

Profile of Saint Thomas Episcopal Church, Taunton, MA

A BRIEF HISTORY



Thomas Coram, a wealthy sea captain arrived in Taunton from England in the 1690's. He established a successful shipyard on the Taunton River. He returned to London in 1703 and left behind 59 acres of land in trust and a substantial collection of books to help found a Church of England in Taunton.

Twenty five years later, Thomas Coram's intent was carried out. In 1738 a congregation of lay persons gathered and a small church was built on the outskirts of town near the Three Mile River on what is now known as Tremont Street. Although the land trust was no longer available, Coram's library became the basis for the young parish's ministry. It has been assumed that St Thomas received its name as an honor to Captain Coram.

During the Revolution, St. Thomas Church, like most Episcopal churches, fell upon hard times and was closed for a number of years. The building itself stood unused and blew down in the Gale of 1815. In 1820 the parish was incorporated. In 1828 the Vestry voted to seek a minister. One was called and progress increased. It was decided to build the new church closer to the center of the city on High Street.

The church grew rapidly leading to the enlargement of the building in the 1840's and this too was outgrown. The third and present structure, designed by Richard Upjohn was consecrated in 1859. A chapel was added in 1869. A fire gutted the church sanctuary in 1898. It was rebuilt with the addition of a large three manual Jardine organ in 1899. The organ, though not completely original, serves the congregation still.



The historically significant 1759 McKinstry House, presently the rectory, adjacent to the church, was purchased in 1907 to house Sunday school.

In 1910, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Cabot Baylies donated a Sunday school building, presently known as the Parish Hall. It has proven to be of immeasurable value to the church and the entire community. In 1960, ground was broken for an addition to the Parish Hall which completed the complex of buildings as we know it today.

In 1985 Our Daily Bread, Taunton's first soup kitchen was organized and has been active since then, on the lower floor of the Parish Hall, feeding those in the city who are hungry for nourishment and friendship.

Taunton, Massachusetts

Taunton is a richly diverse, genuine and appreciative community. It also is a community affected by violent crime, suicide, drug addiction and related deaths.

It was incorporated as a town in 1639 and became a city in 1864. It is located in southeastern MA with easy access to Providence, RI and Boston, MA.

The city is governed by a mayor and a nine member council and has a population of 56,789. The median household income in Taunton is \$52,225. This median reflects a range of professional and business people, and many blue collar workers. We are a city with a strong work ethic. We also share, as many cities do, the challenges posed by a small homeless population - served by soup kitchens, human services and first responders.

We are a welcoming community and our school department has been strong in supporting diversity, educating and supporting a wide range of academic and social needs and providing athletic and cultural outlets for student development. The community has thirteen public schools, including preschools, elementary, middle, a comprehensive high school, an alternative high school serving students who do not function well in a large high school setting, and ownership in a regional vocational school. Our schools serve a population diverse in race, ethnicity, behavioral standards, and academic needs. In addition to our public schools, there is a Catholic grade school and a Catholic Middle / High School in the city.

We are served by a conscientious and involved public library and by conscientious private cultural agencies such as the Old Colony Historical Museum. These institutions are working vigorously to contribute to the quality of life in Taunton through programming and through attention to the social and cultural needs of the community. Our YMCA and Boys and Girls Club offer diverse fitness programming for all ages and backgrounds in a safe environment. Taunton recently welcomed a campus for Bristol Community College which is repurposing space in an underutilized mall. There is easy access to other institutions of higher learning in the area, both state run and private. The mayor's office has supported commercial and industrial development. Taunton has also benefited from Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development (SRPED) recent efforts by concerned young professionals in the city who work with Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership and Mass in Motion to raise our level of consciousness about the need to retain some land as farmland in perpetuity, to make locally grown food available through farmer's markets, and provide safe places for passive recreation such as walking, running, and biking.

The city also has responsive police and fire departments in addition to well-staffed social services and senior services.

