



GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH PARISH NEWSLETTER

Your Guide to What's Happening in Our Parish

Welcome to the Late Winter 25/26 Edition

Each season, we gather the latest information and perspective to help you feel connected to your parish family. If you would like to contribute content (*including pictures!*) for future newsletters, please email them to us at communications@gracechurchwoodlawn.org and put 'Newsletter' on the subject line.



Faces of Grace

We hope you are enjoying this series. To date we have been privileged to interview our Deacon, Marti Holmes, our Director of Music, Anne Giambrone, and our Sr. Warden, Jason Avery.

This time, we talked with one of our outgoing Vestry members and Communications Committee Chair, Steve Dellinger.

GECW: What drew you to Grace and to the Episcopal Church?

Steve: *"I grew up in Belize (at the time named British Honduras) and was raised in the Baptist Church. During my high school and early college years, I attended a Jesuit (Roman Catholic) boys' school, and I appreciated the structure and sensory traditions (what Episcopalians refer to as 'High Church' or 'Anglo-Catholic') that the Roman Catholics include in their liturgy.*

"When I moved to the US to further my education, I continued to express my spiritual life in the Baptist tradition. But, over time and with the increasing popularity of contemporary-styled services in many Baptist Churches, I longed to return to a more formal style of worship.

"So, I reached out to my father, a minister, and he provided some solid yet simple counsel. It was, "Find a church that speaks to you, that cares for the things you care about,

that feeds the mystery of the divine, but that is also unafraid and unashamed to preach the Gospel. I am very happy that following his advice ultimately led me to Grace.”

GECW: You mentioned returning to the US to continue your education, did that lead to a career?

Steve: *“Yes. Education opened doors, and I pursued opportunities that blended my curiosity for systems and data analysis with my passion for people.*

“My professional journey began at IBM for a few years before being recruited by Xerox. My tenure at Xerox required much business travel (often 100+ days/year away from home), and many relocations (five cities in 12 years), which precluded me from regularly attending any one church.

“While these were interesting years, and they allowed me the resources for personal and professional development, in retrospect, I realize that not having a regular church home limited my ability to evolve my faith. I suppose, in general terms, I became a ‘seeker of religion’ instead of focusing on strengthening my existing faith. I hope that makes sense.”

GECW: You are now in public health. Why did that transition occur, and how would you describe the differences between it and your time working at technology corporations?

Steve: *“Circumstances and experience have taught me to listen to the universe – that if you pay attention, you will land where you are intended to land.*

“After spending years navigating the world of corporate innovation, and at a time when technology was reshaping how organizations functioned, I began to feel called back to the values of ‘service to others’ that I first learned while growing up in Belize.

“Find a church that speaks to you, that cares about the things you care about...”

(The Rev. NT Dellinger)

“So, when the opportunity occurred, I pivoted to public health, where my training in organizational solutions, data analysis, and process efficiencies could be used to improve access to adequate healthcare for the many communities that have not always been prioritized.

“In terms of the difference of the industries, once you remove the corporate structure, there are actually many similarities, especially in the way management teams function. In a way, my role in public health is not that much different than my role was in corporate America: I continue to help organizations improve efficiencies, increase accountability, demonstrate impact, and measure success. The big difference is in defining who benefits

from that work. In public health, the connection is much more local and tangible, and it is easier to see direct outcomes. In corporate America, outcomes are usually filtered through internal (return on investment) and external (shareholders) profit goals.”

GECW: You have served on the vestry for three years, and you are rolling off at the end of 2025. What would you say to someone who is interested in joining the vestry in the future?

Steve: *“I believe my friend and fellow vestry member, Jason Avery, said it best in the October newsletter, ‘Just do it!’*

“We each have a role to play in ensuring our parish continues to thrive, and that role does not need to be static - try something new. If you feel led to serve on the vestry, speak with Padre Jose, Deacon Marti, or the vestry’s senior warden, Brad LaMonte.”

