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Welcome to St. Thomas Episcopal Church, located in Huntsville, Alabama! We’re proud of the relationships, the worshipping community, and the traditions we’ve built at St. Thomas, and we’re proud to be part of the Rocket City. As a church family, we have faced years of growth and years of challenge, and although we’re pleased to have emerged from the COVID pandemic as a relatively healthy parish, we are now searching for our next rector who can help us step into our new, re-invigorated post-COVID identity. If the spirit of St. Thomas feels like home to you, we invite you to join us as we work and grow together.

**WELCOME**

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**ST. THOMAS MISSION**

Our Mission is to worship God, serve our neighbors, and love one another. One of the ways we show our love for one another is through a consistent image and representation to our parishioners, visitors, and community.

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**PRAYER FOR A NEW RECTOR**

Almighty God, giver of every good gift: Look graciously on your Church, and so guide the minds of those who shall choose a rector for this parish, that we may receive a faithful pastor, who will care for your people and equip us for our ministries; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.
YEARS AT A GLANCE

Eight rectors have served the parish since its inception in 1958.

- **941** total members
- **506** total communicants
- **246** avg. Sunday attendance
- **10** funerals per year
- **53** children’s weekly attendance at Christian formation
- **118** adult weekly attendance at Christian formation
- **3** confirmations per year
- **3** weddings per year
- **7** baptisms per year
- **38** attendance at weekday bible studies

*Averages from parochial reports 2017, 2018, and 2019 (all pre-pandemic)
Like most institutions, St. Thomas was shut down to varying degrees for two years due to COVID. As we look back on this challenging time, we are pleased to say that our parish showed tenacity, perseverance, and resolve to maintain our community during times when we couldn’t gather in person; at the same time, our membership demonstrated empathy, care, and understanding for the health concerns and risk preferences of our parishioners and respect for medical and scientific guidance. When no indoor gatherings were allowed, we went outside: we gathered for services under the trees, masked and six feet apart with communion elements in bags. Church services, support groups, the Blessing of the Animals, and St. Thomas Presents all met in the church yard. Every week, four members gathered to prepare packets of wafers for Communion and mini cups of wine that parishioners could use for home communion while viewing services online.

In creating this infrastructure, we found a ministry we never realized would be so important to our homebound population -- online services. We prepared Christian Education packets for children and pre-recorded the classes. We conducted Adult Christian Education classes on Zoom to allow for discussion. The electronic format enabled members who had moved away years ago to re-connect, and it brought in new members. Our Loaves and Fishes ministry delivered meals to those in need, while the Daughters of the King wrote cards and made calls. The Cursillo community delivered Easter eggs to every parishioner’s doorstep, and we ran a COVID immunization clinic both in our building and out in the community.

In addition to regular worship activities, we found a way to offer our Farmer’s Market, to have trunk or treat for our children, a food truck event for families, and to offer our Lobsterfest by drive-thru, prepared by parishioners who were COVID tested and protected.

We had a Seder on Zoom, again prepared by a small group of parishioners and picked up by the congregation prior to an online service presented by the clergy. Choir members (children and adult) would learn their music, record it, and forward it to our choir director who would combine and coordinate it to be inserted into the online service. On Palm Sunday the adult choir sang from their cars in the parking lot!

St. Thomas is a spiritual lifeline to me.

It’s been a long two years, but on Easter 2022 we returned to near-normal, including sharing the Common Cup for those who were comfortable doing so. Ninety people attended the Easter Vigil, followed by champagne and chocolate covered strawberries in the courtyard. Our two Easter morning services saw attendance of 150 and 350 people, with 100 at Easter brunch. A five-piece brass ensemble presented wonderful music, and the congregation joined the choir for The Hallelujah Chorus from Handel’s Messiah during both services. The day certainly felt like a resurrection.
HISTORY OF THE PARISH

St. Thomas was founded in 1958 and began meeting in a building on Bob Wallace Avenue. In 1984, the parish found itself landlocked at that location, and Bishop Stough asked the vestry to consider relocating to south Huntsville, where an additional parish was needed. The parish and the Diocese procured a ten-acre tract of land on Bailey Cove Road, a major 4-lane road in South Huntsville. A master plan for the eventual facilities was developed and ground was broken on New Year’s Eve in 1984. While the new church was being built, parishioners met in the gym of Randolph School (also referred to as “Our Lady of the Gym”). The first phase of construction was completed, and services began on the property in the new 325-person capacity Saint Thomas Church in 1985.

