



The African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas Philadelphia, PA

*****A MESSAGE FROM THE 17TH RECTOR***
The Rev. Fr. Martini Shaw**

THE STATE OF THE PARISH

To God Be the Glory!

In 2009, the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas (A.E.C.S.T.) celebrated 217 years of ministry and service – and the founding by our first rector, the Rev. Fr. Absalom Jones. As the first black Episcopal Church in the nation, our parish has remained alive, active, vibrant, prosperous and tremendously blessed, serving God and God’s people. We give thanks to Almighty God for keeping, directing, and blessing us for more than two centuries and pray that the Holy Spirit continues to richly empower us for ministry and service.

During 2009, the “A.E.C.S.T. Express” continued its spiritual journey to many new destinations. It was indeed a glorious year of growth, particularly with the addition of new members to our church family. Some of the highlights of the year-long journey were:

- The Annual Observance and Celebration of the Life and Ministry of the Rev. Martin L. King, Jr. Our guest speaker was the Rev. Charles Howard, Chaplain at the University of Pennsylvania.
- The Annual Observance and Celebration of the Life and Ministry of the Rev. Fr. Absalom Jones.
- Our 2009 Lenten Series had as its theme: “The Wilderness”. Both the Sunday sermons and Wednesday presentations focused on life’s wilderness experiences. Clergy, including a few ecumenical ones, were invited to be presenters: a.) The Rev. Dr. Wilda Gafney – St. Thomas’ Church; b.) The Rev. Lamont Wells – Reformation Lutheran Church; c.) The Rev. Dr. Bernard X. James – New Pentecostal Ministries; d.) The Rev. Dr. Mark Tyler – Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church.
- Palm Sunday began our Holy Week Observance. Good weather again permitted an outdoor procession and liturgy, led by Pedro, our intrepid donkey.
- On Pentecost Sunday, we welcomed to St. Thomas’ friends from around the city and state, as the Philadelphia Tribune Newspaper joined us in celebrating their 125th year Anniversary, as the first black newspaper in the country. How appropriate for such a celebration at the nation’s first black Episcopal parish. Among our many guests were: U.S. Senator Arlene Specter, Philadelphia Mayor – Michael Nutter, President and C.E.O. of Philadelphia Tribune – Robert Bogle, and a host of others. These and others took time to visit with our children in Church School before departing.
- Our Annual Revival welcomed the pastors, choirs and members of two historic Philadelphia churches: The Rev. Terrence Griffith – First African Baptist Church; and The Rev. Dr. Kevin Johnson – Bright Hope Baptist Church. Our souls and spirits were enriched by their presence and messages.

- We welcomed our interim Bishop of Pennsylvania, the Right Rev. Rodney Michel, who administered the Sacrament of Confirmation.
- The summer months of July and August were times of rest, reflection, fun and transition, and included our annual church outing at Church Farm which brought together members of our parish, family members and others, as well as, an exciting transition to our new Administrative Offices.
- The busy Fall Season began with Homecoming Sunday. It was followed by our Annual Back To School Service, with Robert Archey, Chairman of the Philadelphia School Reform, as our guest speaker; Annual Animal Blessing on the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi; Annual Stewardship Kick-off; Celebration of the Feast of All Saints/All Souls; Veteran's Day Service; Family/Friends Day; 2009 Men's Day, welcoming home the Rev. Fr. Jesse Anderson (16th Rector) as the guest preacher; A severe December snow storm that demanded that we cancel Sunday worship; and A festive celebration of the birth of our Lord.
- Our 11:00 a.m. Wednesday Healing Service continued to grow in attendance.
- Plans for our new Pre-School Initiative continued to manifest. An official name was determined: The Absalom Jones Day School.
- The Actual move into the Absalom Jones House, following a 1.5 million dollar restoration effort. This new facility now houses administrative offices, historical/archival space, and meeting room spaces.
- Our Christian Formation classes continued to be vibrant, active and engaging, for children and adults alike.
- Our Stewardship of our Treasures grew, in spite of the country's economic state. People continued to give their Time, Talents and Treasures throughout the year.
- Our Outreach efforts in various forms continued within our many Guilds/Organizations. One of the most obvious, being our Parish's partnership with Chosen 300 Ministry, one of the largest feeding programs in the city of Philadelphia.
- Our parish family was tremendously blessed with the addition of new members. Evangelism efforts were very successful, the largest in years. We thank God for the Growth.

Of equal importance, I continued to serve God and His Church, and to represent St. Thomas' Church in a myriad of capacities locally and nationally, including:

- Member of the Board of Trustees for the Episcopal Church Building Fund
- Member of the National Advisory Board for Episcopal Black Ministries
- Member of the National Board for Episcopal Church Recruitment, Training and Development
- Member of the Board of Trustees for the Philadelphia African American Museum
- Various other National and Local Committees as appointed.
- Preacher/Speaker/Workshop leader in several dioceses in light of the degree of Evangelism and growth at St. Thomas.

2009 was indeed a marvelous year of the Lord at St. Thomas' Church. We were tremendously blessed in so many ways. Our spiritual destinations on the "A.E.C.S.T. Express" were continuously fueled by the Holy Spirit. However there is still much to be done.

The Rector's 2010 Vision for St. Thomas' Church shall again embrace the theme: TEACHING, PREACHING AND REACHING. There are four goals to work toward:

- To lead the parish to become more SCRIPTURE-CENTERED. In 2009, bibles were placed in all pews to begin this process.
- To lead the parish in continued EVANGELISM efforts. In 2009, we grew substantially. A vital part of our evangelism is to ensure that our new members are incorporated into the life of the parish.
- To lead the parish in further support and growth of our YOUTH MINISTRIES. It was recently noted that on a given Saturday, there are over 100 youth involved in ministry at our church. This is remarkable!
- To lead the parish in moving closer to the vision of opening the ABSALOM JONES DAY SCHOOL.

I call upon all members of St. Thomas' Church to espouse, embrace and work toward accomplishing the Vision of 2010. I specifically ask each Guild/Organization/Ministry to prayerfully identify ways that your group is working to bring this vision to reality.

We strive in all that we do to glorify God. We are indeed striving to be the church which God intends for us to be. In 2009, our accomplishments were numerous. But God is not through with us yet. It is my hope and prayer that you will remain steadfast and on board the "A.E.C.S.T. Express", as it travels toward the many visionary destinations of 2010.

Thank you for all that you have done, are doing, and have yet to do for God's Church. May God, who is infinitely more than we can imagine, and who is able to keep us from falling, continue to bless us. And may this same God continue to pour His blessings upon this great historic church, as we celebrate another year of ministry and service.

Please, as always, pray for me, your priest, pastor, rector, and brother in Christ.

To God Be The Glory For The Things He Has Done!!!!

Some Parish Statistics

*Baptisms - 16

*Confirmations - 27

*New Members - 50+

*Deaths - 15