St. Thomas Episcopal Church

Across Three Centuries
1882–2020
St. Thomas Episcopal Church
Parish Profile

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St. Thomas Episcopal Church

As historic stewards of the Christian community in Eustis, Florida, we will continue to be a welcoming, inclusive Christian fellowship, worshipping in the traditional Episcopal form, while fostering unification of the whole community in order to work for the common good.

The Vision of St. Thomas Church

As Christians, we are called to provide meaningful, traditional Episcopal worship and to be a loving family, accepting of all people, growing as disciples through our ministries, teaching and nurturing current and new worshippers, and safeguarding the integrity of creation. The doors of St. Thomas are open to all people. Our motto: “The church with a heart, in the heart of the community,” simply means that we are truly a place and a people who allow God to work in ways that bring about healing, transformation, belonging and love. You are invited to join us and experience life with God in a community of faith.

St. Thomas Mission Statement

St. Thomas was established in 1882 and is part of the Central Florida Diocese that is currently under the direction of Bishop Gregory Brewer. In its history, architecture, worship, music, programs, outreach, and values the parish is a traditional one.

St. Thomas is located in Eustis, Florida, “The City of Bright Tomorrows”. With its history rooted in three centuries, the parish has faith in its future. The parish of St. Thomas is seeking a rector, leader, and friend to help us stand on our traditions and fulfill our mission statement in the twenty-first century. Our goal is to grow and be an increasing Christian presence in the community.
Our Rector

The following information was developed from the parish survey, focus group discussions and the Search Committee. Our Parish Survey indicates that we have a strong desire to grow our church and ministries. We are seeking someone who is passionate and called by the Holy Spirit to serve as the Rector of St. Thomas Episcopal Church.

St. Thomas is a small church with a big heart and great potential. We are looking for a priest who is seeking a long-term relationship.

That priest needs to possess the following skills:

- Excellent pastoral skills,
- Be a “people person”,
- Proven ability to help a church grow,
- Ability to identify with and minister to our elderly congregation
- Identifies with and enjoys working in a “small-town” community.

The right candidate will find a loving church home and family here at St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Eustis, Florida.

The secular duties of our Rector would include, but not be limited, to overseeing the following:

- Performance of staff and other personnel
- Maintenance of building and grounds
- Lay ministries and parish activities
- Our participation in interdenominational and community activities

PARISH VESTRY AND SEARCH COMMITTEE

Leon Stricklen, Chairman
Diane Mullen, Matthew Robertson
Bill Kieran, Monica Potter
Gail Carlson, Cynthia Lenniger
Nancy Conley, George Pawliczak
Our Parish

WORSHIP SERVICES AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

St. Thomas has a rich and enduring liturgical tradition that includes the use of vestments, music, candles, bells, and on occasion, incense. The Eucharist is the center of our worship, which consists of the traditional Liturgy of Rites I. and II. Our Sunday services rely on lay involvement. Usher and acolyte programs, as well as our dedicated Altar Guild, are active and vital participants. Lay Readers, Lectors and Eucharistic Ministers all strengthen our time of worship. In addition to the services and Christian education listed below, we also celebrate all major feast days.

Holy Eucharist: Sunday 8:00 AM, Rite I
Followed by Adult Discussion Forum @ 9:15 AM
Holy Eucharist Sunday 10:30 AM, Rite II
Followed by Fellowship Hour
Healing Service: Thursday 10:00 AM
Followed by Bible Study: 11:00 AM

CLERGY, STAFF and VESTRY

We rely on and appreciate strong leadership from our Deacon, an efficient Parish Secretary, and the part-time assistance of the Music Director and Organist, and Sexton.

