

# THE MISSISSIPPI EPISCOPALIAN

The Official Magazine of the Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi



Volume 150

Issue No. 2

February

# 2025



# Telling our story



198th Annual  
Council  
Special  
Edition

198th Annual  
Council  
highlights  
resilience, looks  
toward a future  
of spreading  
God's love

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# THE MISSISSIPPI EPISCOPALIAN

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The Right Reverend Dr. Dorothy Sanders  
Wells celebrates the Eucharist during her  
first diocesan council as the XI Bishop of  
Mississippi.



# Bishop's Journal

## January 2025

- 1** Office closed
- 2** Meetings with Staff Members
- 3** Meeting with Staff Members  
Meeting with Clergy
- 5** Church of the Good Shepherd,  
Terry  
Preached



- 5** Holy Trinity Church, Crystal  
Springs  
Preached
- 7** Staff Meeting  
Executive Committee Meeting  
Meeting with Staff Members
- 8** Meeting with Habitat for Humanity  
Meeting with Clergy  
Meeting with Clergy and a parish  
family
- 9** Meeting with Clergy  
Meeting with Staff Members
- 10** Meeting with Staff Members  
Meeting (virtual) with CPA Firm re:  
audits
- 12** St. Paul's Church, Hollandale  
Preached



- 13** Bishop's sabbath
- 14** Staff Meeting  
Meetings with Staff Members  
Meeting with Clergy
- 15** Mission Mississippi – Legislative  
Prayer Breakfast  
Lunch with Head of School – St.  
Andrew's  
Meeting with Clergy
- Meeting with Staff Member
- 16** Telephone conversation with  
fellow bishop  
Meeting with Clergy
- 17** Meeting with Staff  
Travel to Gautier, MS
- 18** St. Pierre's Church, Gautier  
Officiate service for clergyman  
(the Rev. John Switzer)  
Preached  
Travel to Starkville
- 19** St. John's Church, Aberdeen  
Preached
- 19** St. Bernard's Church, Okolona  
Preached
- 19** Church of the Resurrection,  
Starkville  
Preached, confirmed 2
- 19** Dinner with Mississippi State  
University Canterbury College  
Group



- 20** Travel to Jackson  
Bishop's sabbath  
MLK Holiday
- 21** Office Closed (weather)  
Staff Meeting (Zoom)  
Courageous Conversations  
Meeting with Staff Members  
(phone)
- 22** Meeting with Clergy  
Meeting with VA Medical Center  
Staff
- 23** Preparations for Council – Video  
Meeting with Clergy  
Meetings with Injured Persons,  
Title IV matter
- 24** Meeting with Staff Member  
Virtual meeting with CPAs re:  
accounting systems  
Meeting with Clergy
- 27** Bishop's sabbath
- 28** Meeting with Clergy  
Staff Meeting  
Title IV Meeting  
Meetings with Staff Members
- 29** College for Bishops – Virtual  
Meeting  
Preparation for Council
- 30** Preparation for Council  
Travel to Biloxi
- 30** 198th Annual Council  
Spoke
- 31** 198th Annual Council continues



# Telling Our Story

198th Annual Council highlights resilience, looks toward a future of spreading God's love



The weekend of January 31st—February 2nd was a busy one in the cavernous halls of the Mississippi Coast Convention Center in Biloxi. At one end of the building gaggles of cheerleading squads from around the region flooded the lines of concession stands as they awaited their turns to perform in competition. A room around the center's midpoint hosted a “hot tub blowout expo” catering to big spenders looking for a soak.

At the far end of the site, less frenetic but full of spirit nonetheless, was the 198th Annual Council of the Diocese of Mississippi. From the residents of the hosting coast to the road-weary northerners of Corinth and Southaven, congregants from all over the diocese greeted old friends, made new ones, conducted the church's business, and greeted each other in peace, as Episcopalians always do.

There was great anticipation for the first council address from Bishop Dorothy Sanders Wells, elected one year before at the 197th council. She took the podium around 6:30 on Friday night to speak on her chosen theme, “Telling Our Story,” one that seemed appropriate after the ten months she'd spent travelling the state to learn. She explained:

Our story as a diocese is really enmeshed in a story of a state—its natives and settlers, changing agriculture and industry, warfare and peace, conflict and struggle through richer times and poorer times, storms and winds—

both literal and figurative—through rebuilding and retooling. Our churches have stood since the early 1820s as places of worship and sanctuary, as beacons of God's light in our cities and towns, as places for communities to gather as makeshift hospitals for the injured, as jumping off points for rebuilding. Our worshiping communities, although largely comprised of persons of European descent, have included all races, ethnicities and all kinds of folks who have found our churches to be places of welcome. The hands of enslaved persons helped erect some of our worshiping spaces and our own records reflect the baptism of persons who are part of our story.

