*

*Don't miss out on parish news and announcements.*

*Subscribe to eNews updates on our website.*

*continued from front cover*

mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.” (61:3)

As we anticipate the end of this season of suffering and grief with several promising vaccines on the horizon, a new administration poised to address the grave challenges that face our nation, and with a deep resolve to redress the racial inequities that plague our society we know that God does not leave us comfortless, but assures us of his presence and power to save.

For me, one of the most meaningful verses in the Book of Psalms is 10:14, “Surely, you behold trouble and misery; you see it and take it into your own hand.” This speaks of God’s desire to accompany us in whatever we have to face. It is at the very heart of the Christmas story we anticipate each year in the Season of Advent. In the Christ-child God sees the precarious and vulnerable position of humanity and chooses to come alongside us assuming all the risk that that entails. So God is not distant or removed from our condition, but in our midst: Emmanuel! God with us! Every Christmas we are reminded of this truth and we celebrate the wonderful mystery of God entering into our world in the power and vulnerability of a child.

## 2020 Pledge Update

Pledged:	\$219,206.48
Received:	\$193,487.20
Pledge Balance:	\$28,676.28

Please make every effort to fulfill your pledge to St. Thomas before the end of the year. Thank you for your support and generosity!





During the coronavirus pandemic we have had to resort to alternative means of gathering for worship, fellowship and formation. This has taken the form of online meetings, live-streaming, and participating in various other kinds of unfamiliar technology.

One of these technologies that has been so essential to our common life is Zoom. We have used it for coffee hours on Sundays, live-streamed worship gatherings, vestry meetings, Bible studies, choir rehearsals, and faith formation classes. Zoom is safe and easy to use. All you need is an internet connected device like a computer, laptop, tablet or smart phone with a built-in microphone and web camera. You can also join a Zoom meeting via telephone using the dial-in numbers provided at the end of each invitation.

### How do I download Zoom?

You can download Zoom by going to the following web address: <https://zoom.us/download>. Just click the download button and the setup package will begin downloading to your computer. Once it's finished, you can find this package in Finder under Downloads. It is free to download! Double click Zoom.pkg and follow the install instructions. Zoom may later ask you to allow access to your webcam and microphone. Make sure you allow this so you can participate in your meetings properly. When you do decide to use Zoom, you can find it under your computer's Launchpad section titled Zoom.us.

Note: you do not need to download Zoom in order to use it. You can use it through your internet browser instead. However, downloading Zoom helps to avoid potential issues.

Mobile users will need to download and install the free Zoom app first: Download Zoom iOS App from iTunes Store.

Download Zoom Android App from Google Play

### Do I need to create an account?

Nope! You only need an account if you want to create a meeting, but most of us will just be accepting invitations. Be aware, though, that if you would like to host a meeting Zoom restricts your meeting time to 40 minutes with a basic free account.

### How do I join a meeting?

You can join Zoom meetings in a few different ways. You can go to [join.zoom.us](https://join.zoom.us) and enter the meeting I.D. provided to you by the host. Once the I.D. is accepted, your computer will prompt you to open the Zoom application. You can use this same process by going directly to the application first. Or the host can send you a link through email. Just click the link (usually in blue hypertext format) that follows the words "Join Zoom Meeting". All in all, it's super simple.

### Using Zoom

The software is intuitive and easy to use and almost all of the controls are shown directly on the screen. Here are a few tips to help you get the most out of your experience. From top right going clockwise: Screen View: the button to the top right will either say "Gallery View" (showing all participants at the same time; if there are more than 25 participants then there will be multiple screens); or "Speaker View" (showing the current speaker full

screen plus small images of the most recent speakers) and lets you freely switch to the other view at any time. To the right of it is a Full Screen button.

Microphone and Audio: the Microphone icon at the bottom left will let you Mute and Unmute your own microphone when this is allowed by the host. If you have background noise in your room, please keep yourself muted.

The arrow just to the right of that lets you access various audio settings and switch between different microphones and audio output devices, for example if you are using a USB headset microphone.