Each season, the newsletter highlights a parishioner (or parishioners) and helps us become more aware of their ‘backstory’. To be in a future newsletter, please speak with Michael Morressey, Bob Miller, Steve Dellinger, or email us at communications@gracechurchwoodlawn.org.



Welcome to Our New Parishioners!

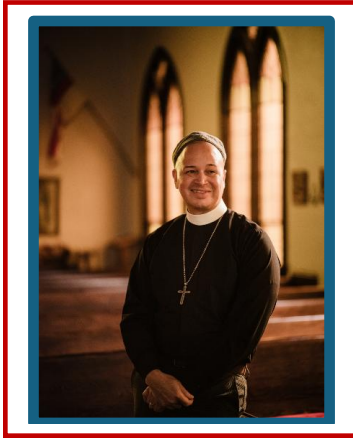
On December 10, 2025, we welcomed **seven new members** to the Grace Family:

Amy Schneider (received), Betty Keith (received), Molly Moore (confirmed), Lily Sanders (confirmed), John Terenzio (confirmed), Brooke Bissell (confirmed), and Henry Slaughter (confirmed).



Please make a point to personally welcome each person to their new church home!

From Your Rector – Fr. José Fernández (“Padre”)



If you were in the Parish Meeting on January 11, 2026, you could feel it in the room: gratitude, relief, and a deep sense of shared purpose. And if you were not able to be there, I want you to hear this clearly—you are part of this story.

Together, we have reached milestones that are worth celebrating. In 2026, Grace Episcopal Church broke its all-time record in pledged giving, with a total of \$235,500 pledged. Even more remarkably, we are entering this year without needing to rely on our savings to balance the budget. That is a significant achievement and a testament to faithful generosity, careful stewardship, and shared trust in where God is leading us.

In 2025, we also received 98% of all pledged dollars promised, a sign not only of commitment but of integrity and follow-through. We have increased our expectations for giving through the Sunday plate as well, reflecting growing participation and engagement in our common life. And perhaps one of the most visible signs of vitality: our Average Sunday Attendance has increased by 45% compared to last year. These numbers are not just statistics—they represent people, relationships, prayers, and lives being touched by grace.

I am deeply grateful for the leadership that has helped guide us to this moment. We give heartfelt thanks to Jason Avery, who completed his term as Senior Warden, and to Steve Dellinger, who chaired the Communications Committee with creativity and dedication. Their years of service and their outstanding work over the past year have strengthened Grace in lasting ways. At the same time, we joyfully welcome Karol Poczatek and Jimmy Warren to the Vestry, and we look forward to supporting the leadership of Brad LaMonte as Senior Warden and Mark LaRue as Junior Warden in the year ahead.

As I shared at the Parish Meeting, I am calling 2026 our “Year of Flourishing in Grace.” This is a year in which we will complete projects that have been in motion for the past two years, deepen ministries already bearing fruit, and continue to discern—with faith, hope, and love—what God is calling us to do next.

Grace is, and continues to be, a pocket of hope in a troubling world. You have been a faithful community, committed to being the hands and feet of God in Woodlawn and beyond. My prayer is that we continue to love one another, stay together, and face the future with courage and trust, confident that the same God who has brought us this far is already preparing what comes next.

With gratitude and hope,

Padre Jose+

Gratitude for Friends - Deacon Marti Holmes

We give thanks for our brothers and sisters at **St. Alban's** (Bluff Park), **St. Mary's on the Highlands** (Birmingham), and **St. Luke's** (Mountain Brook) for their generous supply of coats and cold weather clothing shared with us in the months of September, October, and November.



Additionally, a huge THANKS to **Sis Dixon and the Foundry** for the gift of 3-day emergency hygiene kits specifically designed for our unhoused food clients. We can include them in each no-cook food bag every week for several months!

Our friends and neighbors served through the Food Pantry are so happy to be able to keep warm in cold weather – and it will get cold!

