

THE Messenger

APRIL 2026

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

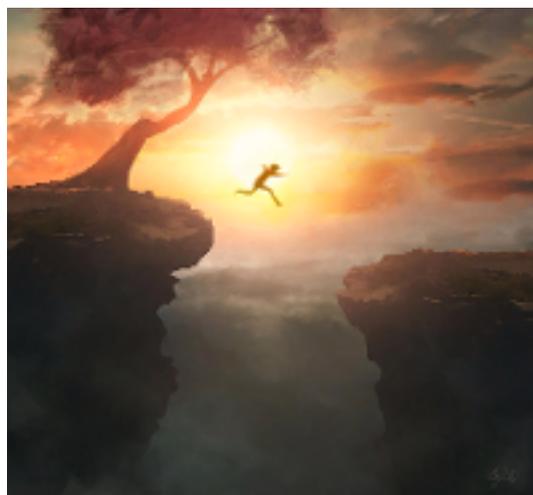


Shoes, Baskets, Clothes, Betrayal, Death, and A Leap into A New Life

By The Rev. H. Huey Gardner

As you receive this, we will be entering the period surrounding Easter, the most significant festival and season for Christians. I find the liturgical acts of Palm Sunday, when we remember Jesus' entry into Jerusalem with palms and shouts of joy, to be a stark contrast to the rest of the week. From the triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (when we shout "blessed" and "crucify him?"), we move to Maundy Thursday and Good Friday with their harsh and unsettling accounts of the last hours. These readings depict Jesus' betrayal, his close friends fleeing in fear, the soldiers beating him, and his death on the cross; in all these events, Jesus remains remarkably silent. He offers no defense against the charges brought against him. Then, on Saturday afternoon, we begin to uncover the rest of the story. The story of Jesus does not end on the cross.

The women go out to a borrowed tomb to finish preparing Jesus' body for burial. There was not enough time on Friday to complete the burial, so it was postponed until after the Sabbath. They thought they were going to do something necessary, important, and even planned. But they stumbled upon an event that has changed the world. Mark Hopkins, a Christian abolitionist who, along with three others, established the Central Pacific Railroad, wrote in the mid-1800s: "No revolution that has ever taken place in society can be compared to that which has



been produced by the words of Jesus Christ." He is describing the power found in Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

Instead of finding a body, the women discover an empty tomb. Matthew describes an interesting reaction to these events: the stone rolled away, no body in sight, frightened soldiers, and an angel of the Lord telling the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised." The angel then

instructs the women to go and tell the disciples. Can you imagine their surprise at hearing about the resurrection? It's hard to grasp what has happened—from the cross to the tomb, and now to resurrection. We understand the crowd's anger and the disciples' fear, but when it comes to the empty tomb, there's wonder, questions, and even doubt. For me, this is where the leap of faith must happen. I think about all these events, but eventually, I have to make the leap to "I will believe in Easter."

Easter takes a step into the unknown. It is true that the resurrection can't be proved. If it could be proved, a leap of faith would not be necessary. Our act of faith toward God's act of salvation is important to Easter and its meaning in our lives. Belief requires a degree of spiritual

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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

Sunday Mornings
9:30 AM in Randolph Memorial Hall

- **April 5: No Sunday School on Easter Day**
- **April 12: The Rev. Deacon John I. Kennedy, Jr. MD** John will teach us about Centering Prayer. He leads a centering prayer session in the chapel on Tuesday mornings at 11:30, with an option to join remotely via Zoom. Come learn more about this method of prayer and peaceful contemplation.
- **Confirmation Sunday, April 19: The Rt. Rev. Glenda S. Curry** (pictured right) will join us for her annual visit and confirmation.
- **Music Sunday, April 26: James Coats**, a parishioner and choir member, will share the past and present of St. Mary's music program. The talk will include information about some of St. Mary's previous music directors. Bring all your questions about hymns, psalms, chanting, and church music!



Bishop Curry will be our guest on April 19.

Bishops and Congregations

By The Rev. H. Huey Gardner

On Sunday, April 19, St. Mary's will host **The Rt. Rev. Glenda S. Curry**, who serves as the Bishop in the Diocese of Alabama. I am often asked, "**Why do bishops make visits?**" The answer is that there are several reasons.

First, it is historic. Bishops are considered the chief shepherds of a diocese. They make visits to support the life of a congregation. This practice dates back to the many visits of support made by the first Apostle, Paul (formerly Saul) of Tarsus.