The Rev. Canon Ernie Bennett, Interim Priest-in-Charge
The Rev. Janet Clarke, Deacon
Margaret Emerson, Parish Secretary
Matthew Robertson, Treasurer
Richard Mangiagli, Music Director and Organist

An elected Vestry under the leadership of the Rector governs parish affairs. The Vestry of St. Thomas is an actively involved group dedicated to diligently leading the congregation, by whom it was elected, and to being good stewards of God’s gifts

PAROCHIAL STATISTICS

Active Baptized Members.............................................................. 380
Communicants in Good Standing............................................... 288
Average Sunday Attendance....................................................... 99
Active Members (Baptisms not recorded)................................. 60
MINISTRIES

St. Thomas has a strong lay leadership and offers many opportunities for its active parishioners to serve and be served. Parish ministry opportunities include, but not limited, to those listed below:

Acolytes
Altar Guild
Bereavement
Bookstore
Coffee hour/Fellowship
Daughters of the King
Lay Eucharistic Ministers, Visitors and Readers
Men of St. Thomas (M.O.S.T.)
Music Ministry
Prayer Shawl Ministry
Prayer Chain
Thrift Shop
Ushers
Vestry

OUTREACH

St. Thomas remains strongly committed to Outreach Ministries. In the 2019 fiscal year, the parish contributed over $20,000. The monetary amount does not reflect the immeasurable gift of our membership through the donation of goods, time, talent or services to community programs.

The organizations that have been supported by St. Thomas include but are not limited to:

Anglican Church of Jerusalem
Church Periodical Club
Episcopal Relief and Development
Fr. Stephen Dass/ São Paulo Mercy Ministry
Haven Lake Sumter (Facility for Domestic Violence victims)
Sunrise ARC (Workshop for adults with Developmental Disabilities)
Lake Community Foundation (A Community Foundation for Charitable Giving)
Open Door (Homeless Resource Center)
Our Turning Point Ranch (Girls Therapeutic Residential Group Home)
United Thank Offering
CHURCH PLANT AND GROUNDS

The St. Thomas campus is located in a residential area within the Washington Avenue Historic District of Eustis, approximately six blocks from the downtown area. The sanctuary is an historic building, dating from the late 1800's. The interior features vaulted wooden arches, stained glass windows, a pipe organ and the original pews, which seat about two hundred communicants. The sacristy is attached to the church by a small parlor. The sacristy itself is renovated and provides room and functional amenities. The church office is attached to the sacristy and houses the rector's office, the church administrator's office, and two small meeting rooms.

A beautiful addition to the original campus is the Parish Hall. The building was designed to blend into the historic campus and yet include modern features such as a full commercial kitchen. The east exit of the Parish Hall opens out onto the Memorial Garden. The previous Parish Hall, now known as Wisdom Hall, is also an historic building. It was originally a Eustis school building and was moved to the church campus in 1935. Wisdom Hall is best suited for small to medium sized groups and houses the Craft Group and Choir Vesting rooms.

The remaining parts of the campus include a Sunday school building built in the early 1970's. This building includes a large activity room, three smaller rooms, and a nursery area. To the north of the main campus is the Thrift Shop. A large parking area completes the campus.
St. Thomas Sanctuary

Parish Hall
Our History

Our proud and tenacious church was built in 1882, five years after the arrival of four Episcopal families in the Eustis area. Hand hewn beams support the ceiling of our Florida Gothic church. We still worship in the original building and sit in the original pews. The stained-glass windows in the chancel area predate Tiffany glass. They are indeed painted glass that was then baked, bonding the paint to the glass, giving the windows vibrant colors and details. The board and batten exterior has been covered in stucco, but the pointed lancet side windows remain. Originally, the church was built for $1,840 and measured 24 by 63 feet. The women of the church purchased the chancel windows and the first organ with money raised from ice cream socials.

In the early days of St. Thomas Mission, services were held when the circuit priest or lay readers were available. Since travel was by horse, wagon, or boat, the fullness of the moon and weather sometimes dictated when services would be held. Records show that at one time, services were cancelled until the end of the rainy season. Heavily rutted Florida sand trails made it very difficult to travel.

We have come a long way since our founding families sacrificed so much for this church. When severe freezes destroyed citrus crops and the economy, we survived. In 1906, we collected money to be sent to San Francisco for the earthquake and fire relief funds. Despite several wars, the Great Depression, and many years in our history when we couldn't afford to pay a priest, our doors remained open.