Over the next 16 years our facility was enlarged to expand our parish hall, kitchen, classrooms, youth room, conference rooms, and parking lot. St. Thomas has long been blessed by parishioners willing to roll up their sleeves and work, as evidenced by recently completed projects done almost exclusively by members. These include a 970 square-foot, two-story storage building in 2019, a complete renovation of the courtyard, including a new exterior columbarium, an outdoor Labyrinth adjacent to the south parking lot, and upgrades to the children’s play areas.

St Thomas has a liberal policy of making our facilities available to community events and many organizations, both inside our buildings and on the grounds. The Building and Grounds Ministry is overseen by the Junior Warden and supported by parish members who offer their talents and time to care for the facilities.

This includes interface as needed with professional service providers. St Thomas’s location on Bailey Cove Road and the Aldridge Creek Greenway facilitates our hosting of Lobsterfest, the Blessing of the Animals, outdoor concerts, and a weekly Farmer’s Market each spring and summer.

We continuously strive to maintain our physical plant as a welcoming and useful space to our members and our community.
ABOUT HUNTSVILLE

With the amenities of a large city and the soul of a small town, Huntsville is a great place to live, work, and grow. With nearly half of the population from outside of the state, new residents can feel right at home in our community. Huntsville’s population is approximately 61.34% White, 30.74% Black, 2.80% multi-racial and 2.60% Asian. Nestled between the rolling hills of the Appalachian Mountains and the Tennessee River, Huntsville has a thriving community and economy. Huntsville has experienced rapid growth and is the largest city in Alabama with a population of 215,000 (The Metro area population is 1.2 million). Throughout the growth, city planners have focused on creating a quality of life, incorporating green spaces in developing areas and repurposing old buildings. It has honored its past while looking to the future. Known as the Rocket City for its role in space exploration, Huntsville has diversified its economic opportunities into genetic research, automobile manufacturing, cybersecurity, and quantum computing. As the home of Redstone Arsenal, it is an important part of our national defense system from helicopters to the FBI. Cummings Research Park is the second largest research park in the U.S. and the fourth in the world.

Huntsville is so much more than just its economic achievements. Huntsville has been ranked #1 Best Place to Live in U.S. News and World Report, 2022, as well as high ratings for quality of life in other publications. There are 70 miles of greenways for hiking and biking, 60 public parks, recreation areas, and two nature preserves. Lowe Mill, a former textile mill, houses the largest privately owned art facility in the Southeast U.S.

There are 15 museums ranging in scope from the U.S. Space and Rocket Center, the largest space museum in the world, to the H.C. Blake Art and History Center, dedicated to the preservation and promotion of local fine art and history, especially the Black experience.

The Huntsville population is highly educated with 91% holding a high school diploma, 69% having at least Bachelor level degrees, and more PHD’s and Engineers per capita than any other city in the US. There are three public school systems, the Alabama School of Cyber Security and Engineering, and a variety of private schools. Three universities and two Community Colleges are located here, as well as multiple advanced educational opportunities connected with Redstone Arsenal.

Huntsville has multiple venues for the performing arts. The Von Braun center is a venue for theater, ballet, Huntsville Symphony Orchestra, and many other live performances. The Orion Amphitheater is the newest spot for musical performances. Concerts in the Park, and Concerts on the Dock provide free family entertainment in spring and summer.
The 12th Bishop of the Diocese of Alabama is the Rt. Rev. Glenda S. Curry, Ph.D, having been consecrated as bishop coadjutor of the Diocese of Alabama on June 27, 2020, and recognized and invested as bishop diocesan on Jan. 9, 2021.

