

THE Messenger

ST. MARY'S-ON-THE-HIGHLANDS EPISCOPAL CHURCH

FEBRUARY 2026



Is Light a Positive or Negative Experience?



The Rev. H. Huey Gardner

I recently participated in a conversation around the positive and negative effects of light. The conversation went from the extremes of sunlight and skin cancer to the negative effects of an atomic blast to the light that is required to grow healthy fruits, plants, and vegetables. It was an interesting conversation, and one I continue to reflect upon.

I also recall several conversations about the introduction of electric lights into homes and about what lighting some neighborhoods accomplished. Crime decreased in some areas, and light improved the household's overall well-being. Another person commented on the change that took place once a neighborhood ballfield was illuminated. All of a sudden, the evening, which was typically "family time," was replaced by additional playtime on the ballfield. These conversations have made me reflect on the power of light.

The Christian mission is built upon the truth that the light of Christ came into the world, bringing hope, salvation, and healing. The presence of Christ and this light is always good. While it highlights the selfish ways of men

and women, it also points to a solution to this reality. Our problem is clearly described in the opening passage of the Gospel of John:

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. (NIV)

The "He" in this passage is the person of Jesus Christ, very God of very God, who stepped into the world to save the world. This passage also states our situation: we do not always recognize the light and presence of God.

However, our response does not control God, who desires that we step into this light. The only way I have been able to grow in this light and reflect the hope of God is by being involved in worship, prayer, and giving of my time, talent, and resources. Just as playing on that lit ballfield was exciting, living in the light of Christ is exciting and life-changing. This year, I hope and pray you will join me and my family in taking another step closer to what God offers and hopes for us. The light of God encourages spiritual growth and is built upon the gifts of salvation and transformation.

Ash Wednesday - February 18



7:00 AM: Imposition of Ashes and Prayers

12:05 PM: Imposition of Ashes & Holy Eucharist

5:30 PM: Imposition of Ashes & Holy Eucharist

Preacher at noon and 5:30 PM: The Rev. Richard Ahlquist

VISION OF ST. MARY'S-ON-THE-HIGHLANDS

St. Mary's will offer a wide range of worship, education and outreach experiences that draw people closer to Christ.

MISSION OF ST. MARY'S-ON-THE-HIGHLANDS

St. Mary's mission is to serve God by proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ within the Parish and into the world by worshiping in the Anglican tradition, by faithfully administering the sacraments, and by ministering to the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of our Parish family and our community.

Adult Christian Education

Sundays / 9:30 AM- 10:15 AM

We continue with our Adult Forum lecture-style classes Randolph Memorial Hall and a Bible study discussion in Room 309.

Bible Study Discussion

A Four-Part Series on "Women of the Bible"

Through February 15 in Room 309

Jennifer Dewees, Emily Yancey and Micki Haralson are surveying important, but historically overlooked, characters in the Bible: women! Join them as they study the women whose stories reveal God's purposes in unexpected ways. We will study the texts themselves, how the women of the Bible have been depicted in art, and how these women have been remembered and interpreted over time. Right: *Esther, 19th Century* by Hermann Anschütz.



Adult Forum Lectures

Randolph Memorial Hall

- February 1 and
- February 15: Dr. Jeff Leonard, Professor of Biblical Studies at Samford University, joins us to discuss two themes: "The Bible's Elusive God" (February 1) and "Seeking an Elusive God" (February 15). Both are explored in his latest book *Seekers in the Hands of Elusive God: Embracing Hope in Seasons of Darkness*. This book explains the scriptural dynamic of an omnipresent but elusive God. It is when we fail to search for God that our view of who God truly is becomes distorted and our own spiritual health diminishes. So how, then, are we called to seek God? Dr. Leonard considers a variety of avenues-Scripture, nature, humanity, worship, silence, doubt, suffering, death, and joy- through which even those of us who wrestle with spiritual loneliness can pursue the face of God.
- At Samford, Dr. Leonard teaches courses in Hebrew, the Hebrew Bible, and ancient Near Eastern literature and religion. He earned his doctorate at Brandeis University. He is the author of *Creation Rediscovered: Finding New Meaning in an Ancient Story* (2020), and a two-volume commentary on the book of Exodus, *The Preacher's Hebrew Companion to Exodus* (2023).
- February 8: Bevelle Worthen will lead us through the concept of "Radical Grace." Huey mentioned Radical Grace in a sermon last fall, and it sparked a great conversation with Bevelle. Her passion for this growing theology seeking to understand the fullness of God's grace is inspiring. She has found many helpful resources, where she follows preachers and thinkers who can help us all continue this conversation beyond the class itself.



