

ALIVE!

DECEMBER 2017

THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF WESTERN LOUISIANA

VOLUME XXXIX, NUMBER 11



Imagining Jesus

Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without Nativity Scenes. Artisans fashion the holy family from ceramic or wood or stone. Mass-produced plastic figures illuminate front yards. A nativity scene constructed from bacon showed up on my Facebook news feed.

Oxen and donkeys, sheep and cattle fill out the traditional cast of characters. Lately I've seen dinosaurs, zombies, Star Wars figures, and hipsters on Segways paying a visit to baby Jesus. Live Nativity Scenes have grown in popularity, especially those designed to provide a drive-through experience.

It probably goes without saying that none of this shows up in the pages of the Bible. Luke tells us only that there were no vacancies in the Bethlehem motels and that Jesus' first crib was a feed trough for barnyard animals. Our imagination has filled in the rest.

At this point you might be expecting me to indulge in a bit of cynicism or scholarly snobbery. But nothing could be further from the truth. On the contrary, God created us with imaginations. And we need to use our imaginations to see the infinite, omnipotent God in a chubby baby wrapped in tattered rags.

See Bishop Jake, page 7

Diocesan News

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AVAILABLE JANUARY 2018

Whether we realize it or not, how we respond to life's opportunities and challenges, to other people, and to ourselves depends upon the stories we tell about ourselves. Too often, we tell distorted stories drawn from painful experiences or internalized from others' critical voices. These fake stories diminish our dreams, damage our relationships, and fill us with fear and self-blame.

Research shows that people yearn for personal ex-

periences of the holy, and Jake Owensby begins by inviting readers to re-imagine Jesus as friend and lover. He then turns to encouraging readers to hear and tell how Jesus would express their story and the stories of others. Jesus' story about us is our true story: the gospel, the story of the beloved. It helps us experience the richness of life, see the stranger as friend, and make a difference in the world.



The season of Advent

The season of Advent is a season of preparation for the coming of Christ. Advent is also the beginning of the Christian year.

The background of Advent is the kingdom of God, and the rule of God over his creation, which is said to be "at hand."



December 2017 Volume XXXIX Number 11

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Copy deadline, next issue:
January 15, 2018



I am so excited to be working as your Director of Camp Hardtner. This job has been a dream of mine since my days as a camper and I am grateful to have this opportunity.



Daniel Chapman

There is excitement and enthusiasm surrounding Camp Hardtner. I have been especially touched by those who have reached out to express their delight at my appointment. Let's keep those good vibes going while digging into the work ahead.

I am getting settled at the office, getting my name added to this account

and that account, meeting with the staff, sorting out the camp's deals with vendors, and getting up to speed with everything that goes along with this new job. Each day I am learning more and more about the good work your Hardtner board of trustees, Summer Camp Director Susan Walpole, and the year-round employees have done in the interim between directors. Many thanks to all of them!

Now is one of the more exciting times of the year when we really begin preparing for 2018 Summer Camp! It may be cold outside, but we are focused on those hot but fun-filled summer days that will soon be here.

Our 2018 Summer Camp dates and rates are now available and you can get Camp on your calendar. Camper registration will open in January through our online system.

Let me point out a few changes that have

continued from page 6

2018 Summer Camp Dates & Rates		Grades are based off of the 2018-2019 school year
First Camp 2nd & 3rd grade + parent/guardian	June 1-3	\$200
Sr. High Camp 11th, 12th, & 2018 HS grads	June 7-14	\$675
Primary Camp 4th, 5th, & 6th grade	June 18-23	\$475
Jr. High Camp 6th, 7th, & 8th grade	June 27-July 3	\$575
Mid. High Camp 9th, 10th, & 11th grade	July 6-15	\$575
Camp Able For special needs campers ages 9 and up	July 19-23	\$400

HAPPENING
A CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

Happening #56 will take place at Camp Hardtner, January 12-14

Happening is a Christian experience presented by teenagers for teenagers with the help of clergy and lay adult leadership. During the Happening retreat, there are activities designed for spiritual enrichment, fun, and Christian community-building among participants. Open to all youth in grades 9-12 who have not already attended Happening. Cost to participate is \$100.

REGISTER BY DECEMBER 28, 2017, TO ORDER A T-SHIRT.
REGISTRATION CLOSES JANUARY 7, 2018.

Church without walls uses food truck to drive home Christian mission of feeding body, soul

by David Paulsen

[Episcopal News Service] It is hard to differentiate the feeding ministry from the work of spiritual enrichment underway at St. Isidore's Episcopal Church. That difficulty is by design.

