

THE MISSISSIPPI EPISCOPALIAN

The Official Magazine of the Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi



Volume 150

Issue No. 1

January

2025



O Come, All Ye Faithful

Christmastide in photos
from around the diocese

Letter from Bishop Wells

January 21, 2025

Dear friends in Christ,

Our Gospel lesson this past Sunday was the account of Jesus turning water into wine at a wedding in Cana, in Galilee (John 2:1-11). The account of this first miracle—or sign, as John calls it—differs greatly from the first miracles in Matthew, Mark and Luke. The first miracles in those three Gospels are about Jesus healing persons who are suffering in body, mind or spirit. It is only in this first miracle in John's Gospel that we see a different kind of sign, and a different kind of engagement of others in the community in the "making of the miracle."

How?

Jesus' mother, Mary, tells Jesus that the bridegroom's household has run out of wine. She also steps in—where arguably she should not have exercised such authority in another household—in asking the household staff to do whatever Jesus tells them.

When Jesus does ask the staff to fill the large water jars with water, they take direction from him, though he is not the master of the household. For whatever reason they feel compelled to do so, they get to work, hauling perhaps 150 gallons or more of water—not an insignificant undertaking.

The steward in charge of the banquet tastes the fine wine that Jesus has made, and wonders why the bridegroom saved the best, the finest, for last.

This lesson is, for me, a commentary on how God uses us, in our world today.

If we see a need—if we see that something is amiss, if we see that all is not okay—like Mary, we should speak up.

If we need to enlist the support of others to assist in caring for a need around us, like Mary, we should speak up—even if we may question our "right" to ask for help.

"bishop" continued on page 8 →



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2 Bishop's Journal

November/December 2024

3 O Come, All Ye Faithful

Christmastide in photos from around the diocese

7 Dialogue in Action

A remembrance of the Vicksburg Massacres of 1874 brings healing, truth to the memory of an often forgotten tragedy

9 Education for Ministry

Education for Ministry groups continue classes, mint new graduates

11 Remembering the Rev. Dr. John Switzer

Former editor of *The Mississippi Episcopalian* dies at 63

13 Deployment Report Faithful Departed

14 Diocesan Calendar



On the cover: Murray & Elec Ford, sons of Audrey & Graham Ford, and Emma Benvenuti, daughter of Brent and Callie Benvenuti and granddaughter of Rev. Kyle Bennett, at Trinity, Pass Christian



Bishop's Journal

November/December 2024

November 2024

- 25** Bishop's sabbath
- 26** Staff Meeting
Meeting with Clergy person
Meetings with Staff Members
Premarital Counseling Session
- 27** Office closed for Thanksgiving
Telephone conversation with CPA firm
- 28** Thanksgiving Day
- 29** Wedding Rehearsal
- 30** Officiated Wedding – Jackson (Juli DiPaolo and Payton Porter)
Preached

December 2024

- 2** Bishop's sabbath
Travel to Minneapolis
- 3** Province IV Bishop's Meeting
- 4** HOB gathering
- 5** Travel to Jackson
- 6** Meetings with Staff Members
- 8** Trinity Church, Hattiesburg
Confirmed 5, and received 2
Meeting with Vestry
Meeting with Clergy person