2026 St. Mary's Lenten Lecture Series

Five Sundays: February 22, March 1, 8, 15, 22

This year's series will feature a variety of speakers whose topics range from *Does God Pick Favorites?* to *Being Spiritually Fed during Holy Week*. Two of our scheduled speakers are well known to us- Huey Gardner and Kee Sloan- while three are first-time visitors that you will NOT want to miss- Rob MacSwain (Sewanee), Reed Carlson (Sewanee), and Scott McWaters (UA Professor of English).

WATCH YOUR EMAIL AND THE SUNDAY ANNOUNCEMENTS FOR MORE DETAILS!

Music Events



Shrove Tuesday, February 17
5:30 PM
Randolph Memorial Hall

The Music at St. Mary's series continues with a Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper & Old-Fashioned Hymn Sing! The event is a fundraiser for the St. Mary's Choir Tour to Wells Cathedral (UK) in July 2026.

The evening features dinner (pancakes/sausage, red beans/rice, and beverages), and a hymn sing with two pianos.

Scan the QR code to make your reservation, and be sure to include your hymn requests. (We will honor as many as time permits.)



Suggested dinner donation:
\$20/person or \$45/family max.

A Service of Compline
sung by the Gentlemen of the Choir

Sunday, February 22

6:00 PM

(following the 5:00 service)

The Office of Compline (Night Prayer) is the final service of the day, placing its emphasis on spiritual peace. The half-hour liturgy consists of plainsong chant and anthems, sung by candlelight, presented by members of the St. Mary's Choir. If you have not experienced this beautiful and peaceful service, plan to attend and invite some friends.

THE MERCADO!

Sunday
February 1

8:30 AM-12:30 PM
Randolph Memorial Hall



We will have delicious home-made food items, hand-crafted gift items, original works of art, and an AMAZING silent auction! All proceeds benefit our mission partners, **Amistad Mission** in Bolivia.

We open at 8:30, so come browse during the Parish Breakfast hour. We stay open until 12:30 PM or til we sell out. The silent auction ends at 12:30 PM.

Women of The Church Lunch

Monday, February 2
11:30 AM

Randolph Memorial Hall

All women of the parish are invited for lunch and fellowship and to hear a presentation by **the Rev. Jayne C. Pool**. \$10 per person for lunch from Taziki's served by the Daughters of the King. Please take your seats early!



The "Loving Well" Support Group for Caregivers

Tuesdays: February 3 and 17
2:00-3:00 PM / Chapel

We invite you to join our support group held on the first and third Tuesdays of each month. This group places a much-needed focus on the caregivers, known and unknown, within our parish. Although we are called to love one another as Christ loves us, at times it can be lonely, frustrating, and confusing. Often, support and relief come in the form of a shared community.

The group is facilitated by Cler Watkins and Kaki O'Flinn.

Children's Ministries

Created for a Purpose: July 20-24

St. Mary's is pleased to offer Created for a Purpose once again this summer! This art camp for girls is centered around scripture and the good news of the Gospels. **Girls rising 3rd grade through 8th grade** are campers, and high school, college, and adult women of the parish serve as leaders.



Registration opens for St. Mary's parishioners **February 9** at 9:00 AM.

Registration opens for the general public **February 16** at 9:00 AM.

Scan QR code to register.



CLUB 456

PIZZA & GAMES

Club 456 Pizza Party
Monday, February 16 / 11:30-1:00
Jim Davenport's Pizza Palace
Mountain Brook

Pizza and drinks are covered. Bring quarters for games! RSVP to Katie@stmarysoth.org.

2026
VBS

Make plans to join the fun

June 8-10!

Registration begins March 2!

Would you like to be part of the planning committee?
Contact Katie Dewees at katie@stmarysoth.org or 881-0704. Children rising 4K-4th grades are campers. Rising 5th and 6th graders do service projects in the community. Rising 7th-college students are assistant leaders! Service hours awarded upon request!

Youth Ministries/EYC



Super-Bowling!
Sunday, February 8 / 1:00-2:30 PM
Vestavia Bowl

Saint Luke's, All Saints', and St. Mary's youth are going bowling before the Super Bowl on February 8! We have lanes reserved from 1:00-2:30 PM at Vestavia Bowl. **We will cover the bowling and shoe fees; please bring money for snacks and arcade games if you would like.**



Horizon School Game Night
Sunday, February 22 / 5:00 PM
Randolph Memorial Hall

EYC will host Horizon School students for a game night on February 23. Bingo, dinner, and lots of prizes! Bring a friend and get some service hours while having fun!



March 15: Family Outreach at Brother Bryan (Dinner and Chapel Service)
April 3: Good Friday Worship at 5:00 PM in RMH
April 19: Confirmation Sunday 10:30 AM
May 3: Youth Sunday at 10:30 AM service

Outreach Ministries



Thank you to all who were so generous!