Congregation

St. Thomas Mission Statement: The Episcopal Church of St. Thomas strives to live by the message of Christ. We are a sacramental and prayerful church, and thoughtful in the consideration of all ideas. We strive to provide a supportive, active and welcoming community in service to the city of Taunton, surrounding communities, and one another.

Our mission serves the Mission of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts which reads: "We, the people of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, are living members of the body of Jesus Christ. As Jesus gathered his disciples, took bread and blessed it, and then offered his body for us in order to bring reconciliation, forgiveness and healing, so may we offer ourselves in Christ's name."



Diversity in age and race adds vitality to our life as a congregation. We are a predominantly Caucasian congregation with a small number of parishioners of color who serve in leadership and participate in liturgy. We have a small number of young families as well as middle aged people and long-time members who help us stay in touch with the richness of our history. Whereas it was unlikely to find people of European ethnic origins at St. Thomas two generations ago, we now have a good representation of ethnicities that have gravitated toward St. Thomas from Catholic churches. All of these people — old and young, gay and straight, black and white — work together in ministry and on fundraisers such as Church Fair and Lobster Day. As a group, we are welcoming, compassionate, and supportive of each other and of the church.

Our membership does not come from Taunton alone. Because there are not many Episcopal churches in the area, and because of the sterling reputation St. Thomas enjoyed over the years in our community, we have members from many surrounding towns in the area. Our membership profile differs from the general profile of the city of Taunton. It would be advantageous to use our gifts to welcome more people from this diverse, and hardworking community into our congregation.

Demographic Miscellanea on Congregation

Of people consulted:

58% attend services weekly; 29% attend several times per month

97% are members of the congregation

97% contribute regularly

100% are comfortable with welcoming people of all sexual orientations

74% are married; 18% single; a few are divorced or separated

61% have children of all ages; @15% have children K-12 and younger

Majority of responders itemized specific ways that they contribute.

One person consulted expressed the need to honor long time members of our congregation, and two responders cautioned against being too liberal.

What we value in a congregation:

- A welcoming atmosphere 100%
- Opportunities for friendship and fun with like-minded people 100%
- Acceptance of diversity in age, ethnicity, race and sexual orientation 100%
- Opportunities for personal fulfillment through volunteer ministries 87%
- A shared commitment to social justice 93%
- Opportunities for deepening spiritual life through instruction in prayer and meditation. 78%
- Ministry to Divorced and Separated People 75%

Someone commented: “I love how our church is a family.” This comment helps express our commitment to being a welcoming, concerned, congenial and devoted congregation.

Ministries: Importance given to existing ministries by people consulted:

- Ministry to sick and homebound 87%
- Ministry to Senior Citizens including Senior Luncheon 87%
- Building and Grounds 84%
- New Liturgy Planning Committee 83%
- Music Ministry 83%
- Ministry to Our Daily Bread Soup Kitchen 80%
- Hospitality / Welcoming Ministry 80%
- Adult Religious Education 83%
- Religious Education K-12 72%
- Altar Guild 71%
- Ministry through Mission Trips 59%

Members minister to the congregation by contributing financially, serving on Vestry, Search Committee, Building and Grounds, teaching Religious Education, working through Altar Guild to create a special environment for liturgy, providing hospitality, working on Scholarship Committee, training acolytes, assisting with social media and photography, counting money, serving as Greeters, supporting music ministry, singing in the choir, planning and executing Annual Fair and Lobster Roll Day fundraisers, keeping congregation informed by publication of our monthly newsletter, The Grapevine, preparing the Annual Parish Retreat, working on Newcomers Brunch, supporting Senior Luncheon, providing coffee hour after 10 o'clock service, leading walks for interested parishioners, offering classes on contemplative spirituality. People work together and enjoy each other at St. Thomas.