- Church of the Ascension, Hattiesburg
Meeting with Vestry
Meeting with Clergy person
 - 9** (Bishop's sabbath)
Christmas Staff Luncheon
Meeting with Staff Members
 - 10** Staff Meeting
Meeting with Postulant
Meeting with Staff Member
 - 11** Travel to Oxford;
lunch visit with St. Peter's Church Spoke
Evening Prayer and dinner visit with St. Timothy's Church, Southaven, Spoke
Church of the Holy Cross, Olive Branch, Spoke
 - 12** Travel to Jackson
Finance Committee Meeting
Meet with Clergy person
Meet with Staff Member
 - 13** Title IV Reference Panel
Meet with ECW Executive Committee
Meet with Rev. Dr. Mark Bozzuti-Jones
Title IV matter – meeting with injured party
 - 14** Advent Retreat – St. Christopher's Church
 - 15** St. John's Church, Laurel
Breakfast with parish family
Visit with Clergy persons
Lunch with parishioners
Preached, confirmed 17, and received 1
 - 16** Bishop's sabbath
 - 17** Staff Meeting
Meetings with Staff Members
 - 18** Meeting with agent for James Meredith
Meeting with Parish Search Committee
 - 19** Meeting with staff members of Mississippi Department of Archives and History re: historic properties
 - 21** Ordination of Gabrielle Annalise Munn to the Sacred Order of Deacons – St. Andrew's Cathedral
- 
- 22** Grace Church, Canton
Preached
 - 23** Staff Meeting
Meetings with Staff Members
 - 24** Christmas Eve, St. Andrew's Cathedral
Preached
 - 25** Christmas Day
 - 28** Visit to Winter Solstice
 - 29** St. Christopher's Church, Jackson
Meet with Parish Family
 - 30** Staff Meeting
Meetings with Staff Members

O Come, All Ye Faithful

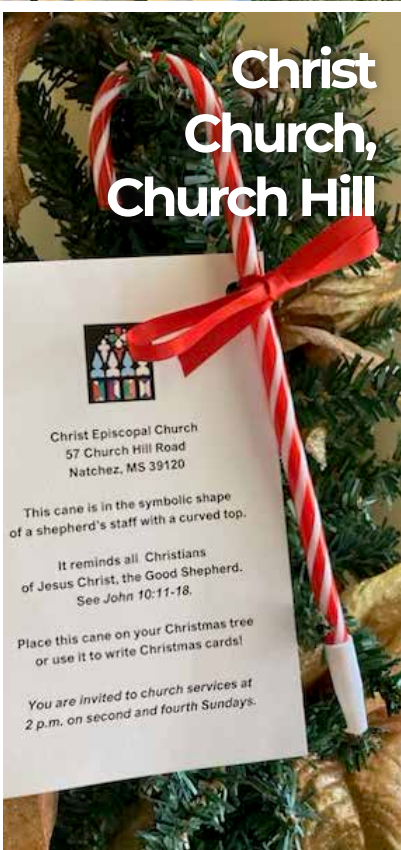
Christmastide
in photos
from around
the diocese



St. Alban's, Bovina



St. Luke's,
Brandon



Christ
Church,
Church Hill


Christ Episcopal Church
57 Church Hill Road
Natchez, MS 39120

This cane is in the symbolic shape
of a shepherd's staff with a curved top.

It reminds all Christians
of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd.
See John 10:11-18.

Place this cane on your Christmas tree
or use it to write Christmas cards!

You are invited to church services at
2 p.m. on second and fourth Sundays.