Our Christmas offering, sent as a gift to the parish of St. Mark's, was **\$10,000**. This gift was made by St. Mary's to honor the ministry of the Rev. Jayne C. Pool and to assist with several projects being undertaken by St. Mark's.

Continued Support for Highlands UMC Homeless Ministry

- Clothing Collection for Highlands UMC:** We are collecting the following items to support HUMC's clothing closet: gently used men's and women's clothing (t-shirts, tops, sweatshirts, jackets, belts, and pants), gently used men's and women's tennis shoes, and new men's and women's underwear and socks. All donations can be left in the St. Mary's Outreach office.
- Highlands UMC Breakfast Ministry:** Four days a week HUMC prepares and serves a hot meal and a sack lunch to those in need. St. Mary's provides volunteers for its breakfast service on Thursdays, 8:30-10:00 AM. To volunteer, visit www.stmarysoth.org/outreach.
- Questions? Contact Monica Sargent (monica@stmarysoth.org or 205-913-4689).

From Our GED Program

Celebrating Shannon



Shannon entered the St. Mary's GED program in 2009, 17 years ago, when her oldest child was 8 months old. Shannon is now the mother of 5 beautiful children, all of whom have spent time in the loving care of St. Mary's.

In December, Shannon took the final section of her GED for the 7th time. The day before the test, she asked the St. Mary's GED staff for prayers, so we held hands and stood in the parking lot, each prayer leading into another. Shannon's tearful prayer was one of thanksgiving for all the gifts she has been given and the request that God's will be done – not hers, but HIS. I walked away from that moment revealing in the beauty of Shannon's prayer. She became a child, full of love and thanksgiving for her father in heaven, despite wanting a gift for herself. I felt the beauty and power of her prayer in that moment.

When we celebrated that she passed that test and obtained her GED, Shannon and I discussed those moments of prayer during which we each received a gift. I learned to be more thankful like the youngest children, and Shannon learned to trust God again. While we were praying, Shannon said she was looking at the angels in the stained-glass windows of the church, and through our prayer, she gave her trust back to God.

Life for Shannon has not been easy, and she had given up on prayer and lost faith in God's promise that anything is possible with Him. She was discouraged and felt her work was all for nothing. But the prayer with the GED staff gave her new hope, new belief that she could pass the test which had held her back for so long. **AND SHE DID!** The very next morning, with renewed hope in God and confidence in her abilities, **SHE PASSED!**

Through each other, we strengthened our faith. God brought us together to remind us of His great love for us, the power of prayer, and the gift of Christian community.

Shannon will graduate with the class of 2026, the same year her daughter will graduate, and will go on to nursing school as her daughter goes to college. What a win for Shannon, thanks be to God!

Thank you for supporting all of our GED students with time and love and encouragement-all things are possible!

Beverley Hoyt

From the Parish Office

Behind the scenes, there are important administrative details that help our parish function smoothly and faithfully. Below are updates and information that support our shared ministry and ensure we care well for our church community.

What is a pledge? You may have followed the details of St. Mary's 2026 Stewardship campaign, which shows about **290 households making financial gifts to the parish's ministries**. These gifts support the day-to-day operations and the various programs of the parish. The life of the parish, which includes, but is not limited to, music, education, breakfast, outreach, ministries to youth, Daughter of the King, clergy, staff, and maintenance, is reflected in this generosity. **The Vestry has planned for 2026 based on these gifts:**

Pledges received: 289

Total Amount Pledged: \$2,461,562

Access to information available on Realm, our parish database. All adult members of St. Mary's and their spouses have access to Realm. Your profile provides information on YOUR financial contributions as well as contact information for other parishioners.

- Don't have a login to Realm?** Contact Realm administrator Melodie Elam at melodie@stmarysoth.org or 205-881-1261. She can send you the "invite." Remember- only parishioners and their spouses have access to Realm.
- Forgot your password?** If you have set up a login in the past, but have forgotten your password, follow this link <https://onrealm.org/StMarysonHighla> OR scan the QR code to the right for the sign in page. Click on "Sign In," enter your email address, then click on "Forgot your password?". Follow instructions from there!



Do we have a Pictorial Directory? YES!! One of the best features of Realm is the photos, but this feature is only as helpful as WE make it. There are three options to add your photo to your profile:

- Using your smart phone** open the Realm Connect app then open your profile. Click on the circle at the top (it should contain your initials) and follow prompts to upload a photo from your phone.
- Send your photo to Melodie Elam** by email (melodie@stmarysoth.org) or by text to 205-881-1261. She can upload it for you.
- Have your photo taken during the Parish Breakfast hour on one of our Sunday "Picture Days."** See page 7 for February dates!
- Your photo can be updated, too, with any of these options!**

Address Changes: Mailing addresses can be updated via Realm or by contacting the Parish Office at 205-933-1140. Remember that St. Mary's uses several forms of *electronic* communication as well. MailChimp and other email lists are used regularly to inform you about what is happening in the life of the parish. Be sure to keep your email address current, too.