Parish Outreach in Ministry to Our Community

- **Visiting the sick and homebound:** Visits are made regularly to residents at Taunton Nursing Home and the All American Assisted Living in Raynham as well as to people confined to their own homes.
- **Joy of Living Senior Luncheon:** A weekly gathering of seniors in the area on Thursday at noon, September through end of May. Program is funded by grants. Creative and healthy lunches are provided weekly September through May by Our Daily Bread Soup Kitchen under the caring direction of Maribeth Ferreira. Lunch is followed by a speaker, conversation on a theme and Bingo once a month. The luncheon provides nourishment, community building and intellectual stimulation for seniors.



- **Our Daily Bread Soup Kitchen:** Provides breakfast, lunch and take home food for the poor and the lonely in our community. No questions asked, but civil behavior understood. Our Daily Bread is funded by grant money, fundraisers, monetary donations, and donations of food from businesses such as Trader Joe's, Panera Bread, and others. Our rector serves on the board as do some of our parishioners. It is self-supporting and pays monthly rent to St. Thomas, but the church ultimately maintains the building which sustains wear from increased usage. It is ably directed by Maribeth Ferreira, a professional chef, who is:
 - deeply committed to food service as ministry.
 - a creative and health conscious cook.
 - a catalyst for helping guests rise out of poverty and grow in self-esteem by bringing in volunteer social workers to help with housing issues, employment readiness, and job leads.
 - forming a committee to access resources from the community in helping our guests to help themselves.

- planning to expand the program in cooperation with churches and businesses in the area to include a monthly dinner in the evening.
- engaging the help of businesses and contractors in the community to enhance the space in which guests are served. Ex: the construction of a new access ramp by Lopes Construction.
- working toward the creation of a computer lab to teach guests computer literacy for job applications and other online needs.



- **Brown Bag Luncheons:** Brown bags filled with nourishment are available for senior citizens on the 4th Wednesday of the month. Program is funded by Greater Boston Food Bank and administered locally by our secretary, Lynn Clifford, who is helped by volunteers from our congregation and the community.



- **Other Community Services Embraced by St. Thomas:**

Some level of service in the form of providing rector's participation on boards and some donation of church space is given to the following programs. These services are administered by appropriate professionals from agencies in the greater community.

- SEMA – VAV Southeastern MA Voices Against Violence
- Suicide Prevention Task Force
- Bristol County Coalition for Suicide Prevention
- Greater Taunton Community Services
- Space provided for meeting of low income Scout Troop
- Wednesday evenings, school months, in Parish Hall.

- **Mission Ministry: An Overview**

- 2008 – Two members of our congregation went to Mirebalais, Haiti with Rev. Joseph Constant to work with the Haiti-Micah Project and with a medical mission team. St. Thomas continues to support the Haiti-Micah Project through the Boynton Haiti Micah Fund, which was established at St. Thomas in recognition of former Rector Dana Boynton. A future trip is tentatively planned. Some parishioners continue supporting the Haiti-Micah Project through the "Support a Child" program.
- 2013 – Nine members of our congregation went to Farmington, New Mexico to work with the Native Navajo community at the Four Corners Navajo Reservation. A follow-up trip is tentatively planned for 2019 to continue working and learning about the culture and customs.
- 2011, 2014 & 2017 – Teams from St. Thomas went to Holy Cross Anglican Primary School in San Mateo Belize to teach children, build and paint classrooms, and teach practical skills such as welding — 19 people went in 2011, 29 in 2014, and 16 in 2017. Several parishioners continue to support the school with financial donations towards the school's lunch program.



Church Buildings, Property and Condition

Church building has handsome stained glass windows and attached chapel. Both church and chapel are foundationally secure but such things as roof maintenance and updating of heating systems are concerns. Generous members contribute to the quality of our environment when specific needs arise.



Both Parish Hall and its 1960 addition need new roofs and maintenance inside, most especially maintenance and repair to the areas used daily by guests coming to Our Daily Bread. The Coram Lounge interior receives ongoing attention from interested parishioners.