With an acknowledgement that there is still plenty for herself individually and the people of the diocese collectively to learn, the bishop felt the choice for her first council was obvious.

“Our story is still evolving,” she said, “and that's why it struck me that there was really no better theme for this council than ‘Telling Our Story.’ There's a lot of story to tell, and God's not done with us yet.”

The bishop's address featured a video presentation showcasing the resilience of churches in the diocese. Some of the stories in it were recent and familiar, some more distant but no less relevant.

Trinity, Yazoo City was destroyed by fire in 1904, by flood in 1927, and by tornado in 1933. Today, the parish

lives on and delivers for the community through the Manna House feeding ministry.

“It is a story of perseverance,” said the Rev. George Woodliff, Rector of Trinity. “It’s a story of the faithfulness of God, and the faithfulness and perseverance of the people of Trinity.”

Much more recently, in March of 2023, Chapel of the Cross, Rolling Fork, suffered its own destruction at the hands of a tornado. Wells, at the time still rector of St. George’s Episcopal Church in Germantown, Tennessee, recalled reading the news and feeling the heartbreak of Rolling Fork’s people. On the Day of Pentecost the following year, she stood beside Chapel rector Greg Proctor, as bishop-elect, to break ground on a new church.

Most appropriate for the setting of council, the latter half of Wells’s presentation focused on the tremendous losses suffered by the churches and larger communities on the coast during Hurricanes Camille (1969) and Katrina (2005). Virtually every Episcopal church on the Mississippi coast was either completely destroyed or heavily damaged in both storms. Yet, the churches rebuilt and persist to this day. Bishop Wells called out, among the many inspirational stories in the aftermath of these disasters, two examples.

At St. Patrick’s, Long Beach, the church is using its space to support the ministry of Emerge Mississippi, which provides vocational training for people with vision loss. St. Paul’s, Picayune, made a similar choice with an underused education building on their campus by partnering with the Picayune Carver Cultural Center, which offers programs for underserved children in the community. St. Paul’s education building is now their home.

The stories are too numerous to tell in limited space (see the full video for a touch more at [msepiscopalian.com/council-video](https://msepiscopalian.com/council-video)).

With the tone for the weekend set, Bishop Wells handed the reins over to the council host parishes to formally welcome all in attendance.

“We’re thrilled that the day has finally arrived that we’ve been planning for for so long,” said the Very Rev. Stephen Kidd, rector of St. Mark’s, Gulfport.


He went on to describe the event as “like a big family

reunion” and said, “the thing we do in addition to business and prayer and worship is we also have a good time.”

A good time was indeed had by all later that evening at the Ground Zero Blues Club, where excellent food and music accompanied many a reunion within the diocesan family.

The tone was set for the weekend, which proceeded with business, with elections, and indeed much worship. On Sunday morning, the banners representing 82 churches and other diocesan institutions filled the room with a dazzling array of colors just as rich and diverse as the places they represent.

Before the final procession, Bishop Wells called on the people of Mississippi to look outward after a weekend of reuniting with those we already know and learn how to use our story to reach others:

How are we welcoming all of God’s people who come into our midst? How are we welcoming the folks who will never come into our midst? We just need to tell them the story of who and what we are, so that they, too, know how much we all are loved by our God. Because it’s that welcome, it’s that affirmation, it’s that truth-telling, it’s that witness that is what draws God’s people again and again and again to the place of worship, to the place where we know that God’s presence will always meet us all. 



# New Officers

Please welcome our new diocesan officers, installed at the 198th Annual Council by election, acclamation, or appointment



## Executive Committee



**The Very Rev. Carol Mead,**  
St. Peter's Episcopal  
Church, Brandon (3-year  
term)



**The Rev. Deacon Gabbie  
Munn,** Seminary of the  
Southwest (3-year term)



**The Rev. Tom Fanning,**  
Chapel of the Cross,  
Madison (1-year  
unexpired term)



**Leigh Grady,** St. James'  
Episcopal Church,  
Jackson (3-year term)



**Kevin Lewis,** St. Andrew's  
Cathedral, Jackson  
(3-year term)

# Disciplinary Board



Lloyd Munn, St. Peter's by-the-Sea, Gulfport (lay person, 3-year term)