Second, it connects the modern congregation to the first apostles. The Anglican tradition (also known as The Episcopal Church in the USA) has consistently maintained a link between the modern church and the church of the apostles through bishops. The authority of a bishop comes directly from the first apostles. When a bishop is consecrated, he or she becomes a representative of the apostles, with Peter being the first. As the hands of other bishops are placed on the head of a newly elected bishop, the hands of Peter are believed to be present in the prayers of those bishops. Not all bishops can claim their consecration derives from the apostolic succession. Anglicans and Roman Catholics are the main denominations that emphasize this connection.

Finally, bishops have a unique job. Only a bishop can offer the following three liturgical actions: Confirmation, Reception, and Reaffirmation:

- **Confirmation** is a mature decision to join a parish. The bishop welcomes believers by praying over them and bringing them into the tradition of apostolic succession through the laying on of hands. This process makes every member of the Anglican church equal. No one can claim their confirmation was somehow better than another. All of us who have been confirmed are equal in the eyes of the church.
- **Reception** is offered to an individual who has previously been confirmed by a bishop of the apostolic succession. Like baptism, you can only be confirmed once by such a bishop. Reception is typically offered to someone who was confirmed as a Roman Catholic or in the Orthodox tradition.
- **Finally, and what I believe is perhaps the most important, is Reaffirmation.** Reaffirmation is a prayer offered by the bishop to encourage faith in an individual. Sometimes we become lazy with our prayers and devotion. Reaffirmation signifies renewal and repentance. It is a pastoral prayer over a person who wants to renew their faith. The bishop can perform this, and the act reminds everyone witnessing it that the journey of faith is vital and involves seasons of renewal and growth.

I hope you will be present on the 19th to host Bishop Curry. She will be our guest speaker at Christian education at 9:30 AM and the preacher and celebrant at our 10:30 service.



Who Knew???

Thursday, April 16 / 12:30 PM / Living Room



June Mays
and
The Undoing

Your family might rely on you to do many things — keep cars maintained and bills paid, gather information for taxes, shop for the household, do laundry, cook, pick up and put away — a thousand tasks! How can they learn what to do when you pass away or become incapacitated? Join parishioner June Mays, a former financial advisor, as we each create a notebook of essential information for survivors. This is for both men and women, whether living alone or with others, regardless of age.

**** Bring a 3-ring binder and tabbed section dividers,** or contact Emily Rushing (emilyjonesrushing@hotmail.com) if you need us to provide supplies.

Middler's Dinner
THURSDAY
APRIL 16TH
6:00-8:30 P.M.

Hosted by
Hill and Dan Weathers
44 Country Club Road 35213
BYOB
\$15 pp for food Venmo Hill @Hill-Weathers
Include your email in your Venmo & we will email parking info
Who are "Middlers"? They are adults in their 40s/50s or anyone who considers themselves a "Middler"

Music Events

The Music at St. Mary's Series continues with

A Concert by St. Mary's Own
JOHN LOWE
at the Casavant organ



SUNDAY, APRIL 12, at 3:00 PM
featuring the music of J.S. Bach,
Herbert Howells, Healey Willan,
and much more!

A reception in
Randolph Memorial Hall
follows the concert. Please join us!

The concert is live-streamed at
www.stmarysoh.org under 'Watch Online.'

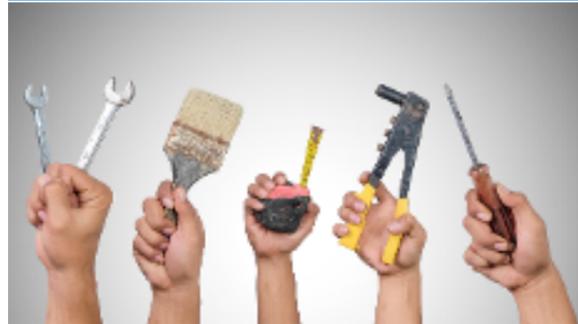
The 5PM service will take place as usual.

Music Sunday
April 26 at 10:30 AM

with the Choirs of
St. Mary's, organ, brass,
and timpani



Announcing A New Parish Ministry!



Men's Service Ministry

St. Mary's is pleased to announce the formation of a new ministry called Men's Ministry to the Parish. A group of our men has volunteered to staff this ministry, which will focus on providing services to parishioners, at their residences, who are unable, due to age, handicap, or lack of experience, to do such things as hanging framed items, relocating furniture, etc. This also includes small hand-tool repairs.

Requests for assistance should be directed to Meade Whitaker at mwhitaker@bradley.com or work (205) 521-8261.

These men are ready to serve!

Children's Ministries

EASTER SUNDAY AT ST. MARY'S

Remember to bring flowers for the cross!

