

The Peace

A Publication from the Episcopal Diocese of West Tennessee | Fall 2026 | Issue 11



Clergy Transitions

The Reverend Deacon Jessica Abell concluded her ministry at St. George's Independent School and now serves as chaplain at Grace-St. Luke's Episcopal School.

Following a season of faithful leadership as Interim Dean of St. Mary's Cathedral, **the Very Reverend Noah Campbell** assumed the role permanently in June, becoming the first permanent dean of St. Mary's Cathedral since 2019.

The Reverend Deacon Lavonnie Perry Claybon was ordained to the transitional diaconate at St. Mary's Cathedral in May 2026 and is now serving St. Andrew's Episcopal Church.

The Reverend Silas Engstrom was called as Rector of St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Dyersburg, beginning his ministry there in May 2026. A graduate of Virginia Theological Seminary, he most recently served as Curate of St. James Episcopal Church in Springfield, Missouri.

The Reverend Deacon Pam Evans was ordained to the transitional diaconate at St. Mary's Cathedral in May 2026 and serves at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Jackson.

The Reverend Donna Gerold concluded her ministry at St. John's Episcopal Church and now serves as Interim Rector of Calvary Episcopal Church in Louisville, Kentucky.

The Reverend Deacon Michael Johnson was ordained to the transitional diaconate at St. Mary's Cathedral in May 2026 and serves at Church of the Holy Communion.

The Reverend Barbara Kirk-Norris will conclude her ministry at Trezevant Manor in October 2026.

The Reverend Deacon Kathy McGregor now serves at St. Mary's Cathedral.

The Reverend Amanda McGriff concluded her ministry as a full-time hospital chaplain in October 2026 and will begin her ministry at Trezevant Manor in November 2026.

The Reverend Lisa McIndoo concluded her ministry at Holy Apostles Episcopal Church in August and now serves at St. Christopher's Episcopal Church in Pensacola, Florida.

The Reverend Wesley Rowell was ordained to the priesthood on June 8, 2026 at Calvary Episcopal Church, where he continues to serve on the ministry team.



The Peace is the official publication of the Episcopal Diocese of West Tennessee.

We encourage the submission of articles and images. We reserve the right to edit materials offered for publication. Please submit content to Emily Austin: eaustin@episwtn.org.

The diocesan office is located at:
692 Poplar Ave.
Memphis, TN 38105

(901) 937-4700
www.EDWTN.org

Bishop & Staff

THE RT. REV. PHOEBE A. ROAF,
Bishop of West Tennessee

MATTHEW AREHART,
Executive Director, St. Columba Episcopal Camp & Retreat Center

EMILY AUSTIN,
Director of Communications & Community Engagement

THE REV. CANON ROB COURTNEY,
Canon to the Ordinary

KARIN FREEMAN,
Diocesan Administrator

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Canon for Finance & Administration

DANESHA MURRAY,
Accounting Assistant

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Director of Ministries, Barth House Episcopal Center

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Campus Missioner

Bishop & Council

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On the Cover

We praise you for the many ministries in your Church, and for calling this your servant. Michael Johnson, Pam Evans, and Lavonnie Perry Claybon kneel before Bishop Phoebe Roaf during the part of the ordination liturgy where ordinands are consecrated as deacons. Each was ordained to the transitional diaconate at St. Mary's Cathedral on May 7, 2026.



The Peace receives top honor.

The Diocese of West Tennessee was well-represented at the 2026 Episcopal Communicators Conference in San Diego, where communications professionals from across The Episcopal Church gathered to learn, share ideas, and celebrate excellence in communications ministry. The Polly Bond Awards honor outstanding work in Episcopal church communications. Emily Austin, Director of Communications & Community Engagement, received the 2026 Polly Bond Award for **Best Print Magazine for a Diocese or Organization for The Peace**. She also received **Honorable Mention in the Writing: Feature** category for "In This Place: Remembering the Sacred Legacy of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Mason," which appeared in the Summer 2025 issue.

A MESSAGE FROM

Bishop Phoebe



Dear friends,

As we reflect on the events of the past several months, there are many things to celebrate. This issue of *The Peace* is full of hopeful articles about St. Columba staffing changes, new leadership for the Special Friends ministry, the ongoing impact of our Ministry Grants program, and the generosity of the Outreach Committee of St. Luke's Jackson. Faithful lay and ordained leaders engage in initiatives throughout our diocese on an ongoing basis, often without publicity. While they don't do this work to draw attention to themselves, their witness is a powerful reminder of the collective impact of our ministries in the 21 counties which comprise the Diocese of West Tennessee.

I recently returned from the fall House of Bishops meeting at Camp Allen in Texas where Presiding Bishop Sean Rowe presented a draft of the denominational strategic plan. Over the past six months, we have engaged in the first phase of a diocesan strategic planning initiative with AE Sloan Leadership consultants. The preliminary results of this work will be outlined at Diocesan Convention on November 21. I am hopeful that the diocesan and denominational initiatives will intersect in powerful ways as we seek to be the body of Christ in this corner of the vineyard. The gathered bishops also heard a moving address by Archbishop Sarah Mullally, the 106th Archbishop of Canterbury. Her presence was a powerful reminder of our connection with the 80 million persons who are part of the Anglican Communion in more than 165 countries.

It is easy to feel overwhelmed by all of the issues facing our nation and the world. As we are preparing to publish this newsletter, Hurricane Isaias is projected to approach landfall as a Category 3 storm. Our prayers are with our sisters and brothers who will be directly impacted by the storm. Despite the literal and figurative storms of life, we are not alone. Jesus surrounds us with his love and compassion, meeting us exactly where we are.

May we hold onto the One whose power can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.

