



St John's

EPISCOPAL CHURCH + DECATUR, ALABAMA

2023 Annual Report

Presented at the Annual Meeting

January 28, 2024

Rector's Report

The Rev. Chase D. Ackerman

Dear People of St. John's,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ! It is with a thankful heart and an overwhelming sense of joy that I welcome this new year with you, the loving and faithful people of St. John's Church. As we take this time to look back and reflect on what we have done during the past year, I hope you will see that the Holy Spirit is indeed alive and at work in this place.

In the pages that follow, you will see report after report telling of the details and fruits each ministry of our parish has produced. These are all wonderful and reassuring to see. However, like each encounter with the Divine that we read in scripture, we must remember that, as human beings, the words we have to use and the data we have to collect can only tell a part of God's story. Thankfully, God is so much more than we can ever see or try to describe. As your Rector, I sometimes get to witness more of the "big picture" of what I believe God is doing at St. John's, and believe me, it is very exciting!

While many people may only see the data that our Sunday service attendance is increasing, I see the fact that God is doing something very special here that people in our community want to be a part of. Simply looking at numbers does not justify why sixteen people chose to be confirmed this past year. Likewise, while many people may only see that the amount of our pledges continues to increase, I see the fact that we had the greatest percentage of individuals and families in our parish pledge than ever have before. This tells me that you believe what we do here matters and that it is important both to ourselves and to our community. Furthermore, our recent selection as the "Best Church" by the readers of the Decatur Daily confirms that our mission and our ministry has an impact that reaches far beyond our walls. Like I said, the Holy Spirit is alive and at work!

St. John's is a healthy parish in so many ways, but most importantly because I believe we do the things we do for the right reasons. Yes, it is wonderful to see the beautiful flowers and sing the uplifting music on Sunday mornings, but we do not do these things for ourselves. Everything we do - from singing, to arranging flowers, to setting the altar, to studying the bible, to gathering and eating together, to feeding the hungry in our community - all of it is done for one reason alone: to glorify God. I believe that you know this as well, and as long as our focus is clear, then we are doing our part in God's kingdom.

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The work of a parish this size and this involved could never be attributed to just one or two people, and thankfully, we are blessed with an amazing group of both lay and ordained leaders. I am very thankful for the leadership of each and every member of this amazing staff and each person who oversees or participates in one of our ministries. Nothing happens without someone making it happen. For the past eighteen years, Ann Stewart made a whole lot happen at St. John's, both within her job description and beyond. Her presence in the office will be missed as she begins her retirement, and I will always be immensely grateful for all that she has done. We are fortunate to have Mary Coe join us this past fall as Director of Communications, and I have been so pleased to have her as a part of our team. I am excited to see how God will continue use her talents here.

It is a privilege and an honor to serve God and to serve you as your Rector. If this past year is any indication, I know God has wonderful things in store for St. John's, and I look forward to experiencing them with you.

Chase+

Associate Rector's Report

The Rev. Sarah E Watts

I think I've said this every year, but I remain full of joy and gratitude for the gift that is the St. John's community. I am continually in awe of the work of this parish both inside and outside our walls and the sacred and life-giving conversations we have at Sunday School, on Wednesday and Thursday nights, and at casual points throughout the week. But most of all, I am continually thankful for the fellowship and community we create together and the deep blessing it is to be involved and part of both.

Over the course of the past year, we have completed one cohort of Sacred Ground and we've begun monthly parish-wide, intergenerational gatherings, we have started to gather for Deep Dive Dinners, we have a robust group of LGBTQ+ Episcopalians who gather on a monthly basis, and I have had the chance to continue to work closely with our Lay Eucharistic Visitors, and our Outreach Committee.

Sacred Ground is a film- and readings-based dialogue series on race, grounded in faith. Over the course of the summer, about 10 parishioners participated in weekly meetings during which we delved into difficult material and had life changing conversations. Now, the entire congregation is invited to gather on a monthly basis for supper and then discussion on a given session of Sacred Ground. Our first session brought 48 people out and, while our second session was postponed due to weather, we hope that it will bring out the same number of people, if not more.

Our Deep Dive Dinners have also been successful. Each month a group of about 10-14 people meet to have dinner together and discuss a complex and difficult issue presenting the church and the world today. Set within the framework of prayer and the intention to deepen understanding of and compassion for our neighbors, these conversations not only provide participants the chance to explore certain issues in more depth, but they will also provide the space for participants to put their theology in conversation with the issues. Thus far we have discussed race, environmental justice, human sexuality, reproductive rights, gun violence, and reparations. I have found these dinners to be a holy space where my heart and my mind are opened more widely.

Over the course of the last year, St. John's has also started a North Alabama gathering of LGBTQ+ Episcopalians (with some non-Episcopalians also in attendance). This has been a wonderful opportunity for members of the LGBTQ+ community to gather and share their experiences, their hurts and their joys with one another in a prayerful and fun way. Our activities have included hikes, socials, books studies, coloring nights, fire-pit nights, BBQs, and much more and we have a steady attendance of about 20 people who gather from all over North Alabama.