The Rev. Canon Zabron ("Chip") Davis, the Gray Center (3-year term)



The Rev. Katie Sorey, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Meridian (3-year term)



The Rev. Deacon Betty Melton, St. Francis of Assisi, Philadelphia (1-year unexpired term)

# Standing Committee



The Rev. Gates Elliott, St. James' Episcopal Church, Jackson (4-year term)



The Rev. Christopher McAbee, St. Andrew's Cathedral, Jackson (2-year unexpired term)



Harris Powers, Church of the Nativity, Greenwood (4-year term)

# Treasurer Trustees of the Diocese



Melissa Calcote, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Meridian (1-year term)



John Davis, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Columbus (4-year term)



Philip Carpenter, Chapel of the Cross, Madison (1-year term)

## Sewanee Trustee

## Registrar

## Secretary



Harris Powers, Church of the Nativity, Greenwood  
(3-year term)



Peggy Jones



The Rev. Annie Elliott

## Chancellors



Robert Ireland,  
Chancellor



Claire Ketner, Vice-  
Chancellor



Laura Elizabeth Tate, Vice  
Chancellor

## Historiographer



Julia Young, St. Philip's  
Episcopal Church,  
Jackson



Les Alvis, All Saints'  
Episcopal Church, Tupelo



# Commission on Ministry



Tom Fortner, Chair



The Rev. Hailey Allin



The Rev. Annie Elliott



The Rev. Deacon Cathy Halford



The Very Rev. Charles Hawkins



The Rev. Canon Gary Meade



The Rev. Jenny Newman



Sara Katherine Beckett



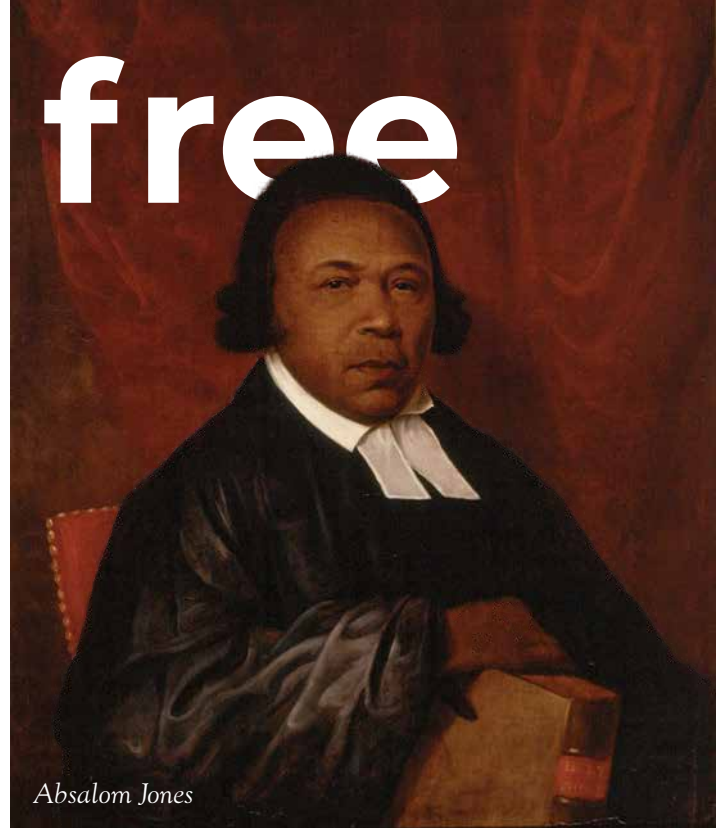
Becca Meaders



Dr. Fred Parker

# Set us free

## Absalom Jones, The First Black Priests, and the Courageous and Faithful White Bishops who Ordained Them



*Absalom Jones*

by **The Rt. Rev. Dr. Dorothy Sanders Wells**

**F**ebruary 13 is the day set aside to commemorate the life of Absalom Jones, the first black man to be ordained as a priest in The Episcopal Church in the United States. No history is contained in a vacuum—and to celebrate Absalom Jones is also to take note of the particular circumstances under which his ministry took root and grew.

Jones was born an enslaved person in Delaware in 1746. He was sold to a slaveowner in Philadelphia, near the time that Pennsylvania became a “free” state—ending the importation of enslaved persons into the state and declaring that all children born in the state were emancipated. Jones worked first to secure his wife’s freedom, and then to secure his own, all the while learning to read, write and be a contributing member of a free society.

