

# ST. MARY'S MESSENGER

AUGUST 2025

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## THE VIRGIN MARY, MOTHER OF OUR LORD

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The honor paid to Mary, the virgin mother of Jesus Christ our Lord and God, goes back to the earliest days of the Church. Indeed, it goes back further, for even before the birth of her Son, Mary prophesied, "From this time forth, all generations shall call me blessed."

The New Testament records several incidents from the life of the Virgin: her betrothal to Joseph, the Annunciation by the angel Gabriel that she was to bear the Messiah, her Visitation to Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist, the Nativity of our Lord, the visits of the shepherds and the magi...

*[Continues in Calendar, Page 4.](#)*



## NEW JERSEY MAYOR SAYS TOWN WON'T SEIZE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IF PUBLIC DOESN'T SUPPORT PLAN

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Mayor Dan Rodrick of Toms River, New Jersey, has delayed a council vote on his [plan](#) to seize an Episcopal church's property, and he told Episcopal News Service he would end his effort to turn the church's 11 acres into parkland if town officials confirm the public doesn't support it.

The proposed ordinance that would allow the town to seize Christ Episcopal Church had been heading for a final vote July 30. Instead, the delay was welcomed by Episcopal leaders, who expressed relief while reaffirming that the church is not for sale...

*[Continues in  
National News,  
Page 12.](#)*

## CHURCH OF ENGLAND NEWSPAPER SUSPENDS PUBLICATION

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Andrew Carey, editor of The Church of England Newspaper since 2022, made an announcement July 22 that any editor dreads: his publication may have seen its last edition.

The newspaper, founded in 1828 as The Record, merged with The Church Family Newspaper in 1949 and adopted its current name. The paper became a voice for evangelical members of the church after John Cordle purchased it in the mid-1950s.

In the past year, CEN published news-making commentary. Bishop Philip North of Blackburn wrote that he had not spoken out against grooming gangs because of a "fear-driven silence." ...

*[Continues in International  
News, Page 21.](#)*

## ATTENTION ALL CHURCH MEMBERS!



### ALTAR FLOWERS

If anyone is interested in furnishing the altar flowers, please call the church office at 432-267-8201 or email the Parish Secretary at [baileys.stmarys@gmail.com](mailto:baileys.stmarys@gmail.com).

### SERVING SIGNUP

At this time, we are looking for people who are willing to volunteer to serve during the Sunday morning service. There are several positions available for anyone who would like to help.

The positions are:

- Chalice- Serves the cup of wine.
- Lector- Reads the lessons and the psalms, and the Gospel during Morning Prayer.
- Acolyte- Carries the cross and the Gospel, and guards the front.
- Ushers- Welcomes people and direct them as needed

If you are interested, please call the church office or email the Parish Secretary at [baileys.stmarys@gmail.com](mailto:baileys.stmarys@gmail.com).

The church would also like to thank everyone who does volunteer!

**QUIZ QUESTION 1:** *(Riddle answers will be on the last page.)*

**According to the Book of Acts, how many days after Jesus ascended into Heaven did the disciples celebrate Pentecost?**

- A.** Five
- B.** Three
- C.** One
- D.** Ten

**AUGUST CALENDAR**

**3<sup>rd</sup>** Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

**6<sup>th</sup>** The Transfiguration of Our Lord

**10<sup>th</sup>** Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

**15<sup>th</sup>** Saint Mary the Virgin: Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ

**17<sup>th</sup>** Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

**24<sup>th</sup>** Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

**25<sup>th</sup>** Saint Bartholomew the Apostle

**31<sup>st</sup>** Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost



**WEEKLY SCHEDULE**

**Sunday**

9:30 AM- Christian Education

10:30 AM- Morning Service

Coffee Hour- Following the service

**Wednesday**

10:30 AM- Bible Study/Coffee hour

5:30 PM- Evening Prayer

**Monday thru Thursday**

8:30AM- Morning Prayer (In the chapel & on YouTube)

**ANNIVERSARY WISHES**

**1<sup>st</sup>** Paul & Allene Ausmus

*Happy Anniversary!!*

**BIRTHDAY WISHES**

**24<sup>th</sup>** Jessica Rubio

**29<sup>th</sup>** Becky Henry

*Happy Birthday!!*



## THE VIRGIN MARY, MOTHER OF OUR LORD – 15 AUGUST NT

BY JAMES KIEFER

*The following article has been taken from [James Kiefer's Christian Biographies](#). This article is to highlight the importance of Saint Mary the Virgin, who we commemorate on August 15th. The text has been edited for reading purposes. The photo comes from the [Episcopal Church](#).*

*[Continued from front page]* the Presentation of the infant Jesus in the Temple at the age of forty days, the flight into Egypt, the Passover visit to the Temple when Jesus was twelve, the wedding at Cana in Galilee and the performance of her Son's first miracle at her intercession, the occasions when observers said, "How can this man be special? We know his family!", an occasion when she came with others to see him while he was preaching, her presence at the foot of the Cross, where Jesus commends her to the care of the Beloved Disciple, and her presence with the apostles in the upper room after the Ascension, waiting for the promised Spirit. She is thus seen to be present at most of the chief events of her Son's life.