In 1924, our original rectory was built next to the church. This now houses the rector’s office, the church administrator’s office, and several meeting rooms. A major expansion of the church, costing $16,000 took place in 1930 (despite the depression) to accommodate a new organ and provide more space for worship. The east end of the church was cut off and moved 18 feet further east. A new altar was installed, the new chancel was furnished, and a $5,000 pipe organ with 9 ranks, four of them wooden, was added. Our first parish hall, Wisdom Hall, was built as a one room schoolhouse in 1906. It was rolled on logs to its present site in 1935. It has a parlor, houses a large craft room and our choir practice area and meeting space for various functions.

We became a parish in 1941. By the time we celebrated our Centennial in 1982, more land had been purchased. Our Sunday school building was built, the Thrift Shop building was purchased, a Columbarium was added, and a large parking area across from the church was cleared. Our new parish hall was built in 2000. It seats 200 for meals and has a full commercial kitchen, handicapped-accessible restrooms, and a bookstore. All buildings are debt free. For more than 120 years, this church has welcomed all those who have sought a prayerful place to worship. We are the oldest church in Eustis, and with God's help and guidance, our spiritual journey will continue into the future.
Our Community
“Eustis - City of Bright Tomorrows”

INTRODUCTION

Located in Central Florida, along the eastern shore of Lake Eustis, the city offers a nearly perfect climate, allowing outdoor activities year-round. It is a uniquely beautiful community, rich in history. The City of Eustis introduced the new Downtown Waterfront Entertainment District in 2013 which provides unique shopping, fine dining and live entertainment. Eustis hosts a 1st Friday Street Party to provide family-friendly community social events to promote the downtown businesses and showcase the historic downtown as well as the lake. A stroll through downtown Eustis takes you back to yesteryear, as the renovated buildings comprise what is known as The Village. The shops located on Magnolia Avenue and Eustis Street, overlook brick sidewalks and tree-shaded benches provide a relaxing shopping experience. Eustis prides itself on its great diversity of businesses and industries, including agricultural, food products, graphics, forest products, manufacturing, retail and transportation.

LOCATION

Conveniently situated midway between Orlando, Daytona and Ocala, a commuting distance of an hour will take you to major theme parks and airports, as well as to either coast. Nearby access to Interstates 4 and 75 and US Highway 27 provide easy access to other areas in Florida and beyond.

POPULATION

With a population of just under 20,000, Eustis is large enough to offer most big city amenities, yet is small enough to retain its small-town charm. Eustis offers complete facilities for its citizens and visitors and a variety of recreational and educational opportunities. The estimated household income was just over $38,000 in 2015 and the estimated median house value was $123, 549. The ethnic background of the city is 64.7% white, 18% black, 12.9% Hispanic, 2.2% Asian and 3% other.

EDUCATION

Eustis residents are within comfortable commuting distance to several of the finest colleges and universities in the state, plus three community colleges and three vocational-technical schools. For the population over 25 years old, 86.3% have a high school education or higher; 17.7% have a Bachelor’s degree or higher; and 6.3% have a graduate or professional degree. (Eustis, FL website)
OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

The Eustis area accesses 300 miles of shoreline. Lake Eustis is one of 1,400 lakes in Lake County, which provide breathtaking natural beauty and a variety of activities from boating and fishing to water skiing and diving.

The Ocala National Forest borders Eustis twenty minutes to the north. This area encompasses 26 state recreation areas and is noted for its numerous crystal clear natural springs. Canoe runs enable you to explore the area's wildlife and waterways, in addition nature trails for hiking, horseback riding and campgrounds are available. As golf is a sport that is enjoyed year-round in Eustis, the area boasts a variety of highly rated golf courses.

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

The Alice McClelland Memorial Bandshell offers a variety of entertainment for old and young alike. The bandshell is one of only two in the state, and has been added to the National Register of Historic Places along with the Palms House and the Eustis Historical Museum (The Clifford House).

Florida's oldest continuous festival, Washington's Birthday Festival, began in 1902 and is held annually on the last weekend in February. The celebration generally includes a parade, arts & crafts, food, sailing regatta, water ski show, children's activities, and a carnival. Additionally, the downtown merchants host monthly street parties and entertainment throughout most of the year. The Lake Eustis Museum of Art the Historical Museum and Bay Street Players for the performing arts are part of the charm of downtown. The Eustis Art League and art leagues of neighboring towns sponsor frequent shows.