We currently have four Lay Eucharistic Visitors who are sent out from our Sunday and Wednesday Eucharists to visit those in our congregation who are not able to join us for Holy Eucharist. This ministry of taking the sacrament out into the world is a true and deep blessing for many, and I am thankful for all of our

LEVs who take the time to bring a bit of holiness into the lives of their fellow parishioners. I am particularly grateful for Mary McKimmon who keeps us organized and meeting regularly.

Another major area of my work at St. John's is working with Grant Thompson and the Outreach Committee. Our newly designed and online Grant Distribution Process has worked very well, and we were able to distribute about \$60,000 in grants and outreach resources to local organizations (see Grant's report below for more details). What really impressed me, however, about this process was the time, dedication, and faithfulness of the committee who came together to have hard, honest, and prayerful conversations. It was a huge gift to be part of and bear witness to this work, and I am looking forward to our process again this year.

All in all, I am enormously thankful to be part of this community. It is truly a joy and an honor to serve with and walk alongside all of you and I am looking forward to another year in ministry.

Sarah+

Warden's Report

Julia Smeds Roth, Senior Warden
Steve Price, Junior Warden

St. John's continued its steady growth in 2023. This year, like last year, except for the recent closings for the ice storm of 2023, St. John's was fully open for worship and service. No matter what day or time you came to St. John's you could see people engaged in activities throughout the Parish Hall and Nave. You could feel its vibrancy.

Here is a summary of the activities this past year.

In January, at the annual parish meeting we installed a new class of vestry members and thanked our outgoing senior class of 5 for their service. We adopted a budget based on our annual pledges of over \$834,000 annual pledges. In 2022 the Vestry voted to restore our annual maintenance budget reserve to \$100,000. In 2023 the annual maintenance reserve continues to be \$100,000.

The Vestry retreat was in February at Camp McDowell. We worked on how we want St. John's to look in the future. We assigned the members to various committees and reviewed our responsibilities for being a Vestry on Duty for each Sunday of the year. The retreat is a way for members to get to know each other better and learn how to work together for the betterment of the parish.

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Spring saw the very active Outreach Committee award community grants totaling \$50,000 to our outreach partners. Also, we had a parish work day in April where we tackled a long list of chores which help our church really shine.

Our St. John's Cursillo community is thriving. Erica Huber is our church's coordinator of this community, and this year at Cursillo #227 Father Chase was on staff, and our parish sent 6 pilgrims to that weekend event—the most ever sent from our church at one time. The many Cursillo reunion groups in our parish are very active, most with weekly meetings.

Easter at St. John's was special as always. Our flower guild outdid themselves. We hear from many in our town that our flower guild is the best in town. Our rectors did a wonderful job all through Lent, Holy Week, and Easter. Our Easter services were packed. Our organist Foster Bailey and Choir Director Lauren Cantrell did an outstanding job as they do all year making our services more meaningful and beautiful.

Summer saw Vacation Bible School being held for one day in June and was Lay led by Kristin Propst and Suzanne Thompson. It was a fun, fast paced day with laughter and smiling faces filling our rooms and halls. Also, this summer our own Sam Burcham's discernment for the Diaconate was endorsed by the Vestry.

We also learned this summer that our Communications Director Ann Stewart planned on retiring this year, and the Vestry began a search for a new Director. We hosted a retirement party for Ann this fall to honor her faithful service. She is still an active member here for which we are thankful. Hired for this position was Mary Coe, who started this fall. If you haven't met her please do. She is already an asset to our parish.

Rally Day was well attended. Several new families attended, and we signed up for the ministries we wanted to work with. Throughout the year we had lovely receptions following some services or special events like the Bishop's visit. Melba Middleton as our Food and Hospitality Coordinator continues to please with delicious food and refreshments at those events. This fall we had weekly dinners with programs, and Melba assisted with every week!

In September we had a new event for the church—a Women's Retreat at Camp McDowell led by Mother Sarah. Those who attended, including our Senior Warden, had a wonderful relaxing time of fellowship and spiritual growth. From the responses to the Women's Retreat Questionnaire there is interest in reforming an Episcopal Women's Group (ECW) at the church. The President of the ECW will speak to the church on February 11, 2024 so we can learn about this possibility.

Also in September, Sunday School resumed following its summer pause. For the children, Sally Marsh planned many activities for them. Sam Burcham has been an inspiring leader for our youth from 4th graders to our youth going off to college. We continue to have two active Sunday School classes for adults—one Lay led and one Clergy led.

Mother Watts had initiated a new study program called the Deep Dive Dinners which are at her home, and it has become almost a standing room only program!

The fall had so many events at our church that you could come to church every week day and every Sunday and there will be some activity you could choose from. The weekly VIEW, sent via email, is a great resource to all of us where we can keep up with everything!

This fall we had a fun parish picnic at the Propst's farm in Cullman. Our Stewardship Campaign led by Stuart Tubb and Lisa Dye was very successful. We had 78% of our parishioners pledge their resources to the campaign. There was an increase in both the number of pledgers as well as an increase in pledged amounts.

The Bake Sale, led by Emily Nazarchyk and Leah Cason, with the assistance of dedicated volunteers and former Senior Warden Pat Price, was successful and well attended. The sale began at 8 a.m., and by 11 a.m. most of the food was gone!