Besides Jesus himself, only two humans are mentioned by name in the Creeds. One is Pontius Pilate, Roman procurator of Judea from 26 to 36 AD. That Jesus was crucified by order of Pontius Pilate pins down the date of his death within a few years, and certifies that we are not talking, like the worshippers of Tammuz or Adonis, about a personification or symbol of the annual death and resurrection of the crops. His death is an event in history, something that really happened. The other name is that of



Mary. The Creeds say that Christ was "born of the virgin Mary." That is to say, they assert on the one hand that he was truly and fully human, born of a woman and not descended from the skies like an angel. On the other hand, by telling us that his mother was a virgin they exclude the theory that he was simply an ordinary man who was so virtuous that he eventually, at his baptism, became filled with the Spirit of God. His virgin birth attests to the fact that he was always more than merely human, always one whose presence among us was in

itself a miracle, from the first moment of his earthly existence. In Mary, Virgin and Mother, God gives us a sign that Jesus is both truly God and truly Man.

It sometimes happens that someone will report an appearance of the Virgin Mary, bearing a message, usually encouraging faithfulness in prayer. A reader has asked, "How far back do such reports go?" According to Donald Attwater (Penguin Dictionary of Saints), Gregory of Nyssa (335-395) says that the earliest known report of a supernatural appearance of the Blessed Virgin to anyone was of one to Gregory Thaumaturgos (213-270). At the request of a Roman Catholic listmember, I point out that the genuineness of these appearances is not official Roman Catholic doctrine. It is perfectly possible to reject all such appearances as delusions, and still be a Roman Catholic in good standing.

Little is known of the life of the Virgin Mary except insofar as it intersects with the life of her Son, and there is an appropriateness in this. The Scriptures record her words to the angel Gabriel, to her kinswoman Elizabeth, to her Son on two occasions. But the only recorded saying of hers to what may be called ordinary, run-of-the-mill hearers is her instruction to the servants at the wedding feast, to whom she says simply, indicating her Son, "Whatever he says to you, do it."

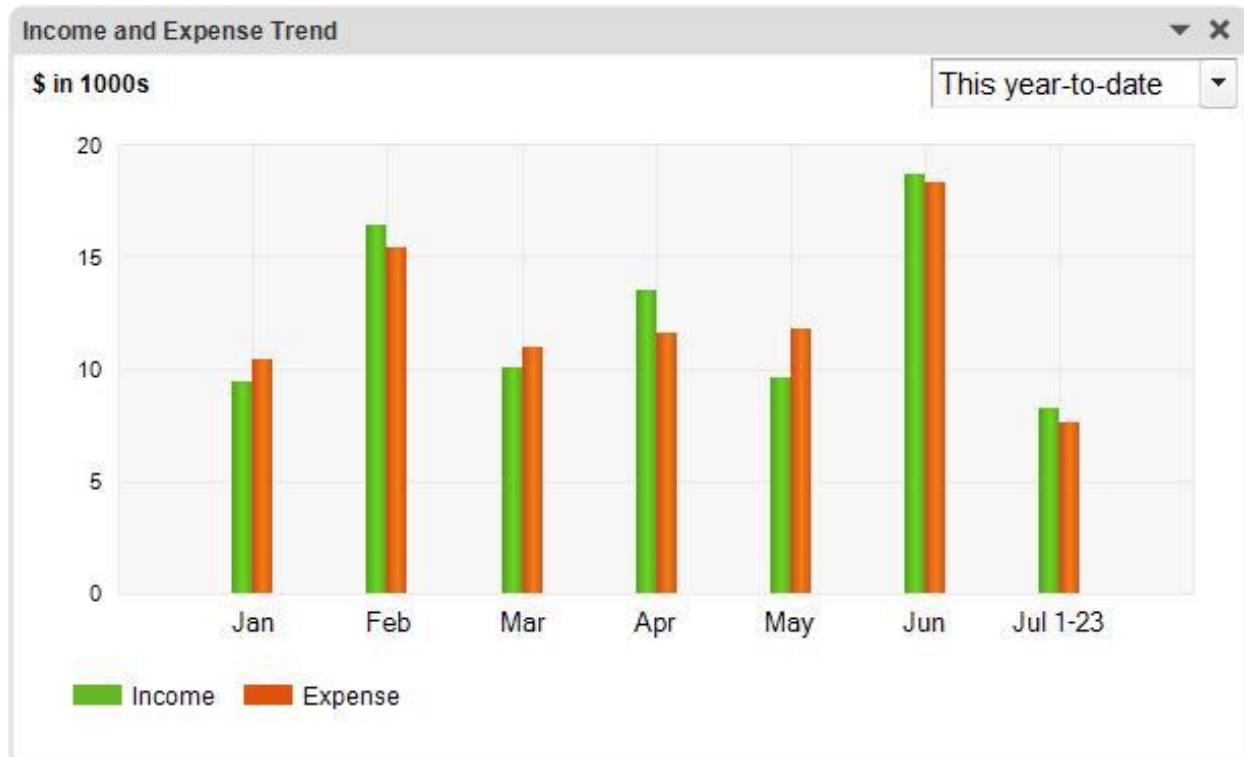
This we may take to be the summation of her message to the world. If we listen to her, she will tell us, "Listen to Him. Listen to my Son. Do what He tells you." When we see her, we see her pointing to her Son. If our regard for the Blessed Virgin does not have the immediate effect of turning our attention from her to the One whom she carried in her womb for nine months and suckled at her breast, to the Incarnate God, the Word made flesh, then we may be sure that it is not the kind of regard that she seeks. A right regard for her will always direct us to Him Who found in her His first earthly dwelling-place.