Peace,

Bishop Phoebe

The Right Reverend Phoebe A. Roaf



(ROW 1) Holy Trinity parishioners Jeane Chapman and Tim Flowers jot down notes at the second annual Small Church Conference at St. Luke's Jackson in April. **(ROW 2)** Long before municipal-mandated vital records started being kept in medieval Europe, churches acted as the primary historical record-keepers. The Church has long played an important role in documenting the vital events of the community. Births, marriages, deaths, and other community happenings that took place long ago are known today because of the work of church archivists and historians throughout the ages. Archivists take part in the ministry of remembering. The Diocese of West Tennessee recently appointed two new Archivists: Angela Massengale and Whitney Robinson. The bulk of their work this year has been devoted to assisting the five churches forming St. Constance Episcopal Church with the practical tasks of closure and consolidation, but they hope to offer educational resources about church record keeping and archival best practices to the wider diocese in the future. **(ROW 3)** Members of the Diocesan Youth Council visited Trezevant Manor to present Easter cards made by the youth of the Diocese for distribution to Trezevant's residents during the Easter season. From left: Emily Austin (Diocesan Director of Community Engagement), Cannon Edwards (St. Mary's Cathedral), Katherine Meinhart (St. Andrew's), Thomas Meinhart (St. Andrew's), MC Hitt (Calvary), and the Rev. Paul McLain.





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Opposite Page

2026 has been a year of intentional prayer, reflection, and listening for members of the diocesan leadership team. The Bishop, along with her staff, members of Bishop & Council, Standing Committee, Finance Committee, and others are fully engaged in a process of Strategic Visioning. They are working with AE Sloan Leadership Consultants to articulate a diocesan-wide vision for the future of The Episcopal Church in West Tennessee. Pictured are members of the leadership team at a recent visioning workshop at Barth House.

St. Luke's Celebrates \$1 Million in Giving to Its Community

by Emily Austin

When Susan Francisco, a parishioner at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Jackson, checked the box next to Outreach Committee on a parish time and talents form, she did not expect it to lead to overseeing a program that would eventually distribute \$1 million.

"It turns out I was the only one that signed up for outreach committee that year."

Years later, Francisco chairs an outreach committee whose giving has reached a remarkable milestone: \$1 million distributed through St. Luke's community grantmaking. Behind that number are nonprofits, neighborhood programs, ministries and other organizations working with children, veterans, people experiencing addiction, families confronting loss and others throughout Jackson, Madison County and West Tennessee.

The story begins with Hal and Beth Meredith, longtime members of St. Luke's who continued to support the church even after moving away.

The Merediths had made provisions for St. Luke's in their estate planning. Francisco described the arrangement as a remainder trust, with Beth Meredith receiving income from the money during her lifetime. After her death, the funds came to St. Luke's. The church then established guidelines governing how income generated by the endowment would be used.

One portion supports members of St. Luke's pursuing higher education.

"Members of St. Luke who are pursuing college, master's or even doctoral degrees could get a stipend," Francisco said. "It's not a huge amount, but it is something that would certainly help."

The remainder goes toward outreach.

From one volunteer to a committee

Francisco came to St. Luke's after a path that had already taken her across Tennessee. She attended St. Mary's Cathedral in Memphis throughout her youth and attended Sewanee: The University of the South for college. Following medical training in Memphis, she eventually landed in Jack-

son, where she joined St. Luke's in 1991.

Her medical career prepared her for the work of chairing St. Luke's community grantmaking program.

"As a physician, you had to be on committees, and I ended up being on a critical care committee and chairing it for many, many years, mainly because no one else wanted to," Francisco said. "I can run a meeting and run it quickly."

So when St. Luke's needed a group to oversee the outreach money provided by the Meredith endowment, Francisco helped assemble one in 2010.

"Several of the people who were part of the original group are still on the committee today."

Today, including Francisco, the St. Luke's outreach committee includes Ginny DeWitt, Harry Ecoff, Andrea Hazlehurst, Kathleen Huneycutt, Jonathan Kendrick, and Charles Overlay.

Once formed, the committee then faced a wonderfully simple question that became the foundation for a locally driven grant-making process:

Who are some people we'd like to give money to?

Finding good work and helping it grow

The committee primarily supports qualifying charitable organizations serving people in Jackson and Madison County, although its reach may extend elsewhere in West Tennessee. Church members and committee members recommend organizations, including groups St. Luke's has funded previously and organizations the committee is encountering for the first time.

When an organization is new to the com-

mittee, St. Luke's takes the time to learn about it.

"We have someone from that group come and talk to us and tell us what they're doing and all that stuff and what they're trying to accomplish," Francisco said. "And then, after we've done that, get together and discuss those different groups and then decide about giving them money."

The approach is not simply to give money to every organization that comes along. Francisco said the committee has declined some requests when an organization did not have enough of a track record. The endowment's purpose also establishes boundaries around what St. Luke's can fund, with the focus on helping people.

Grant amounts vary with the money available and the organization's needs and experience.

"If it's something that's brand new, we might not give as much, to see how they're going to go," Francisco explained. "Sometimes things, great ideas, they don't quite gel or whatever. But usually if they've got proven track records, we've given between \$2,000 and \$5,000 per group."

Those individual grants, multiplied across years and organizations, have now added up to \$1 million.

A million dollars, many kinds of ministry.

Ask Francisco to name organizations St. Luke's has helped, and one name quickly leads to another.

"There's a lot of them we've done," she said.

The list she recalled during the conversation reflects the diversity of need in the community. St. Luke's has given to Keep My Hood Good, an after-school program; the library; Regional Interfaith Association;

the Carl Perkins Center; programs addressing alcohol and drug addiction; Scarlet Rope, serving survivors of human trafficking; and programs supporting veterans. The church has supported a music ministry in which symphony musicians play classical music for people receiving chemotherapy. It has helped a hospital program serving families when a baby dies. It has supported a prison education initiative that allows incarcerated people to begin working toward a degree they can continue after leaving prison.

Of the prison program, Francisco was particularly struck by its potential to ripple from one generation into the next.

“It helps them to let their children know that it’s possible to succeed and get an education, get a better life,” she said.

St. Luke’s also supports a local café built around a pay-what-you-can model, where people unable to pay for a meal can instead contribute through work.

“It’s just about anything that is a nonprofit that is helping people with things like addiction, loss of a baby, whatever,” Francisco said.

Sharing beyond St. Luke’s

Eventually, the committee began asking what the Meredith family’s gift might make possible beyond St. Luke’s immediate surroundings.