Last year the Memorial Committee voted on repairing, cleaning, and protecting our stained-glass windows. The company under contract with us for this work is in great demand. They have informed us they will begin the work this month!

On an exciting note, the Decatur Daily has a Best of the Best vote every year for our community. This year our church was voted BEST CHURCH and Chase was voted BEST PREACHER! And best we can tell no one in our parish led any type of campaign to win this, so that means the awards mean that much more.

In our minds, the outreach to which we are committed is making a difference in in our community. From the Outreach grants, to the Beans and Rice program, to the Banks Caddell 5th grade Camp McDowell week, to the monthly non-profits we sponsor, to the Boys and Girls Club Christmas shoe tree, and to other unpublished acts of service, we are making a difference in the lives of many. Thank you for your service.

Writing this part as the Senior Warden, I can say it has been one of the greatest honors of my life to serve as Senior Warden for the past year. It couldn't have been done without the help from Junior Warden Steve Price, the Vestry, the competent office staff, the worship staff, Sam and Sally, Mother Watts and Father Ackerman, and all the St. John's family. I am proud to be a part of this amazing St. John's family. Thank you. Julia

And also from Julia, you will be in very good hands next year under the leadership of now Senior Warden, Steve Price.

Director of Youth Ministries Report (4th-12th)

Sam Burcham

On December 5, 2023 the Fuller Theological Seminary's Youth Institute published the results of a momentous survey conducted between 2021-2023. This survey polled youth ministers throughout the United States—and across denominational boundaries—in effort to determine the “State of Youth Ministry” in a post-COVID world. And what they found isn't surprising, even if it *is* discouraging. The survey found that **there are two themes which characterize youth ministry**, regardless of denomination, **in this new world**. One, is the fact that “young people are extremely busy or not prioritizing church attendance.” The second, is that youth leaders perceive there to be a “lack of interest in a desire for God and the Church [,] and in taking ownership of their faith [among young people].”

While this study was—and IS—an important one, as who one participated in the survey there were questions omitted from their examination which might reveal a more encouraging portrait of young persons' faith development. I have considered these questions over the course of the past year in ministry with our young people at St. John's, and in my purview, **I have much that is positive to report about youth ministry at St. John's**; it is my hope that it is more widespread than that which you will find online and which the world of “religious news” currently acknowledges.

For those who poured over my report last year—and really, why wouldn't you have poured over an annual youth ministry report?! - you may recall that I was able to confirm the first theme noted above (i.e., busyness) to be true. Our **young people were busy** last year, and they are just as busy—if not busier!—now.

However, I cannot confirm the second theme (i.e., lack of interest) to be true despite what Fuller Theological Seminary may say. You see, because Fuller polled only youth ministers, implicit in the results obtained is this: the tenure of the average youth minister is roughly ten months. In which case, most youth leaders

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can't really know what young people think about God or the Church simply because they haven't had enough time with young people to know. After all, during the sixteen months I've been with St. John's, **I've only scratched the surface of what our young people think and believe.** But what I have learned bucks the norm; it deviates from the prevailing "youth ministry diagnoses." You see, in my purview **our young people are certainly interested in God and the Church.** For example, did you know that, despite the fact that our young peoples' busy schedules hinder them from coming to many youth-specific events, **72% of of our Club 456 and EYC members are present at three out of every four services of worship?** That is indicative of interest and care in my book.

Furthermore, I've had time to speak with young people on ski retreats, Six Flag trips, over coffee, and other varied settings and they *are* people discovering who God is calling them to be. My point is this: surveys, articles in *The Living Church*, on *Forma*, etc. can only look at attendance metrics for data. But such metrics don't reveal that one of our seniors is called to be a nurse out of love for their neighbors (i.e., "the second [commandment] is like unto it") and another a veterinarian out of concern for God's good creation. Such studies just can't know that young people have questions about God, God's work, and their place in it without a good deal of time being invested *with* them.

I've only had sixteen months. And admittedly, sometimes I've invested well. Sometimes I haven't. But when I have managed to get out of my own way, I have found St. John's to be full of inquisitive, thoughtful, gracious, and servant-minded young people—the kinds of young people who will prepare Thanksgiving meals for Meals on Wheels the day before Thanksgiving... sign a prayerbook for a newly baptized person and celebrate them...offer to babysit my kids simply because they are kind.

These are the things I've learned about our young people over the course of sixteen months with them. I can't wait to see what I'll discover in sixteen more.

Postscript:

As always, there are so many people to thank for their help with our young people! Father Chase, Mother Sarah, Sue Powell, Sally Marsh, Suzanne Thompson, Victoria Tumbleson, and others! Specifically, however, I want to recognize Jen DiCarlo. If you believe in magic, you'll recognize that she is *magic* when it comes to young people. She has been helping me work with our young people in various ways - teaching, learning, and loving them - and with her help, I think we're creating a very unique community, particularly with Club 456. You should see her in action some time, it's amazing! Our young people love her, and with her help we are becoming who we are called to be as a Episcopal Youth Community.