Grace Church, Canton





St. Elizabeth's, Collins



St. Thomas, Diamondhead

The Rev. Carrie Duncan and the Rev. Deacon Gabbie Munn. Photo by Jeanie Munn



Trinity, Hattiesburg



Christ Church, Holly Springs



St. James', Jackson





St. Mark's, Jackson



St. Philip's, Jackson



St. Matthew's, Kosciusko



Chapel of the Cross, Madison



St. John's, Ocean Springs



St. Peter's, Oxford

Duncan, Amber, Harper, Sadie, and Miller Gray



Trinity,
Pass
Christian



St. Timothy's,
Southaven



Holy Trinity,
Vicksburg



Epiphany, Tunica



Nativity, Water Valley

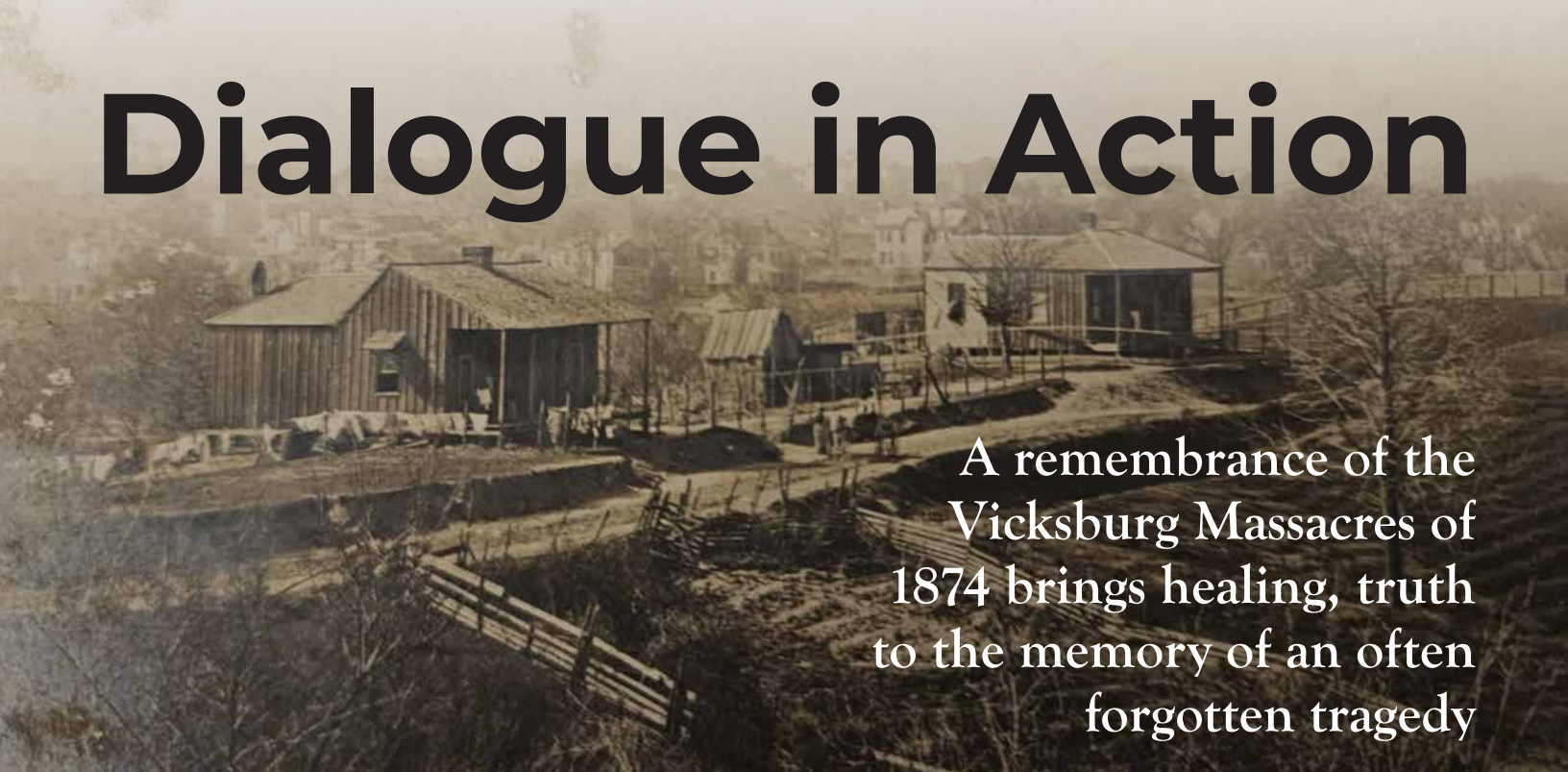


Rabbi Debra Kassoff



Incarnation,
West Point

Dialogue in Action



A remembrance of the
Vicksburg Massacres of
1874 brings healing, truth
to the memory of an often
forgotten tragedy

by Ellen Morris Prewitt

The large basement at the Church of the Holy Trinity was packed with over a hundred Vicksburg movers and shakers. County commissioners and business leaders, plus regular folks like me. Spring of 2022, we were attending the Becoming Beloved Community Episcopal Church Mississippi Day of Dialogue. We'd learned new concepts and shared our stories and now, at the end of our day, we were talking tourism.

Tourism is a big deal in Vicksburg. Vicksburg National Military Park spreads its palm across the city's landscape, a physical reminder of the city's role in the Civil War. As my table discussed the future of local tourism, no one mentioned the upcoming 150th anniversary of the Vicksburg Massacres.