St. Isidore's is a church built without walls but with a set of wheels that allows it to bring faith and food to several small communities of worshippers north of Houston, Texas. Some meet at a Taco Bell or a Panera Bread, others at a laundromat. Central to the mission is the Abundant Harvest food truck, which serves as a focal point for developing Christian relationships while alleviating both physical and spiritual hunger.

"I think people need to be nourished body, mind and soul," said the Rev. Sean Steele, who started St. Isidore's in 2015 as a church plant through Trinity Episcopal Church in The Woodlands, Texas. It now supports eight distinct faith communities totaling about 80 people, as well as its Abundant Harvest ministries. "Feeding and eating is a huge part of everything we do."

Episcopal News Service caught up with him by phone to conclude its "Food and Faith" series on the range of efforts within the Episcopal Church to fight hunger.

St. Isidore's growth over the past few months has been driven largely by the congregation's relief efforts in the devastating aftermath of Hurricane Harvey. Steele estimates his parishioners and volunteers have served about 10,000 meals to people suddenly in need of food because they lost their homes in the late-August storm and subsequent flooding.

"It has shown us what we are capable of," Steele said. And although the urgent need for hurricane relief has thankfully decreased, the feeding ministry has maintained its momentum. Donations have increased. Its volunteer list has more than tripled. St. Isidore's likely will serve 750 meals or more each week through the end of the year.

Steele isn't the only Episcopal priest enlisting a food truck to disseminate meals and a gospel message, nor is he alone in the church planting trend of holding spiritual gatherings outside of traditional church spaces. But his work

is receiving national attention partly for his deliberate blend of outreach and Episcopal traditions, preferring not to minimize sacramental connections.

"There's something to do with how we eat and who we eat with that says something about how we relate to God above," Steele said, adding that references to food permeate the gospels.

He cited Matthew 25, in which Jesus said those who care for the needy will inherit the kingdom of the God. Jesus' list of those in need is expansive – strangers, prisoners, the sick, the naked – and it starts with those who hunger and thirst: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink."

The idea behind St. Isidore's is to go beyond giving food to the hungry. Steele and other staff members and volunteers are deliberate about creating communion at the same time.

"It's really our idea not to just pop in and get people fed and leave again," said Molly Carr, the full-time food truck missionary at St. Isidore's. "Ours is really about community, about building relationship around the table, and that is how we think Jesus built relationships. We're kind of following that lead."

Part of her role resembles that of a food pantry coordinator, as she collects excess groceries donated by stores in the suburban Houston area to repackage for distribution through the food truck. That process becomes an opportunity to bring together another one of St. Isidore's communities: the volunteers who gather twice a week to help sort the food while also enjoying fellowship, Christian renewal and the meals that they bring back to their families at home.

In this, as in each of St. Isidore's com-



Volunteers with St. Isidore's Episcopal Church's Abundant Harvest food truck distribute free meals in early September as part of Hurricane Harvey relief efforts in the Houston, Texas, area. Photo: Abundant Harvest



The Rev. Sean Steele leads a September gathering of the Warrior Church, a community of St. Isidore's Episcopal Church that meets for fellowship, worship and exercise at a fitness club in the Houston area. Photo: Warrior Church, via Facebook

munities, Steele said the goal is to create a sacred space that maintains sacramental Christianity without depending on a church building.

"I love churches," Steele said. "I'm just not entirely sure we need to build many more of them."

Searching for the church economy

Steele, born in Omaha, Nebraska, spent most of his childhood in California, where he described his spiritual upbringing as

"culturally Irish Roman Catholic." His family moved to Houston when he was 16. He didn't initially hear a call to ordained ministry, going to college instead to study finance and accounting.

That training helped him land a job at Enron, at a time when the Houston-based energy company was one of the largest in the world – but also shortly before it would collapse into

See **Food**, page 6

ORDINATIONS to the priesthood



The Rev. Deacon Christie Fleming
Christ Episcopal Church, Bastrop
Saturday, December 16, 2017, 11:00 a.m.
The Rt. Rev. Jacob Owensby will ordain the Rev. Deacon Fleming on behalf of the Diocese of San Diego.

The Rev. Deacon Wayne Fletcher
St. Michael's Episcopal Church, Pineville
Saturday, December 30, 2017, 11:00 a.m.
The Rt. Rev. Jacob Owensby will ordain the Rev. Deacon Fletcher on behalf of the Rt. Rev William Stokes of the Diocese of New Jersey.

