



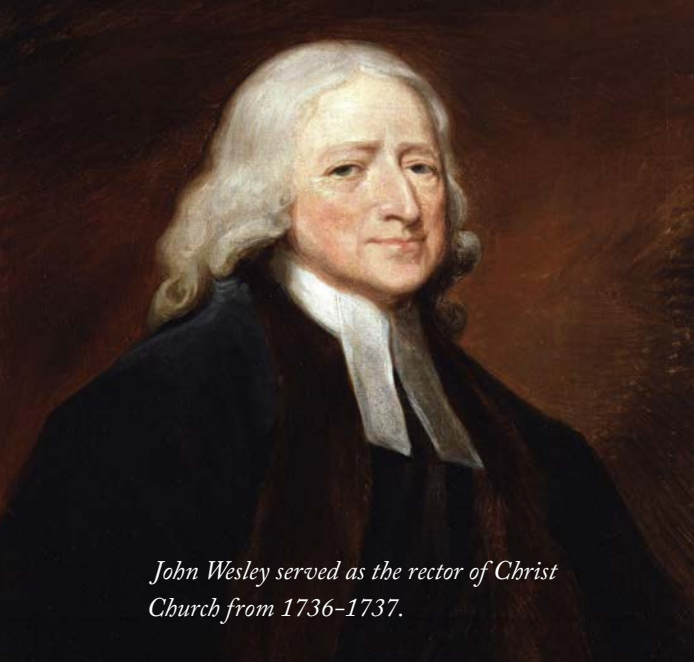
“THE WORLD IS OUR PARISH”



STRATEGIC PLAN 2015

CHRIST CHURCH
EPISCOPAL

THE MOTHER CHURCH OF GEORGIA . ESTABLISHED 1733



John Wesley served as the rector of Christ Church from 1736-1737.



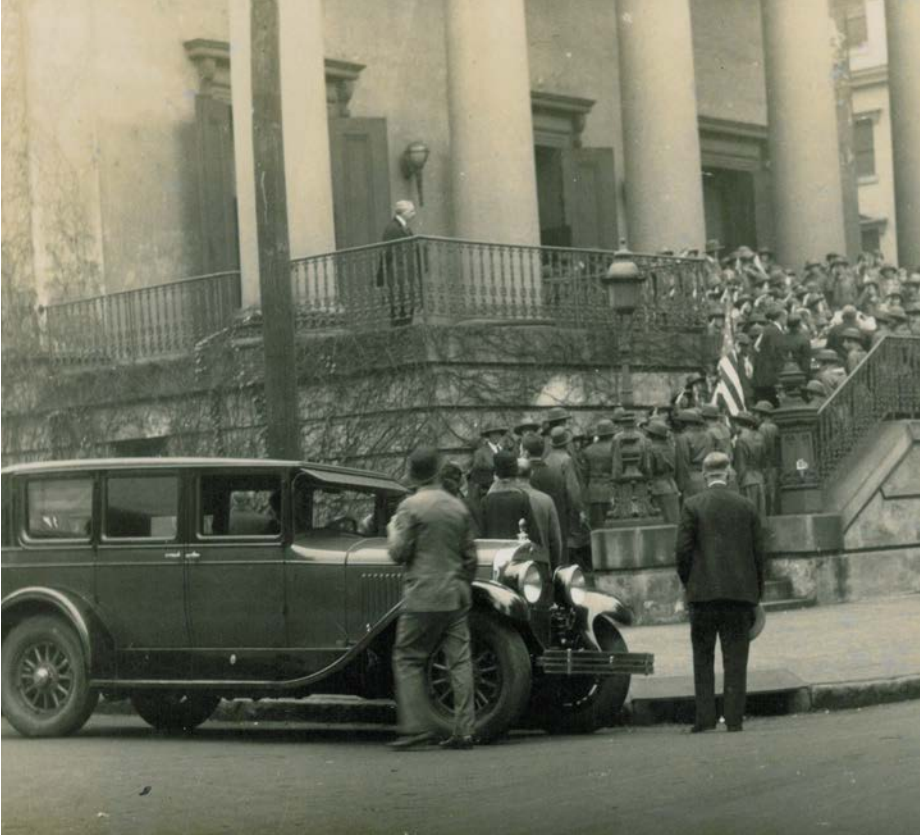
Photograph of Christ Church taken by Bradley Lawrence in 1936.