**Prayer** (contemporary language)

O God, who chose the blessed Virgin Mary to be the mother of your incarnate Son: Grant that we, who have been redeemed by his blood, may share with her the glory of your eternal kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

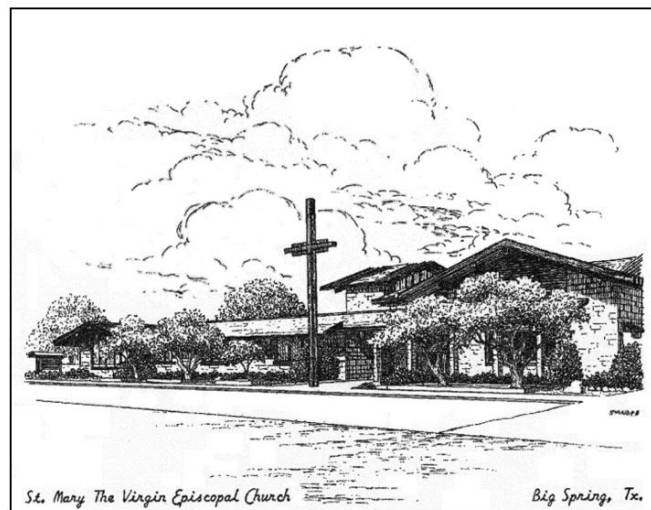
O God, who have taken to yourself the blessed Virgin Mary, mother of your incarnate Son: Grant that we, who have been redeemed by his blood, may share with her the glory of your eternal kingdom; through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

## INCOME & EXPENSE REPORT



## ST. MARY'S NOW ON YOUTUBE

Under the leadership of Fr. Christopher, St. Mary's has been making some positive changes in regard to how we operate. One of these changes is that St. Mary's is now on YouTube. On the church's YouTube channel ([@StMarysBigSpring](#)), you can find daily prayers and Fr. Christopher's homilies. These videos are there for you to watch, or rewatch, at your convenience. Please check out the church's channel, and we hope you enjoy the videos!



## WEST TEXAS PREPARES FOR LONG-TERM RESPONSE ALMOST TWO WEEKS AFTER DEADLY FLOODS

BY SHIREEN KORKZAN | JULY 16, 2025

The following text and photo have been taken from the [ENS](#). The first picture is of a memorial erected by the Guadalupe River.

The San Antonio-based [Diocese of West Texas](#) is assessing how best to assist with immediate and long-term recovery efforts after July 4 floodwaters [killed](#) at least 134 people and left at least 101 still missing in the Texas Hill Country.



“There’s going to be a lot of rebuilding to do. There’s going to be a lot of counseling to do. There’s going to be a lot of need in the long haul financially,” West Texas Bishop David G. Read told Episcopal News Service in a July 15 phone interview. “Right now, we’re focusing on financial support and then we’ll partner with other agencies.”

Episcopalians are encouraged to continue to pray for the victims and rescue workers and to donate to one of

several relief funds. The Diocese of West Texas has launched a [donation webpage](#), as has [St. Peter’s Episcopal Church in Kerrville](#) and [Episcopal Relief & Development](#). Sharing donation information on social media and

elsewhere is “much appreciated,” Read said.

The diocese purchased an RV for rescue workers to use for search efforts and to assist people who’ve lost their homes in the floods, the bishop added. St. Peter’s is setting up a satellite site in Hunt, a small town about 12 miles northwest of

Kerrville, to do ministry work with rescue workers and assist with search efforts. The church, which is located two blocks from the Guadalupe River, also is [recruiting](#) volunteers to assist with rebuilding efforts. The diocese told ENS last week that the flood did not severely [damage](#) St. Peter’s property.

[St. Peter’s](#), which averages about 300 worshippers on Sundays, is in Kerr County, where most of the fatalities occurred when the Guadalupe River

swelled and breached its banks along [40 miles](#). Seven parishioners, including two adults, a family of four and an 8-year-old girl, died in the floods, Read told ENS. Other parishioners remain missing as of July 16.