St. James Concert Series



Christmas in Central & South America with El Mundo

Thursday, December 14, 2017 at 7:00p. m.
St. James Episcopal Church, 1620 Murray Street, Alexandria
Performing Central and South American Christmas music of the 16th through 19th centuries on period instruments with voices, the San Francisco based ensemble, El Mundo, combines bowed strings with the rarely heard accompaniment forces of mixed guitars, lutes and percussion. Join us for this unique performance. Admission is free and open to the public. For more information, please contact the Church office at 318.445.9845.

DAUGHTERS OF THE KING DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY



Women of the Bible: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

Saturday, February 24, 2018 9:30 a.m.-2:00 p.m.
St. James Episcopal Church, Shreveport — Hosted by the DOK Chapters of the Shreveport Convocation
Cost: \$25
Contact: Debbie Fitzpatrick -- fitzpatrickdbr@bellouth.net
Registration form and additional information in January



continued from page 3

been made in an effort to increase participation and better serve our campers. You may notice that we have re-evaluated and shifted our grade groupings. This does a couple things that we believe will enhance our programs.

First it means that the sessions offered will draw from three grades instead of two. This equates to more campers per session. We know from experience that there is more excitement and energy generated when sessions are larger, and we are confident everyone is going to enjoy this boost.

It is normal for session offerings and grade groupings to fluctuate in step with cycles of attendance and our demographics. This concentrates our resources into a more fo-

cused period. We expect to offer more sessions again as our numbers grow. Secondly, we are going to avoid conflicts with the beginning of school by ending our season earlier. This benefits our campers, volunteers, and counselor staff especially. We hire young adults who exemplify extraordinary leadership. They often take on positions outside of Camp at school - as Resident Assistants, sorority/fraternity leaders, on research projects, etc. Ending earlier means more are going to be able to serve our campers for the entire summer. We anticipate seeing the most positive effect on Camp Able as our pool of staff and volunteers will not have as many scheduling conflicts.

Campers entering the 6th and 11th grade

will notice that they will actually be able to attend Camp twice during the summer! Or, parents can consider which session better aligns with their camper's summer schedule or maturity.

As you read this, recruiting for the 2018 counselors is underway. You might also hear them referred to as the "permanent staff" for the summer. We will be hiring 20 young adults to serve as cabin counselors, one head driver, and one head counselor. These young adults are the backbone of the camp program. They are on the "front lines" working tirelessly to provide and facilitate an exceptional experience for our campers. In return, they gain valuable job and life skills (Note to Mom & Dad: this is a "real job" with valuable transferable skills)

and most have a positive experience of a lifetime.

One last thing — this Christmas season consider for your children, grandchildren, or a pal you've made at church, the gift of an *experience* of summer camp at Camp Hardtner.

It's a gift they won't outgrow or get bored with. It will stick with them forever.

We are blessed to bless,

Daniel Chapman
Director, Camp Hardtner

Food

continued from page 4

bankruptcy in 2001.

Suddenly out of a job, "I had a sort of moment of clarity where I realized that's not the direction I wanted to take my life," he said. Instead, he went back to school and got a master's degree in Roman Catholic systematic theology.

A fellow student in his program was an Episcopalian and introduced Steele to the Episcopal Church. From that experience, Steele embarked in 2006 on a six-year journey to ordination, first as an Episcopal deacon in 2012 and as a priest in 2013 after graduating from the Seminary of the Southwest in Austin, Texas.

Trinity Episcopal in The Woodlands was his first church, where he served his curacy. In conversations with Trinity's rector, the Rev. Gerald Sevick, Steele already had ideas for starting a church plant, and Steele said Sevick encouraged that thinking, as did Diocese of Texas Bishop Andy Doyle.

As Steele took on the role of associate rector at Trinity, Sevick gave him a few hours each week starting in early 2015 in which he was free to dream big, get creative, conduct research and search for the answer to what it means to be church in the 21st century.

By October 2015, he had a plan for St. Isidore's as a church plant of Trinity Episcopal, with fundraising underway and an initial goal of purchasing a food truck. Named for the patron saint of peasant laborers, St. Isidore's started with one com-

munity of eight adults and five children, including Steele's own family, that met in a house.