INTRODUCTION

Christ Church's Founding

Christ Church, recognized as “The Mother Church of Georgia,” was founded on February 12, 1733 and is a member of the Diocese of Georgia, which, in turn, is one of 109 Dioceses that composes The Episcopal Church in the United States of America and abroad. The Episcopal Church is a constituent member of the Anglican Communion, a fellowship within the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of those duly constituted dioceses, provinces, and regional Churches in communion with the See of Canterbury. The fellowship upholds and propagates the historic Faith and Order as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer.

Throughout Christ Church's storied history, it has sought to be a leader among Episcopal and other churches. For example, its former rectors include none other than John Wesley, our third rector who served the parish from 1736-37. He was followed by George Whitefield who served until 1740 and, while here, he founded the Bethesda Orphan House and Academy (which is now known as the Bethesda Academy and is the oldest home and school for boys in the U.S.). On May 15, 1791, President George Washington, an Episcopalian, worshipped at Christ Church when he came to Savannah as part of his Southern tour. In addition, under Christ Church's leadership, the Diocese of Georgia was formed in 1823.



The funeral of Juliette Gordon Low, founder of the Girl Scouts and lifelong member of Christ Church, January 1927.



Other important historical facts include:

- ✝ In 1841 the first Bishop of Georgia, The Rt. Rev. Stephen Elliott, was consecrated in Christ Church. In that same year, Bishop Elliott divided the parish to create a new congregation. All families south of Oglethorpe Avenue became members of the new parish to be known as “St. John’s.”
- ✝ In 1908 Frederick F. Reese was consecrated the fourth Bishop of Georgia in Christ Church.
- ✝ In 1927 founder of the Girl Scouts and lifelong member Juliette Gordon Low died and was buried from Christ Church.
- ✝ In 1964 Henry I. Louttit, Jr., ninth Bishop of Georgia, was ordained to the Sacred Order of Priests at Christ Church by The Rt. Rev. Albert Rhett Stuart, the sixth Bishop of Georgia.
- ✝ In 1969 G. Paul Reeves was consecrated Bishop Coadjutor of Georgia in Christ Church.
- ✝ In 1973 Bishop Stuart’s funeral was held on Holy Saturday in Christ Church. In that same year the Bishop of London attended the Sesquicentennial of the Diocese of Georgia and dedicated the new organ in Christ Church.
- ✝ In 1984 Harry W. Shipps was consecrated Bishop Coadjutor of Georgia in Christ Church on the Feast of the Epiphany. Also Francis Bland Tucker, our 37th rector, died and was buried from Christ Church.
- ✝ In 2008 and 2014, Katharine Jefferts Schori, Presiding Bishop and Primate, The Episcopal Church, preached and celebrated at Christ Church.



The Rev. Michael S. White Becomes Our Rector

In April 2008, Christ Church called The Rev. Michael S. White as our 41st rector and Fr. White, along with his wife The Rev. Helen S. White and their two children Ethan and Jay, began his ministry with us on July 1, 2008. Since that time, Christ Church has grown exponentially with respect to its average Sunday attendance, number of communicants and stewardship income.

The Rev. Sierra Wilkinson Reyes Becomes Our Associate Rector

In June 2011, The Rev. Sierra Wilkinson Reyes accepted a call to be Christ Church's assistant rector. The Rev. Wilkinson graduated from Harvard Divinity School in May 2011 and was ordained to the priesthood at Christ Church by The Rt. Rev. Scott Anson Benhase on February 18, 2012. In early 2015, in recognition of the important pastoral role that the Rev. Wilkinson carries in all areas of our common life, her title was changed to associate rector.

Previous Strategic Planning Initiatives

During Fr. White's tenure as our rector, Christ Church has conducted several strategic planning initiatives. These initiatives resulted in the affirmation of certain foundational values including:

- ✝ Christ Church is an Episcopal Church.
- ✝ Christ Church is centered in joyful, loving, welcoming and vibrant worship.
- ✝ Christ Church is to be a place of strong spiritual growth, direction, unconditional love, grace, dignity, joy, humility and forgiveness.