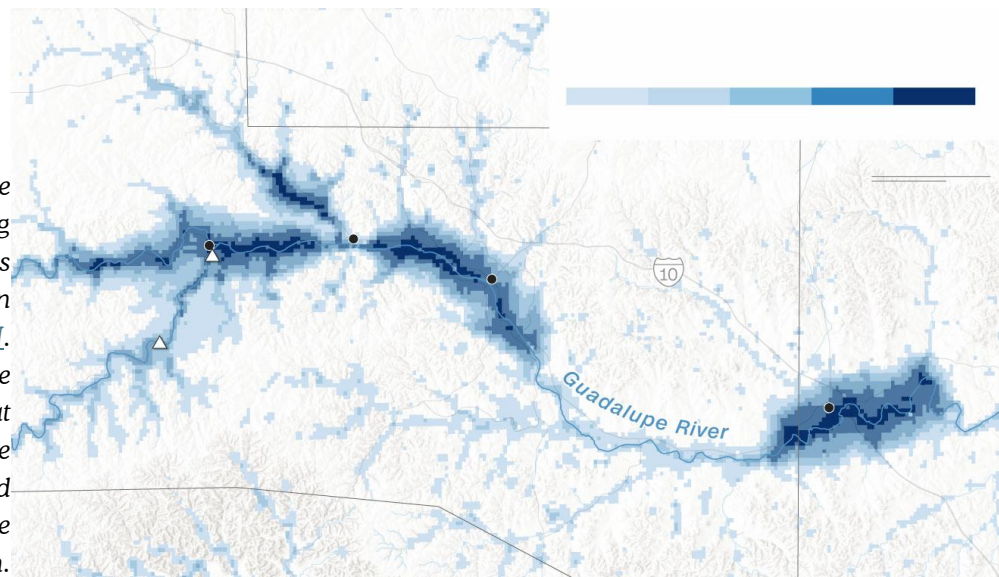
The 8-year-old girl, [Renee Smajstrla](#), was among the 27 campers and staff who died at Camp Mystic, an all-girls nondenominational Christian camp located east of Kerrville along the river.

Smajstrla's funeral was on July 12, the first of the funerals for flood victims held at St. Peter's. The following day, she was among the victims and missing who were [remembered](#) during St. Peter's Sunday morning worship services.

St. Peter's has been [open daily](#) for residents seeking a place for prayer as the community grieves. Amid the recovery, the church's worship schedule will continue as normal, and Read said that 90 students are enrolled in vacation Bible school, which started on July 14.

As early as July 2, emergency management officials [warned](#) of potential flooding heading into Independence Day. The deadly flood began early July 4 when a slow-moving storm brought heavy downpours to the region, [dropping](#) as much as 15 inches of rain on parts of Kerr County and causing parts of the Guadalupe River to [rise](#) as high as 30 feet in 45 minutes. Near Camp Mystic, the river's water level [peaked](#) at 37.52 feet, surpassing the highest recorded crest in 1932.

The National Weather Service [issued](#) a flash flood warning in central Kerr County and northwest Bandera County that night shortly after 1 a.m., while many people were [asleep](#). Richard "Dick" Eastland, longtime Camp Mystic co-director, began [evacuating](#) the hundreds of campers and staff members about 45 minutes later. He died while trying to rescue girls stuck inside one of the cabins near the river. Campers and staff remain among the missing.



The following map has been taken from [CNN](#). It shows the areas that were flooded during the storm.

To provide short- and long-term counseling for children who've been impacted by the floods, the diocese is coordinating with the San Antonio-based

nonprofit [Children's Bereavement Center of South Texas](#), which offers counseling and support to children and families mourning the death of loved ones. The bereavement center established a permanent office at St. Philip's Episcopal Church in Uvalde, where in 2022 19 children and two adults were murdered in a [mass shooting](#) at Robb Elementary School.

"Some people with the center were up at St. Peter's [on July 14] scoping out the possibilities and meeting with the director of the parish about needs and possibilities," Read said. "It's a conversation that at this point hasn't fully developed yet, but it's a great agency that we have a good relationship with."

Read said at least 35 Episcopal bishops, including Presiding Bishop Sean Rowe, have reached out directly to offer prayers and support. Some churches in other dioceses, like the [Church of St. John the Divine in Houston](#), where the [Diocese of Texas](#) is based, have dedicated their own worship services to praying for rescue workers and for victims and their loved ones. Many of Camp Mystic's alumnae are [parishioners](#) of the Church of St. John the Divine, according to the New York Times.

"I'm very, very grateful for the response," Read told ENS. "The parishioners I spoke with at St. Peter's have also expressed gratitude for the prayers and offered support from other congregations."

Read said he's also been in touch with the bishops in North Carolina, where heavy rain caused floods two days after those in West Texas. A tropical storm [made landfall](#) on July 6 in South Carolina, dropping heavy rain as it moved into North Carolina, with as much as 12 inches causing flash floods and minor tornadoes across the central part of the state. At least six people [died](#) from the floods in North Carolina. Also in the state, the Diocese of Western North Carolina [continues to recover](#) nine months after Hurricane Helene inundated the region.