Since then, it has grown to include groups that meet at restaurants, taverns, a boxing gym and spoken-word poetry events. Its monthly "laundry love" events at a local laundromat pay for hundreds of loads of laundry, but they don't end there - Mass is held inside the laundromat in English and Spanish, and worshipers also are offered social service assistance, from flu shots to haircuts.

And, of course, food is served. The laundromat is one of the many regular stops on the Abundant Harvest truck's monthly route, which includes meals at a low-income apartment complex.

"We are a church that believes, at the heart, we are called to feed people," Steele said. "So, we create environments where communion is built around the table."

Coffee, prayer and an abundant harvest

The community dinners offered at the apartment complex come with a prayer service. There's always an extra seat at the table, Carr said, and volunteers are assigned specifically to engage the residents in conversations and make them feel welcome as they are eating their meals.

"These are our neighbors we're eating with, and they're eating with their neighbors," Carr said. "And when you can have a conversation over a meal that's healthy and tastes good, physiologically, that's going to make you feel better."

Steele talks of promoting a church

economy that values things differently from American capitalist society. That church economy is on humble display every Monday and Thursday morning in the kitchen of Trinity Episcopal.

At 6:45 a.m., about a half dozen people gather to help unload food deliveries and sort through bruised apples, rotten bananas and cracked eggs to repack unspoiled items suitable for the families that the Abundant Harvest food truck serves.

These volunteers also are some of the food truck's clients, ranging from struggling college students to senior citizens to single parents, and they get to take a portion of the food home with them, a process of giving and receiving that sends ripples in all directions.

"It's really a very mellow and positive environment," said Dulce Cueva Salas, a 33-year-old native of Costa Rica who is part of the crew of volunteers that helps sort food on Mondays. Carr also hired Cueva Salas part time this fall to help with some of the meal distribution, especially in Spanish-speaking neighborhoods.

"The whole idea behind the food truck, behind Abundant Harvest, it just drives me," Cueva Salas said. "It really calls me. I feel like I have a call."

New volunteers come and go, making friends along the way as they work their morning shifts. Some volunteers have in the past invited others over for dinner, enjoying the food they have received together and further extending the fellowship.

The choice of the word "abundant" in the food truck ministry's name was delib-

erate. God's abundance is everywhere, Carr said, and not just in the food these families share. After bringing in the food, they pause each morning to have coffee and pray together. When the sorting begins, Carr puts on music in the background. Conversations bloom - not necessarily serious or profound, just people catching up on their lives, she said.

The work and cleanup are usually done by 8 a.m. (or by 7:30 a.m. for Carr's more-experienced Thursday crew), and the volunteers say their goodbyes and go on their way with their bags of food.

The food Cueva Salas takes home after volunteering Mondays mornings - bread, milk, cheese, eggs, meat and plenty of fruits and vegetables - makes a big difference for her family. Her husband is unemployed, and they have a 9-year-old son and 7-year-old daughter to feed. "It has been a blessing for us," she said.

Not everyone who participates in one of St. Isidore's communities comes to nurture a relationship with God, Steele said. When the food truck stops at the laundromat, some visitors pick up food and simply go home. That's fine, too.

"The goal is to bring about the kingdom of God," Steele said. "And then I think that, of course, at the end of the day, we are called to feed people that are hungry and give them food. People are thirsty, we want to give them drink."

—David Paulsen is an editor and reporter for the Episcopal News Service.



St. Francis gave us the very first Nativity Scene in 1223. Pope Honorius III granted him permission to fill a feed trough with straw and to place it in a cave along with an ox and a donkey. Francis invited the villagers of Greccio, Italy, to look at the scene while he preached about the babe of Bethlehem.

In other words, Francis urged the congregation to use not only their senses and their intellect but also their imagination to experience the meaning of Jesus' birth.

I invite you to do something similar. Come with your mind's eye to the manger as one of the shepherds. An angelic messenger has sent you this night to encounter God in a new and unlikely way. In the weak and vulnerable flesh of an infant.

Francis believed that the Nativity shows us most clearly who God is and who we are. Franciscan theologians have been influenced by this insight ever since. As a result, they offer us a minority but still orthodox view of what God is doing in the manger.

Theologians from various traditions have asked the same question to uncover the Nativity's meaning: Why did God become a human being?

Many Catholic and Protestant thinkers alike have seen Jesus as God's Plan B. God sent Jesus to die for our sins. Had Adam and Eve never eaten the forbidden fruit, there would have been no Jesus. Grace enters the universe as a repair kit.