The diocese consists of 88 parishes and worshipping communities. In 2000, the Order of Deacons was re-established in our diocese. There are now 31 active deacons, with most serving in a parish, including Deacon Jeannie Randall at St. Thomas.

Camp McDowell utilizes environmentally conscious building methods and features a recycling facility, solar array, and is exploring hydroelectric options on Clear Creek.

Bethany Village at Camp McDowell, with its more accessible sidewalks and buildings, is home to Special Session, a program for adults of all abilities. Special Session has grown and now offers two summer sessions and a fall program called Unbound.
The diocese also supports the Sawyerville ministry, a summer day camp for underserved children in rural Black Belt Hale County. This program has grown to serve 700 in its 25+ years of ministry. Sawyerville includes three summer day camp sessions, a summer learning program, a mentoring program, and Person2Person: A Race Relations Pilgrimage. Two diocesan staff members are devoted to this special program.

The diocese has a long tradition of commitment to youth ministries, with a full-time youth ministry coordinator that organizes diocesan events and serves as a resource to parish-based youth ministers. A Lifelong Christian Formation Coordinator supports other formational ministries, including Cursillo and Vocare, as well as care for aging members and support for caregivers.

We have a robust mission for outreach at the parish and diocesan levels, with engagements in Companion Relationships from Haiti to Brazil to the Virgin Islands. We have a strong relationship with Episcopal Relief & Development and are active in disaster response and recovery both locally and abroad.

The Task Force for the Stewardship of Creation works to bring people together to explore the theology of environmentally sustainable living and to provide resources to our parishes.

The Commission on Truth, Justice and Racial Reconciliation leads two annual workshops on antiracism training called “Seeing the Face of God in Each Other.” The Commission also coordinates the annual Jonathan Daniels Pilgrimage in Hayneville, Alabama, each August that honors Daniels and the Civil Rights Martyrs of Alabama.

Since 1981, the diocese has relied on a voluntary program of giving from the parishes, rather than imposing assessments. In 2001, the diocese established guidelines for parishes to consider, calling for parishes with a plate and pledge base of more than $150,000 to pledge 15%, and those with a pledge and plate base under $150,000 to pledge 10%. In the 5-year period 2014-2018, our parishes had a 4.6% increase in the average plate and pledge base and a 7.86% increase in overall operating revenues.
The opportunities for worship are plentiful at St. Thomas. All services are listed in the service bulletins and in the parish newsletter, "The Epistle." Service offerings include the following:

- BCP for Communion at 8 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. Sundays
- Taizé (Contemplative) offered monthly
- Centering Prayer via Zoom every Thursday
- Children’s services quarterly during the year
Sunday services, which follow Rite II, can be formal or informal, depending on the occasion. The 10:30 service features the adult choir, the Joyful Noise Choir, or the Children’s Choir, with occasional appearances by the Handbell Choir. Lay members and youth serve as lectors, LEMs, ushers, greeters, and acolytes. The Altar Guild, the Flower Guild, and the Funeral Guild also enrich our corporate worship experience.

Between the 8:00 and 10:30 Sunday services parishioners can share breakfast and an adult Christian formation class. This schedule arrangement provides a perfect fellowship opportunity for "early service people" to mix and mingle with "late service people." Various groups volunteer to cook breakfast in our commercial state-of-the-art kitchen from week-to-week.

Children’s Chapel is offered during the 10:30 service for children in kindergarten through 2nd grade. The children exit prior to the readings and return at the exchange of the peace, allowing them to participate in the Eucharist with their family.

We have a service for just about every significant event on the Church calendar and some events on the secular calendar, such as our "Boo-charest" service at Halloween.

“St. Thomas is where our family has had baptisms, weddings, and funerals. Many, many lifelong friends have been made at St. Thomas. A beautiful place!”
MUSIC AT
ST. THOMAS

St. Thomas has a long tradition of musical excellence and offers a variety of musical styles. Organ music and traditional hymns are the norm for most Sunday worship services, with the adult choir providing an anthem at the 10:30 service.