After St. Luke’s hosted the 2025 diocesan Small Church Conference, Francisco proposed using some of the available money to empower smaller Episcopal congregations farther from Memphis and Shelby County. St. Luke’s began offering some of those churches \$5,000 to put toward a charitable organization in their community or toward work that could strengthen their own congregation and ministry.

The idea recognizes something small churches often understand better than anyone: significant ministry can happen with limited resources, and sometimes an injection of funding can make something previously out of reach possible.

Francisco also hopes the grants help communities see their local Episcopal churches in new ways.

“If we can raise awareness of their church in their community, maybe that will get them more attendees too,” she said. “It’s kind of, this may not work, but at least we’ll try. But it’ll still be doing good regardless.”

For Susan Francisco, the grants are only one expression of the congregation’s commitment to its neighbors. Members of St. Luke’s give not only financially, but through their work, volunteer service and relationships throughout the community. “We’ve got a lot of involvement that’s not just strictly money,” Francisco said. That understanding of generosity is deeply rooted in the Episcopal tradition of stewardship: what we have is not ours, but has been entrusted to our care.

Hal and Beth Meredith entrusted a gift to their parish. St. Luke’s received it and, over the years, has continued to give it away. Their generosity has become scholarships for students, meals for hungry



ROW 1: Andrea Hazlehurst & Ashley Akerson of Dreamers & Makers Art Club, an art- and culinary-centered afterschool program in Jackson for middle school students.

ROW 2: Andrea Hazlehurst & Tina Varghese from ComeUnity Cafe in Jackson, a unique social enterprise with a mission to “build community by providing nutritious and delicious meals to the people of Jackson regardless of their ability to pay, while using locally grown, organic, and sustainably grown ingredients.”

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ST. LUKE’S EPISCOPAL CHURCH.



From Trail to Table

Two new members of the St. Columba team bring their gifts to camp and community

CANDICE BAXTER

St. Columba has a way of bringing people to the right place at the right time. This year, two new members of the St. Columba team arrived with years of experience, a deep appreciation for camp and community, and skills that seem tailor-made for the work ahead. Facilities and Grounds Manager Sam Perkins brings a lifelong love of the outdoors and a knack for finding practical solutions, while Executive Chef Kendrick Robertson brings creativity, hospitality and a passion for connecting people through food. Their paths to St. Columba are different, but both are discovering that this special place has plenty of room for their gifts to grow.

The night before Sam Perkins' first day as Facilities and Grounds Manager at St. Columba, a massive old oak fell across the main trail behind Gates Pavilion. No injuries. No structural damage. But its trunk was about as wide as a city street is tall, and MUD Camp was in full swing. He had to clear this essential pathway for the campers, and he knew just how to do it and which tools to use. He just needed to be pointed in the right direction. The reception that followed provided space for fellowship, reunion, and welcome, setting a tone of hospitality and connection that carried into the sessions that followed.

Which Way?

"My career started out mowing yards as a kid, and very quickly I started working at summer camp because I didn't want to mow yards anymore." Perkins attended Camp Hopewell in Oxford, Mississippi, and worked there all through college. "It really inspired a love for the outdoors, a love for the community that you gain from camp."

As he studied Parks and Recreation Administration at Ole Miss, Perkins got interested in sustainable agriculture. "Previously, I thought farming was acres of corn and massive combines," he says. Before long, he grew infatuated with learning about small-scale organic no-till farming and rotational grazing of animals.

While he worked in camp maintenance, he learned to become a handy man of sorts. He mulched the challenge course, repaired broken water lines, and learned to fix just about anything

worth fixing. But during the summers he took youth on wilderness adventures through a trip-based summer program. Perkins led backcountry experiences to Jackson Hole, the Tetons, Hawaii, and Australia.

Change in Course

After earning his Bachelor's degree, Perkins moved to Salt Lake City, but a severe snowboarding accident left him idle at home with time to heal. His interest returned to agriculture. He interned at a small farm in South Carolina and discovered the importance of developing his maintenance skills. "When you're a farmer, you have to learn how to fix things yourself," says Perkins. "Because if you always have to pay other people to do things for you, you'll never make any money."

This experience led to his role as Farm Manager at Ounce of Hope for six years. While engulfed in seasonal horticulture practices, Perkins developed a philosophy on preventative maintenance. "It's important to invest dollars in taking care of valuable equipment, not only to keep things from breaking, but for safety. It's the key to stewarding resources properly."

Right Place, Right Time

Through a decade of camp experience and a decade of farming, Perkins had the tools and knowledge to use them this past summer on his very first day working at St. Columba. When faced with the biggest tree he'd ever had to clear, he used it as a learning moment. Now he knows where to find the chainsaws in the shop, the easiest trail to handle the tractor, and the best place to



ROW 1: Sam Perkins, Facilities and Grounds Manager.

ROW 2: Kendrick "Ken" Robertson, Executive Chef.

ROW 3: Chef Ken blends familiar downhome hospitality with international techniques and flavors: "instead of roasted chicken thighs with gravy, we have blackened chicken with lemon-herb jus," he says. "So we trade thick gravy for a thinner pan sauce, which is a French technique. Then add some fresh veggies, a starch, and that's a good base-level entree."

drop logs near the firewood shed.

Sam Perkins didn't look at his first day as an insurmountable task. He was happy to crank up a chainsaw and get down to it. "I've worked in camps and agriculture all my life. This is the part I like, learning how to find solutions to problems."

Contemporary Southern Fusion

With more than 13 years of experience in Memphis-area fine dining restaurants, Chef Ken has honed a certain style. "People coming to St. Columba are getting a chance to taste the life I've lived through my own art form," he says. "Food is easy, but capturing culture is different."

During his years at Andrew Michael Italian Kitchen, he learned how simple it is to make fresh pasta. At Southern Social, he gained leadership and managerial skills, learning the importance of proper ordering and building vendor relationships. He led campus-wide catering at the University of Memphis where he learned to juggle multiple events at once.

His cooking philosophy developed into what Chef Ken calls *contemporary southern fusion*. He blends familiar downhome hospitality with international techniques and flavors. "For instance, instead of roasted chicken thighs with gravy, we have blackened chicken with lemon-herb jus," he says. "So we trade thick gravy for a thinner pan sauce, which is a French technique. Then add some fresh veggies, a starch, and that's a good base-level entree."