Amid the recent tragedy in his diocese, Read said he's lately been turning to [Psalm 121:1-2](#): "I lift up my eyes to the hills – from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and Earth." The psalm is quoted in a [letter](#) he and West Texas Bishop Suffragan Angela Cortiñas wrote to the diocese on July 5 in the floods' immediate aftermath.

"It seems like the right message for what's happening [in the Texas Hill Country]," he said.

## THE FOUNDING OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA

BY ROBERT DUNCAN

The following article and picture have been taken from the [Anglican Church in North America](#). This was a speech given at the 2025 Provincial Council by Archbishop Robert Duncan. The photo is of Archbishop Duncan at the Provincial Council.



Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Dearest Friends in the Lord: I have been asked to speak for just a very few minutes about the founding vision and values of this Province. I am honored, humbled, and privileged to do so. In 1975 – fifty years ago – leaders of the Fellowship of Witness determined to found a seminary for ministry and mission that could bring about the reform of the Episcopal Church. That was their idea: a seedbed for Anglican missional leaders committed to the Bible as the “ultimate rule and standard” of the Christian Faith. In retrospect, God’s idea was that it would shape and gather men and women, lay and ordained, who, more than any other group, would bring about the creation of the Anglican

Church in North America.

...Both Biblical and Missional. In 1999 – twenty-six years ago now – Presiding Bishop Leonard Riches of the Reformed Episcopal Church sent his newest suffragan, Ray Sutton, to Pittsburgh, to Bob Duncan, who had led the turn-around of a three-streams, rust belt Episcopal diocese, with a message: “The only way Hitler was defeated in

the Second World War was that the Allies came together.” “As Anglican Christians, our only hope to defeat the Ruler of This World is that we separated ones had to come together.” ... Not only Biblical and Missional, but also United. Then the Lord Himself acted sovereignly. Over the next five years He changed the hearts of countless believers of the Anglican Diaspora. We had to come together. For more than 40 years faithful Anglicans had gone the way of the Reformed Episcopal Church, had been splintering over denominational heterodoxy, prayerbook, and ordination of women to the diaconate and presbyterate. By 2004, both the Common Cause Partnership and the Anglican

Communion Network had come together. A Common Cause Theological Statement was our first fruit. It would become Article I of the Constitution of the Anglican Church in 2009. Moreover, by 2004 the first of the Global life-boats had been launched by Rwanda and Singapore (none will forget the consecrations for the Anglican Mission in America in January 2000), one of whose two bishops was here in Ambridge on Trinity's faculty, the other of which was the church-planting visionary, Chuck Murphy. By 2004, the VISION OF THE MOVEMENT was set: Biblical, Missionary, and United. All decisions would be made with reference to these three values. Two "Godly Accommodations" were unanimously agreed and written into the Constitution and Canons at the Founding of the Anglican Church in North America in 2009. There was no way to unity apart from these accommodations. First: Dioceses were free to be complementarian or egalitarian as to the ordination of women to the diaconate and priesthood, but the whole Church would be complementarian as to a male only episcopate. Second: There would be overlapping diocesan jurisdictions as to the Reformed Episcopal Church, the four Episcopal Dioceses (eventually five) that realigned, and the life-boats emerging from Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, Nigeria, Recife, and Southern Cone. While discomfiting to many, these

godly accommodations are what has made our life possible, and what, given our fruitfulness and growth, unlike any other North American denomination, has consistently seemed to have had the Lord's hand of favor. Also "baked-in" to the DNA of our founding were these commitments: congregations as the chief agency of mission; subsidiarity in practice (doing at the most local level that which which [*sic.*] it can be done effectively there); financing by commitment to tithing; dioceses that serve their congregations and a province that serves them both; an inverted leadership pyramid where what is at the bottom (the congregations) is at the top; a church that shapes, forms, includes and empowers the next generation of leaders; and a province where conflict always seeks a win/win outcome. The final thing I would observe in this very brief summary of the early story that made us who we are today is that in 2009 we also were given a way to articulate our mission as a Province. It radically changed how we saw ourselves, what we talked about, what we were committed to, and what continues to draw so many hungry souls to us: "We were and are called together to reach North America [and the world] with the transforming love of Jesus Christ." Our proclamation would be that of uncompromised Biblical Truth, but our posture would be that of radical and humble love. That's our founding story

## NEW JERSEY MAYOR SAYS TOWN WON'T SEIZE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IF PUBLIC DOESN'T SUPPORT PLAN

BY MARY FRANCES SCHJONBERG | JULY 23, 2025

The following article and photos have been taken from [ENS](#). The first photo shows Christ Episcopal Church in New Jersey.

*[Continued from front page]* The mayor made his latest move a day after a group of residents in the Jersey Shore town of 100,000 [launched a petition drive](#) to rescind the proposed land seizure ordinance, which was first approved on April 30. Such ordinances require a second vote before taking effect.