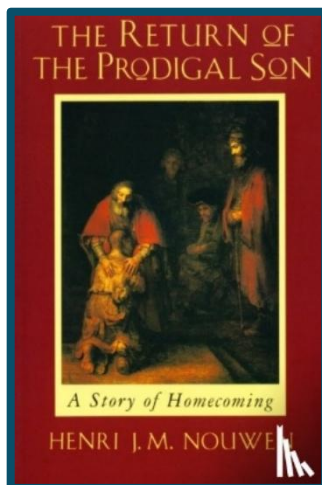
As always, our neighbors and friends in need can benefit from gently used jeans, work pants, and rubber soled shoes (men's and women's – all sizes).

View our website for items on the wish list and let us know your plan for delivering donations (*please refrain from leaving donations outside at the door*). Thanks!



Book of the Month

The Grace Clergy and Adult Formation team would like to share some of their favorite or most influential books. Each month we will select one book to recommend to the parish.



This month, Deacon Marti recommends 'The Return of the Prodigal Son', by Henri Nouwen. This relatively short book is packed with theological reflections that speak to each person who allows Henri's reflections to rest in their minds and hearts. A short, but powerful, read.

"Mercy gave the prodigal son a second chance. Grace gave him a feast. I am the prodigal son every time I search for unconditional love where it cannot be found".

(Henri Nouwen, 2013)

By Grace

By Grace is an opportunity for parishioners to share their thoughts and insights. If you would like to submit an article for review, please email our communications team at communications@gracechurchwoodlawn.org.

THE 'STRANGE NEWNESS' OF THIS NEW YEAR

(Steve Dellinger, 2026)

The first week of January is often defined by a familiar rhythm of secular renewal. Gyms swell with new members, health food stores hum with optimism, and salads suddenly claim center stage on restaurant menus. It is the season of resolutions—when we recommit to improving the “temple of the Holy Spirit,” our bodies.

Yet there is another type of resolution, one far less visible but infinitely more consequential. This resolve does not sculpt muscles or count calories; it cleanses the spirit and prepares us to live out the greatest commandment: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind...and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* (Matthew 22:37-39)

This invites us to ask a challenging question: **Are we consistently embracing the second part of the Great Commandment as we reflect on our obedience to it?**

In his book, ‘Unshakable Hope’, Max Lucado reminds us that, *“Every person you see was created by God to bear his image and deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. This means all people deserve to be seen for who they are: image bearers of God. Would you let this truth define the way you see other people? Imagine the impact this idea would have on the society that embraced it. What civility it would engender! What kindness it would foster! Will society write off the indigent, the mentally ill, the inmate on death row, the poor, the shunned, or the refugee? Not if we believe - truly believe - that every human being is God’s idea.”*

In a world saturated by 24/7 news cycles, relentless punditry, and the constant pull of social media, it is no small task to pause, reflect, or listen deeply. Yet if we genuinely desire to live faithfully and in the hope of hearing the words, *“Well done, good and faithful servant...”* (Matthew 25:23), we must make room for actions that welcome the weary, choose compassion over confrontation, and pursue peace over politics. This verse stands as God’s affirmation of those who remain devoted—not only in their service to Him, but also in their care for one another.

Living out both—**equal**—parts of the Great Commandment often demand a renewed sense of balance. Achieving that balance may require us to establish boundaries that feel uncomfortable or even awkward, sometimes with people we love and respect. Still, faithfulness calls us to hold firm to love that is both principled and practiced.

John (the beloved disciple) reminds us, “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” (1 John 4:11). In his first epistle Peter puts it a bit more bluntly, “**Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins.**” (1 Peter 4:8).

Resolution and renewal are not solitary endeavors; they are communal ones. Matthew tells us that, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there with you.” (Matthew 18:20). Our prayers for peace are sustained by the presence of the Holy Spirit—our living connection to the Triune God. This promise is a profound gift, one that confirms we are never alone, and our barriers and boundaries are never shouldered without God’s sustaining grace.

In the weeks and months ahead, as we strive to follow the Great Commandment and reflect on the promises we make to ourselves and to others, remember this: **the Divine is present in every one of them.**

Jeremiah reminds us, “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” (Lamentations 3:22). All that is required is our willingness to recognize His presence. May it be so this year.