Jones and other black worshippers had begun worshipping at St. George’s Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. He and fellow worshipper Richard Allen were worship leaders, and were reportedly the first black men to be licensed as preachers in the Methodist Church. The black worshippers at St. George’s continued to grow in number, with Jones and Allen ministering to them. On a fateful Sunday in 1791 or 1792, the black worshippers arrived at St. George’s and were asked to

sit in a newly-constructed balcony (which it seems the black worshippers may have helped to fund through their offerings). The black worshippers walked out, and did not return.

Uncertain of how the worshipping community would move forward without an organized church to which to attach, Jones apparently sought out Bishop William White (1st and 4th Presiding Bishop, and Bishop of Pennsylvania). Jones had specific requests on behalf of the black worshippers: The group needed to be recognized as an organized body of worshippers and have control over its own affairs. White agreed to the requests, the worshippers voted to become part of this fledgling new American church, and the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas was born in Philadelphia. Jones was ordained a deacon in 1795, and a priest in 1802. Under Jones’ committed and pastoral leadership, St. Thomas Church grew to more than 500 communicants in the first year.

And, more history would be made: Jones’ ministry colleague, Richard Allen, did not join the Episcopal worshippers. Allen went on to establish the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, the nation’s first black Christian denomination. Allen had successfully sued for the right to establish a new Methodist denomination.

Any commemoration of the life of Absalom Jones

must also recognize Bishop William White. White ordained another black priest, William Levington—and little is included in White’s biographical works about those two ordinations. One might speculate that in the early 19th century, as slavery continued on in most of the nation, White’s decision to ordain two black men was a controversial one. But White was for his time deeply involved in supporting the vulnerable in society—a supporter of education, and of the marginalized and outcast, and credited with having founded a Philadelphia ministry which helped young women begin again after leaving prostitution.

History doesn’t seem to include the reasons that Absalom Jones sought out Bishop William White. Perhaps he knew of Bishop White’s instrumental work in helping to organize the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States—and was hopeful that this “new” church would be a welcoming place for the worshipping community gathered around him. However the Holy Spirit worked to lead Absalom Jones to The Episcopal Church—and to enable Bishop White to see Jones’ gifts—today we give thanks:

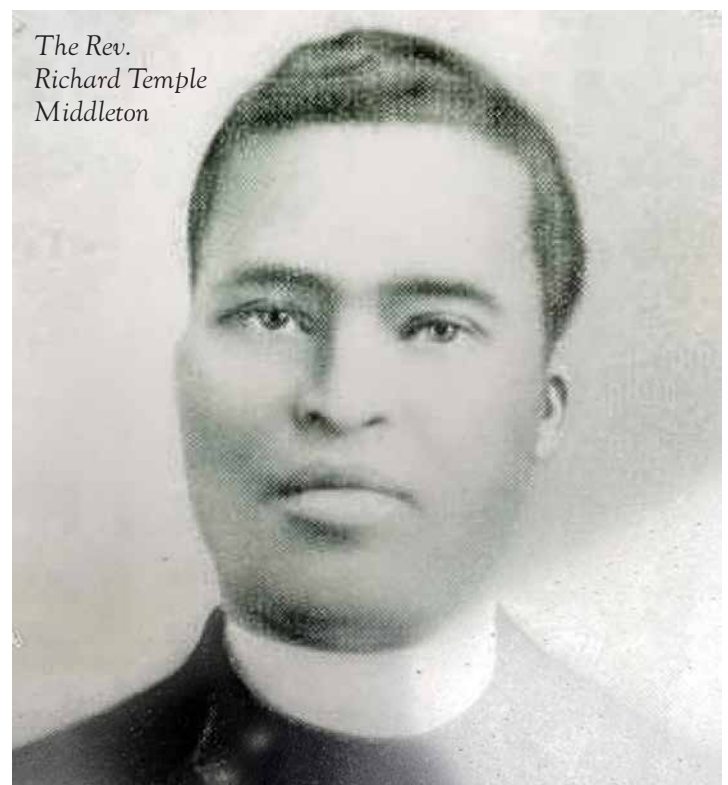
*Set us free, heavenly Father, from every bond of prejudice and fear; that, honoring the steadfast courage of your servant Absalom Jones, we may show forth in our lives the reconciling love and true freedom of the children of God, which you have given us in your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