"I have always been of the belief that elected officials should represent their constituents,"

Rodrick told ENS. "So, we are conducting a public opinion poll, and once we have a better understanding of how the public feels about acquiring the property we will make a determination as to whether or not we are moving forward."

The petition drive will continue, according to Philip Brilliant, one of the organizers. A [separate effort to recall Rodrick](#) is expected to start July 25.



The proposed ordinance would allow the town to acquire the 11-acre Christ Church site and five other properties not adjacent to the church either through voluntary sale or seizure by eminent domain. Rodrick had said he envisioned

turning the property into pickleball courts, a soccer field, a children's playground and a skate park – a plan that first materialized publicly in April after

Christ Church and its partner organizations had proposed building a homeless shelter on part of the property. The shelter proposal had been opposed by Rodrick and some of the church's neighbors, and in June, the town's [zoning board voted against](#) the church's request for a variance.

"I am relieved to learn that Mayor Rodrick has removed the [eminent domain] ordinance from the July 30 agenda as he seeks the wisdom of the

people he serves in Toms River," New Jersey Bishop Sally French told ENS. "Attempts to take a house of worship by eminent domain would be a great injustice to the community Christ Church has served for 160 years. It would also infringe on our religious freedom."

The Rev. Lisa Hoffman, Christ Church's rector, echoed those sentiments. "The leadership of Christ Church has been clear since the April 30 council meeting that the church and property at 415 Washington St. are not for sale," she said. "We continue to stand by this and believe that we have wide community support against the actions introduced by the mayor and council."

Hoffman added that she hopes the township "will respect our right to worship in our church home and continue our mission and ministry to the Toms River community by rescinding the eminent domain ordinance prior to its second reading."

Rodrick told ENS, "It was our belief that the church would be interested in selling the property to us, but we still haven't heard anything from church leadership" in response to "emails and phone calls."



*The 11-acre property belonging to Christ Episcopal Church.*

However, a diocesan spokesperson said that "Bishop French is unaware of official communication from the mayor's office regarding the property, and since Christ Church is not for sale, a meeting on that topic would be inappropriate."

If the church and diocese are not "willing sellers," Rodrick told ENS, he now wants to gauge public support for his plan through a "statistically significant" poll of some 300-500 respondents, financed with his campaign funds.

If the poll indicates support, "then maybe we'll move forward," he said. "If the public does not support it, then I won't. And I won't do that just based on a meeting where people come down to lobby the council, because inevitably you're really just seeing one side."

Rodrick did not make clear whether that polling has begun or how the results

would be made known. "I'm not going to give you the details on it," he said.

Opposition to the eminent domain plan has been vocal and, in some cases, organized. Many people who spoke at the April, May and June council meetings vehemently objected. Christ Church and the diocese also mounted a campaign to oppose Rodrick's efforts. Members attended the council meetings wearing Christ Church T-shirts and carrying signs. Others stood along the Washington Street side of the church property on a regular basis waving signs that read "Save Christ Church" and "People Over Pickleball."



Church members protesting against the land being seized.

The church also drew support from an interfaith group of clergy and lay people and from the wider public. A [Change.org petition supporting the church](#) has been signed by 9,303 people. A [GoFundMe page](#) has raised nearly \$26,300 to help with the church's legal costs. The parish has pledged that any money remaining would go toward Christ Church's outreach ministries.

Meanwhile, Rodrick acknowledged to ENS that, while he had talked in the past about creating downtown parks, he hadn't initiated a formal planning process until April to acquire the Christ Church site and five other properties.

He also indicated that he had been unaware until May that the ashes of 325 people were interred at Christ Church's memorial garden. "The township would not be interested in disturbing any sort of burial ground or memorial garden," he told ENS at the time.

## **QUIZ QUESTION 2:**

**While everyone was gathered together in a room celebrating the [Pentecostal] feast, what sound was heard all around them, as described in Acts?**

- A. Rushing wind
- B. Water gurgling
- C. Fire crackling
- D. Children laughing

## CHIP AND JOANNA GAINES TRIED TO BUILD A BIG TENT. CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS AREN'T HAVING IT.

BY KATHRYN POST | JULY 22, 2025

The following article and photos have been taken from the [Religion News Service](#). The first photo is of Chip and Joanna Gaines during an episode of their show "Fixer Upper."

Celebrities are routinely judged for everything from their fashion choices to the way they [cook their eggs](#). But for those who are both famous and publicly Christian, that scrutiny often broadens to encompass their religious beliefs — even if they're implicit.

The latest case is the Waco, Texas-based home renovation duo Chip and Joanna Gaines, who faced backlash in recent weeks over their decision to feature a gay couple on their new reality show, "Back to the Frontier." While the Gaineses haven't said anything directly about being LGBTQ-affirming, many conservative Christians condemned the move as a betrayal of Christian values and an attempt to normalize queer relationships. On the flip side, some progressive Christians called out what they view as hypocrisy of conservative leaders who are holding the reality stars to a higher moral standard than the president of the United States.

