



A Message from the Rector: The State of the Parish 2008

The Rev. Fr. Martini Shaw
17th Rector

The AECST Express: Continuing 216 Years of Prodigious Spiritual Growth

In 2008, our parish celebrated 216 years of ministry and service. Since 1792 – and the founding by our first rector, The Rev. Absalom Jones – our church has remained not only alive and active but also vibrant and prosperous, serving God and God's people. We give thanks and praise to God for sustaining and blessing us for more than two centuries and pray that the Holy Spirit continues to empower us for ministry and service.

The AECST Express continued its spiritual journey in 2008 to many great destinations. Our year-long journey included some of the following highlights:

- The annual observance and celebration of the life and ministry of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. We were very pleased to welcome as our guest speaker, former United States Senator Carol Moseley Braun, the first black female U.S. Senator.
- The annual observance and celebration of the life and ministry of our parish founder, and the first black Episcopal priest in the U.S., the Rev. Absalom Jones. We were very pleased to welcome as our guest preacher, former U.S. Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, the Most Rev. Frank T. Griswold.
- The annual Black History Month celebration brought to us the National President of the Union of Black Episcopalians, the Very Rev. C. David Williams.
- The 2008 Lenten Series stretched our minds to reflect upon and compare the Church Liturgical Calendar with the Human Body Development Life cycle. Each Wednesday during the Lenten Season, presenters from among our parish clergy facilitated the sessions, in conjunction with the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.
- Once again, our Holy week began on Palm Sunday with our outdoor procession, led by Pedro, our intrepid donkey.
- One Sunday highlighted the welcoming of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who worshipped with us and met with the Parish Leadership and children following the service.
- St. Thomas was the host Church for the National Day of Repentance for the Episcopal Church. This service attracted people from around the country, clergy and lay, including the Presiding Bishop, The Most Rev. Katherine Jefferts-Schori.
- A vision was established by our new Pre-School initiative (St. Barnabas). This vision has energized the Board of Directors.
- The restored Parish House (The Absalom Jones House) was dedicated following several years of planning and work. The new facility will house parish administrative offices, historical/archival space, and meeting room spaces. The official move-in will be in March, 2009.
- Our Christian Formation classes continue to be active and strong, both the adults and the children components.
- Our stewardship continued to grow, in spite of the decline of the country's economic state. People continued to give of their Time, Talents and Treasures.

- Our outreach ministry expanded in 2008. We entered a partnership with an agency in the city, Chosen 300. The entire parish is involved with this feeding program every two months. Most have found it to be a rewarding ministry.
- Sizeable membership growth. That is, St. Thomas continued to add new individuals to our church family.

Of equal importance, I continued to serve God and His church in a myriad of capacities, including these few: member of the Board of Trustees for the Episcopal Church Building Fund; member of the Advisory Board for Episcopal Black Ministries, and a member of the Board of Trustees for the Philadelphia African American Museum .

A few personal accomplishments and additional work included:

- The completion of my Doctorate of Ministry Degree. I give thanks to members of the congregation for their prayers, support and encouragement over the past few years.
- I served as the Dean for two major National Church Conferences: the Union of Black Episcopalians held in Philadelphia; and the National Triennial Black Clergy Conference held in New Orleans.

2008 was truly another magnificent year we witnessed at St. Thomas' Church; a year where our spiritual stops were fully fueled by the Holy Spirit.

This year, the Rector's Vision for St. Thomas' Church focuses on **Four** major goals, surrounding the theme: **Teaching, Preaching and Reaching:**

- To lead the parish in developing a greater interest and comfort in the use of the **Bible**, the **Holy Scripture**. We shall become a more bible-centered church. Encouraging members to attend one of the weekly Christian Formation Sessions.
- To lead the parish in continued **Evangelism Efforts**. Encouraging members to invite others to worship.
- To lead the parish in doing a better job to **Transition New Members** into the life of our parish.
- To lead the parish in establishing an **Early Learning Center**.

It is my hope and prayer that all guilds, organizations and ministries of our parish will espouse, embrace and work toward accomplishing this Vision of 2009. This year, I will attempt to visit all groups in an effort to communicate this vision, to answer any questions and, just as important, to see how your groups plan to bring this vision to fruition.

I thank you so much for all that you did and contributed to our parish in 2008. Our accomplishments were numerous. I pray that you remain on board the AECST Express train as it keeps us on track with our vision of 2009. May God richly bless you, your family and loved ones. And may God continue to shower His blessings upon this great historic church as we celebrate 217 years of ministry. And, as always, please continue to pray for me, your priest, pastor and rector.

"To whom much is given, much is required."

Some Parish 2008 Statistics

Baptisms – 9 Confirmations – 23
Marriages – 2 New Members – 30+ Deaths - 13