The rectory is a gracious 18th century building. It has had basic maintenance and also needs further attention to interior and to roof. We have a temporary tenant for income.

We own a small cemetery on Tremont Street, site of the second church building.

The Waldron Gibson House is a two tenement house at 73 School Street. It was a legacy to the church with stipulations that it must be used to provide affordable housing to low income people; it cannot provide income for the church and must be self-supporting. It is in fair condition. The roof is about seven years old; the siding was replaced in the late '80's. In time a new kitchen, and bathroom will be needed.

We also own:

- A driveway and small church parking lot near the Parish Hall which are in fair condition.
- A medium parking lot for Parish Hall located behind Walgreen's Pharmacy on Winthrop St. This lot was recently acquired and is in excellent condition.

Staff

We have been blessed with fine transitional ministry provided by Bridge, Rev. Patricia Handloss, and Interim, Rev. John Beach. Lynn Clifford, secretary, and Paul Boudreau, custodian, provide invaluable service to our congregation in good times and in bad. Our Vestry, treasurer, and volunteers provide critical service to the congregation.

Worship

We have two services on Sunday, 8 AM with no music and 10 AM with music. Services are traditional. They are enhanced by the participation of children and teens that are nurtured and trained to serve comfortably and respectfully on the altar; also by our verger, our lay readers, Eucharistic ministers, organist and choir. We are delighted but appropriately responsive when one of our little children takes a fancy to walk up to the altar during a service. We love having children and their parents in our congregation.

Music

Our organist recently resigned and will be leaving his position of Music Director as of the new year. He holds degrees in church music and organ performance and has been maximizing the potential of our 1899 Jardine Pipe Organ. The music program has tended to be traditional in its use of the **1982 Hymnal** and **Lift Every Voice and Sing**. Music tends toward classical and well-established church music. We are currently evaluating the future direction of our music program.

Religious Education Program

After a short lapse in offering a Religious Education Program at St. Thomas, the Vestry voted in 2017 to initiate a new Religious Education Program both to provide Religious Education for our children and to attract people raising families to our congregation. Parents and interested parishioners run the nursery program in the chapel during the 10 o'clock services while school aged children are taught in the Parish Hall. Several adult volunteers have been working on an alternating basis as assistants in the program. All personnel undergo CORI Checks, and are trained in both Safe Church protocol and Godly Play, our Montessori-style curriculum.

Children range in age from 4 to 13. An average of 10 school-aged children attends classes weekly, and 3 to 6 younger children attend nursery school weekly.

The program hopes to attract more teachers and more volunteers to work as assistants. The vision is to have Religious Education available from nursery through grade 12. The team wants to work in conjunction with the rector, and to have more members of the congregation involved.

Occasional classes are offered to adults on Centering Prayer, aspects of contemplative spirituality, and aspects of Mindfulness.

Finances:

St. Thomas is challenged with expenses, but after withdrawing from endowments has ended each year with a balanced budget. Our annual operating budget of \$380,000 supports our three-quarter time priest and helps house Our Daily Bread Soup Kitchen described in detail elsewhere. St. Thomas has just over \$807,000 in endowments which reside at two brokerage houses. Most endowments are restricted; however four are available for general operating support and maintenance which totals \$415,000. St. Thomas has slowly decreased the use of endowments for general funding and used \$88,676 in 2017 and \$53,235 in 2018 to date. The initial development of 2019 budget shows a similar use of investments to support the general fund of 70,000. St. Thomas works hard at fundraising. Each year parishioners raise almost \$24,000 working three major fundraising events. Additional fundraising covered \$35,000 for a 2017 Mission Trip. St. Thomas does not have a mortgage. We own a rectory on site and The Waldron Gibson House, a self-funding legacy to the church, which provides two low-income, affordable housing apartment units in the city of Taunton. We are seeking ways to be better stewards of our physical properties and are committed to developing a strategic plan to limit future endowment spending to help cover our annual operating budget going forward.