Fr. White's Sabbatical

In the summer of 2014 and in recognition of and thanksgiving for Fr. White's faithful service to our parish, Christ Church provided him with a twelve-week sabbatical.

Fr. White began his sabbatical at the two oldest seminaries of the Episcopal Church: General Theological Seminary in New York, New York and Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, Virginia. While residing in these two Episcopal communities, the rector had a clear experience that we at Christ Church, through our long and storied history and through the vibrancy of our current community, are widely recognized as leaders in the Episcopal Church. For example, while at General Seminary, Fr. White was approached by the Professor of Liturgy and Music about the impact that Christ Church's 37th rector, The Rev. Dr. F. Bland Tucker (1895-1985) who served our parish from 1945-1967, had on Episcopal Hymnody with his work on the 1940 and 1982 Hymnals. Fr. White also learned that a General Seminary student had recently written a research paper on Dr. Tucker. Another student commented how inspiring it was to have someone from Christ Church visit General Seminary since his class had recently completed a case study – using Christ Church as a model – of how a parish lives into the joyful life and spirit.

The next phase of Fr. White's sabbatical involved his traveling to England to study the Episcopal heritage as found in the Church of England. While in England, Fr. White quickly observed that Church of England parishes do not view themselves as existing only for the people who attend worship on Sunday but, instead, as an outpost of spiritual care and service to the entire community. The "parish" is the geographical area in which the church is located and called to serve. It was this understanding of "church" that the early members and clergy of Christ Church brought with them from England to Savannah in 1733.





“THE WORLD IS OUR PARISH”

Strategic Planning Process

At the August 2014 vestry retreat, Fr. White gave a presentation about his sabbatical experience and Christ Church's rich spiritual and civic history as servant leaders for Savannah, the Episcopal Church and the world and how this example could shape our future as a congregation. The vestry was excited by the accounts of our past and how this foundation can be used as a guide for our future. At the request of the vestry, the entire congregation was invited to a September 2014 evening presentation entitled "Christ Church - Our Story." We gathered with standing-room only to listen and reflect on the stories of Christ Church's heritage and to begin to dream how these experiences could guide our future direction, calling and ministry to God's world. At the conclusion of the evening, a Strategic Planning Committee appointed by the vestry was introduced as the team to lead us through a time of listening and planning. The Committee was to be led by tri-chairs (Christ Church's three previous senior wardens: Mills Fleming, Mimi Jones and Margaret Miller) and composed of a wide range of members from various backgrounds at Christ Church.

Through additional vestry meetings and conversations, the vestry articulated God-inspired values, which are to guide us in proclaiming Jesus Christ and his resurrection. These values represent the "who we are" and "what we do" as a congregation:

- ✝ *Centered in Worship*
- ✝ *All are Welcome*
- ✝ *Joyful Living*
- ✝ *Servant Leadership for Savannah, the Episcopal Church and the World*

The Planning Committee was asked to work with the understanding that the vestry deemed these values to be essential elements of who we are as a people and must be present in all that we do.

Throughout the fall of 2014 the Committee met regularly; examined all aspects of our congregational life; and assessed our strengths, weaknesses,



opportunities, and challenges. After fully engaging the assessments, experiences and opinions of the Committee, the planning group held open forums in January and February for input from the congregation through surveys, question-and-answer sessions, discussions with church staff, and the ongoing casual conversations that were the results of living into this process.

In March 2015, the Committee began to assess the accumulated data and worked toward creating a focused strategic plan for the next three-to-five years and raise awareness of the great possibilities for mission and congregational life that await us in our longer term future.





What We Learned

The Committee was truly moved and amazed at the overwhelming sense of joy and happiness expressed in the information collected. While there was general hope that we continue to grow and expand in all areas of our common life (e.g., worship, outreach and community leadership, children and youth ministry, opportunities for spiritual growth and fellowship, care of seniors and those who are home bound and leadership in the Episcopal Church), it was clear that the vast majority of our members feel we have a healthy balance and should continue to expand all areas of ministry as we grow into God's future.