The Massacres had become pivotal to me. On a journey of familial discovery, I learned my ancestor participated in the Reconstruction-era Massacres. In 1874, a white mob demanded Warren County's duly elected African American sheriff resign, and, when he refused, the mob went on a murderous rampage. When I asked those at the table if there were any plans to commemorate this major anniversary, no one knew what I was talking about.

Later, I learned Vicksburg's massacres weren't unique. Killings of innocent Black Americans by mobs of white Americans shred our history. What was unique was

how totally and effectively the "memory" of the Vicksburg Massacres had been buried.

As one at our table summarized our conversation to the larger group, the woman next to me said, "Ask them your question."

I did not want to ask my question. We were at the feel-good part of the day where we came together over a unifying topic. And she wanted me to bring up the Massacres?

She wouldn't look away.

I stood up.

"My ancestor was an instigator of the 1874 Vicksburg Massacres," I said, because I wasn't going to ask without disclosing why. "John Hebron. He's in the Congressional Record of the hearings about the rampaging that took place after Sheriff Crosby was deposed. I was wondering if there are any plans for the Massacres' 150th anniversary?"

The facilitator at the podium glanced around the silent room. "I'm not familiar with what you're talking about," he finally said. "But I promise you, I intend to find out."

Two and a half years after that promise, the Mississippi Beloved Community co-hosted a Weekend of Remembrance on the Vicksburg Massacres.


The December 6th, 2024 weekend opened with a talk hosted by historic Bethel AME Church. The talk was led by Dr. Albert Dorsey, Jr., Jackson State University assistant

history professor and author of an upcoming book on Vicksburg and Redeemer violence, and Dr. Beth Kruse, a Fellow of the Andrew Mellon Foundation partnering with the National Park Service on the African American experience from the Civil War through Reconstruction. The event deepened as members of the community asked question after question.

Saturday offered a traditional African Libation Ceremony on the grounds of the National Park near where killings took place. The Rev. Andy Andrews, Missioner for Becoming Beloved Communities and Congregational Vitality, offered the Invocation. Sunday morning, St. Mary's Episcopal Church, a historically Black Episcopal church, hosted a Service of Sacred Remembering and Empowering. The Church of the Holy Trinity, a traditionally white church where the Day of Dialogue took place, joined in officiating. Names of twenty-three known victims were read, candles lit, and bells rung.

If life is learning to hold two paradoxical things in the palm at once, this weekend was a master class for me. At Saturday's Libation Ceremony, the Park Superintendent asked descendants of those murdered to stand. Unexpectedly, she then asked descendants of the instigators to stand. I stood, alone, but surrounded by my Beloved Community. Later, Rev. Andrews asked how it felt, standing up. "I stood to be whatever anyone needed me to be," I told him, "Including the physical embodiment of my ancestor's sins, as well as the forgiveness of those sins." Again on Sunday, when I was called to offer the Telling of the Massacres, I experienced both the pin-drop solemnity of the moment and the joyous embrace by the St. Mary's congregation.

The remembering will continue in February 2025 when Catfish Row Museum focuses on telling the story of Sheriff Crosby and hosts an African American genealogy workshop. In spring, a state historical marker honoring Sheriff Crosby will be erected on public land in Vicksburg.

If anyone ever tells you a Day of Dialogue is all talk, share with them this story of a Day of Dialogue birthing the Mississippi Beloved Community's holding hands with the Vicksburg community in a moment of sacred remembering. And rejoice. 



New Daughters take their vows

St. Mary's Daughter of the King Chapter of St. Columb's Episcopal Church, Ridgeland, welcomes these 4 ladies who took their vows on Dec.1, 2024. From the left: Deenie Grubbs, Chapter President; Alicia Ferguson; Betty Jo Mahaffey; Kristen Guinn; Angie Durham; and Kris Mink, Discernment Training Facilitator.

“bishop” continued

If we feel that God-nudge to do what is needed to help God's people, like the household staff, we should roll up our sleeves and get to work—even if the work before us is hard and tedious, regardless of whether it's required of us, whether or not we perceive it's our responsibility—to make certain that justice and righteousness are accomplished.