One Sunday each month, Joyful Noise—a guitar, keyboard, and percussion band—leads the congregation in music from the Alleluia III songbook. Taizé services offer another style of musical worship. A highlight of the Pentecost service is a jazz mass, composed by the choir director. The choir presents Lessons and Carols during the Advent season and a service of readings and anthems during Holy Week. Instrumentalists and soloists are frequently incorporated into the music offerings. Musical training and fun fellowship are provided to kids pre-K and up, with the Children’s Choir providing music for the quarterly Children’s Service and other special occasions.

St. Thomas Presents is another musical venue which offers concerts four times per year and is a gift to the wider community. Past performances have offered a wide variety of musical styles, including big band, classical, Celtic, vocal, instrumental and Americana. Concerts have been held on the church lawn as well as in the sanctuary and have received a good community response.
To facilitate spiritual growth, St. Thomas offers a variety of Christian Formation opportunities for children and adults of all ages.

Sunday mornings between the services find the younger parish children engaged in Godly Play (pre-K - 2nd grade) or the Love First curriculum (3rd – 5th grade). Through Bible based lessons, activities, and play they become aware of meaning of Christian community. Children’s Chapel is offered during the 10:30 service for children in kindergarten through 2nd grade. The children exit prior to the readings and return at the exchange of the peace, allowing them to participate in the Eucharist with their family. Bible school is held each summer, which draws children from the community as well as the parish.

Christian formation for middle schoolers (6th-8th) and high schoolers (9th-12th) is also held between services on Sunday morning. Their curriculum is based on exploring the Bible and applying those lessons to their daily life. This age group participates in Episcopal Youth Community (EYC) which meets weekly for fellowship, service and worship. Confirmation classes for 8th – 12th graders are offered yearly. Several Diocesan events are also offered for the youth, including Happening, weekend retreats, and serving on staff for Special Session at Camp McDowell and Sawyerville. All children of eligible age are encouraged to attend summer sessions at Camp McDowell.

St. Thomas means family to me. It’s my safe place where I am encouraged to grow and know I am loved despite my flaws.
Christian formation is a life-long process, and so, in addition to children’s Christian formation, adults at St. Thomas have many opportunities for growth. Classes between the services on Sunday mornings focus on a wide range of topics and may include Bible study, book study or special speakers. Two Bible studies, led by clergy, are offered on Wednesday mornings and a centering prayer group also meets weekly. A more structured form of study is Education for Ministry (EfM), a four-year program of Biblical, theological, interfaith, historical, and theological reflection. Cursillo, a movement for Christian renewal, is offered through the Diocese, and St. Thomas encourages parishioners to attend. St. Thomas has a large and active Cursillo community. Vocare, a renewal weekend for young adults from 18 – 30, is a newer Diocesan offering. St. Thomas has had members on staff and encourages young adults to attend.

"It is a place where I can grow spiritually. It is a place I need in my life."
St. Thomas has long been viewed as a welcoming community, and this trait became even stronger when the parish adopted the Invite, Welcome, Connect ministry. After greeting newcomers, the committee follows up with personal contact by committee members as well as clergy and holds informational newcomer’s luncheons. Newcomers are encouraged to explore areas of ministry that fit with their interests and talents and become an integral part of the parish.

Once new members have matriculated into our parish, St. Thomas continues to enjoy fellowship, fun, and food. After all, we have learned that families are better able to attend church when a meal is provided. Below is a listing of the many opportunities offered throughout the year.

When our parishioners are homebound or in need, the Pastoral Care committee receives parishioners’ calls and requests and passes those requests along to Clergy; Lay Eucharistic Ministers deliver eucharist; the Loaves & Fishes committee delivers food; Daughters of the King sends handwritten notes; the Caregivers Group provides emotional support to other caretakers; and Parents Morning Out provides a free Parent’s Morning Out each week.