Elevating the Options

Chef Ken has inspiring ideas for the future. He wants to host intimate upscale outdoor fine dining experiences, like an evening in the fairy forest or sunset by the lake. For event coordinators, he has created a selection of four menu options with tiered pricing for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Beginning in 2027, coordinators can choose from a list of entrees, sides and desserts, which will rotate according to what produce is in season locally.

"I'm happy to lead live cooking demonstrations and classes," says Chef Ken. The open kitchens of Johnson and Coleman lodges have large islands perfect for groups to learn how to make pasta, biscuits from scratch or just watch as the meal is being created. "We can do themed tastings. I have recipes, but they can change slightly. I follow my heart in the moment if it needs more salt or acidity, and people feel connected to that."

This fall will be Chef Ken's first time seeing the leaves change all around Scheibler Lodge. As he begins a new season of receptions and art openings along with retreats and camps for St. Columba, he's grateful for the way it all worked out. Everyone's prayers were answered.

And as for those cups of joy, well, they sure do runneth over.

Candice Baxter is Marketing and Communications Manager at St. Columba Episcopal Camp and Retreat Center.



When Janie Morris started Special Friends Fellowship in 2016, she was looking for something her son Walker had lost when he aged out of a Christian ministry program: a place to belong.

Nearly a decade later, that same sense of belonging remains at the heart of Special Friends Fellowship, a West Tennessee Episcopal Diocesan ministry for individuals with special needs, ages 15 and up.

This fall, the ministry begins a new chapter under the leadership of Karrie LaCroix, St. George's Director of Children, Family and Youth Ministry. Karrie and the St. George's youth have spent the past two years volunteering with Special Friends, and she says they have loved every moment with the group.

Karrie brings a deeply personal understanding of the ministry's importance. Her daughter Emma, who lived with mitochondrial disease, taught her family to embrace life fully and cherish the joy found in time together. As a registered nurse and longtime member of the Special Friends community, Karrie has a clear vision of Special Friends being a place where faith and friendship meet in a very tangible way.

"I hope that everyone in the Special Friends Fellowship will feel loved and get a chance to experience God's love through the hearts and spirits of our volunteers," Karrie says.

The evenings are intentionally simple: dinner around the table, time for a favorite activity, and worship together in the Nave. Some nights bring bingo or painting. Others might be a disco night, or an adventure beyond the parish. This fall, the group hopes to gather for a Memphis Tigers tailgate and visit a local horse farm.

What matters most, though, is the gathering itself. Special Friends offers a place where people are known, welcomed, and invited to participate fully in the life of the church.



As this beloved ministry enters its next season, Karrie hopes more friends will find their way to the table, and more volunteers will discover the joy of being part of it.

Get Involved!

Special Friends gathers bimonthly at St. George's Episcopal Church in Germantown, 2425 S. Germantown Road. For the upcoming schedule or to contact Karrie LaCroix, go to

EDWTN.org/groups/specialfriends

Whitney Boyd is Director of Communications at St. George's Episcopal Church in Germantown.

A New Rhythm for Special Friends

BY WHITNEY BOYD

Doing Good and Sharing Well

Four Churches Build Lasting Community Partnerships

by Gabi Flohr

Through its innovative Small Church Initiative, the Episcopal Diocese of West Tennessee demonstrated that a congregation does not need a massive membership roll to make a monumental community impact. At the heart of that effort was the Do Good & Share Ministry Grant Program, a two-year initiative inspired by Hebrews 13:16: “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have.”

Through Experimental and Sustaining Grants, the program encouraged congregations to listen closely to their communities, build relationships, and respond creatively to local needs. While the grant program concluded following the 2025 funding cycle, its legacy remains visible in the ministries and partnerships that continue across West Tennessee.

Among the churches that received grants in both 2024 and 2025, four congregations offer particularly compelling examples of how outreach can grow when churches commit to learning from their neighbors rather than simply serving them: Grace Episcopal Church in Paris, St. Thomas the Apostle in Humboldt, St. Mary's Episcopal Cathedral in Memphis, and Ravenscroft Episcopal Chapel in Brighton.

Grace Episcopal Church (Paris): Meeting Neighbors Where They Are

At Grace Episcopal Church in Paris, the Loaves & Fishes ministry's evolution reflects the heart of the grant program's mission. The ministry initially received an Experimental Grant in 2024 with hopes of providing hot meals and creating opportunities for conversation and relationship-building within the church itself. Church leaders envisioned gathering neighbors around a shared table and learning from those interactions.

What happened instead became a lesson in listening.

As participation lagged, leaders began asking why. Transportation barriers and discomfort with entering an unfamiliar church environment prevented many neighbors from taking part.

Instead of giving up, the congregation adapted.

“We were wanting originally to start a program where we would actually feed people in-house ... and no one came,” Patricia Easley recalled. “We quickly shifted

gears that very first year, and we started doing a mobile food mission where we would just actually go out and deliver.”

The ministry relocated its efforts to a nearby low-income housing complex, delivering food, laundry detergent, cleaning supplies, and other necessities directly to residents. Volunteers intentionally scheduled deliveries near the end of each month.

As Easley explained, “...even if they have government-subsidized funding like food stamps or the SNAP cards or whatever, they usually run out of those benefits toward the end of the month.”

The relationship continued to deepen. In addition to food deliveries, the ministry expanded to include backpacks filled with school supplies and handmade prayer journals for local children. What began as an experimental project grew into a responsive ministry shaped by ongoing conversations with the people it served.

For Easley, seeing children receive those resources remains one of the ministry's most meaningful moments.

“Thinking of kids going to school and not having what they needed the first day ... that was probably one of the proudest moments,” she said. Remembering photos parents later sent of their children with new backpacks and supplies, she added, “...that just warmed my heart.”

Ultimately, the ministry's greatest success may not be measured in meals delivered or supplies distributed, but in the congregation's willingness to change course.

“We had to leave [the in-house plan] behind because, as I said, people weren't comfortable coming in,” Easley reflected. “But it's still rewarding because we know that we are providing a need ... meeting them where they are instead of expecting them to come to us.”