Diocesan Events



Prayerful Search for a New Bishop

January 24, 2026: Electing Convention at Cathedral Church of the Advent.

June 26-27, 2026: Presiding Bishop ordains bishop-elect (pending approvals).

A PRAYER FOR THE ELECTION OF A BISHOP

(The Book of Common Prayer, page 818)

“Almighty God, giver of every good gift: Look graciously on your Church, and so guide the minds of those who shall choose a Bishop for the Diocese of Alabama, that we may receive a faithful pastor who will preach the Gospel, care for your people, equip us for ministry, and lead us forth in fulfillment of the Great Commission, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.”


**THE ALABAMA
EPISCOPALIAN:**
Now Accepting
Submissions

Send all articles to
nana@dioala.org

The Journey: Beyond Episcopal Divinity
A GOD-SIZED DREAM

 The Episcopal
Church
in Alabama

**NOMINATIONS FOR DIOCESAN
OFFICE NOW OPEN**

We welcome nominations for:

- Standing Committee
- The Diocesan Council
- The Disciplinary Board
- General Convention Deputies

All pre-filed nominations will close on Friday,
January 30, 2026, at 5:00 p.m.
For questions, contact Elizabeth Blake at
eblake@dioala.org or 205-358-9224

January 2026 Calendar

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4 Mass 10:30a (Nave)	5 Food Bank Delivery	6 Laundry Love Feast of the Epiphany	7 Contemplative Prayer Noon	8	9	10
11 Mass 10:30a (Nave) Parish Business Meeting (Parish Hall)	12	13 Food Pantry 8:30-10:00a	14 Contemplative Prayer Noon	15	16	17
18 Mass 10:30a (Nave)	19	20 Food Pantry 8:30-10:00a	21 Contemplative Prayer Noon	22	23	24
25 Mass 10:30a (Nave)	26	27 Food Pantry 8:30-10:00a	28 Contemplative Prayer Noon	29	30	

February 2026 Calendar

1 Mass 10:30a (Nave)	2 Food Bank Delivery	3 Laundry Love	4 Contemplative Prayer Noon	5	6	7
8 Mass 10:30a (Nave)	9	10 Food Pantry 8:30-10:00a	11 Contemplative Prayer Noon	12	13	14
15 Mass 10:30a (Nave)	16	17 Food Pantry 8:30-10:00a	18 Contemplative Prayer Noon	19	20	21
22 Mass 10:30a (Nave)	23	24 Food Pantry 8:30-10:00a	25 Contemplative Prayer Noon	26	27	28



January 2026 Rota

Roles	01/04	01/11	01/18	01/25
<i>Vestry Counters</i>				
	Mark LaRue	Anne Mize	Mark LaRue	Anne Mize
	TBD	TBD	Leslie Rubio	TBD
<i>Acolytes</i>				
	Leigh Coxwell	Steve Dellinger	Anne Mize	Amy LaRue
	Emily Thayer	Don Evans	Eloise Miller	Emily Thayer
	Steve Dellinger		Wallis Miller	Henry Slaughter
<i>Readers</i>				
	Katie Slaughter	Ashley Teague	Brooke Bissell	John Carpenter
	Lily Sanders	Mark LaRue	Ashley Teague	Anne Mize
<i>Eucharistic Ministers</i>				
	Amy LaRue	Eloise Miller	Tellis Shoemaker	Anne Mize
	Eloise Miller	Amy LaRue	Emily Thayer	Jason Avery
<i>Thurifer</i>				
	Henry Slaughter	Leigh Coxwell	Freddy Rubio	Henry Slaughter
<i>Spanish Gospeler</i>				
	TBD	TBD	Patricia Thornton	Magaly Marchena
<i>Ushers</i>				
	Brad LaMonte	Kevin Fouts	Kevin Fouts	James Walker
	Greg Brinks	Jason Avery	Steve Thornton	Brade LaMonte
<i>Prayers of the People</i>				
	Charlie Giambrone	Mark LaRue	Bob Miller	Paula Fleming
<i>Altar Guild</i>				
	Amy LaRue	Katie Short	Amy Schneider	Molly Flynn
	Mark LaRue	Leslie Rubio	Tellis Shoemaker	Zack Marciano
<i>Flower Guild</i>				
	Elizabeth Lindsey	Leslie Rubio	Leigh Coxwell	Elizabeth Lindsey
<i>Children's Formation</i>				
	Brooke Bissell	Katie Short	Brooke Bissell	Amy Schneider
	Ana More	Ana More	Ana More	Ana More