The Franciscans acknowledge that our sins did Jesus in. But Franciscan theologians like John Duns Scotus insist that Jesus was not part of some Plan B. When God decided to bring the world into being, Jesus was God's very first thought. Grace governs the creation from its inception.

God created each rosebush, aardvark, and proton one at a time. Each dog, each star, and each human being is radically unique. No one and nothing is interchangeable. Every creature in this vast universe is completely irreplaceable.

God made each being to love. That includes each and every one of us fragile, coarse, tender, wounded, glorious human beings. To love means to draw near. To get so close that you become one.

In Jesus, the divine and the human are so intimately woven together as to be inseparable. That has been God's aim from all of eternity. And it is in Jesus that we see who we truly are as human beings: The one who God loves.

No one on this planet is a mistake. No one is disposable. God created each of us to be one with us.

While that sounds lovely for most of us, a few will be resistant. They will prefer to go their own way. But even for those of us who hear Good News in the manger, there's a hitch.

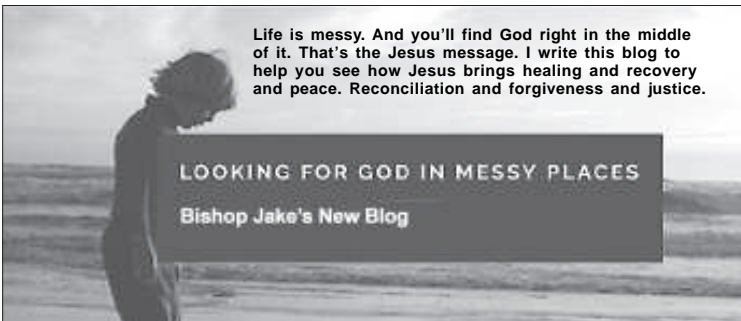
Sure, in Christ we become one with God (theologians call that atonement or at-one-ment). But by being one with God in Christ, we become one with everybody that God loves. And that includes some people we've been keeping at arm's length.

We've grown accustomed to dividing the world into black and white, winner and loser, gay and straight, rural and urban, rich and poor. These days we've grown increasingly suspicious of people who speak languages other than our own or who dress in foreign garb. Our political differences have at times erupted into physical violence.

The challenge for us, now that we have been to the manger, is to live the truth we've found there. Everyone we meet is the person God loves. In all their breathtaking otherness and bewildering uniqueness.

God's love draws us toward unity with each other. This is the work of the Incarnation. And that work continues in us.

The Rt. Rev. Jacob Owensby, Ph.D., D.D., is the fourth bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Western Louisiana.



DIOCESAN DATES OF NOTE

Planning an event in the diocese? CONTACT JOY FIRST!

After a great deal of planning and hard work, the Diocese has established and will maintain a central diocesan calendar of events to be held in the diocese.

The creation and maintenance of that calendar is the responsibility of Missioner for Children, Youth, and Young Adults, Joy Owensby. (JOwensby@diocesewla.org) SO, if you are planning an event to be held in the diocese, your first move is to CONTACT JOY! This central calendar is designed to help avoid overlapping events.

Remember, your first move is to CONTACT JOY! jowensby@diocesewla.org

December 2017

- 16 — Ordination of Deacon **Christie Fleming** to the priesthood, *Christ Church, Bastrop, starts at 11:00 a.m.*
- 24 — Bishop's Visitation, *Christmas Eve: St. Mark's, Shreveport (early); St. James, Alexandria (late)*
- 30 — Ordination of Deacon **Wayne Fletcher** to the priesthood, *St. Michael's, Pineville, starts at 11:00 a.m.*

January 2018

- 6 — Summer Camp Permanent Staff Interviews, *Camp Hardtner*
- 7 — Bishop's Visitation, *St. James, Alexandria*
- 12-14 — Happening #56, *Camp Hardtner, starts at 7:00 p.m.*
- 14 — Bishop's Visitation, *Christ, Memorial, Mansfield*
- 21 — Bishop's Visitation, *St. Matthias, Shreveport*

February 2018

- 4 — Bishop's Visitation, *St. Thomas, Monroe*
- 14 — Bishop's Visitation, *St. James, Alexandria (noonday)*
- 18 — Bishop's Visitation, *Trinity, Natchitoches*
- 23-24 — Clergy Spouses Retreat, *Camp Hardtner*
- 24 — Daughters of the King Diocesan Assembly, *St. James, Shreveport*
- 25 — Bishop's Visitation, *St. Paul's, Shreveport*
- 27 — Commission on Ministry, *Diocesan House, starts at 10:00 a.m.*