And, yes, there may be times that what is required of us is only to pronounce God's goodness, and the sweet taste of God's love, for ears that need to hear.

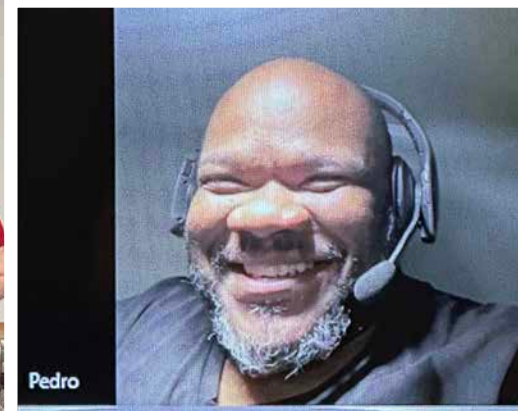
There were lots of “roles” in this account of the first miracle in John's Gospel—and I believe those roles remind us that we are all part of unfolding miracles every single day; we need only look around us. Now is not the time for silence or inaction. And, if we think that our voices, our hands, our hearts are not important to God's work in the world, perhaps we should think about that a bit more.

God's peace,

+Dorothy

Education for Ministry

Education for Ministry groups continue classes, mint new graduates



The EfM gathering at St. Timothy's, Southaven. Center: Nicole Clayton (grad and facilitator), Moore, and Eaton. Right: Pedro Echavarria joined via video link. Bottom right: Adrienne Moore, Eleanor Gill, Nicole Clayton, Paula Eaton (grad), Joyce Helmick, Belinda McCrory, Rosie Becker, Dan Smith, and Gwen Durrett.



Bottom left: Rev. Clay Calhoun, Paula Eaton, and Matt Wisdom at a previous EfM graduation at Holy Cross, Olive Branch



Save the Date!
March 21-23, 2025

Work, Play, Life: Vocation

Retreat for Young Adults ages 18-28
at Gray Center

Episcopal Diocese of MS
Young Adult Commission
diomsyac@gmail.com

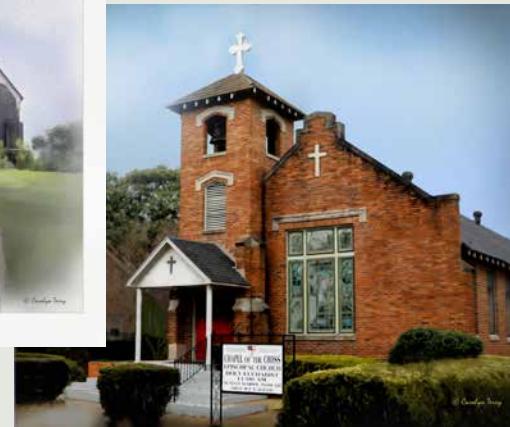
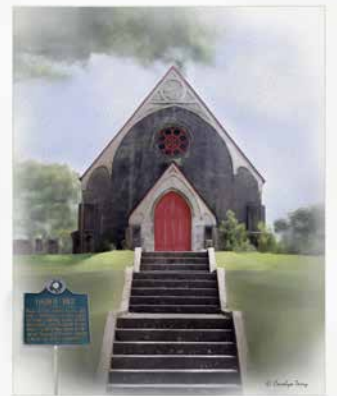
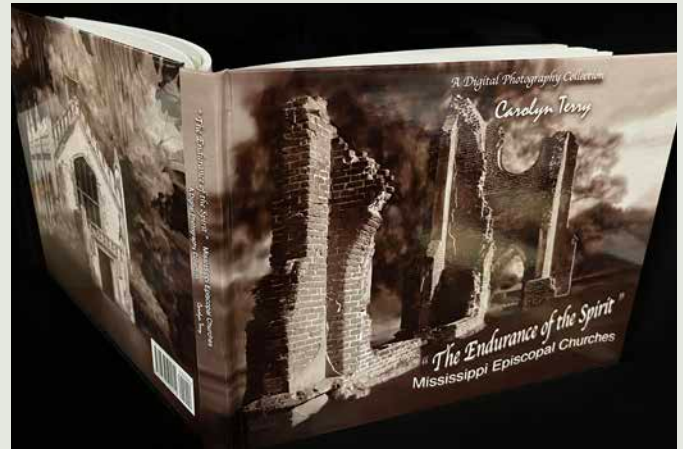


