

Saint Thomas Church



The Rector's Chronicle

Advent 2016

My dear friends,

I love Thanksgiving Day; this is my third as Rector and the celebration really roots me in American life and tradition. I was delighted that so many people were in church on the day – it meant that we began the day by *giving thanks* which is of course, the meaning of the word 'Eucharist'. We are a Eucharistic Community, which means that thanksgiving is at the very heart of our common life together. We celebrate the mass nineteen times a week so living lives that are filled with thanksgiving and generosity should come naturally to each one of us.

It was very encouraging to break our \$1million target for the Annual Appeal well before Thanksgiving this year; thank you to all of you who have made your pledges for the 2017 appeal. The Annual Appeal not only supports the life of our church in its worship, music and pastoral care but directly supports the Choir School and helps change children's lives. At the time of this writing, many of you have increased your pledges and we have a number of new leadership pledges (\$5000 and above) including several from Webcast listeners. This is wonderful; **thank you.**

The weekend following Thanksgiving Day, we celebrated Advent Sunday. This year, Christmas Day is a Sunday, so we have four full weeks of Advent. This allows us to journey to Christmas in a more leisurely manner and to reflect on the great Advent themes of the Second Coming and Judgment as well as the Incarnation of Jesus Christ and his first coming at Bethlehem.

Persecuted Christians

A number of you have mentioned your distress at the scenes we have witnessed on our television screens and the stories of the plight of Christian communities in the Middle East. For many years we have been

praying for the fragile Christian communities in the land of Jesus' birth and especially near Bethlehem. But the plight of Christians in Syria, Iraq, and Iran is disturbing. There is, of course, great poignancy as we celebrate Christmas, for on December 28 we celebrate the feast of the Holy Innocents and remember Herod's slaughter of the children in and around Bethlehem. Escaping the infanticide of a despotic King, the Holy Family became refugees in Egypt before returning home to Nazareth once it was safe to do so. For many Christians who have been displaced in the Middle East, there seems little hope that they will be able to return to their homes, and we must do what we can to support them in our prayers and otherwise.



To that end, I am delighted to welcome the Bishop of the (Anglican) Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf to Saint Thomas Church during Advent. Bishop Michael Lewis will give a talk on Sunday, December 11, at 10am on the fifth floor of the parish house and then preach at the 11am mass. I hope that you will come and meet him at the coffee hour afterwards.

We can help him and his fragile diocese very practically just as we were able to help Pastor Sharif and his family escape death threats in Pakistan earlier this year.

A number of us recently attended a symposium on the plight of Christians in the Middle East hosted by Cardinal Dolan at the Sheen Center; there were sobering stories from a number of contributors including those whose families had fled persecution, Ambassador Ronald Lauder, the recently retired Army Chief of Staff General Raymond Odierno, and professors from Princeton University.



Here, Cardinal Dolan holds an icon of ‘The coptic martyrs of Libya’ murdered by ISIS last year; we must all pray for and canvass support for an end to a genocide that is being largely ignored.

The call of the bells...

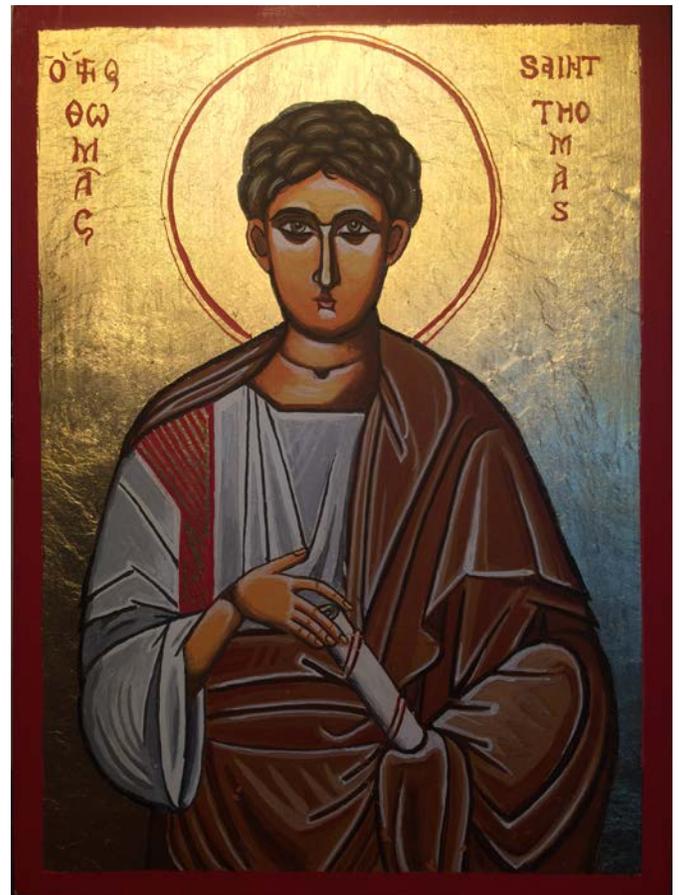
Julie Zhu, our resident carillonneur, recently came to discuss ways that we can make the carillon more accessible and known in New York. Now that the scaffolding is coming down, the bells will sound even more clearly on Fifth Avenue, and Julie has some great ideas for people to hear the carillon more frequently. Julie is well known in the international scene and has played carillons all over the world. A number of groups have visited the tower recently and have been fascinated to see the bells, the actual carillon, and the practice instrument.