March 2018

- 2-4 — Hardtner Permanent Staff Reunion, *Camp Hardtner, starts at 3:00 p.m.*
- 4 — Bishop's Visitation, *Redeemer, Oak Ridge*
- 9-11 — CLEY Youth Retreat, *Camp Hardtner, starts at 7:00 p.m.*
- 17 — St. Patrick's Day 5K Run sponsored by St. Patrick's, West Monroe
- 25 — Bishop's Visitation, *St. James, Alexandria*

Bishop Owensby will be in Alexandria for Holy Week in 2018 and 2019. He is dedicating the next 2 years to forming combined services for Lent and Holy Week within the Alexandria Convocation. He will be present at the Cathedral for the Easter Sunday services both years.

April 2018

- 1 — Bishop's Visitation, *(Easter) St. Mark's Cathedral, Shreveport*
- 15 — Bishop's Visitation, *St. Barnabas, Lafayette*
- 20-22 — Women's Time for Joy, *Camp Hardtner*
- 22 — Bishop's Visitation, *Good Shepherd, Lake Charles*

May 2018

- 4-6 — Cursillo Retreat Weekend, *Camp Hardtner*
- 6 — Bishop's Visitation, *Holy Spirit, Big Lake*
- 13 — Bishop's Visitation, *Ascension, Lafayette*
- 15-18 — Spring Clergy Retreat, *Camp Hardtner, starts at 6:00 p.m.*
- 20 — Bishop's Visitation, *St. Mark's Cathedral, Shreveport*
- 22 — Commission on Ministry, *Diocesan House, starts at 10:00 a.m.*
- 27 — Bishop's Visitation, *Polk Memorial, Leesville*

June 2018

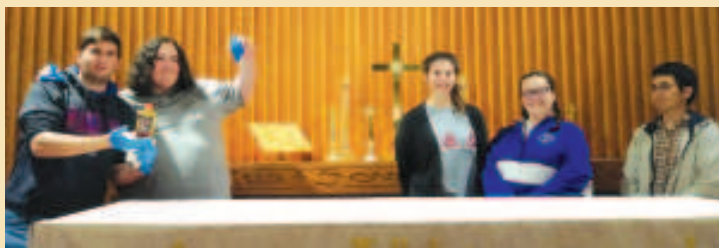
- 10 — Bishop's Visitation, *Trinity, DeRidder*
- 17 — Bishop's Visitation, *St. Andrew's, Moss Bluff*
- 24 — Bishop's Visitation, *Calvary, Bunkie*

Last Look!



The Bishop visits Grace, Monroe

Bishop Jake Owensby made his Visitation to Grace on December 3, 2017. Bishop Jake with those Confirmed, Received, and those who Reaffirmed their Baptismal Vows (left to right): front row: Sarah McQueen (Bishop's Chaplain), Annemarie Sartor (Received), and Allie Beder (Confirmed); 2nd row: Fr. Michael Bordelon, Julie Wade (Reaffirmed) with son Landry, Karen Cooper (Confirmed), Amy Hutton Beder (Confirmed), and Archdeacon Bette Kauffman; 3rd row: Burton L. Wade III (Reaffirmed), Bishop Jake, Bob Cooper (Received), and Fr. Richard Norman.



Louisiana Tech Canterbury Club pitches in to help.

In preparation for the upcoming seasons of Advent and Christmas, members of Redeemer's Louisiana Tech Canterbury Association spent one of their weekly meetings to help the Altar Guild by polishing the altar brass.

Redeemer is grateful for the generous help. Thank you students.

Left-to-right: Mike Marchman, Gus Michel, Sydney Hazel, Tracy Stodghill, and Juan Valenzuela

2017 MAP grant

MAP grant provides comfort during the extremes of weather

The sanctuary of Christ Episcopal Church is 144 years old, and is the oldest church structure in the Northeast Louisiana hamlet of St. Joseph.

On very hot or cold days the church is quite uncomfortable; its HVAC system is undersized and can't handle the extremes of the weather even though it's in good working order.

An HVAC consultant suggested the practical solution of adding an additional unit that nearly doubles the capabilities of the combined system, yet the beauty of the sanctuary is not impacted.

A Missional MAP grant in the amount of \$5,000 matched with St. Joseph's funds made the new system a reality.

So, this Christmas Eve, whether it's hot or cold, the packed sanctuary will be comfortable.