Our Daily Bread Soup Kitchen has its own Board, an endowment of \$200,000, and works vigorously at receiving grants and raising funds. ODB covers its own annual expenses, but St. Thomas is responsible for maintaining the facilities that house ODB.

Currently St. Thomas is in year two of a very aggressive capital campaign to raise \$385,000. Three major tenants of the drive are Building and Grounds (\$290,000), Mission and Outreach (\$45,000) and Program development (\$50,000).

St. Thomas has an average Sunday attendance of 107 parishioners and guests. Of these, there are 97 predictable pledging units year to year. In addition to funding 65% of our operating budget, rental income from groups using church and hall generates \$58,525 annually.

Groups Paying Rent for Use of Church Space:

- Renters of Rectory use second floor and share first floor with congregation.
- Our Daily Bread, uses the Parish Hall entrance, basement kitchen and dining area, and one Sunday School room upstairs for computers.
- 7th Day Adventist rents space on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. They use the Chapel and the Parish Hall including one Sunday School room on the second floor.
- New Life African American Community rents space on Tuesday, Saturday, and Sunday. They use the Chapel and have the use of the main church at 5 PM on Sundays. A couple of times a year they ask to use the Parish Hall.
- Cheerleaders rent space in the Parish Hall on Tuesdays.
- Overeaters Anonymous will begin renting space in the Coram Lounge, Parish Hall on Wednesdays.
- N.B. St. Thomas provides space in Parish Hall on Wednesday evenings during the school year for a troop of low income Boy Scouts to use Parish Hall without paying rent.

What We Value in a Rector:

- Person of integrity 100%
- Caring, compassionate and approachable 100%
- Attentive to sick and grieving parishioners 100%
- Able to allow input from vestry and congregation 100%
- Committed to personal prayer and the teachings of Jesus 93%
- Careful to maintain positive relationships with members of congregation 97%
- Aware of current issues and social mores 90%
- Able to preach a meaningful and engaging sermon 93%
- Able to assist vestry in business and financial aspects of parish management 90%
- Committed to transparency in regard to church finances 97%
- Able to provide opportunities for spiritual growth 94%
- Sociologically, a rector who is
 - Liberal 29%
 - Moderate 58%
 - Conservative 16%
- In relation to theology and liturgical format, a rector who is
 - Liberal 30%
 - Moderate 53%
 - Conservative 17%

Input from the congregation shows our desire to have a new rector who will lead us in following the Gospel of Jesus and adapting to changes in human consciousness, a rector who works well with people and is moderate to liberal, energetic, and willing.

Our Future

We hope to find a good-natured, stalwart and devout, ³/₄-time rector who leads us and walks with us on the spiritual journey. We hope that our rector will be happy working with us, and working in our community. We want to learn from our rector and to work with him or her at becoming one with the mind and heart of Christ, as well as at bringing Christian and humane values into our life together as a congregation and into our efforts to be of service to others.

We are evaluating options for future development of our music program; we want to extend our Religious Education Program and our Youth Ministry so that we can provide Religious Education for our young families, and attract more young families. We want to care for the poor, for the homebound, the sick and dying, and also for our buildings. We are seeking ways to become effective stewards of our properties, as well as further engage our congregation in various ways to promote financial stewardship. Our Rectory is currently being rented to help generate income, but will be made available to the rector as a residence, if desired.

We want to present a face for St. Thomas which says to others, “Come join us in worship and in walking toward Light and Love. Come worship with us; work with us, and play with us. We are happy here, and you are welcome.”

Candidates interested in this position should email a cover letter explaining what about St. Thomas is peaking your interest, a resume or CV, your OTM profile, and a means for accessing your sermons to stthomastauntonrectorsearch111@gmail.com. Inquiries can also be directed to this mailbox or addressed via phone at (413) 728-9453.