“
It is my family, my support system. It’s my friends, my social network and my joy in watching children come into and grow into God’s love.”

- Burning of the greens
- Mardi Gras dinner
- Soup/Salad Lenten dinners
- Seder Supper
- Crawfish and Crosses
- Easter Vigil reception
- Easter Brunch
- Easter Egg Hunt
- Pentecost Picnic
- Boocharist Trunk or Treat
- Lobsterfest parish dinner
- Christmas Eve cocoa
- Annual Parish Meeting luncheon
- Weekly Breakfast between early Sunday service and Christian Formation hour
- Cookies and beverage following most 10:30 Sunday services
- Luncheon for Bishop and Confirmations
- Parish Retreat at Camp McDowell

Other opportunities for fellowship include:
- Silver Saints movies – a once a month matinee with snacks
- Quarterly Bible study luncheon
- Pub Theology for various age groups
- Golden Girls and Guys Luncheon
St. Thomas is a parish deeply devoted to serving others and reaching out to God’s people. Our parishioners use their time and talents to help numerous groups locally and globally. We are a caring church with a warm heart and a generous hand in support of those less fortunate.

We devote a big share of our outreach energies to local programs and organizations serving those in need. Notable among them:

- **Outreach**

  - **Evangelism and Outreach**

    Lobsterfest is a weekend fundraising event held at St. Thomas every fall since 1994—to raise funds for First Stop, Friends of 400, and Honduras. We prepare live lobsters flown in from Maine, along with traditional southern barbecue; and our buildings are filled with craft sales, a bake sale, and kids’ games that spill out onto the grounds. In addition to raising money, Lobsterfest opens our doors to the local community, allows the community at large the chance to see what we are like, and gives our parishioners a chance to work together on an event that requires months of planning and effort. Each year Lobsterfest raises over $30,000 for outreach.

    The Bailey Cove Farmers’ Market at St. Thomas is Southeast Huntsville’s Saturday open-air market offering locally grown fresh fruits, vegetables, meats, flowers and other products that are locally produced. It is a ministry for our community and the farmers.

    The Little Free Pantry was established in October 2018 as a food ministry of St. Thomas. It is based on the concept of The Little Free Libraries that have been around for years: “Take what you need, leave what you can.” It is stocked daily with non-perishable food, toiletries, and various clothing items for anyone in need. Whether a need for food or a need to give, Little Free Pantry facilitates feeding neighbors and nourishing neighborhoods.

- **First Stop**

  - Our community’s response to the homeless—receives financial support, bi-weekly meals, meal packs and warm clothing for the colder months, as well as operations counselling.

- **Meals on Wheels**

  - A program that provides a warm meal and visit to many shut-ins in Huntsville.

- **Feed My Sheep Backpack Meals Program**

  - Provides meals for at-risk elementary school students to take home over the weekend.

- **Special Children’s Christmas Party**

  - A St. Thomas tradition and the highlight of the Christmas season for dozens of physically and mentally challenged children in the Huntsville City school system.

- **Interfaith Mission Service (IMS) Foodline/The Servant’s Closet**

  - Food collection in support of our local food pantry.

- **Foodline/The Servant’s Closet**

  - St. Thomas is currently working on its 27th house in the Habitat program.

- **CASA Temps**

  - An annual one-day effort to assist those needing help preparing their homes for the colder months.

- **Aquarius Club**

  - Helps provide lunches for mental health clients.

- **Various Other Charities**

  - have received St. Thomas support to provide Christmas gifts for at-risk-elementary age children living in Downtown Huntsville.
Our experience and determination have helped us achieve excellence in both responding to immediate needs as well as establishing long term missions in Honduras.

The Honduran Mission is our largest global effort. Annually, our parishioners, doctors, and dentists provide much-needed medical aid to the rural areas of Puerto Cortes, including our sponsored village of El Colonia Episcopal. Here, St. Thomas established a medical and dental clinic that is staffed by a local doctor, a nurse, and a dentist.