The Diocese of Alabama will gather at Camp McDowell on February 5, 6, and 7. The Vestry of St. Mary's has elected these individuals to represent the parish:

George and Sybil Newton	Bob and Jeanie MacKenzie
Guy and Katie Dewees	Greg and Margaret Ellis
Clergy delegates: Huey Gardner, Richard Ahlquist, Kaki O'Flinn, and John Kennedy	

The convention's theme will be "Good News for a New Day," taken from Lamentations 3:22-23: "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." This theme invites the convention to embrace God's ever-renewing mercy and share the Good News of Christ's love in fresh ways each day. The representatives will reflect on the life of the diocese and consider any particular resolutions that may be submitted. Details on the actions of the convention are available on the diocesan webpage (www.dioala.org).

Who Knew???

Seeking A Spiritual Discipline for A Richer Lent Thursday, February 19

12:30-2:00 PM in the Living Room

Join us as we take our first steps into a richer Lent. The mood will be quiet as we explore a variety of spiritual practices together, activities that invite us into closer company with Jesus. Kaki O'Flinn, Emily Rushing, and others will be our guides as we consider journaling, breath prayer, rule of life, and other practices.

Directory Pictures February Dates

Realm, our online parish directory, is more than a collection of names and phone numbers—it's a way to strengthen our sense of community. Including your photo helps us put faces with names, welcome new members, and stay connected as a church family. **Please drop by Randolph Memorial Hall on the following Sundays between 8:45 and 9:15 AM so we can get your picture.**

February 15 & 22 March 1

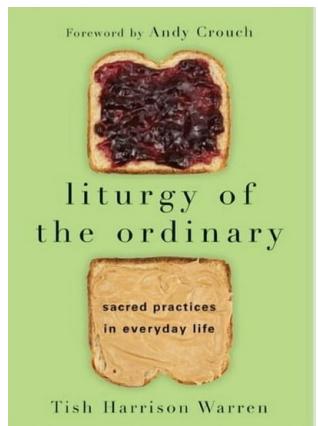
Help us make our directory a true reflection of the people who make our parish home.

NEW Women's Bible Study!!

Tuesdays / 1:00-2:00 PM / Level 3 Atrium

Are you looking for a group to join for weekly Bible Study?

Join us in the Level 3 atrium (Room 105, on the same level as the offices) on Tuesday afternoons beginning on February 3.



This will be a discussion-based gathering. We'll begin with a study of *Liturgy of the Ordinary* by Tish Harrison Warren. Copies are available for purchase on the table outside of Randolph Memorial Hall.

Questions? Contact Katie Dewees: katie@stmarysoth.org.

Transitions

Baptisms

Marynell Hall and Richard Hall
Children of Jessica and Owens Hall
Grandchildren of Debbie and Dave Dresher
January 4, 2026

New Members

Lee Stayer
Miles and Christy Parsons
Kate

Rest In Peace

Roberta Constance Sharp
Mother of Kristie Moorer
December 19, 2025

Dale Snyder Holditch
December 23, 2025
Linda Etten Vann
December 25, 2025

Mary Ruth "Lorrie" Lorimer Ball
Mother of Edmund Ball
January 5, 2026

"Road Runners" Road Trip Around Birmingham!

Thursday, February 12

Meet at 9:00 AM in the Motor Court

The second "Road Runners" trip will be a local one as we visit several of **Birmingham's historical houses of worship plus a catered lunch in RMH**. All are invited! Visit the Events page of our website for complete details and to sign up. (www.stmarysoth.org/events). To cover the expense of the bus rental and lunch, we ask \$30 pp in advance. No refunds, but scholarships are available! We are capped at 30 people, so don't delay!

If you do not have access to the internet, you may call Melodie Elam to register (205-881-1261). Please call Jim Park (205-516-5091) with any other questions.

Preaching Schedule

February 1:	The Rev. H. Huey Gardner
February 8:	The Rev. Deacon Kaki O'Flinn
February 15:	The Rev. Richard Ahlquist
February 22:	The Rev. H. Huey Gardner (8AM, 5PM) Rob MacSwain (10:30 AM)

St. Mary's On-Call Clergy Number

205-881-3278

This number is only active on the weekends. Weekday Pastoral Emergency Calls should be directed to 205-933-1140.



ST. MARY'S

ON THE HIGHLANDS
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The Rev. Deacon Kaki O'Flinn

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The Rev. John I. Kennedy, Jr. MD

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The Messenger is a monthly newsletter of St. Mary's-on-the-Highlands to inform readers about what is happening in and around our parish community.

Visit us on-line at stmarysoth.org