Photo book
proceeds go to
Chapel of the
Cross, Rolling Fork

Endurance of the Spirit, a book of photos of churches in the Diocese of Mississippi, will be on sale in the exhibitor area of the 198th Annual Council in Biloxi. Photographer Carolyn Terry will be present and will also be selling prints of the church photos inside. A portion of all proceeds will be donated to the rebuilding fund for Chapel of the Cross, Rolling Fork.

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of the Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi

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Submit your church's
upcoming events and
news for our bi-weekly
email newsletter, **TME-
News!**



Remembering The Reverend Dr. John Switzer

Former editor of *The Mississippi
Episcopalian* dies at 63



Editor's Note: Rev. Switzer, as is noted in this obituary, was a former editor of The Mississippi Episcopalian, a position he held from 2021-2023. As his successor, I know he truly loved the job and only resigned due to his declining health. Despite the challenges his illness presented him, he was a diligent teacher and advocate for me as I assumed his duties, instructing me on the processes, introducing me to the contacts, and filling me in on the pitfalls I would need to know to be an effective editor of this publication. He also continued to work as a volunteer copyeditor for some months after he stepped down until he was no longer well enough to do so. Though I only knew him for a short while, I'm grateful for his help, I admire him for his dedication, and I'm honored to hold this post in his wake. —Wil Oakes

Rev. Dr. John B. Switzer

July 17, 1960 — December 27, 2024

Ocean Springs

Reprinted from *Riemann Family Funeral Homes*

The Rev. Dr. John Benton Switzer passed away peacefully at home, on December 27, 2024. Born on July 17, 1960, he was a lifelong resident of Ocean Springs and a twelve-year student of Ocean Springs School District. He was a long-time member of Troop 210 of the Boy Scouts of America, where he learned about the importance of patriotism, service, and honesty under the tutelage of amazing role models. As a small child he read the story of Enoch (Genesis 5) who “walked with God,” and he decided to do likewise.

At the age of 18 John began attending St. Joseph Seminary College in St. Benedict, Louisiana, preparing for his life as a priest in the Catholic Diocese of Biloxi. He earned a BA in history and philosophy. He took a break to work for the Peoples Bank of Biloxi and then returned to seminary studies, this time in Rome, Italy. There he earned a degree in theology from the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, with honors.

John left seminary for the last time in 1986 and returned to South Mississippi where he met and married his talented and spirited wife, Patsy, to whom he was married for over 35 years. They did, however, return to Rome to have their wedding vows blessed in St. Peter's Basilica. Together, the two of them owned and operated Lagniappe Restaurant for many years. He earned an MA in religious studies from Loyola University in New Orleans and taught religious studies at Our Lady Academy in Bay St. Louis. He completed an interdisciplinary PhD in theology and education from Boston College and then taught for nearly 20 years at Spring Hill College, Mobile, Alabama. Popular with his students, his teaching was recognized twice with institutional awards. During this time he served as director of Graduate Programs in Theology and Pastoral Ministry; he was known for his interreligious work, which was also recognized with awards. In 2022 the college recognized him as professor emeritus.