February 2026 Rota

Roles	02/01	02/08	02/15	02/18 Ash Wednesday	02/22
Vestry					
Counters					
	Leslie Rubio	TBD	TBD	TBD	Mark LaRue
	TBD	TBD	Mark LaRue	Anne Mize	TBD
Acolytes					
	Henry Slaughter	Jason Avery	Amy LaRue	Anne Mize	Henry Slaughter
	Leigh Coxwell	Eloise Miller	Emily Thayer	TBD	Steve Dellinger
	Amy LaRue	Wallis Miller	Jason Avery	TBD	Don Evans
Readers					
	Paula Flemming	Charlie Giambrone	Diane Gray	Mark LaRue	Calle Mendenhall
	Calle Mendenhall	Bob Miller	Charlie Giambrone	John Carpenter	Katie Slaughter
Eucharistic Ministers					
	Emily Thayer	Don Evans	Amy LaRue	Jason Avery	Tellis Shoemaker
	Anne Mize	Tellis Shoemaker	Don Evans	Emily Thayer	Jason Avery
Thurifer					
	Freddy Rubio	Henry Slaughter	Leigh Coxwell	TBD	TBD
Spanish Gospeler					
	Gibe Marino	Patricia Thornton	Magaly Marchena	Patricia Thornton	Gibe Marine
Ushers					
	Greg Brinks	Kevin Fouts	James Walker	Steve Thornton	Jason Avery
	Jason Avery	Steve Thornton	Brad LaMonte	Greg Brinks	James Walker
Prayers of the People					
	Calle Mendenhall	Bob Miller	Frank Romanowicz	TBD	Ashley Teague
Altar Guild					
	Mark LaRue	Katie Short	Leslie Rubio	Amy LaRue	Zach Marciano
	Amy LaRue	Amy Schneider	Tellis Shoemaker	Mark LaRue	Molly Flynn
Flower Guild					
	Leslie Rubio	Brad LaMonte	Elizabeth Lindsey	Leigh Coxwell	TBD
Children's Formation					
	Mary Paris	Anne Mize	Amy Schneider	<i>No Childcare</i>	Amy LaRue
	Ana More	Ana More	Ana More	<i>No Childcare</i>	Ana More

Prayer Requests

As a parish, we are committed to supporting one another through prayer. If you or someone you love needs prayer, please submit your request by Wednesday so it may be included in the Sunday bulletin. Names will remain on the list for three weeks, and you are welcome to submit a renewal request if continued prayer is desired. Prayer request forms are available at the back of the church, or you may call our Parish Administrator, Sylvia Strothers, at 205-595-4636 to submit or renew a prayer request.

Clergy and Communion Visits

If you need a pastoral visit, or you are unable to attend worship and would like to receive communion at home, please contact the church office so we can arrange a visit. If you are hospitalized, let us know as soon as possible or ask someone to contact us on your behalf. Be sure to provide the hospital name, location, and room number, so we can support you with prayer or pastoral care. If you or a family member is experiencing a pastoral emergency, you may reach the clergy member on call at 205-258-0138.



Contact Us

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Birmingham, AL 35212

Phone: 205-595-4636

Email: info@gracechurchwoodlawn.org

Website: gracechurchwoodlawn.org



Grace Episcopal Church is a fully inclusive, broadly diverse parish in the Anglo-Catholic tradition that worships God in the beauty of holiness and shares the love of Christ through service in the Woodlawn community and the world.