The committee was also impressed with the fact that the vestry's discerned congregational core values of - Centered in Worship | All are Welcome | Joyful Living | Service to Savannah, the Episcopal Church and the World - were materially present in every area of the survey and our conversations.

Moreover, the Committee found that individuals who are a part of the Christ Church community have deliberately chosen to do so as evidenced by a demographic analysis of our members - many of whom travel past other churches (and who live in different communities) to attend Christ Church.

In the section that follows, the Committee chose to use the framework of our stated core values to reflect on our **past** (the stories of our heritage that still inspire us today), **present** (what we have heard from our current congregation through surveys and other means of listening) and **future** (in which we describe where we plan to focus our priorities in the next three-to-five years). We use the word priorities in each of these areas of our common life because we know that there will be other aspects of development and growth as part of our congregation, but this section will name the stated priorities of our parish structures.





CENTERED IN WORSHIP

Past

Since the earliest days of the Georgia colony, Christ Church has been at its best when we have been a community centered in worship using the Book of Common Prayer. Our Church of England heritage is to be a church where people across the theological and political spectrum gather in common prayer and not necessarily common thought. While at Christ Church, John and Charles Wesley published one of the first Hymnals in the new world. As the oldest continuing community of worship in the state of Georgia, worship has been at the heart of who we are since our establishment in 1733 as “The Mother Church of Georgia.”





Present

An important fact revealed from our surveys and conversations has been the affirmation that people first came to Christ Church and continue to be a part of this community of faith because they were invited by someone and they truly enjoy the worship experience. It is widely understood that worship is at the heart of all that we do. Our outreach efforts and all opportunities for spiritual development grow out of our shared experience of common worship. There was a clear desire to keep our “holy bubble” and not have “politics” penetrate the sanctity of our shared encounter of worship. People enjoy our worship, which some describe as traditional yet “non-judgmental”, and there is great appreciation for the attention to liturgical detail and emphasis on music and strong preaching. A few voices were heard to say that they miss when Christ Church was a smaller and more intimate group; however, the overwhelming consensus is that we are amazingly positive about our experience of “church” and worship and desire to be purposeful and intentional in our growth and development so that others in our community can become a part of the positive experience of church and faith that we are enjoying.

Future

- ✦ Assist all members in growing spiritually through a deeper commitment to Jesus Christ.
- ✦ Increase membership and attendance in worship by 10% each year for the next five years.
- ✦ Increase the number of services offered on Sundays and during the week with the hope that different times and atmospheres of worship will reach additional people.
- ✦ Increase support, financial and logistical, for our music ministry which is an integral part of our worship experience under the direction of our organist and choirmaster Timothy L. Hall.
- ✦ Emphasize acolyting as a way to further integrate our youth into the life of the church, and increase attention and structure for our growing Children’s Chapel during the sermon.
- ✦ Emphasize the importance of the sacred rites of the church including baptisms, confirmations, weddings and funerals.



ALL ARE WELCOME

Past

In the earliest days of the Georgia colony, Christ Church was the only organized community of worship and was known to conduct Sunday services in English, French, and Italian. Most certainly, these worshippers were not part of the Anglican tradition of worship. John Wesley's journal from his time at Christ Church also states that he was learning another language so he could be a better neighbor and friend to the Jewish population of Savannah. A house of prayer and worship for all people was part of the Anglican identity that the Church of England colonists brought with them to the new world. John Wesley led his Sunday school class barefooted so that the boys who could not afford shoes would know that they were welcomed

and encouraged to participate. In 1750, Christ Church celebrated the first baptism of a person of African descent. In that era Christ Church had about 30 members of African heritage. The first two women ordained as deacons in the Diocese of Georgia were The Rev. Susan W. Harrison and The Rev. Susan S. Dulany, both from Christ Church. The first woman to be chosen senior warden of a congregation in our Diocese was Franklin S. Traub of Christ Church. While our past is by no means perfect, there is no question that the arc of inclusion and "All are Welcome" are clearly part of our long and storied history.