Finally, if you would like to read more about FYI survey and youth ministry data, visit: <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/blog/challenges-youth-leaders-faced-in-2023>.

Respectfully Submitted,
Sam Burcham

Director of Children's Ministries Report (Nursery – 3rd)

Sally Marsh

2023 started much the same way 2024 did, very cold. Despite that the life of St. John's didn't stop. Many of our families stepped up and helped our unhoused community by washing bedding each day while the warming center at H.A.N.D.S Across Decatur was open. The community feeling was continued each month with a different activity for our children and their families to take part in.

February – Super Bowl Party

March – Wednesday Night Series (I am Statement of Jesus)

April – Easter Egg Dash

May – 3rd Friday in Downtown Decatur and End of School Cook Out

June – Vacation Bible School. This was held on a Saturday with Kristen Propst and Suzanne Thompson leading the way.

July – Family Game Night

August – Blessing of the Backpacks and Back to School Bash

September – Fall Craft Night

October – Impromptu Tie Dye and Wednesday night series

November – Hot Chocolate kit making for the annual Simply Divine Bake Sale

December – Wednesday night intergenerational Christmas fun and Christmas Eve Program

Our number of families increased this year with most of our growth continuing in the kindergarten and nursery age group adding eight new children to our roll. Children's Chapel (Pre-school through 6th grade) saw an increase in the average number attending as well.

This year saw the Children's Department develop a Vision Statement to guide us for years to come. A committed group of adults met for several months to discern what the vision for children at St. John's is; "The vision of children's ministry at St. John's is for children to experience the unconditional love of God and be empowered to share that love with all creation." This vision guides each step of formation and community in our Children's Department. If a decision or event does not point back to this vision, we do not need to do it. Another group took on the task of setting goals for the next three years. The most ambitious being having 10 new families with children at St. John's. These goals will be reported periodically. The first goal of setting a 12-month calendar at the first of the year has already been reached and it is attached to this report. St. John's continues to look toward meeting the 10-family goal by holding fun events and quality Sunday formation. We are planning an 'invite a friend day' multiple times a year to share, what we think, makes St. John's a special place for children.

In addition to the above events, St. John's hosted an Autism Workshop in September. This was a community event with keynote speaker Ellen Casale. There were 40+ participants most not being members of St. John's. The information provided was exceptional and empowered many to continue looking for services that meet the needs of children in their care.

The excitement and energy that is St. John's continues to grow as do. I continue to be grateful for the support from our community and look forward to reaching our goals in the coming years.

Blessings,

Sally W Marsh

Director of Children's Ministry

Director of Communications Report

Mary Coe

This year saw major changes in communications at St. John's as longtime communications director Ann Stewart stepped down and returned to the pews. Ann left this department in great shape, with solid programs and procedures in place. She has been very generous with help and knowledge as I have begun to fill her shoes. And you will still see her all around St. John's as she continues her involvement in the life of the church.

The importance of good communication cannot be overstated. In church communications, our intention is to be regularly in touch with each of you, so you don't miss an opportunity for worship, fellowship, outreach, or spiritual growth. And we seek to connect with the wider community, inviting our neighbors in and being out in the neighborhood.

Church information is shared in a multitude of ways: newsletters, social media, email, streaming, podcasts, the Realm church directory, and sometimes even a good old paper letter sent to your home mailbox. Even church merch like stickers, shirts and yard signs spread the word about the good things happening at St. John's.

As we move through 2024, our goal is to improve and expand church communications so that everyone, both inside St. John's doors and out, knows they are invited to experience God's love in this special place.

Thanks be to God!

Outreach Report

Grant Thompson

Love God, love your neighbor, love yourself. No exceptions.

St. John's has a rich history of serving in our community and recognizing where we can meet the grown needs of our neighbors. As you may know, our parish administers a good portion of our outreach support in the form of a grant application process, where area non-profits and ministries within the parish submit online applications which are evaluated by a committee of parishioners. Area nonprofits and ministries submit a request for funding (usually no more than \$5,000) that support an initiative or operations within their organization that impact locally and reflect the reconciling love of Christ in the Gospels.

In spring of 2023, the committee approved grants for 13 non-profits and parish ministries in the amount of \$50,000, which was approximately 6% of our parish operating budget. Our entire outreach budget—which includes our diocesan contribution, Sawyerville and seminary support, and Episcopal Center expenses—totaled 18% of our overall budget.

Our evaluation committee features the three members of the Vestry's outreach subcommittee, six at-large parishioners who have expressed interest in serving and willing to commit to a three-year term, a clergy representative, and a committee chair. The goal of rotating members is to utilize the experience, passion, and diversity of our parish, providing more people the chance to serve, and building new lay leaders in our church. This structure has and will continue to strengthen the process for years to come.

The parish received applications from 20 organizations in the fall of 2023, and the committee is in the final review process of developing our recommendations for distributions. Once that service is complete, the

committee will share the results of our work, and where our resources are meeting needs in our community. Based on early numbers in the stewardship and budgeting process, the parish will potentially have more to distribute to our outreach partners than ever before.

Doing parish outreach work honors the blessings God has given us, and we can in so many ways fulfill Paul's image of being the hands and feet of the Body of Christ. St. John's gives us opportunities to do that, humbly tell our story of being instruments of love, and encouraging others to join us.