WORSHIP AT
7:00 AM, 9:00 AM, AND 11:00 AM

LEMONADE AND COOKIES AFTER 9:00 SERVICE

Good Shepherd Sunday April 26

The fourth Sunday of Easter, April 26, is Good Shepherd Sunday.



Everyone is invited to the garden after the 10:30 service to visit with a lamb and enjoy lemonade and sheep cookies!

Club 456

GAME NIGHT

Games - Prizes - Pizza

Roll the Dice, Grab Your Cards!

Friday, May 1 6-8 PM

Bring a friend!

RSVP katie@stmarysoth.org

VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL JUNE 8-10 / 9:00-12:30

Visit our events page to sign up as a volunteer and to register your child:



www.stmarysoth.org/events

Youth Ministries/EYC

Good Friday Worship Night Friday, April 3 / 5:00-6:00 PM Randolph Memorial Hall

We're putting together a special contemporary worship night for 7th-12th graders and any college students who are home for Easter. The service will include music, Scripture readings, and prayer. We have invited students from Advent, St. Luke's, St. Stephens, and All Saints to join.

Please invite any friends!

Youth Sunday! May 3 / 10:30 AM Service

Everyone's favorite Sunday is just around the corner! Youth Sunday is an opportunity for the students (7th - 12th grade) at St. Mary's to lead a Eucharist service by serving as greeters, ushers, acolytes, chalice, readers, and musicians. Our hope is to have as many students as possible involved in the service.

Please email Jessica@stmarysoth.org sign up!

Created for a Purpose: July 20-24

Created For A Purpose is a creative arts camp for girls rooted in Scripture and the Gospel. Campers (rising 3rd-8th grade girls) are led by high school, college, and adult women from the parish. Each day includes hands-on activities and biblical teaching, emphasizing that God has gifted everyone with talents to be used for His glory. The ministry offers a space where girls can be themselves - creating, singing, laughing, and learning about Jesus in ways that shape their lives.



Interested in Serving?

Counselors: Rising 9th-12th grade girls and college women. Rising 10th graders and older will receive a \$200 stipend.

Adult Volunteers: All women of the parish are invited to sign up!

Visit the Events page of our website for application links (www.stmarysoth.org/events).

Outreach Events & Ministries



April Birthday Party at Episcopal Place: Tuesday, April 14, at 4:00. All are welcome to this always lively celebration!

Save the date: Thursday, June 4 - St. Mary's will serve dinner to the Sawyerville staff.

If you would like to serve at either (or both!) of these events, please contact Monica Sargent (monica@stmarysoth.org).

Sawyerville Staff Applications Now Open! Volunteer staff applications for Summer Camp 2026 are now open for youth ages 16 and up. To read more about Summer 2026 and staff responsibilities before applying and to complete the application, please visit www.sawyerville.org.



Every Child Deserves a Safe Ride!

At the St. Mary's GED program, the safety and well-being of our children are always top priorities. To help support families in our GED community, **we are currently accepting donations of clean, gently used car seats.** If your child has outgrown a car seat that is still in good condition, we would be grateful for your donation.

Thank you for helping us keep our little ones protected!

Beverley Hoyt and Betsy Henley
Program Directors



An Inspiring Story from Our GED Program

By Michelle Espinoza

Below is a portion of a speech our GED graduate and part-time staff member Michelle Espinoza gave at a recent community luncheon. To read her entire speech, please visit www.stmarysoth.org/GED.

I didn't finish high school. I got married young, and soon after, I became pregnant. I stepped into being a wife and a mother before I had finished my own education. Life moved quickly, and I poured myself into my family. Education wasn't something I felt urgency about at the time — I told myself I would get back to it eventually.

But as our family grew...something began to shift in me. I started thinking about the example I was setting. I didn't just want to tell my children that education mattered — I wanted to show them.

As a mom, you can't just decide to pursue your education and walk out the door. You have to know your child is safe. You have to know they're cared for. You have to know you're not choosing your future at the expense of your family.

And that's where St. Mary's changed everything for me. When I found the St. Mary's GED Program, I didn't just find classes — I found people who believed in me. My teacher, **Virginia Sheffield**, believed in me and encouraged me every step of the way. And then there was the nursery. **Beverly [Hoyt] and Betsy [Henley]** cared for my youngest daughter while I was in class. They didn't just watch her — they loved her. They made it possible for me to sit in that classroom without worry. Because of them, I could focus. I could learn. I could grow.

And then, I graduated. That moment wasn't just about passing a test. It was about finishing something that had been incomplete for years. It was about keeping a promise to myself. And it was about letting my children watch me accomplish something that once felt out of reach.