Present

It is evident that there is a real appreciation of the fact that Christ Church is a house of prayer and worship for all people. We continue to welcome members of different races, ages, religious backgrounds, sexual orientations, and political preferences while maintaining a very purposeful Episcopal identity. This is something with which people are both pleased and extremely committed to living into more fully.

Of additional interest is that, even with this spirit of openness, a few of the survey responses noted that our congregation is predominately “white” and, for the most part, well educated. These observations are not to be viewed as being negative characteristics by any means but a recognition that, with the changing demographics of Savannah, there may be opportunities for our parish to appeal to a broader audience. In the coming years it is our desire to continue to invite all friends and people to Christ Church in the hope that we continue to diversify our membership.

In this area we also recognize that our beautiful historic facilities on Johnson Square create a space for worship that is deeply meaningful and moving. However, in our desire to truly live into “All are Welcome,” we need to address some issues of hearing and accessibility in our church. One of the stated reasons that people attend Christ Church is the clear sense of joy and welcome that people encounter when they arrive for worship. Therefore, we recognize that we have an opportunity to improve our ability to incorporate new members into the larger life of our congregation. As the original church of the Georgia colony, often referenced as “The Mother Church,” a few observed that the church building is not available to the larger community throughout much of the week.

Future

- ✦ Establish strong and intentional ministries for newcomer incorporation and current member retention.
- ✦ Be intentional in promoting the importance of the diversity of our congregation including young adults and college ministry.
- ✦ Establish a more formal communications department and plan including traditional and social media.
- ✦ Appoint a team to identify and implement recognizable Episcopal signage for our facilities.
- ✦ Study and implement a plan for making the church nave more accessible to the elderly and physically challenged persons.
- ✦ Study and implement a plan for lighting and sound improvement especially for those who have difficulty hearing during our worship services.
- ✦ Find ways to have the church open during the week so that we are more fully a house of prayer for all people.



JOYFUL LIVING

Past

From our earliest days, Christ Church has been an intergenerational community. For generations, parishioners young, old, and in between have shared the experience of being “church” together on Johnson Square. When the children of Savannah were known to be bored, John Wesley hosted what is said to be the first Sunday school in America to bring some engagement and joy to their lives. Christ Church also tended to the needs of the members of the community who were sick and/or in failing health. The joy experienced through Christ Church has also inspired creative minds like four-time Academy Award winner Johnny Mercer and Girl Scout founder Juliette Gordon Low to “share the joy” through music and service. Christ Church has a heritage of “Joyful Living,” and we are at our best when this core value shines.



Present

Along with the ideas of the people and the worship, the sense of joy that people experience at Christ Church is a vital part of our identity as a congregation. This has not just happened on its own but has been at least partly related to the intentional effort of creating and sustaining a spirit of joy and wonder in all that we do. While centered in worship our community is knit together in a bond of love and joy. The joyful living that we experience in Sunday worship is growing and spreading into other areas of our common life. It is clear that, as we grow, we need to be purposeful about reaching out to “share the joy” with members of our community who are sick or homebound and no longer able to participate in Sunday worship. We are also very aware that for us to continue to grow we need to offer additional opportunities for spiritual growth and fellowship in small groups outside of Sunday worship. The survey results demonstrated that there is optimism and hope that our youth and children’s programs are moving in a positive direction and with attention and support this ministry can continue to expand and thrive. Christ Church and John Wesley hosted the first Sunday school in America and the church is poised and committed to educating our youth and children in the Christian faith in a new century.

Future

- ✦ Continue to explore new and creative ways to educate our children and youth in the Christian faith (e.g., Sunday school, youth group, Vacation Bible School and family devotional materials).
- ✦ Increase small group opportunities for spiritual growth on Sundays and throughout the week (e.g., Sunday school, adult forums, book groups, and Emmaus House serving team).
- ✦ Organize a care team for our elderly that would include home visits, home communions, and offering monthly Eucharist services in communities such as Savannah Square and The Marshes at Skidaway.
- ✦ Establish a parish life team for additional opportunities for fellowship and sharing the joy with others inside and outside of our parish community (e.g., Mardi Gras, Tybee Surf Day and Cabbage Ball).