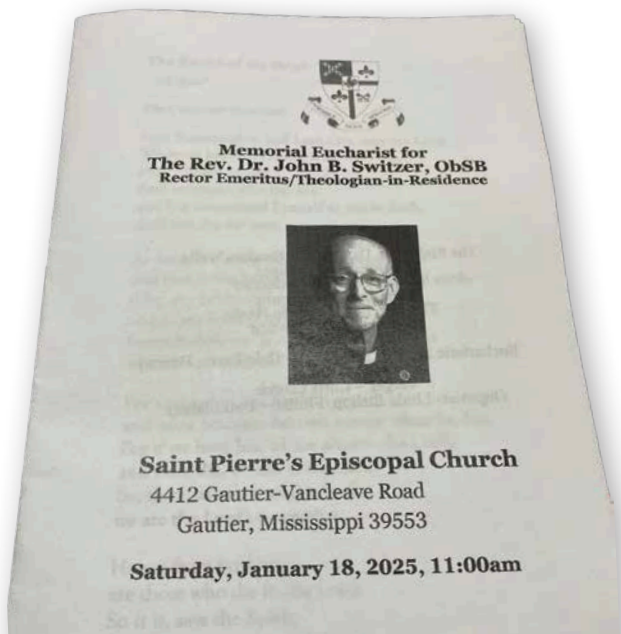
Upon the invitation of Episcopalian friends who knew of his theological background, John was received into the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion.

He was ordained a deacon in 2017 and a priest in 2018. A lifelong dream and vocation were at last fulfilled. He served as vicar of St. Pierre's Episcopal Church in Gautier, which was then a mission of the Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi. Working with lay leaders of the parish, he assisted in gaining for the congregation its recognition as a full-fledged parish and he became its first rector. He was an oblate member of the Community of St. Joseph, an Episcopalian community of Benedictines that includes monks and oblates. He served the Episcopal diocese as editor of the newspaper, chair of the board of examining chaplains, and as ecumenical and interreligious officer.

John is survived by his wife Patsy Diane Webb Leaghty, his brother James Austin Switzer, and his niece Austyn (Joseph). Other relatives live out of state. He was predeceased by his beloved parents, John A. and Avis V. Switzer, and many other adorable relatives whom he missed often, as well as a plenitude of dogs and cats. Regarding his beloved parents, he never ceased to be amazed and grateful for the sacrifices and love they gave to him and his brother. He was a member of the First Families of Mississippi, the Sons of Confederate Veterans, and was a life member of the NRA.

Before leaving this world, John was planning to celebrate in the presence of the Lamb with that great cloud of witnesses that went before him. There he will pray for the peace of the world, mutual dialogue and respect among all religions and races, and for honesty in politics.

A Memorial Eucharist honoring his life was held on Saturday, January 18, 2025, at 11:00 a.m. at St. Pierre's Episcopal Church in Gautier.



TELLING OUR STORY
MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST 2025

JANUARY 31st - FEBRUARY 2nd
MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST CONVENTION CENTER
BILOXI, MISSISSIPPI

JOIN US FOR ANNUAL COUNCIL 2025!
EXPERIENCE THE STATEWIDE DIOCESE BIG EVENT! THE ANNUAL COUNCIL OF THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MISSISSIPPI INVITES YOU TO JOIN US FOR A WEEKEND FILLED WITH FELLOWSHIP AND INSPIRATION ON THE GULF COAST. ENGAGE, LEARN, AND BE A PART OF THE GOVERNING. REGISTER NOW TO ENSURE YOUR VOICE RESONATES IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

mscouncil198.org

May 24, 2025
2ND ANNUAL
CULPEPPER
COOKOUT

TEAM SIGN UP IS LIVE!
BBQ TEAM ENTRY FEE \$150
BANANA PUDDING TEAM ENTRY FEE \$50

Teams must be formed through a church or diocesan organization.

Complete the Team Registration Form in our bio to secure your spot as a competing team.

THE MISSISSIPPI EPISCOPALIAN

The Official Publication of the Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi



Faithful Departed

Please submit Faithful Departed notices to your church for submission

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Bishop of Mississippi, Publisher

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David Byron Jones, 71, communicant of St. Mark's, Raymond, died November 6, 2024.

Claude Oliver Simpson, 87, communicant of St. Paul's, Columbus, died November 18, 2024.

Harold Jerome "Jerry" Hodson, 82, communicant of St. Paul's, Columbus, died November 21, 2024.

Edward Uihlein "Buster" Beneke, Jr., 82, communicant of St. Paul's, Columbus, died November 22, 2024.