Julie is currently composing music for the off-Broadway show, *Babel*, that debuts in January at the *14th St. Y*, and the Saint Thomas bells are featured prominently in the score!

The gift of a new icon

Some of you may remember that we had a group of parishioners from Exeter Cathedral visit Saint Thomas in the late Spring. They so enjoyed their visit that they have surprised us with a lovely and very special gift. Members of the Exeter Cathedral community have commissioned an icon of Saint Thomas to be painted (or ‘written’ as some prefer to describe the process) by iconographer John Coleman (who has painted icons for various churches and monasteries including Lambeth Palace).

The icon is being painted using traditional methods – natural pigments dissolved in egg yolk and applied to a gessoed oak panel. The icon will be embellished with 24kt gold leaf and will no doubt look beautiful in the dark church, especially in candlelight. We are going to be sent photographs of work on the panel and we will put these on the website so that you can follow the progress as the iconographer prays and fasts as he paints. It will be some months before this is finished, and I hope we will dedicate it in September 2017 when we celebrate our Patronal Feast.



A miniature prototype of the icon.

Fellowship events

We have continued to have some very enjoyable **Senior Lunches** beautifully and professionally catered for us by Rodrigo Rosas. There have been several gatherings at the Rectory and in the Parish House including the **Young Adults Group** who continue to meet once or twice monthly in the Parish House or at the Rectory. That group is growing its membership and has a varied program of events. If you are in your 20's or early 30's and would like to be on the mailing list, please contact our seminarian Michael Horvath at Mhorvath@SaintThomasChurch.org.



At the end of September, we had one of our themed events which attracted a very diverse crowd from the parish as young and old danced the night away at our **Caribbean Evening** and enjoyed traditional fare from the Islands including jerk chicken and Eddie Thomas's now famous home-made curried goat! The first person on the dance floor was Barbara Como and the last to leave the dance floor was Jean Grainger who taught us some wonderful moves. We were joined by several seminarians from GTS.

The Young Adults are clearly on a roll as they were also the winning team in our Annual **Quiz Night** held at the Choir School; a fun evening was had by all with some delicious food made by Heidi Thomas, our school chef. There was only one embarrassing moment when, for a spot prize, I misread the answer and told the assembled gathering that Lake Superior

was not the largest of the Great Lakes and that Lake Huron was. (The person who won the prize did not complain!).



The Young Adults Group have invited members of the Diocese's Young Adult's Network to join them for a *Bring-a-long-and-Sing-a-long* on December 11. If you are interested, please see Michael Horvath.