Memorial service for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on April 7, 1968. Photo by Fred Baldwin.

SERVICE TO SAVANNAH, THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND THE WORLD

Past

As the original church of the Georgia colony, we were by necessity serving the needs of the larger community. John Wesley learned a new language to better serve his neighbors. The first Roman Catholic priest in Savannah was buried in Christ Church's Cemetery. The original Sunday school in America was held in the afternoon for all the children of the city not just the members of Christ Church. The first Sunday school in America was also largely a literacy program helping children learn to read. When early colonists were dying and leaving children behind as orphans, Christ Church would be the point community for establishing a plan under the leadership of our fourth rector George Whitefield who, as already noted, founded Bethesda to care for these children. The first bishop of the newly formed Diocese of Georgia,

Stephen Elliott, was the rector of Christ Church. Christ Church lay leader Malcolm R. Maclean was the mayor of Savannah (1960-1966) during the days of integration and served as the diocesan chancellor for many years. The community-wide memorial for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was held at Christ Church on April 7, 1968. Christ Church members joined with others to establish the Emmaus House feeding program in 1982 and the Project Smile mission to Belize in 1992. Our identity as a congregation is solidly grounded in the Episcopal Church, and we have a long and rich history of serving as leaders for the Episcopal Church as well as civic and religious leaders for Savannah and the world. As we live into our calling of servant leadership, we do so aware that in addition to our role as spiritual leader, Christ Church has a unique civic role in the city of Savannah and the state of Georgia.



Present

We see ourselves as a blessed community and long to share the joy and love of God that we have experienced with others in Savannah, the Episcopal Church and the world. In the Episcopal Church, deacons are called to bring the needs of the world to the church, to send the people at the end of the liturgy into the world to live out their baptismal ministry and to make certain that the marginalized people in our society are remembered in the Prayers of the People. The ministry and presence of our deacon, The Rev. Patricia Rhoads Davis, is a purposeful reminder that we gather in worship so that we might serve. Christ Church members also serve as individuals giving of their time and talent as servant leaders in a multitude of ministries. A clear part of our identity is that we as individuals and as a congregation are called to servant leadership. While there is great consensus in the hope that our ministries of outreach will continue to expand, it is also true that there is a desire to focus our efforts on certain priorities and establish a meaningful relationship of service and partnership rather than spread ourselves across too many different ministries. There are many valuable ministries of service to the world that we as individuals are called to serve, but we should choose a few for our corporate attention and energy. We also heard a clear desire for us not only to feed the hungry but also to find a way to continue addressing some of the underlying causes of hunger and homelessness.





Future

- ✦ Continue our civic leadership with projects like stuffed animals for the Savannah Police Department, the downtown pet blessing on Johnson Square, ringing bells for September 11, participating in interfaith dialogues and hosting groups such as the Georgia Historical Society.
- ✦ Continue to deepen our relationship in mission both locally and globally in our commitment to and support for Emmaus House feeding ministry (local), Kairos Prison Ministry (statewide) and the Project Smile and Hearing Mission (global).
- ✦ Renew and strengthen our relationship with Bethesda Academy both financially and through hands-on service and relationships.
- ✦ Develop a program for the Savannah community to address at least one root cause of homelessness (e.g., literacy).
- ✦ Establish a signature music concert and/or lecture series for the city of Savannah (e.g., Carols for a Cause).
- ✦ Document Christ Church's history including the use of plaques and memorials.
- ✦ Continue to provide leadership both corporately and as individual members for the Episcopal Diocese of Georgia and the larger church.
- ✦ Help every member of the congregation to find a ministry of service.



NEXT STEPS

In order to pursue these priorities and to accomplish all that we believe God is calling us to do as a congregation, we will also need to work together with our clergy, staff, and vestry toward the following priorities:

Future

- ✝ Increase the number of households who pledge to the ministry of Christ Church and increase the number of pledging households committed to proportional giving (a percentage of income with the goal of 10%).
- ✝ Increase clergy and support staff to keep the mission growing.
- ✝ Educate the congregation on the existence, purpose and need for giving to the Endowment Fund.
- ✝ Provide for the upkeep and maintenance of the church building on Johnson Square and the parish house on Abercorn Street.
- ✝ Institute a planned giving program for estate planning to assist members in finding ways to support Christ Church and its ministry through their Will and other financial instruments.
- ✝ Assess future space needs including the feasibility of renovating the entire parish house and/or constructing a multi-story building over the church parking lot.





