

Narrative Responses – Episcopal Churches of Panama City Beach

1. Describe a moment in your worshipping community's recent ministry which you recognize as one of success and fulfillment.

Three and a half years ago following the retirement of priests at both Grace Episcopal and St. Thomas by the Sea Episcopal Churches on Panama City Beach, Florida, our Bishop, the Rt. Rev. Russell Kendrick came to leadership with a proposal. As both churches (we/us) had approximately 100 members and Sunday average service attendance of fewer than fifty, the Bishop offered diocesan support of a discernment project for three years. A Shared Ministry Team of 3 members from each parish would meet over a three year period (during which the Diocese would appoint and help to support a priest for us) to determine whether at the end of the three years: 1. We might join together to form one larger church, 2. We might form a shared ministry to serve Panama City Beach, or 3. We might continue with the status quo.

Following our determination two years into the process to create a shared ministry model, the Team developed a Covenant that would define our shared ministry and guide our future endeavors together. The members of our churches have approved the covenant and it was finalized last winter. Since then we have maintained a schedule of quarterly shared ministry / vestry meetings and activities when appropriate.

As our priest and deacon for the past three years move on to new ministry, we The Episcopal Churches of Panama City Beach are prepared to grow and strengthen our relationship and parishes.

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2. Describe your liturgical style & practice. If your community provides more than one type of worship service, please describe all:

- Traditional and liturgical with a lectionary basis for the homily
- Incorporating music with organ preludes/postludes, additional instrumental accompaniment, chanting, hymns, and anthems by a choir as able.
- Welcoming spirit for all who seek and/or find our doors and repose in the arms of the loving and forgiving God of the universe as he is revealed through the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit.
- Worship services have included: sunrise Easter Eucharist, sunset beach Eucharists, weekly evening Eucharists, seasonal Morning Prayer and Stations of the Cross, monthly/weekly Evening Prayer and Compline.

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3. How do you practice incorporating others in ministry?

- Welcoming everyone warmly: visitors, known attendees, snowbirds, and long-time members; answering questions and assisting them in finding seating as needed.
- Inviting all attendees; members, regular participants, and especially visitors to join us for coffee/fellowship hour.

- Connecting new members with a lay ministry that will fully engage them in parish life. Examples include: participation in monthly potluck dinners and Adult Christian education, greeter, choir, altar guild, lector, chalice bearer, Episcopal Church Women, Men's Group, and participation in some of many outreach ministries.
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4. As a worshipping community how do you care for your spiritual, emotional and physical well-being?

- Spiritual support is provided via a variety of in-church, in-home (for sick and elderly), in-public and on-line worship and Christian education events. In addition to those mentioned elsewhere, our current priest offered "Holy Hikes" through a nearby conservation park. The hikes concluded with a Eucharist. We maintain a Prayer List via e-mail to provide ongoing support to those spiritual, physical or emotional distress.
 - Emotional well-being is supported through a variety of parish programs including Fellowship/Coffee hour after church, parish pot-luck dinners, and celebratory events. We have all experienced loss during this year of quarantine. Fortunately, via Zoom, we are able to connect with each other for meetings (e.g. Vestry) and Christian education.
 - Physical well-being is a component for which we were planning during our Diocesan Jubilee celebrations. A member of St. Thomas by the Sea had planned to initiate movement classes (e.g. stretching, yoga, gentle movement for arthritis, etc.) in the spring. This has been sidelined by the pandemic.
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6. Describe your worshipping community's involvement in either the wider Church or geographical region.

(There are two 6s on the church website. This is the first 6. 😊)

We have a rich history of supporting the wider Church at the Diocese and within our geographic region.

1. Standing Committee membership (current)
 2. Membership on Diocesan Commissions
 3. Voting Delegates at National Convention
 4. Annual participation in Diocesan Convention
 5. Annual United Thank Offering Ingathering
 6. Ongoing communication with winter visitors and others who share an interest.
 7. Strong commitment to a variety of outreach programs
 - a. Hosting Alcoholics Anonymous multiple time weekly
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- b. Feeding the poor, homeless and food insecure through Supper at Grace and sack lunch programs
 - c. Partnering with a local elementary school via mentoring, providing school supplies and other needs as indicated.
 - d. Prayer shawl ministry
 - e. And Others
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6. How do you engage in pastoral care for those beyond your worshipping community?

Both St. Thomas by the Sea and Grace are proud of our community outreach activities. Some of our programs are directly focused on providing pastoral care beyond our worshipping community.

1. Informal Episcopal worship is held just prior to sunset on the public beach, a central location, popular with locals and visitors and welcoming any participant.
 2. Supper at Grace, hosted by Grace for over 20 years, feeds those in need and the homeless.
 3. A business partnership with West Bay Elementary School to provide for student mentoring, family, and facility needs.
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7. Tell about a ministry that your worshipping community has initiated in the past five years. Who can be contacted about this?

“A New Day” is a new program established by a local non-profit for veterans’ post-incarceration. It was established in September 2019 and provides a Transitional Resource Community Center within our community. With a diocesan Missional grant, a Grace Vestry member who is a board member and active volunteer, has been able to attend a three-day Recovery Bootcamp. She has been able to take her training and knowledge to create transitional plans and provide teaching to volunteers helping those in need help themselves. Covid-19 has slowed the face to face approach to helping our community, but with creative efforts skype meetings with inmates prior to release at the local jail are taking place. The program is open one day each week to receive participants in the program, hosting veteran meetings and Bible study (with social distancing in place). Since the grant was received, A New Day has been able to assist several Supper At Grace attendees with resources.

Contact Deborah Edmondson at deb.edmondson51@gmail.com

8. How are you preparing yourselves for the Church of the future?

The Episcopal Churches of Panama City Beach continue to move forward even during these challenging times. We continue to live into our faith by serving those that worship here, proclaiming the good news of the Gospel; and our vision for the future is extremely bright.

Our goal for the near future is to attract a priest who will continue to serve both congregations with traditions and values of the Episcopal Church of today. At the same time, our hope is for our new priest to be open-minded and creative in ways that will help grow both churches. Like all churches it is our hope to find a dynamic and inspirational preacher that leaves us spiritually fulfilled as we exit worship services. We love our current, largely “senior”, membership but also hope for a priest with the interest and ability to attract younger members and their families.

12. Please provide words describing the gifts and skills essential to the future leaders of your worshipping community.

4 – 6 words describing gifts and skills essential to the future leader of our worshipping community

1. Preaching, Education
2. Pastoral Care
3. Parish Growth
4. Social Media
5. Fellowship
6. Outreach