



# CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

MIDDLETOWN, NEW JERSEY

**Inside this issue:**

- Vestry Corner - page 1
- Rodeo Picnic- page 2
- Summer Events - pages 3
- Interview - page 4-5
- What’s Happening- page 6

**Weekly Worship:**

- 7:30 am Monday and Friday Morning Prayer
- 5:00 pm Monday and Friday Evening Prayer
- 8:00 am Sunday Eucharist (Spoken)
- 10:00 am Sunday Eucharist (with Music)

As I sat down to share some thoughts, I looked back to what I wrote one year ago. Back then, we were in transition. Isn’t that the way of life though? The world doesn’t stay the same and our priorities, hopes and dreams certainly shift in response. I like to think that the sense of community and family here at Christ Church serves as an anchor, comfort, encouragement, and source of joy in all our transitions and for that I value this place and all of you.



One happy change is that we have a Priest. We have always had Cathy, and she has always been very much one of us. But, now she is our official Priest and spiritual leader. Her calling dovetails perfectly with where we are today. As Tom so eloquently shared in the last Crier, this congregation is exactly where we need to be in this moment of time. And now that we have some respite from needing to find a priest, we can look to the future and use the next few years to grow this church and build upon our considerable strengths. This is an opportunity to build this community, extend our faith and put us in a stronger position when the next search begins.

You’re likely shaking your head – much easier said than done and we absolutely have work ahead of us. We need to seek new ways to engage with the community - both to attract members and to support our existing members in a world where church/organized religion is not the priority it once was. There is comfort in emerging societal trends (see NYT, April 20, 2025, Religion’s Role is Being Revisited in America) but that doesn’t mean people are flocking back to church. But maybe there’s an opportunity. In the coming weeks, we are hoping to schedule some discussions about the implications of some of our challenges, some things we are planning to do and to discuss some things we’d like to do. This, my friends, is a call to arms and I am hoping each of you will find some way to help. Stay tuned.... Betty



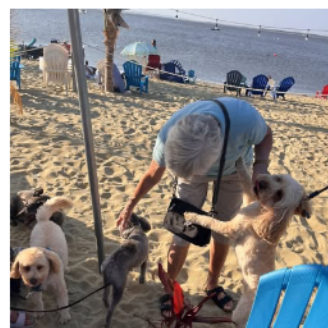
**Quick links:**

- Christ Church Website: [www.christchurchmiddletown.org](http://www.christchurchmiddletown.org)
- Christ Church Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/ChristChurchMiddletown/>

# Rodeo Themed Annual Picnic



# Summer Soiree/Beach Party





**“Hello Cathy, Well Hello Cathy  
...It’s so Nice to Have you ‘Back Where you  
Belong’”**

(Updated Interview from August 2023)

**Q:** For all the working women/mothers out there who had to deal with a male-dominated workforce in the 1970s and 1980s ( and certainly even today!), what was the hardest thing that you had to deal with as a newly ordained Episcopal priest and what brought you the most joy?

**A:** I would say that the ordination process turned out to be rather fraught. Because, it was just difficult. When I went through seminary, the Episcopal church was ordaining women as deacons, which all priests have to be deacons first. Usually 6 months after they're ordained as deacons they become priests. It's called provisional ordination as a deacon. I was ordained in 1975 in Pittsburgh where I was living and working. Women were not at that point permitted to be ordained as priests, however while I was at seminary.... there were 2 ordinations of women to the priesthood - one was in Philadelphia and one was in Washington. Eleven women were irregularly ordained to the priesthood in the Episcopal church. I was actually invited to join the group in Washington because at that point I was a deacon. I didn't think at that the time that I really wasn't ready to make that decision. I wasn't that frustrated. I wasn't really worried about whether or not the process would eventually work out. Maybe I should have been, but I wasn't. Maybe I was naive, but I was very young. By 1976, the Episcopal Church voted to allow women to be ordained to the priesthood and also to become bishops. So, I was ordained as soon as that was permitted which was in 1977. I was one of the first 50 regularly ordained women.