St. Thomas the Apostle (Humboldt): Investing in Local Youth

For St. Thomas the Apostle in Humboldt, the grant program provided an opportunity to strengthen a growing partnership with the local Boys & Girls Club.

The congregation's first grant helped support a playground project, creating a recreational space for local children and youth. By the following year, the church had deepened its commitment through the “World Without Technology” initiative, which sought to improve technology access and educational opportunities for club participants.

While the projects themselves changed, the underlying partnership remained consistent.

“In the initial year of the grant ... what our grant money enabled them to do was rework the concrete pad and install a portable adjustable basketball goal,” said Rev. Deacon Tommy Rhoads. “And in the second year, they were redoing their STEM center ... and our grant money enabled them to purchase updated laptop computers.”

For Rhoads, one of the most significant outcomes of the partnership has been its effect on the church's visibility and relationships within Humboldt.

“We have had great local media coverage of the grant,” he said. “And so, we have really raised the profile of the church in the community. The broader community outside of the church community has gotten to know us and who we are because of our involvement.”

That visibility has translated into deeper engagement. Beyond grant-funded projects, parishioners now participate in the club's Angel Tree ministry and annual fundraising events, creating year-round opportunities for connection. The relationship that began through financial

support has grown into an ongoing partnership rooted in shared investment in local youth.

St. Mary's Cathedral (Memphis): Building on Relationships Already Formed

At St. Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, both grant projects emerged from relationships that already existed through the cathedral's longstanding outreach ministries.

The cathedral's 2024 project focused on helping neighbors access urgent healthcare services. Through years of regular interaction with residents experiencing poverty and housing instability, volunteers repeatedly encountered individuals facing medical concerns but lacking transportation, insurance, or other resources needed to obtain treatment. The project sought to connect those neighbors with care through Church Health and other local providers. The initiative grew directly from needs identified through face-to-face ministry.

By 2025, the cathedral had turned its attention toward another concern raised by neighbors: access to fresh food. Through the "Hope & Food: Fresh From the Farm" initiative, St. Mary's partnered with Alpha Omega Veterans Services to make fresh produce available during its weekly outreach ministry. The project built upon an existing ministry that already welcomed more than 150 guests each week and responded to repeated requests for healthier food options. The goal was not simply to distribute food but to provide fresh fruits and vegetables that were often difficult to obtain in the surrounding neighborhood.

In many ways, the cathedral's two grant projects illustrate a similar pattern. Rather than beginning with predetermined programs, ministry leaders listened carefully to their neighbors, identified recurring needs, and then designed initiatives around those observations. Healthcare access led to one project. Food access led to another. Both grew out of relationships already established through years of presence and trust.

Ravenscroft Episcopal Chapel (Brighton): A Partnership That Continues to Evolve

Long before participating in the grant program, Ravenscroft Episcopal Chapel in Brighton had cultivated a strong relationship with nearby Drummonds Elementary School. Church members volunteered in classrooms, supplied books and school supplies, helped maintain gardens, and supported school events.

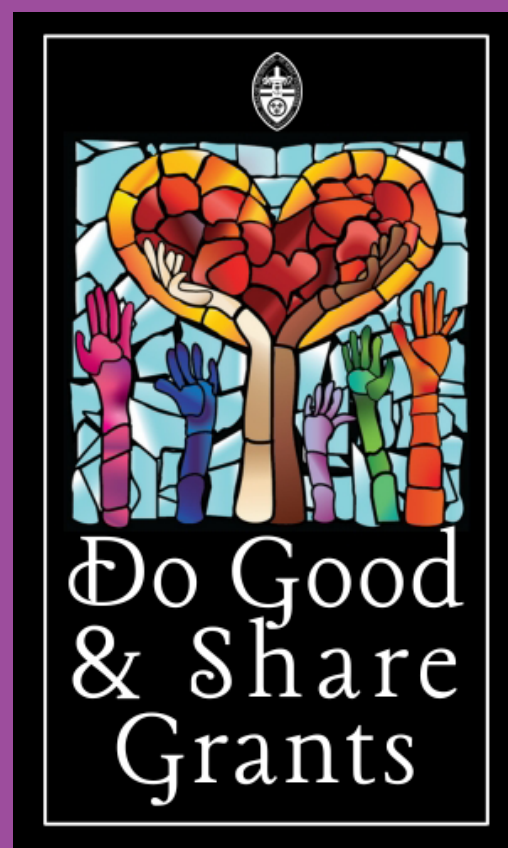
The congregation's 2024 grant project expanded that relationship by concentrating on family support and education. Through the Family Tools for Success initiative, parents participated in sessions focused on topics such as financial literacy, educational engagement, attendance, child development, and employment readiness. Rather than offering one-time assistance, the church sought to provide resources that could strengthen families over the long term.

As the partnership matured, church and school leaders gained a clearer understanding of their community's evolving needs. The result was a different approach in 2025.

The chapel's second grant focused on encouraging student achievement through a series of academic incentive programs. Reading challenges, mathematics competitions, and proficiency awards celebrated educational milestones and encouraged students to develop confidence in their abilities. Working closely with school leadership, the congregation identified ways to motivate and support students while remaining deeply connected to the life of the school.

The transition from family-focused programming to student achievement initiatives demonstrates the flexibility that characterized

Do Good and Share continued on page 21



When Constance and Her Companions—the Martyrs of Memphis—won Lent Madness in 2026, it was a delightful surprise for the Episcopal Diocese of West Tennessee.

Lent Madness, a March Madness-style online tournament featuring saints and other figures from the Christian tradition, is meant to be fun. But for those of us in Memphis, seeing Constance and her companions make their way through the bracket and ultimately win felt like something more than a game. It was an opportunity to tell a story that belongs not only to Memphis, but to the wider Church.

That story was introduced to thousands of Lent Madness participants in part through the writing of Neva Fox, a New York-area writer and longtime participant in Lent Madness. Fox had encountered Constance and her Companions years earlier through the Episcopal Church's calendar of saints. When she was assigned them for Lent Madness this year, she was thrilled.