Dialing in by Phone: if you are having problems with computer audio and your meeting is set up to also allow you to dial in by phone, dial in to Zoom and enter the meeting ID when prompted. Phone users may mute or unmute themselves by entering \*6.

Mobile App: the mobile app runs on both iOS and Android phones and tablets and allows you to swipe left or right from a Speaker View to a reduced Gallery View (the number of images shown at a time depends on the screen size of your device) and also to a Driving Mode with sound only and a very large and easy to access Tap to Speak button. See you on Zoom!







## What I learned in Preaching Circle

Some years ago it was discovered there were a few would be preachers in our congregation, so Fr. Brian got the idea to put out feelers for anyone who wanted to preach to meet with him and Dale Bennet once a month to grow us up in the craft. We call ourselves "The Preaching Circle" and we still continue to add new people.

These are some of the things I've learned over the years about writing sermons. Pray about it. Read the lessons over every day. Live into them. Watch for connections. Pray. Read the texts before and behind. Put yourself there. Talk it over with your husband. Ask tough questions of the texts. Read several commentaries on them. Find a theme that strikes you personally. Pray about what's going on in the world and in the parish. Remember how much you love each person in the Parish. Pray for them. Ask what do we need to hear. Where is the good news in the texts.

Discover a different theme. Start writing that theme. Make

it an arrow that sails through your writing until it hits its mark at the end. Don't waver from your theme. Tell stories from your own experience. Pray. Be urgent and ruthless with yourself. Kill the babies (ideas) that are lovely but do not fit your theme. Pray. Find out what you've written is lousy and start over. Let yourself decide you are not going to preach because you just can't get it to gel. Wallow in that for 2 days. Go back and revisit it. Say, "Aha!" and work hard for hours or a few minutes. Read it to someone. Preach it to the preaching circle. Let them critique. Listen. Fix it. Pray. Go over it with a red marker and get rid of about every 5th word. Preach it. Stand straight. Project your voice. Pray. Enunciate. Go slow. Pause. Smile sometimes. Make eye contact. Say what you're going to say. Say it. Say what you just said. Sleep all Sunday afternoon. — *Sharon Engle*

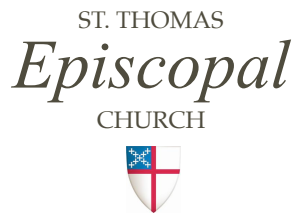
Congratulations to Trish Harris who has been nominated to participate in the Preaching Excellence Program of the Episcopal Preaching Foundation this spring in Virginia.

Participation in the program is limited to approximately 60 seminarians from Episcopal seminaries in the North America who show outstanding promise as preachers.

Trish admits she was giddy at the news and "I started crying when I read the email. This means so much to me. The academy is challenging me & stretching me and it's one of the best things I've ever done in my life."

We are so proud of you, Trish, and we look forward to hearing you preach again some day at St. Thomas. Your journey is an inspiration in authentic discernment and discipleship and we are grateful for the opportunity to share it with you.





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**The Rev. Brian Coleman**  
*Rector*

*RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED*

**Dr. Stephen White**  
*Director of Music*

**Denise Genise**  
*Bookkeeper*

**Karmel Addis**  
*Communications*

## *Parish Schedule*

### **Sundays**

9:00 a.m. Holy Eucharist (online)

11:00 a.m. *Coffee hour on Zoom*

5:00 p.m. Choral Evensong (online)  
(First and Third Sundays)

### **Weekdays in the Chapel**

*Monday – Saturday*

8:30 a.m. Morning Prayer on Zoom

5:30 p.m. Evening Prayer on Zoom

*Wednesdays*

Classes at 6:30 p.m.  
See December Happenings, pg. 7

*Fridays*

11:00 a.m. Bible Study on Zoom

### **Office Hours**

Monday – Friday 9 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.



*St. Thomas Holiday Basket Program serves approximately 72 families with two boxes of groceries for Thanksgiving and Christmas meals. This year many adaptations were introduced due to the pandemic, including the use of the elevator entrance to load cars picking up their food boxes. Thanks to all the volunteers who make this vital ministry possible. Happy Holiday Baskets!*