If you have questions and ideas about outreach at St. John's, please reach out at (256) 783-4420 or grant.h.thompson@gmail.com

Music Report

Lauren Cantrell, Choirmaster

We've had another great year in St. John's Choir! We participated in choir camp at Camp McDowell with the Church of the Ascension and continued our Lessons and Carols tradition with Ascension and Good Shepherd. The choir has worked on some beautiful new pieces throughout the year, including Randall Thompson's "Alleluia" and Biebl's "Ave Maria." We rehearse on Sunday mornings at 9:30 in the church, so join us any time! We have a great time and would love to have you sing with us!

Flower Guild Report

Altar Flowers, Sue Hennessy

Rearrangers & Delivery, Ann Stewart

St. John's Flower Guild mission is to bring the beauty of God's world into our worship space, while giving members of the congregation a meaningful way to remember loved ones or to celebrate special events with flowers. The Guild takes full advantage of the glorious natural flowers and greenery that our God given environment provides.

Currently, 24 members actively arrange altar flowers for Sunday mornings, special events, and receptions. The Flower Guild is open to anyone interested in helping arrange flowers—all levels of skills are welcomed. *If you would like to learn more about how to arrange the altar flowers, please call Sue Hennessy 256-318-2064.*

The Flower Rearrangers are a group of men and women who help after the 10:30 a.m. Sunday service to rearrange the altar flowers into small containers for the delivery team.

The Flower Delivery volunteers are a group of men and women, families, and individuals, who help distribute small arrangements on a rotating schedule to those who are homebound, have recently experienced an illness or surgery, or to those who are in the hospital. *For more information about rearranging and delivering, please reach out to Ann Stewart, 256-303-9758.*

Thinking of You/St. Anne's Bereavement Guild Report

Melba Middleton

Members of the Thinking of You Committee continue to cook and deliver meals, deliver flowers, send cards or call parishioners during times of illness, or when a new parishioner has lost a family member who is not a member of St. John's. There are twelve teams with 4 people on each team and each team is responsible for one month per year.

St. Anne's Bereavement Guild will prepare and serve a meal for the family (maximum of 25 people) on the day of the funeral of a loved one that is held at St. John's. If the funeral is not held at St. John's, the committee will prepare a bereavement meal if the deceased is a member of our church or is a parishioner's spouse, child or parent so long as the deceased is not a member of another Decatur area church. The meal will be served at St. John's or at the home of a family member or friend of the deceased. Coffee and ice water can also be provided during visitation.

Both these ministries are very important to our church family. A recent Thank You note sums it up best:: "I've always known that St. John's provides a meal for a church family following a funeral. But, I never knew until now what a blessing it is."

Please consider becoming a part of one or both of these important ministries. For more information, please contact Melba Middleton at 256-651-1058.

Family Life Committee Report

Bunny Edwards

The Family Life Committee provides fellowship opportunities for St. John's parish family. In 2023 the committee sponsored the Parish Retreat at Camp McDowell, the Annual Parish Picnic, the Chili/Cornbread Cookoff, the Advent Wreath Workshop & Supper, and Roadrunners. Our committee members are: Amy Calame, Annie Cornell, Beth Gilbert, Betty Weaver, Carol Sandlin, Dana Baggette, Dashiell McKay, David Bibb, David Rice, D Hall, Dodie Hall, Huey Hall, Jack Williamson, Jackie Joiner, Janet Morgan, Jennifer Jackson, Joe Propst, Julia Roth, June Hall, Kathy Stoner, Kerry Standridge, Laura Ritch, Lori Presnell, Lou Greene, Marlene Eads, Marthelyn Biles, Mary McKimmon, Menine Rice, Nancy Turbyfill, Nell Standridge, Nick Roth, Pat Price, Rachel Wiley, Sally Bibb, Sally Quinn, Sara Reed Thompson, Steve Price and Victoria Hughes.

We would love for you to be part of this group. To join contact Bunny Edwards at (256) 227-3760 or edwards.bunny46@gmail.com.

Cursillo Report

Erika Huber

Cursillo is an opportunity to grow in faith and spirituality. Cursillo in the Diocese of Alabama begins with a three-day weekend at Camp McDowell. During these three days, lay people and clergy share their experiences and perspective on a variety of topics related to the love of God, the Christian life, and Christian community. Through Cursillo we seek a deeper understanding of the teachings of Jesus and how we can serve Him. We work together to share God's love and encourage each other to persevere in carrying out our Baptismal vows. Cursillo starts with a three-day weekend, but THE BEST IS YET TO COME.

In 2023, St. John's sent six pilgrims to Cursillo: Julia and Nick Roth, Rebecca Self, Rob and Teresa Getman and Patrick Lokken. St. John's also volunteered staff, money, and time to support the 2023 Cursillo weekends.

"Ultreya" means "Onward" and each participant in Cursillo becomes a member of the St. John's Ultreya group which meets periodically to continue to celebrate our Cursillo experience. In 2024, our Ultreya will live out its "Fourth Day" by meeting on the fourth Sunday of every month beginning in February. The Diocesan Ultreya, an event open to all Cursillistas throughout the Diocese, will be held at Camp McDowell from April 20-21.