"I've been doing Lent Madness for decades," Fox said. "That's how I first learned about Constance and her companions. There were a few things that struck me about them, and I always kept them in mind."

One of those things became the theme Fox carried throughout her Lent Madness writing: "Remember their names."

The ordinariness of the Martyrs of Memphis is important. The women who came to Memphis were primarily young teachers from elsewhere, sent to establish a school. The clergy came from different places, too. They could not have known exactly what they would face when they arrived.

Remember Their Names

The names are Sister Constance, Sister Thecla, Sister Ruth, Sister Frances, the Rev. Charles Parsons and the Rev. Louis Schuyler. Two others survived the epidemic. "Yes, we are honoring these men and women," Fox said, "but let us honor them by their names."

That simple phrase—remember their names—became especially meaningful in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Fox saw a connection between the experience of a modern pandemic and the story of Memphis in 1878, when yellow fever swept through the city.

But the parallels only went so far. The conditions the Sisters of St. Mary faced in Memphis are almost unimaginable to us now.

"They didn't have air conditioning," Fox said. "It was hot, it was muggy."

And they weren't wearing shorts and T-shirts.

"They were wearing their full regalia," Fox said.

They Stayed

While many people who could leave Memphis did, Constance and her companions stayed. They cared for people who were sick and dying, took in orphans, fed them and found homes for them. They cared for people who were dying in the streets and dealt with the bodies of those who had died.

"They were there," Fox said. "And they had prayers that they prayed every time. And they kept their ministry to God in the forefront."

That, perhaps, is the part of the story that resonates most deeply: they stayed.

"They were ordinary people who found themselves in a situation and they were called by God," Fox said. "We are the same way. We may be ordinary people, but we also are called by God."

The ordinariness of the Martyrs of Memphis is important. The women who came to Memphis were primarily young teachers from elsewhere, sent to establish a school. The clergy came from different places, too. They could not have known exactly what they would face when they arrived.

Saints Come From Us

Martyrs of Memphis win Lent Madness

EMILY AUSTIN



“They became a team right away,” Fox said. “A lot of times it takes time to grow to be a team... But they didn’t have time. And they recognized they didn’t have time.”

They came together and did the work in front of them.

The Ministry of Presence

That witness is particularly striking when viewed from the perspective of St. Mary’s Cathedral, where the memorial altar honors Constance and her companions. One can’t help but think about the history of the Cathedral and the wider Episcopal Church in West Tennessee. The Sisters of St. Mary served a city that had only recently emerged from the Civil War, in a time when segregation and racial injustice were deeply embedded in American life. Many of the people they served during the yellow fever epidemic were already marginalized with little ability to leave Memphis.

Against that backdrop, the witness of the Sisters of St. Mary takes on another dimension. Their ministry was one of radical presence: they stayed with people who had been abandoned by much of the city.

For Fox, that ministry of presence remains central to her own understanding of lay ministry.

“I’m not ordained, but I am a firm believer in lay ministry,” she said. “And lay leadership.”

She calls it “the ministry of presence” or “the ministry of witness.”

Martyrs continued on page 20



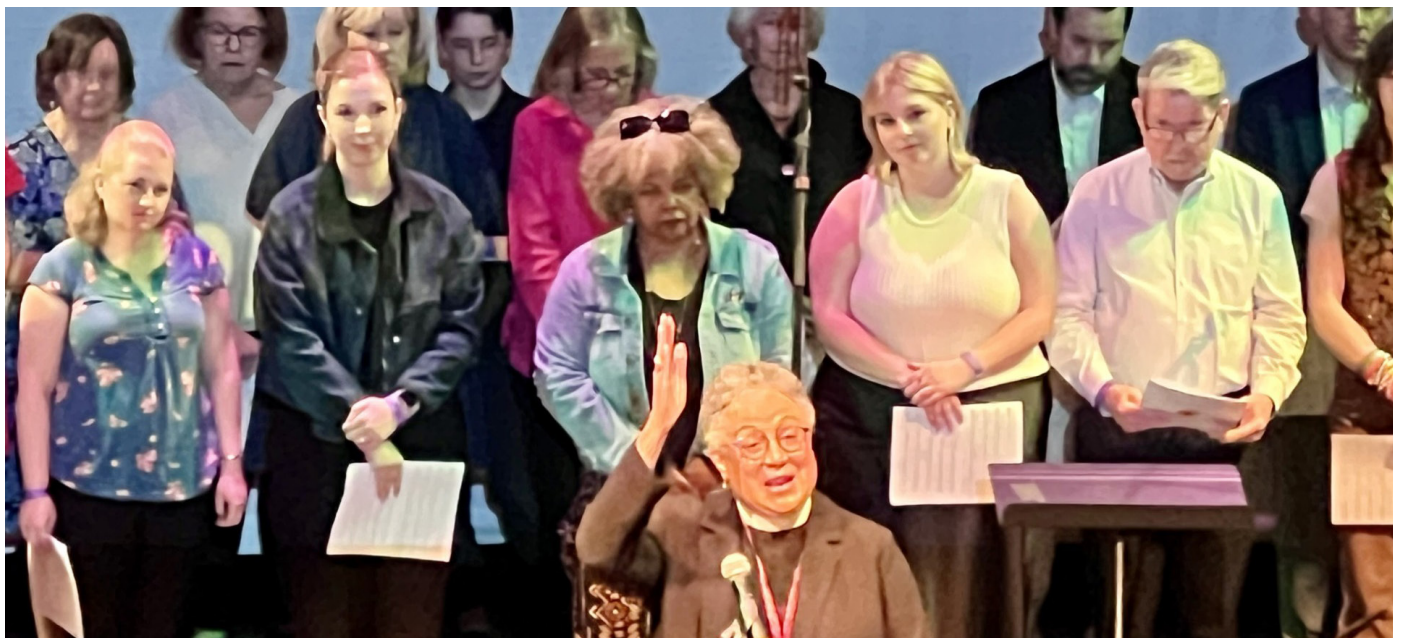
ROW 1: In September, members of St. Mary’s Cathedral, St. Constance Episcopal Church, Trinity Mason, and the Sisters of St. Mary’s Convent (Sewanee) gathered at the graves of the Martyrs of Memphis at Elmwood Cemetery to give thanks for their ministry and sacrifice.