FINAL THOUGHTS

We are truly excited about what God is doing in and through the life of Christ Church. You will notice that the focus of our priorities for the next three to five years is about growing in spirit and ministry and continuing to share the joy of Christ and Christ's Church with more people.



It is our belief and expectation that if we focus this next chapter of our story on these priorities, then we will also need to address the limitations of our current facilities, especially the Parish House on Reynolds Square. During the recent weeks in Lent, we were regularly using the first two floors of the Parish House to the fullest capacity for Sunday Christian Education for all ages, the daily ministry of Emmaus House feeding program and the downtown AA meetings, and we hosted a series of meetings for various committees of the Episcopal Diocese of Georgia.

If we continue to expand ministry and memberships on our current path of growth, we will maximize our usage of the first two floors of the Parish House. As we move forward with our focus on ministry and people, the Strategic Planning Committee asks the vestry and congregation to begin to discern the direction for expanding our facilities for ministries of small groups, spiritual development, fellowship opportunities, and our outreach mission to God's world.





The Strategic Planning Committee and vestry believe that planning is an ongoing process and not a one-time event. Therefore, as we begin to live into these stated priorities, we believe that we will need to annually re-evaluate where we might best channel our energy and resources. In the coming weeks, we will offer opportunities for questions, clarifications, and continued dreaming of what God can and will do through the ministry and people of Christ Church. Our hope is that each year, we will reaffirm our stated plans or we can make updates and modifications as circumstances evolve and change during our future of continued growth and expansion of ministry. This process has affirmed for us how truly blessed we are to be part of such an amazing community of faith. We have a wonderful heritage, and we are truly blessed that God has brought all of us together for this shared life as Christ Church in the present. However, we are most excited by the hope and possibilities of what God can and will do through our joyful community of worship and service, Christ Church, in the future years to come. “The World is our Parish!”



COMMITTEE MEMBERS

T. Mills Fleming (*tri-chair*), Mimi S. Jones (*tri-chair*), Margaret J. Miller (*tri-chair*), Jefferson M. Bailey, Trina M. Brown, J. Ryan Chandler (*vestry liaison*), Michael M. Franck, Joseph R. Gussler, M.D., Caroline B. Keller, Ann C. Lerch, Mary E. Raines, John B. Severance, Denton W. Stone, William H. Wallace, M.D. and Louise E. Wyche.

VESTRY MEMBERS

Rosalie S. Morris, *Senior Warden*, William F. Wallace, M.D., *Junior Warden*, Montie S. Acuff, *Clerk of the Vestry*, Jane F. Espy, *Treasurer*, J. Ryan Chandler, Robert M. Davenport, M. Marie Dent, Ph.D., Celia W. Dunn, John Thomas Gennuso, Caroline B. Keller, Ann Y. Miller, J. Kurt C. Oelschig, Elizabeth Lee Pember, Isabella Stuart Reeves and David M. Slatinsky.

CLERGY AND STAFF

The Right Reverend Scott Anson Benhase, *D. Min., Bishop of Georgia*,
The Reverend Michael S. White, *Rector*, The Reverend Sierra Wilkinson Reyes, *Associate Rector*,
The Reverend Patricia Rhoads Davis, *Deacon*, The Right Reverend Henry I. Louttit, Jr., *Bishop-in-Residence*,
The Reverend George M. Maxwell, *Rector Emeritus*, The Reverend Helen S. White, *Priest Associate*,
Timothy L. Hall, *Organist and Choirmaster*, Leslie D. Parker, *Parish Administrator* and Regina M. Crofts, *Bookkeeper*.

(912) 236-2500

www.ChristChurchSavannah.org





CHRIST CHURCH

JOHNSON SQUARE · 28 BULL STREET

MAILING ADDRESS:

18 ABERCORN STREET, SAVANNAH, GA 31401