In addition, each pilgrim is encouraged to join a Reunion Group, a small group that serves to support one another in living out our lives as Christians. There are also several opportunities for training throughout the year, so that Cursillistas can enjoy future weekends as staff members, including music staff.

In June, 2024, Luke Slaton will be the Lay Rector of Cursillo #232, and Brian and Emily White will also serve with Luke on the #232 staff. I have been asked to serve on the staff of #234 in October.

If you are interested in knowing more about Cursillo, please let me know. I serve as the Parish Lay Rector, the liaison between St. John's and Alabama Cursillo. I also serve on the Secretariat (the Board) of Alabama Cursillo as the editor of the newsletter, The Vivencia. I can be reached at ehuber4404@gmail.com and 256-425-1877.

More information about Cursillo can also be found at alabamacursillo.org.

Cursillo dates in 2024 are:

#232 April 18-21

#233 June 6-9

#234 September 12-15

#235 October 17-20

Common Ground Community Garden Report

Ellis Chenault
Julia Chenault
Carol Hancock

2023 Accomplishments

We planted many new natives, most of which thrived to certain degrees. American Beauty Berry, Lyreleaf Sage, Frogfruit, Blazing Star Liatris, Scarlet Sage, Lanceleaf Coreopsis, Snowy Milkweed, Lobelia, Narrowleaf Mountain Mint, Spotted St John's Wort.

We applied and received a \$1400 grant from the Trowlers Garden Club which was used for the new educational sign featuring a beautifully executed graphic.

2024 Expectations (and maybe beyond!)

Replace the big sign on the west side. New design coming soon!

Add to our collection of native and pollinator plants.

Continue to showcase the native/pollinator/pesticide-free aspects of Common Ground with our articles in The View and on our Facebook page, inviting folks not only to visit the garden but to join in the fun of the stewardship of it.

Make fence modifications and repairs.

Sandblast and repaint metal butterfly.

Encourage age-appropriate garden activities for our parish children.

Please like us on Facebook at *Common Ground: St John's Episcopal Church Community Garden* and share our posts frequently to broaden support for sustainable practices for our earthly home.

With gratitude and appreciation for parish support,

Co-Chairs: Ellis Chenault, Julia Chenault, Carol Hancock

Grounds Committee Report

Bill Briscoe

Our landscape company, N2Grass, continues to do a nice job with most aspects of our campus. The Community Garden:Common Ground volunteers are doing a great job as always. The Jackson Street garden area is now being cared for by Carol Chenault and Sally Quinn and they're doing a very nice job. Our teak furniture project is almost complete but the finish that was used is not holding up well so we're back investigating a better process. More later.

2024 Vestry Slate

Congratulations to these eight individuals for their nomination to serve on St. John's Vestry.



Nora Hall

Twenty-three years ago when I was very disenchanted with the church that I grew up in, I was invited by several St. John's members to come visit. Since that first time I stepped thru the doors of St. John's, it has been my home. I love our priests, our church family and the building we worship in. In these past 23 years I have served on Altar Guild, Thinking of You Committee, Flower Delivery, Past Godly Play instructor, Front Door/Back Door Committee, member of the 155 Cursillo Class (de colores), active member of the Road Runners and faithful follower of Theology on Tap, not to mention, previously served on the vestry. I believe being part of a church family is being involved, enhances the opportunity to see God's work in progress and being a part of it. By serving on the vestry, it gives one a much more chance to support our church and its mission thru all of the intricate parts that it takes to support St. John's mission and purpose.



Joe Hughes

St. John's means so much to Tessa and me, because, first, it is where we were married in 2001. I am a cradle Episcopalian, confirmed at St. Luke's, Birmingham. Tessa was a confirmed Catholic, but we both wanted to get married in the Episcopal church (preferably near Moulton, Tessa's childhood home). Rich Webster was the priest of St. John's at the time and graciously agreed to marry us. Our wedding in this beautiful church meant so much to both of us. Tessa was later accepted into the Episcopal Church, and we both attended Calvary Episcopal in Oneonta for many years, where I also served as Senior Warden.

Now that we have joined St. John's as members, I find that the church feeds my soul because it is the essence of all things Episcopalian – we have a wonderful liturgy, traditional hymns sung out of books to an organ (for which I am thankful more than I can say), and good preaching that makes me think (without people ever yelling at me). It also gives us the opportunity to remain connected to our Cursillo community. But what I really love is how St. John's is serving the community with its outreach opportunities. Tessa and I did a lot of research in deciding to join St. John's, and what we found is that it is head and shoulders above other churches in Decatur and surrounding communities with the programs it supports to help those in need.

continues



Julie Leavitt

I was confirmed and became a member of St Johns over 35 years ago. Jeff, my husband, and I were married here over 34 years ago. We have three children that were baptized here and one daughter married here. Needless to say, St Johns has been a large part of our lives.

I have played an active role in many different aspects of St John Life including the following: outreach, flower guild, bake sale, acolyte team leader, children's Sunday school, children's choir, bible school, Lay Eucharistic Minister, and Vestry.