ROW 2: An icon depicting the Martyrs of Memphis, written by Suzanne Schleck. Schleck’s work has been published in *Episcopal Life*, in a number of online exhibits with the Episcopal Church and Visual Arts (ECVA), as well as at the 2006 General Convention of the Episcopal Church.



If it's not about Love, it's not about God!

In April, Grace-St. Luke's Episcopal Church and the Diocese of West Tennessee collaborated to host Summit on the Power of Love at Crosstown Concourse in Memphis, featuring a prophetic keynote address from Bishop Michael Curry, retired Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church.





TOP: Make no peace with oppression. Against the backdrop of a Holy Week sunset, worshipers gathered at the Barth House for a diocesan Service of Prayer and Lament in April.

RIGHT: The Rev. Dn. Linda Tardy Wilson, Bishop Phoebe Roaf, and the Rev. Becca Stevens at the Episcopal Women's History Project Conference in Nashville in June 2026. In her keynote address, Stevens reflected on the witness of the Martyrs of Memphis, whose decision to remain and care for those suffering during the 1878 yellow fever epidemic continues to challenge the Church.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE EPISCOPAL WOMEN'S HISTORY CONFERENCE.





LEFT: *Many hands make light work. A team of volunteers from throughout the Diocese came together on Memorial Day to clear out trash from the packing party at Emmanuel (Memphis) in May. Emmanuel is one of the West Tennessee congregations merging to form St. Constance Episcopal Church.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF HESTER MATHES.

BELOW: *In August, staff from the Diocesan Office, Barth House, and St. Columba retreated at Ballet Memphis. Left to right: Karin Freeman, the Rev. Dorothy White, Danesha Murray, Maggie Schaumleffel, Canon Alisa Kelly, Bishop Phoebe Roaf, Ken Robertson, Shelby Noustens, the Rev. Canon Rob Courtney, Candice Baxter, Sam Perkins, Matthew Arehart, and Emily Austin. Not pictured: Dillon Harrison.*





TOP: *Happening 77 at Church of the Holy Communion in August . PHOTO COURTESY OF HAPPENING WEST TENNESSEE.*

RIGHT: *At the second annual diocesan Small Church Conference, hosted by St. Luke's Episcopal Church in April, the Rev. Sarah Cowan presented encouraging insights.*



Martyrs continued from page 15

"Sometimes you just have to let people talk to you," she said.

That ministry can be as simple as welcoming people who have come into your church for the first time, showing them where the restrooms are or helping them find their way around. It can mean feeding people, volunteering at a food bank or responding when a neighbor is in need.

"There's a place for checkbook ministry," Fox said. "But for me, and maybe for you too, maybe for most of us, we find ourselves in situations where we just know we have to do something."

They Showed Up

That is one reason the story of Constance and her companions continues to matter. Their sainthood did not begin with extraordinary power or status. They were ordinary people who found themselves in an extraordinary circumstance and responded to what they believed God was asking of them.

"They were called to do this, and they showed up," Fox said.

As we look ahead to 2028, when the Diocese of West Tennessee will commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Martyrs of Memphis, we have an opportunity to remember their names in a deeper way. St. Mary's Cathedral is beginning to look toward that anniversary, and each year around Martyrs Weekend, members of the St. Mary's Episcopal School community participate in remembering and caring for the graves of the martyrs at Elmwood Cemetery.

And now there is another connection.

During Holy Week 2026, five Episcopal congregations in West Tennessee that have been doing ministry together for several years voted to become one congregation. From a list of roughly 25 possible names, they chose St. Constance Episcopal Church.

Saints Come From Us

Perhaps that is why Lent Madness gave us such a gift this year. A playful competition brought a Memphis story to the attention of people far beyond West Tennessee. Fox's book club, for example, is predominantly Roman Catholic, and she began sharing Lent Madness with them. They knew little about the saints.

"They're just amazed, like, *where do these saints come from?*"

Fox's answer is simple:

"They come from us. They come from our personas. They come from our history. They come from our humanity."

The invitation of the saints is to remember that ordinary people can become witnesses to extraordinary love.

And so, in the spirit of Lent Madness and in anticipation of the 150th anniversary of their martyrdom, we remember their names:

Sister Constance.
Sister Thecla.
Sister Ruth.
Sister Frances.
The Rev. Charles Parsons.
The Rev. Louis Schuyler.

"Remember their names," Fox said.

And perhaps, as we remember them, we might also ask ourselves: Where are we being called to show up?



The first worship service of the newly-named St. Constance Episcopal Church in Memphis. Members of the five congregations merging to form St. Constance (All Saints', Emmanuel, Good Shepherd, Holy Trinity, and St. Joseph's) voted to name the new congregation in honor of Blessed Constance. Left to right: the Rev. Dr. Dorothy White, the Rev. Canon Rob Courtney, the Rev. Hester Mathes, and Alan Bolton.

St. Luke's continued from page 7

neighbors, support for people seeking recovery, care for grieving families, educational opportunities and resources for organizations serving communities throughout West Tennessee. More recently, St. Luke's has extended that circle of stewardship by placing resources in the hands of smaller Episcopal congregations and trusting them to discern how those gifts might best serve their own communities.

In that sense, the story of St. Luke's \$1 million milestone is about more than philanthropy. It is about vocation: a parish asking how the gifts entrusted to it might participate in God's work beyond its own walls. A gift received becomes a gift offered, and that offering becomes ministry in places and lives the original givers could never have known.

The \$1 million marks what St. Luke's has given away. Its greater measure may be the abundance made possible when a church understands its gifts not simply as resources to possess, but as blessings entrusted to it for the sake of the world.

Do Good and Share continued from page 13

many successful grant projects. Like other recurring recipients, Ravenscroft continually adjusted its efforts based on what it learned from its community partner.

A Legacy of Listening

Although the Do Good & Share Ministry Grant Program concluded after the 2025 funding cycle, its impact continues through the relationships it helped strengthen.