Because of that foundation, I was able to go to college. I earned my EMT license, and I am currently working toward becoming a paramedic. And one of the most meaningful full-circle moments in my journey is this: I was given the opportunity to work in the very same nursery at St. Mary's where my daughter was cared for while I was in class.

Thank you for [supporting the St. Mary's GED program and] making stories like mine possible.

From The Editor

New Newsletter Format Coming Soon!

Beginning with our June 2026 issue, St. Mary's will transition The Messenger to a primarily e-newsletter format. This change reflects our commitment to being good stewards of church resources while continuing to share timely and meaningful information with our parish community.



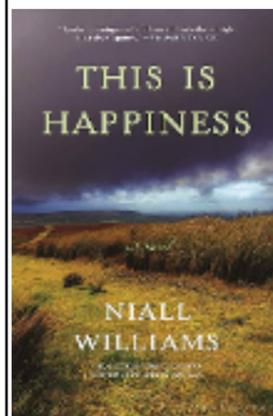
As printing, production, and mailing costs continue to rise, moving to an electronic format allows us to reduce expenses and direct more of our resources toward ministry, outreach, and parish life. An e-newsletter also enables us to share news and announcements more quickly, helping everyone stay informed and connected.

We recognize that email is not the best option for everyone. **If we do not have an email address on file for you, you will continue to receive a printed copy of the newsletter by first-class mail.** In addition, the digital version will be available as usual on our website, and a limited number of printed copies will be placed around the buildings for anyone who would like to pick one up.

If you need to update your contact information, please contact Melodie Elam at melodie@stmarysoth.org or 205-881-1261. Thank you for your understanding and support as we take this step together in faithful stewardship and communication.

St. Mary's April Book Club

Tuesday, April 14
Noon / Living Room



This month's Book Club selection is *This Is Happiness* by Niall Williams. Set in a small Irish village on the edge of change, this thoughtful novel explores time, memory, and the rhythms of everyday life. It invites us to consider what we gain—and what we lose—as the world moves forward. **Bring your lunch—we'll provide treats and, as always, a lively discussion.**

continued from cover

maturity (which ironically we tend to have as children and then lose somewhat as we become more sophisticated), and it also requires our desire to see good triumph over evil, as well as our wanting to believe. This sentence is something I remember from a friend, Bill Kolb – he is right!

“Wanting to believe” is such a powerful phrase. I want to believe in many things! I want to believe my plans for the future are solid, I want to believe our children will grow up to be exactly what I hope, I want to believe I am attentive to my family's needs and those of the congregation I serve — the list goes on... These “wants” focus on me. Easter, however, is about what God wants. God desires new life for each of us. As I think about the things we do for Easter—like buying new clothes and shoes, setting up baskets, and hunting eggs—I realize these seasonal traditions are also about new life. Hidden in each egg, basket, and new piece of clothing is the belief that we can be made new. This is the true power of Easter: On a day some 2,000 years ago, the world was touched by God's restoring power, which desires renewal in all our lives. This is a gift and an opportunity for us to reflect on, live into, and make into the bedrock of our daily lives.

He is risen!

Preaching Schedule

Holy Week:

Maundy Thursday, April 2:
The Rev. Deacon Kaki O'Flinn

Good Friday, April 3: The Rev. Richard Ahlquist

Easter Vigil, April 4/Easter Day, April 5:
The Rev. H. Huey Gardner

April 12: The Rev. Deacon Kaki O'Flinn

April 19: The Rev. Richard Ahlquist (8AM & 5PM)
The Rt. Rev. Glenda Curry (10:30 AM)

April 26: The Rev. H. Huey Gardner

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.

Transitions

Births

Mac Hardy Anderson
Son of Christine and Adam Anderson
Grandson of Gloria and Bob Anderson
December 25, 2025

Eden Elizabeth Adrain
Daughter of Mary Arden Pennington-Adrain
and Alex Adrain
Granddaughter of Betsy and James Pennington
Born February 26, 20206

Remington Louis Ravel
Son of Sidney and Christopher Ravel
Great-grandnephew of Jim Harbour
Born March 3, 2026

Eleanor Stewart Kidd
Daughter of Elle and Bradford Kidd
Granddaughter of Robin and Brad Kidd
Born March 16, 2026

New Members

Name Correction! Our apologies to the Vinson family!

Suzanne and Craig Vinson
Anna, Adele, and Trey

Rest In Peace

Eddie Friend
Spouse of Catharine Comer Friend
February 26, 2026

Glen David Hale, II
March 6, 2026





ST. MARY'S

ON THE HIGHLANDS
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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