I love St Johns and the way we worship, our services, and the lifelong friends I have made here. I have always felt very comfortable and welcomed at St Johns and can't imagine it not being part of my life. I do feel to be a member of St Johns it is my responsibility to be active and participate in the life of the church



Laurie Loyd

I have been a member at St. Johns for several years and love this community. It just feels like home. I'm running for the vestry because someone honored me by asking if they could nominate me. I taught kindergarten at St. Anns and Walter Jackson but now I'm retired.

If I can help the church. I'm ready to try. I am very impressed by all the people nominated for the vestry, and if I don't get on the board it won't bother me one little bit. I will support the church in any way I can.



Lyla Peebles

I became a member of St Johns in 1980.

I have served my wonderful church by teaching a Sunday school class for over 20 years. Served on the vestry twice and enjoyed being ECW president for a two year period.

I love my church family and will strive to do my best if elected.



Sue Hennessy

My family and I have been members of St. John's for over 20 years. Raising our children in the church has been a privilege. I have had the pleasure to serve on many different committees during that time. I currently serve as Chair for St. John's Flower Guild and is a member of our Outreach Committee.

I have been on Vestry two previous times and enjoyed serving our parish and supporting our Rector as a vestry member. If nominated again, I hope to bring my gifts to that group to uphold the values of our congregation.



**Victoria
Tumbleson**

I could go on and on about how thankful I am for St. John's. Finding St. John's and its people has been like taking the biggest gulp of fresh air. I grew up and spent the majority of my life attending and working in an Evangelical church. In 2020, while we were all quarantined in our homes and with our thoughts, I spent a lot of time asking myself why I believed what I believed. This led to quite a reckoning inside myself and a lot of prayerful considerations of who I am in relation to who I believe God made me to be and what that means inside a community of believers. I looked around my community and my network of friends and realized that so many of my favorite people that I look up to, respect, trust, and that radiate the joy of the Lord all attended St. John's, there must be something special about this place. I'm proud to call St. John's home not only because of our wonderful clergy, but also because of each of you that I've met since joining. I am choosing to stand for vestry because I believe in the mission and the work of our church. I believe that God is in the business of details and I'm happy to lend my time and talents to further His mission. My husband Steven and I love attending St. John's and look forward to growing with and diving deeper in for years to come.



Kevin Wilson

St. John's has been a refuge during my spiritual journey. I am incredibly grateful for this church, witnessing how we openly offer the loving community of Christ to any and all, no matter how or where they may find themselves. Serving as part of the Vestry is an honor and a responsibility, as we continue to bring Christ's love to our neighbor."

Trustees Report

Trust Funds	Starting Balance (01/01/2023)	Renovation Monies Returned	Annual Distribution Received	Other Changes in Investment Value	Ending Balance (12/31/2023)
Charles H. Eyster General Fund <i>supports outreach & care of properties</i>	\$129,158.33	\$4,702.83	(\$6,457.92)	\$18,517.43	\$145,920.67
Charles H. Eyster Choir Fund <i>supports music programs</i>	\$135,226.32	\$4,923.78	-0-	\$20,074.84	\$160,224.94
Margaret A. Hoff Memorial Fund <i>supports outreach & care of properties</i>	\$198,554.68	\$7,229.65	(\$9,927.73)	\$28,466.76	\$224,323.36
St. John's Endowment Fund <i>supports outreach & care of properties</i>	\$86,339.52	\$3,143.74	(\$4,316.98)	\$12,378.51	\$97,544.79
Total	\$549,278.85	\$20,000.00	(\$20,702.63)	\$79,437.54	\$628,013.76

Stewardship Report

2024 Pledge Increase—1.34% over 2023

14 New Pledges

86 Same Amount as in 2023

17 Decreased Their Pledge

37 Increased Their Pledge

20 Stopped Their Pledge

26 Made No Pledge

200 Total Pledging Units

2024 Average Pledge \$5,504.66 vs. \$5,228.03 in 2023

Total Budget Income is increased by 2.17%

2023 - \$922,046

2024 - \$942,218

2023 Treasurer's Report

John Thornton

St. John's financial position is strong.

We ended 2023 with a very small deficit (expenses exceeded revenues) of \$382. As background, each year the Vestry and then the Parish members are presented a budget that allocates every dollar expected to be received in the coming year from pledges, plate offerings, etc. so that there is a zero balance projected for year-end. This year in fact revenues almost exactly matched expenses, but that does not present the whole picture.

In the 2023 budget there was \$30,000 allocated for building maintenance expenses but the total for that category at year-end was \$88,395 because there were extraordinary expenses related to aging HVAC units, plus the Vestry decided to go forward with the purchase and installation of a video surveillance system, a one-time expense.

In 2023 the stewardship campaign so far totals just under \$848,000 in pledges a slight increase over 2022. That amount added to other expected receipts has resulted in the total 2024 budget amount of \$942,218. Again, the total amount of receipts has been allocated for all the various expenses we expect to incur for the year.

In conclusion, I want to again thank the clergy, staff and Vestry who are such good stewards of the generosity of Parish members. And an additional word about how Ms. Vickie Reed, Financial Administrator, makes my role as Treasurer easy because of her diligence and hard work.