"The Venn diagram of Christians who voted for a rapist and Christians who are outraged over Chip and Joanna Gaines being nice to

gay people is a circle," April Ajoy, author of "[Star-Spangled Jesus: Leaving Christian Nationalism and Finding A True Faith](#)," wrote on X on July 14.

The Gaines debate is among a string of situations that highlight the difficulty of catering to both mainstream and Christian audiences. From the backlash faced by Christian pop musician Amy Grant in 2022 after she agreed to [host her niece's same-sex wedding](#) to the way Christian author Jen Hatmaker's books were [pulled from LifeWay Christian Stores shelves](#) in 2016 after she voiced support for the LGBTQ community, this pattern is nothing new. And in a polarized political climate, some argue the balancing act is becoming increasingly unachievable.



At first glance, “Back to the Frontier,” which debuted on July 10 on HBO Max and the Gaineses’ Magnolia Network, seems catered to evangelical Christians — especially those inspired by modern tradwife, homeschooling and homesteading movements. Chip and Joanna Gaines are executive producers on the eight-episode series, which follows three families spending a summer living like 1880s homesteaders in the grassy Canadian plains west of Calgary, Alberta. The families forgo running water, flushing toilets and electricity, learning to travel in covered wagons and harvest their own crops.

One of those families is the Hanna-Riggs household, which includes husbands Jason Hanna and Joe Riggs, along with their 10-year-old twin sons.

“Joe and I, we’re both the head of our household, like, it’s equal,” Hanna said in episode one. “Coming back to the 1880s, there were no two-dad families.”

The pushback was swift. On July 12, Franklin Graham, son of the late famed evangelist Billy Graham and president of evangelical humanitarian aid organization Samaritan’s Purse, called the Gaineses’ decision to feature the Hanna-Riggs family “disappointing.”

“While we are to love people, we should love them enough to tell them the truth of God’s Word. His Word is absolute truth,” Graham [wrote on X](#). “God loves us, and His design for marriage is between one man and one woman.



*The Hanna-Riggs family as seen on "Back to the Frontier."*

Promoting something that God defines as sin is in itself sin.”

Conservative Christian commentators such as [Allie Beth Stuckey](#) and [Megan Basham](#) joined the call for the Gaineses to repent, as did the [evangelical pastor Mark Driscoll](#), apologist Frank Turek and Joel Berry of the Babylon Bee, a Christian news satire website.

In a statement to RNS, Ed Vitagliano, executive vice president of the conservative evangelical advocacy group American Family Association, said that previously, the Gaineses “stood firm on the sanctity of marriage.”

“We aren’t sure why the Gaineses have reversed course,” he wrote, “but we are sure of this: ‘Back to the Frontier’ promotes an unbiblical view of human sexuality, marriage, and family — a view no Christian should embrace.”

In response to the outcry, pastor and public theologian Kevin M. Young wrote [a satirical headline](#) on X: “BREAKING: Christians furious over

Chip and Joanna Gaines famously forget they pray to a man with two dads,” referring to Jesus, whom the Bible depicts as having a heavenly father (God) and an earthly father (Joseph).

In a conversation with RNS, Young said the backlash is evidence of the kinds of litmus tests the Gaineses and others are subjected to.

“We see within evangelicalism the same thing that we have seen over the last century or so in America society in general, and that is a loss of the middle. People who try to speak to both sides of the ideological spectrum are increasingly unable to do that tenably,” Young said. “And a lot of good, well-meaning folks with great content, like the Gaineses, are getting caught in the middle of that.”

Made famous by their HGTV home-improvement reality TV series “Fixer Upper,” the Gaineses have historically not been shy about their Christian faith. They are both graduates of Baylor University, the world’s largest Baptist university, and discuss their faith in their October 2016 book “The Magnolia Story.”

In November 2016, the couple [faced criticism](#) from progressives after a BuzzFeed story highlighted their [membership at Antioch Community Church](#) in Waco, a nondenominational megachurch whose pastor, Jimmy Seibert, has publicly stood against homosexuality.

More recently, in 2021, the Gaineses [donated \\$1,000](#) to the school board campaign of Chip Gaines’ sister, Shannon Braun, who ran on a platform of opposing critical race theory and discussion of gender identity for the Grapevine-Colleyville Independent School District in Texas. As school board president, she has helped pass [policies](#) that require students to only use bathrooms that align with their sex assigned at birth, that provide more oversight over library materials and that allow teachers to [reject students’ preferred pronouns](#).

Now, though, the couple have drawn fire from Christian conservatives. As the blowback accelerated on social media last week, Chip Gaines on X encouraged people to ask questions, listen and learn.

“It’s a sad Sunday [*sic.*] when ‘non-believers’ have never been confronted with hate or vitriol until they are introduced to a modern American Christian,” he [wrote](#).