**Q:** What made you decide to specialize in Pastoral Care and Counseling?

**A:** One of the requirements in Seminary for ordination was I needed to take what was called a unit of CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education). I was going to seminary in Pittsburgh and I found a CPE program at Woodville State Hospital, which was a massive hospital for severely ill psychiatric patients and it was very much a long term type of place. So I applied and was accepted into the program. And I went there every day through the summer - it was 10 weeks. The truth is I fell in love with the patients and I actually also loved the process of how we were learning clinically. It was a new experience for me. I wound up taking a total of 10 units, 400 hours each, over the course of the next couple of years. That led me eventually into taking the training, the education to become a CPE supervisor myself, meaning educator.... The thing I taught was Pastoral Care to people, seminarians, clergy - sometimes laypeople, who wanted to learn how to provide PC in an institutional setting or as parish clergy visiting their parishioners in institutions like hospitals. I did that for over 40 years in various places.



## Cathy Bickerton Interview Part 2

Q: What challenges do you see ahead not just for our church, but churches as a whole? What gives you optimism about the future? (Answer was made in August 2023 - before Cathy became our new PIC)

A: I think the church, which is true of other institutions too, is suffering after the pandemic. Maybe it started before, but regardless, attendance is down and available members of Clergy are down. That's affecting the seminaries, which are often merging and trying somehow or another keep afloat with lower numbers of students attending. That means our pool in finding a new Priest in Charge or Rector is going to be a little more limited than in the past. That worries me. HOWEVER, I think God's hand is at work in all this and I pray that we will find the right person for our church, our parish right now.

My main source of optimism actually is the strength and resilience of this parish. It's been through a number of difficult times over the past few years, including a pandemic - and survived - and has come out the other end stronger and healthier. People are more active. It's not a gossipy, mean congregation; it's a very loving congregation, very supportive congregation. That's my optimism.

**Summer 2025 Addendum:** Q: Earlier this summer, Christ Church members and friends were thrilled to hear that you would be our new Priest-in-Charge. What made you decide to take on a new challenge at this point in your life?

A: I'm a practical person first and foremost. I could see that the Bishop's ideas for our church just weren't working out. I felt frustrated as did the Vestry and staff. I woke up one day thinking, "Why in the world should we continue to struggle with decisions about getting a new priest? If I could continue working at the level I've been working, I could do it for a while." After all, it was the holy work I planned to do in seminary. It was only a shortage of positions in the church that pushed me into my teaching hospital ministry. I'm pleased and delighted to be officially the priest in charge. I'm also a little terrified!!!

This is a partial transcript of the August 2023 You Tube interview with Cathy Bickerton, with a Summer 2025 written addendum. See the video on YT: <https://youtu.be/RktyqUr5Gpk>



## What's Happening at Christ Church

September 7 - Blessing of the Backpacks

September 12 - Last Summer Soiree of 2025

September 21 - First Day of Sunday School

October 19 - Crop Walk

October 26 - Blessing of the Trick or Treaters

November 2 - All Souls Day Concert



Ahead of the nation's 250 year anniversary in 2026, the historic church and cemetery are getting ready for their close-ups, with needed repairs and grounds work. As part of Middletown America 250, the Township of Middletown will be placing a Betsy Ross 13-star flag on the cemetery grounds as well as a sign with a QR code that links visitors to information about the site and those interned there. There are four Revolutionary War veterans (John Robbins, Isaac Van Dorn, Humphrey Willett and John Wilson) buried in Christ Church historic cemetery.

Greeting Ministry Update: The Greeting Ministry offers *name tags* for all who want them. If you want a tag, just place your name on the sheet in the Narthex. You can have first and last name or just a first name. Your tag will take 6-10 days. You can take keep tag with you or, if you are more forgetful, you can leave your tag on the magnetic board in the Narthex.

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