Treasurer's Report

D. Hall

Balance Sheet as of 12/31/2023

Assets

Bank Independent	
(Checking + Money Market)	\$452,757
Clergy Discretionary Funds	9,336
Endowment	628,014
Petty Cash	200
Accounts Receivable	8,906
Total Current Assets	\$1,099,213

Liabilities

Accounts Payable	\$11,664
Payroll Taxes & Elective Deductions	7,809
Restricted Funds	1,007,131
Equity	72,609
Total Liabilities	\$1,099,213

2023 Operations Income/Expense Summary

Income

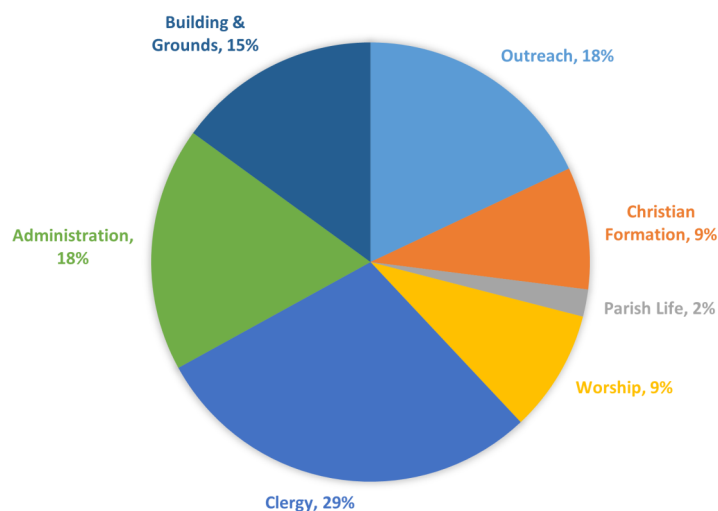
Pledge Income	\$818,715
Non-Pledge & Other Income	94,035
Trust Distribution	20,703
Total Operations Income	\$933,453

Expense

Outreach	\$162,175
Programs	431,776
Administration, Properties, Debt Service	339,884
Total Operations Expense	\$933,835

2022 Designated Income/Expense Summary

Designated Income	\$452,555
Designated Expense	449,537
Total Designated Net Income	\$3,018



St. John's 2024 Budget (Proposed)

Income

Pledge	\$847,718
Plate	16,000
Non-Pledge	48,000
Endowment Distribution	20,000
Interest Income	8,000
Breakfast & Dinner	2,500
Communion Wine Dedications	0
Total Income	\$942,218

For expense breakdown, see chart below.

Total Expense \$942,218

Area of Ministry	2024 Budget	% of Budget	2023 Budget	2023 Actual
Outreach	\$168,312	18%	\$160,935	\$162,176
Christian Formation	86,482	9%	141,343	87,564
Parish Life	20,809	2%	17,760	21,456
Worship	78,732	9%	71,879	70,371
Clergy	275,395	29%	255,274	252,384
Administration	169,088	18%	157,855	162,582
Building & Grounds	143,400	15%	117,000	177,302
Total	\$942,218	100%	\$922,046	\$933,835

The Vestry

We give gratitude and thanks to our outgoing Vestry Class of 2023

Beth Gilbert, Jennifer Jackson, Julia Roth (Senior Warden), Karen Smith, Suzanne Thompson

In 2024, the Wardens of St. John's will be Steve Price (Senior Warden) and Brian White (Junior Warden)

The Current Vestry

Class of 2024: Sandy Barr, Mike Burnthall, Steve Price, (Senior Warden) Kristen Propst, Karen Sawyer

Class of 2025: Tony Bolan, Ellis Chenault, Lisa Dye, Brian White (Junior Warden), Rachel Wiley

John Thornton	<i>Treasurer</i>
Stan Evans	<i>Assistant Treasurer</i>
Carol Sartain	<i>Clerk</i>
Ken Schuppert	<i>Chancellor</i>

The Parish Staff

The Rev. Chase Ackerman, <i>Rector</i>	ext. 102	chase@stjohnsdecatur.org
The Rev. Sarah Watts, <i>Associate Rector</i>	ext. 103	sarah@stjohnsdecatur.org
Vickie Reed, <i>Financial Administrator</i>	ext. 101	vickie@stjohnsdecatur.org
Mary Coe, <i>Director of Communications</i>	ext. 105	mary@stjohnsdecatur.org
Sam Burcham, <i>Director of Youth Ministries</i>	ext. 110	sam@stjohnsdecatur.org
Sally Marsh, <i>Director of Children's Ministries</i>	ext. 111	sally@stjohnsdecatur.org

Lauren Cantrell	<i>Choirmaster</i>
Foster Bailey	<i>Organist</i>
Melba Middleton	<i>Food & Hospitality</i>
Sam Hogwood	<i>Nursery</i>

St. John's Episcopal Church

202 Gordon Drive SE

Decatur, Alabama 35601

Church Office 256-353-9615

After-hours Pastoral Emergency: 256-280-3792

Monday -Thursday 8:30 am - 4:30 pm; closed Friday