Additional efforts include educational support to the elementary school and students at El Colonia. Village students who wish to continue their education into high school are “adopted” and sponsored by generous St. Thomas parishioners. Through these St. Thomas efforts, our Honduran students receive school supplies and transportation that they would not otherwise have had. We do what we can; we help those in front of us whom we can help.
St. Thomas is proud to faithfully pledge the maximum recommended percentage to the Diocesan Covenant toward the support of the shared mission and ministry to the Diocese of Alabama. Our finances are bolstered by two significant endowments, undesignated and designated, with a total value of $1.3 million, generating about $60,000 per year for our budget. One highlight of the annual budget is a line item to set aside $3,000 a year towards a fund for the rector’s sabbatical expenses.

We currently have 148 pledging units, which is down slightly from 2021, when there were 161 pledging units. There were 168 in 2020 and 169 in 2019. Despite a slight decline in pledging units, plate and pledge revenue has continued to increase; we believe this is due to the COVID pandemic, which has left some people hesitant to commit to an annual pledge, yet willing to give week-to-week.

A major part of our financial life every year is Lobsterfest: with a tradition of 27 years, this event raises an average of over $30,000 each year, even during the COVID pandemic. One hundred percent of these proceeds is dedicated to outreach programs locally, nationally, and internationally. Our overseas outreach ministry includes the Sloan medical clinic in the Colonia Episcopal village of Honduras; this clinic works to serve the medical and pharmaceutical needs of the community until our missioner team returns the next year.

The parish has no mortgage or other similar debt hanging over it. Salaries are not represented in the chart above because compensation for clergy and staff is spread across the areas where they apply their energy.

Another item not reflected in our budget is the income raised by our all-volunteer BBQ team. This group formed some years ago to raise money for special occasions, including Special Session at Camp McDowell and other worthy events. The team’s fundraising potential was so impressive that the parish loaned them the funds to buy a large commercial smoker, and the group paid the loan off very quickly. In addition to continuing to raise money for worthy causes, this group of volunteers cooks wonderful dinners which are part of the parish life at St. Thomas. The funds raised by the BBQ Team, while not part of the annual budget, help St. Thomas to make additional donations on an "as needed" basis.
Our parish survey reveals that a strong clergy team and a sense of community bring people to St. Thomas and keep them here. Parishioners have said they want a new rector who can do the following things:

- Focus on the congregation by serving as a shepherd and teacher
- Foster growth of the parish
- Be a manager that leads by example, while working with the staff on improvement/growth
- Have life experience and an interest in children
- Be a good preacher
- Be vulnerable, with a sense of humor
- Be energetic

At the same time, the parish has expressed a desire for the new rector to maintain the following programs that we enjoy:

- Strong music program
- Continue our Honduran mission
- Continue to offer meals at church gatherings
- Maintain our welcoming atmosphere

The Vestry consists of twelve members, each elected to a 3-year term. At its January retreat the Vestry elects a Senior Warden to provide leadership in parish life and a Junior Warden to oversee building and grounds.
To effectively represent the spirit of St. Thomas, we must close with a few more words about Lobsterfest. It was twenty-seven years ago that St. Thomas rector Kee Sloan perceived a need for an event that would accomplish three goals—bond St. Thomas parishioners, offer hospitality to the Huntsville community, and generate funds for outreach. Thus, Lobsterfest was born, and it has become our defining event, one that offers more than great food—it has grown to include children’s activities, a silent auction, craft vendors, a bake sale, a snack bar, a coffee corner and live entertainment. An undertaking of this scope requires many helping hands and offers a wonderful way for the congregation to work together and get to know one another. Fifteen years ago, barbecue sandwiches and ribs were added to the menu, thereby including our famous barbecue team in the festivities and gastronomic offerings. From the beginning all proceeds went to outreach programs—local, national and global. This generosity has generated much goodwill and community participation. The wider community has dubbed St. Thomas as “the Lobster Church,” and we are proud of that moniker!