At Grace Episcopal Church, volunteers learned that ministry sometimes means changing plans and delivering assistance directly to neighbors. At St. Thomas the Apostle, a partnership with the Boys & Girls Club became a visible sign of the church's commitment to local youth. At St. Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, outreach projects emerged from years of trust built through weekly ministry. At Ravenscroft Episcopal Chapel, collaboration with a local school evolved as new needs and opportunities surfaced.

Together, these congregations embody the central lesson of the Do Good & Share program: effective ministry begins with relationships. By listening carefully, adapting faithfully, and walking alongside their neighbors, these churches demonstrated that even the smallest congregations can become powerful agents of transformation in their communities.

Gabriella "Gabi" Flohr is a senior at St. George's Independent School in Collierville, Tennessee, where she is the Editor-in-Chief of the student publication, The Lodge.



TOP: School is back in session! In August 2026, St. Luke's supplied Arlington Elementary School with 500 brand new backpacks for the school year. Pictured is Andrea Hazlehurst with Arlington principal Dr. Shemon Reaves.

BELOW: Donna Stines with Health & Healing Foundation, Andrea Hazlehurst, Kathleen Huneycutt, Susan Francisco and Tina Prescott, CEO of West Tennessee Healthcare

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ST. LUKE'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

At Large and At Small

by the Rev. Canon Rob Courtney



One of the gifts of being Canon to the Ordinary is the 30,000 ft. view of the Diocese I get regularly. Because I work with people from around the diocese, and travel to congregations around the diocese, I get to see more of what goes on than the average clergy or layperson in an individual faith community. The Bishop gets this type of view as well, but there is usually more pomp and circumstance when she is present than when I am present. I believe canons to the ordinary get to see more of the regular day-to-day (or Sunday-to-Sunday, as it were) than bishops do.

One example of this that has continued to stick with me is a visit I made to St. Thomas, Somerville nearly a year ago. St. Thomas is one of our smallest congregations, and they do not have full-time clergy. Deacon Drew Woodruff is with them twice a month on Sundays, but otherwise they are a completely lay-led community, and their ministry is vibrant. That particular Sunday began with me standing out front observing the bees humming around their lovely flowerbeds as people made their way into the nave. I greeted a neighbor walking up to their Blessing Box, a small food pantry in their front yard. It is similar to a “Little Free Library,” but it contains non-perishable food items for anyone to take. The neighbor asked a question that I could not answer, and St. Thomas’s then senior warden Nancy Boatwright stepped right in to help. Turns out this was a new neighbor who got to take some food and got a standing invitation to church. My morning started off with both outreach and evangelism!

As worship began, their pianist played with such fervor that I kept waiting for the piano to catch fire. His playing is really that good! The people of St. Thomas participated heartily in singing and responding, and it made the service lively.

After that lovely worship service, I was invited to come share in a regular light potluck luncheon in their tiny parish hall. The food and the conversation were wonderful. Before I realized what was happening, a man stood up and announced it was time for Sunday School. He read from a devotional book he enjoys and then talked about what that devotion meant to him in very personal terms. Soon, everyone in the room was sharing in equally intimate ways the joys and struggles of their own lives. They asked good questions of the leader, me, and each other. There was some prayer, and we concluded.



I found myself surprised that morning by the varied combination of what I saw this small group of Christians doing on that particular day. I was witness to outreach, evangelism, worship, formation, prayer, and community building in a way that was clearly making a difference for the people who were participating in it, as well as for the people outside the doors.

I could tell you similar stories about all of the congregations I visit, and about the gospel-centered ministry everyone around the diocese is doing in their own settings. I share this story because I found myself surprised that morning by the varied combination of what I saw this small group of Christians doing on that particular day. I was witness to outreach, evangelism, worship, formation, prayer, and community building in a way that was clearly making a difference for the people who were participating in it, as well as for the people outside the doors. It's not that they were doing anything that was revolutionary or earth-shattering, but it was authentically St. Thomas. Simple conversation with neighbors, and an offer of some hospitality and support. Simple worship with confident participation. A simple shared meal and a simple, but open and vulnerable lesson.

On that morning, and on many other mornings in different congregations across our diocese, I am reminded that God is (to borrow a phrase from the essayist Anne Fadiman) both "at large and at small." Our ministries need not be huge and audacious to be impactful. My prayer is that on any given Sunday people in our congregations and communities might get a similar taste of such authentic, heartfelt Christian witness.

Rob Courtney is the Canon to the Ordinary of the Diocese of West Tennessee.



THE 45TH ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE
EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF WEST TENNESSEE

A VISION FOR THE APPOINTED TIME

NOV. 20-21, 2026 | ST. LUKE'S JACKSON

There are two upcoming virtual pre-Convention hearings where all may ask questions and learn more about the proposed diocesan budget and resolutions.

Advanced registration required.

Resolution Hearing: Tuesday, October 20, 12-1 p.m.

Register: <https://gqr.sh/g9P4>

Budget Hearing: Friday, October 23, 12-1 p.m.

Register: <https://gqr.sh/h47A>



EDW.TN.ORG/CONVENTION



SACRED GROUND *Dialogue on Race & Faith* MEMPHIS GATHERING Oct. 23-25, 2026



FRIDAY

Oct. 23, 6-8 PM @ Idlewild Presbyterian

GATHER for food and fellowship

WALK the labyrinth in preparation for the next phase of your Sacred Ground journey

SATURDAY

Oct. 24, 9 AM-5 PM @ Grace-St. Luke's Episcopal Church

CONNECT with others striving for racial healing and justice

BE INSPIRED by what is already in motion across the region

PLAN your next steps in this life-long work

SUNDAY

Oct. 25, 10 AM @ St. Constance Episcopal Church

WORSHIP together, again grounding our call to build Beloved Community in our faith in Jesus Christ

People of faith committed to racial healing, reconciliation, and justice are invited to a weekend of worship, learning, and dialogue at churches in Memphis, Tennessee.

Whether you have participated in the Episcopal Church's Sacred Ground program, serve in racial justice ministry, or are simply seeking ways to engage more deeply in this work, you are invited to join others from across the region as we answer the ongoing call to become Beloved Community. This free event includes Friday dinner, Saturday workshops, and Sunday worship.

TINYURL.COM/SACREDGROUNDMEMPHIS2026