Kevin Scott Pridmore, 62, communicant of St. Paul's, Columbus, died November 24, 2024.

Mona Parker Sanders, 76, communicant of St. Paul's, Columbus, died November 26, 2024.

George Clayton Johnson, 78, communicant of Mediator/ Redeemer, McComb/Magnolia, died December 5, 2024.

George Clayton Martin, Jr., 78, communicant of Mediator/ Redeemer, McComb/Magnolia, died December 5, 2024.

Isaac Dudley Stewart III, 81, communicant of St. James', Greenville, died December 10, 2024.

Lowell Price "Tommy" Mill, 91, communicant of St. James', Greenville, died Dec. 12, 2024.

Dr. Edwin McLeod "Dick" Meek, Jr., 81, communicant of Nativity, Greenwood, died December 16, 2024.

The Rev. Dr. John B. Switzer, 63, a member of the Society of Scholar-Priests since 2013; served St. John's, Ocean Springs 2017-2018; St. Pierre's, Gautier 2018-2023; as Diocesan Ecumenical Officer 2021-2024, and Editor of *The Mississippi Episcopalian*, 2021-2023; died December 27, 2024.

Kathy Milone, 61, communicant of St. Mark's, Raymond, died December 30, 2024.

Deployment Report

Churches seeking rectors or interim rectors

All Saints, Grenada

Calvary, Cleveland

Mediator, Meridian

St. James, Jackson

St. Peter's, Oxford

Trinity, Natchez

Incarnation, West Point

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

Diocesan Calendar

Diocesan Meetings continue by Zoom unless otherwise noted. Though the Diocesan Staff works in a hybrid model (office and home), the Allin House is staffed daily, M-Th, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Fridays (through Labor Day) 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon.

January

31 - 2 198th Annual Convention, Mississippi Gulf Coast

February

- 3-4** Allin House closed
- 4** Bishop visits St. John's, Pascagoula
- 4** Small Church Collaborative, online, 2:00 pm
- 5** Bishop visits St. Mark's, Gulfport
- 6** Racial Reconciliation Task Force, noon
- 9** Bishop visits Redeemer, Brookhaven
- 9** Bishop visits Annunciation, Perkinston
- 10-13** New Bishops and Spouses Conference, Richmond, VA
- 14-15** A. C. Marble School, online
- 16** Bishop visits Holy Innocents, Como
- 23** Bishop visits Nativity, Water Vallery
- 28-2** Happening Staff Training
- 28-1** Ministry Exploration Gathering (tentative)

March

- 2** Bishop visits All Saints', Grenada
- 4** Small Churches Collaborative, online, 2:00 pm
- 6** Executive Committee, St. Andrew's Cathedral or Zoom
- 6** Racial Reconciliation Task Force, online, noon
- 9** Bishop visits St. Mark's, Raymond
- 13** Trustees' meeting, Allin House, 1:00-4:00 pm
- 14-15** Committee on Ministry
- 14-16** Happening, St. Paul's, Columbus
- 14-16** A.C. Marble School, online
- 15** Standing Committee, 9:30 am - 3:30 pm
- 23** Bishop visits St. John's, Leland
- 17-24** House of Bishops, Camp McDowell
- 28-30** Jr. High DOY, Gray Center
- 30** Bishop visits St. Luke's, Brandon

April

- 1** Small Churches Collaborative, online, 2:00 pm
- 3** Racial Reconciliation Task Force, online, noon
- 3-5** Cursillo, Gray Center
- 11-12** A.C. Marble School, Solomon Center

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Submission deadlines for the next six months

(always available at

msepiscopeian.com/submissions):

March 2025 issue

February 15th, 2025

June 2025 issue

May 15th, 2025

April 2025 issue

March 15th, 2025

July 2025 issue

June 15th, 2025

May 2025 issue

April 22nd, 2025

August 2025 issue

July 15th, 2025



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Actors in an Epiphany Pageant at St. Timothy's in Southaven. During Christmastide throughout the Diocese of Mississippi, churches have held services, parties, outreach events, pageants, and more. To see more pictures, see page 3.