## **The first black men ordained in Mississippi**

There is little information about the ordination of the first black clergy in Mississippi apart from Council proceedings and bishops’ journals. Those records indicate a commitment on the part of the Diocese of Mississippi to minister to black persons before and after emancipation—with baptisms, church school attendance and worship with “colored” persons having been recorded. The first ordination of a “colored” man in Mississippi is recorded to have taken place on May 13, 1874, when George Jackson was ordained to the diaconate

by our first bishop, Bishop William Mercer Green. Bishop Green, recognizing that training in residential seminaries was not an option for all persons who were called to ordained ministry, established the Bishop Green Training School and Associate Mission, near Dry Grove (Hinds County) [We note here that Mississippi continues to provide local formation for the diaconate through the A. C. Marble School, part of the Iona Collaborative, and named after our VIII Bishop, Alfred C. Marble, Jr.]. Jackson was educated there, apparently alongside white men who were also being prepared at the Bishop Green Training School. Jackson’s ordination is believed to be one of the first—if not the first—ordination of a black man to take place in the South. From the few available records concerning Jackson, it appears that his diaconal ministry ended in 1878.

The first three bishops of Mississippi all ordained black men: The first black man to be ordained a priest in Mississippi is recorded to have been Richard Temple Middleton, who was ordained a deacon in 1900 by our second bishop, the Rt. Rev. Hugh Miller Thompson, and was ordained a priest in 1903 by our third bishop, the Rt. Rev. Theodore DuBose Bratton. Richard Temple Middleton would go on to become the first black priest to serve St. Mark’s Church (Jackson), where he began serving in 1904.



*The Rev.  
Richard Temple  
Middleton*

Richard Temple Middleton's father, George Gilbert Middleton, was also a priest, but not ordained to the priesthood in Mississippi: George Middleton had been ordained to the diaconate in 1887 by Bishop William Forbes Adams "for Mississippi" (Adams, who had previously served both at St. Paul's, Woodville and Church of the Holy Trinity, Vicksburg after retiring as the first missionary bishop for Arizona and New Mexico, ordained George Middleton on behalf of Bishop Thompson, who had fallen ill on the scheduled ordination date. Adams was later elected bishop of Easton (Maryland)). George Gilbert Middleton was ordained a priest in 1896 by Bishop Charles Reuben Hale, Bishop Coadjutor for the Diocese of Springfield, Illinois. After his return to Mississippi, Middleton assumed the role of Assistant to the Rector of Trinity Church, Natchez "for work among the colored people." [Two more Middletons would be ordained to the priesthood in Mississippi: Richard Temple Middleton, II (ordained to the diaconate in June 1938 and to the priesthood in July 1939, by Bishop William Mercer Green—grandson of our first Bishop.), and Richard Temple Middleton, III (ordained to the diaconate in July 1993 by Bishop Duncan Gray, Jr. and ordained to the priesthood in February 1994 by Bishop A.C. Marble.)]

Other early black priests in the Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi included C.M. Ellingham, Albert A. Roberts and Henry S. Hartley—all three welcomed during Bishop




The Rev. Richard Temple Middleton, III

Thompson's episcopacy. Diocesan records indicate that Ellingham came to Mississippi from the Diocese of Chicago to serve St. Mary's Church, Vicksburg. Roberts reportedly came to Mississippi from

the Diocese of Western New York, and began serving St. Mary's, Vicksburg after Ellingham departed for Missouri. Hartley is said to have come from the Diocese of Louisiana and began serving St. Mary's, Vicksburg after Roberts departed for Tennessee. Black worshipping communities including St. Mark's, Jackson (org. 1883), St. Mary's, Vicksburg (org. 1885), Church of the Redeemer, Greenville (org. 1913), and St. Christopher's, Jackson (org. 1966), all continue to serve our communities today.

For the wealth of diversity in our diocese today, and the ways that we all serve the world in Christ's name, we give thanks:

*O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.* 



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Please submit Faithful Departed notices to your church for submission

## The Official Magazine of the Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi

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**Augustus Maxwell Argrett, III**, 54, communicant of St. Mark's, Jackson, died December 30, 2024.