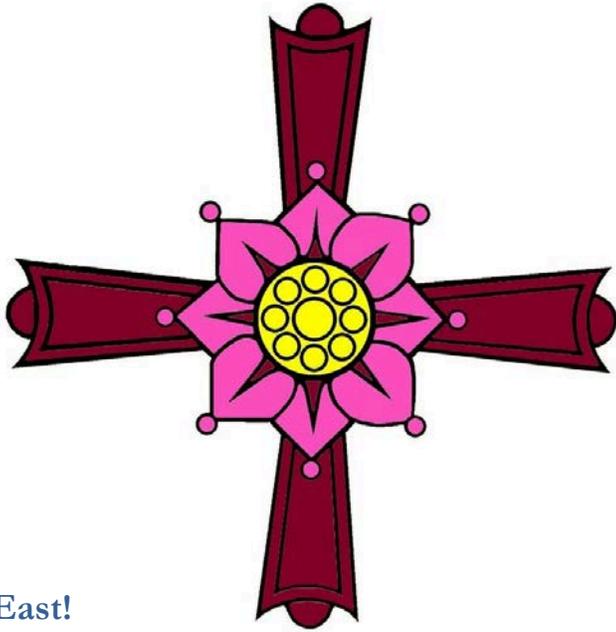
Fall Lecture

We were all immensely impressed with the lecture given by **The Very Rev'd Andrew McGowan** on the subject of sacrifice in the Bible and the early Church. Dean McGowan has a wonderfully engaging style and illustrated his lecture with some amusing anecdotes and interesting slides. I was talking to a parishioner the other day at the Soup Kitchen and telling her that I had been rather embarrassed to discover things about the Hebrew Scriptures that I did not know; her response was to remind me that we are all 'life-long learners'.

The Adult Education Committee is about to have its third meeting and Fr. Daniels will soon be telling us about our Spring Lecture; if it is as good as the Fall Lecture we will be richly blessed.

Canon Wright...

...Recently celebrated a special birthday. It has been a delight to see him back in church again; the new wheelchair lift is getting regular use now so if you know anyone who is wheelchair bound but would like to come to church, please let them know that it is quite easy to do so.



East!

The recently formed *Episcopal Asian Supper Table* is a monthly gathering of Episcopalians of Asian heritage from the New York Metropolitan area. Every month they meet to worship and then enjoy a meal together. I am pleased to let you know that Saint Thomas Church will be hosting *EAST* on Saturday, March 11, 2017. With a growing presence of parishioners at Saint Thomas of Asian descent, it will be good to be hosts next spring. More details will be in a future Chronicle.

The Rector's Christian Doctrine Class

If you are new to the Episcopal Church, wish to be baptized and/or confirmed, or received then this course is for you. A systematic treatment of the essentials of the Christian faith, as received through the Catholic heritage of Anglicanism within the Episcopal Church, the 2017 course begins on Tuesday, January 17 and continues every Tuesday until April 4 when there is a break for Holy Week and Easter. Classes resume on April 25 and conclude on May 16. The Service of Confirmation and Reception is on Sunday, May 21 at 11 a.m.

Recently someone said to me "It's important people know what their priest believes." Well, if you want to know what the Rector believes, come to the class and participate; we also need parishioners to commit to supporting new members in their journey of faith as fellow pilgrims *on the Way*.

Strategic Planning

Since the summer, a Committee has begun thinking about the creation of a five-year plus strategic plan for our parish. As you are aware from our Annual Appeal materials and from my sermons on stewardship, we cannot be complacent since our expenses exceed our income. Running a church and a choir school in Manhattan is very costly. For many years now, in order to balance our budget, we have had to exceed our policy of drawing only 5% from our invested funds. This practice is not sustainable. The strategic planning exercise is about safeguarding our church and its musical heritage for future generations. Principally, it is about finances but it is also about our vision and where we want to be in the next ten years.

In the new year, the Vestry will let you know how we intend to involve parishioners and supporters of Saint Thomas Church in this planning exercise. In the meantime, the Strategic Planning Committee has been working hard to ensure that any external help we require matches our particular tradition and gives us good value. It is our hope that by June we will have engaged with many of you, examined all aspects of our current life together, explored ways of securing our future, and set good action plans to achieve our goals.

Finally,

On Sunday, December 11 at 1 p.m. the Sunday School will present this year's **Christmas Pageant** entitled *The Fourth Wise Man*. Fr. Spurlock, Sarah Cornwell and the Sunday School team have worked hard with the children and their parents to prepare this year's pageant, so please come and support them.

May Christmas bring joy and delight, and hope for a peaceful New Year; may the love and the joy of the Lord Jesus Christ surround you and your loved ones always,

Affectionately,

your priest,

www.saintthomaschurch.org