**Ralph Edward Young, Jr.**, 81, communicant of St. Paul's, Meridian, died January 3, 2025.

**Beth Weems Sellers**, 95, communicant of St. Paul's, Meridian, died January 7, 2025.

**Gilbert Stillman Macvaugh III**, 54, communicant of St. James', Greenville, died January 14, 2025.

**Sharon Boyette Gault**, 77, communicant of St. James', Greenville, died January 16, 2025.

## Deployment Report

### Churches seeking rectors or interim rectors

**Calvary, Cleveland**  
**Mediator, Meridian**  
**St. James, Jackson**  
**St. Peter's, Oxford**  
**Trinity, Natchez**  
**Incarnation, West Point**

### Churches Seeking Supply Clergy

**Redeemer, Brookhaven**  
**Good Shepherd, Columbus**  
**Christ Church, Holly Springs**  
**St. Matthew's, Kosciusko**

### Available Chaplaincy (summer 2025)

**Canterbury: Mississippi State University**

Questions about deployment should be directed to  
**The Rev. Canon Gary Meade, Canon to the Ordinary,**  
[gmeade@dioms.org](mailto:gmeade@dioms.org); 601-948-5954.

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# 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.

## February

- 27** Executive Committee Meeting, St. Andrew's School North Campus, 11:30 am - 4:30 pm
- 25-29** Ministry Exploration Gathering
- 28-2** Happening Staff Training

- 21-23** Young Adult Retreat, Camp Bratton-Green
- 21-22** Small Church Conference, Grace, Canton
- 17-24** House of Bishops, Camp McDowell
- 27** Diocesan Bible Study, each Thursday during Lent
- 28-30** Jr. High DOY, Gray Center
- 28-30** DOK Spring Retreat, Chapel of the Cross, Madison
- 30** Bishop visits St. Luke's, Brandon

## March

- 1** Annual Parochial Reports due
- 1** Credentials of Delegates/Alternates to Annual Council Due
- 2** Bishop visits All Saints', Grenada
- 4** Small Churches Collaborative, online, 2:00 pm
- 5** Ash Wednesday
- 6** Diocesan Bible Study, each Thursday during Lent
- 6** Executive Committee, St. Andrew's Cathedral or Zoom
- 6** Racial Reconciliation Task Force, online, noon
- 9** Bishop visits St. Mark's, Raymond
- 13** Diocesan Bible Study, each Thursday during Lent
- 13** Trustee's meeting, Allin House, 1:00-4:00 pm
- 14-15** Committee on Ministry
- 14-16** Happening #98, St. Paul's, Columbus
- 14-16** A.C. Marble School, online
- 15** Standing Committee, 9:30 am - 3:30 pm
- 16** Bishop visits Christ Church, Holly Springs
- 16** Bishop visits Calvary, Michigan City
- 20** Diocesan Bible Study, each Thursday during Lent
- 20** Mississippi Episcopalian deadline

## April

- 1** Small Churches Collaborative, online, 2:00 pm
- 3** Racial Reconciliation Task Force, online, noon
- 3** Diocesan Bible Study, each Thursday during Lent
- 3-5** Cursillo, Gray Center
- 6** Bishop to St. Matthew's, Kosciusko
- 10** Diocesan Bible Study, each Thursday during Lent
- 11-12** A.C. Marble, Solomon Center
- 12** Spiritual Formation for Racial Healing & Relationship Building, St. Mark's, Gulfport
- 13** Bishop at St. Mary's, Lexington
- 17** Maundy Thursday
- 17** Bishop visits St. Mark's, Raymond
- 17** Diocesan Bible Study, each Thursday during Lent
- 18** Good Friday
- 18** Bishop visits Chapel of the Cross, Madison
- 19** Easter Vigil
- 19** Bishop visits St. Philip's, Jackson
- 20** Mississippi Episcopalian deadline
- 20** Easter Sunday
- 20** Bishop visits St. Andrew's Cathedral, Jackson
- 22** Bishop visits USM, Hattiesburg
- 23** Bishop visits St. Andrew's School North Campus, Ridgeland
- 27** Bishop visits St. Peter's, Oxford

**Submission deadlines—next six months**  
(always available at  
[msepiscopalian.com/submissions](https://msepiscopalian.com/submissions))

### April 2025 issue

March 15th, 2025

### May 2025 issue

April 22nd, 2025

### June 2025 issue

May 15th, 2025

### July 2025 issue

June 15th, 2025

### August 2025 issue

July 15th, 2025

### September 2025 issue

August 15th, 2025

## we want stories . . .

**about your church, your ministry, your school... or whatever is on your Episcopal mind! Send us fully realized stories, photos, or just ideas at [msepiscopalian@dioms.org](mailto:msepiscopalian@dioms.org).**



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*The Rt. Rev. Dr. Dorothy Sanders Wells delivers her opening address at the 198th Annual Council of the Diocese of Mississippi. To read more about her remarks and the theme of the weekend, see page 3. Photo by Jeanie Munn.*