When conservative commentator Jon Root asked on X why Gaines was “promoting homosexuality as a Christian,” Gaines [responded](#) by quoting 1 Peter 3:15: “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”

The question of how to welcome LGBTQ folks, and to what extent, has led

to clashes within Christian circles for decades, and disagreements continue to trigger splits and fractures within denominations. In the media, these clashes have made it difficult to appeal to both secular and Christian fan-bases. After Hallmark began featuring gay couples in their popular Christmas films in 2020, Christian and Hallmark star Candace Cameron Bure left the network after 13 years. Instead, she opted to join the Great American Family network, a much smaller but fast-growing network which promotes faith-based programs and [what Bure called](#) “traditional marriage.” Being seen as LGBTQ-affirming is so provocative in certain circles that even popular Christian TV shows such as “The Chosen” haven’t avoided the crossfire; in 2023, it drew [calls for a boycott](#) after a small pride flag was glimpsed on the set.

Today, these divisions are playing out on a larger scale in the political arena. [While roughly 67% of Americans](#) still agree same-sex marriage should be legal, [according to a 2024 report by Public Religion Research](#)

[Institute](#), small but influential conservative constituencies — many of them motivated by their faith — have begun strategizing to overturn *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the Supreme Court ruling that in 2015 legalized same-sex marriage across the U.S. Last month, the Southern Baptist Convention, which remains the nation’s largest Protestant denomination, [adopted a resolution](#) calling for the overturning of *Obergefell*.

Ajoy, a content creator who left conservative evangelicalism, said that in the *Gaineses’* case, being too welcoming toward a gay couple seemed to signal to conservative evangelicals that the *Gaineses* are “no longer on the right side of the culture war.”

“Evangelicalism today in America has traded the red letters for red hats, and we are known for what we’re against, not for what we’re for,” Ajoy told RNS, referring to the words of Jesus in the Bible. “We have traded love for bullying and kindness for cruelty, and it’s all in the name of God.”

### **QUIZ QUESTION 3:**

**Which of these people were with Jesus (NOT watching Jesus) at the transfiguration?**

- A. Elijah and Abraham
- B. Moses and Abraham
- C. Moses and Elijah
- D. God and the Holy Spirit

## ANGLICAN-BACKED ADULT LITERACY MISSION IS CHANGING LIVES IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

JULY 14, 2025

The following article and picture has been taken from [ACNS](#). The photo shows students doing a group presentation at Port Moresby Adult Literacy School.



The ABM reported that “interrupted education is common” in Papua New Guinea, where financial security is not certain and school costs parents dearly in terms of fees, materials and uniforms. The Adult Literacy Programmes offer those over school age who never completed their education a second chance to do so.

The Anglican Board of Mission (ABM) recently shared an account of how one of the missions they aid through funding in Papua New Guinea has provided a second chance for adults at literacy education, working with indigenous communities.

ABM stated that in May this year, 8 men and 8 women graduated from the Moreguina Literacy School. They went on to share that “Across Papua New Guinea, the Adult Literacy Program has a further 318 students enrolled in locations across Port Moresby and Popondota Dioceses. The program is supported by ABM AID through the Australian Government’s PNG Church Partnership Program.”

ABM explained that students complete literacy and numeracy modules, then “teachers work from a flexible curriculum that is led by learners’ interests.” These might include community or business development lessons, healthy island activities or aid in the transition to formal education or employment or even undertaking the Agents of Change course, developed by the Anglican Alliance.

The Secretary General of the Anglican Communion, the Rt Revd Anthony Poggio, recently visited Papua New Guinea during his trip to many of the provinces in Oceania and expressed his

great admiration for the Adult Literacy Programmes he saw there.

Back in March 2025, the Secretary General recounted that "One of the things that I admired [in Papua New Guinea] is the adult literacy initiatives carried out by the church. This is an encouragement to me, personally, as someone from South Sudan, where literacy levels are very low. The program aimed at helping people learn to read and write is so important to me."

Indeed, literacy, or lack thereof, is a concern in the region, as [Asia Pacific Report](#) published in August 2023, that Papua New Guinea's literacy rate was "the lowest in the Pacific". One adult learner from the Popondetta diocese Adult Literacy school, whose education

was interrupted due to a lack of household funds in Grade 6, stated the programme has "helped with my confidence, public speaking, English and leadership skills".

Regarding the value of the programme in making a tangible difference to the lives of young people and their families, the Secretary General noted after his visit to the area, that after completing the programme, which usually lasts around nine months, students are able to go onto secondary school, university and in some cases, have gone on to lead their own businesses. The Adult Literacy Programme demonstrates how access to functional education can effectively disrupt the cycle of poverty and lead to greater opportunities.

#### **QUIZ QUESTION 4:**

**How many people were visibly present at the Transfiguration (NOT counting God the Father)?**

- A. 1
- B. 6
- C. 3
- D. 15

## CHURCH OF ENGLAND NEWSPAPER SUSPENDS PUBLICATION

BY DOUGLAS LEBLANC | JULY 24, 2025

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*The following article has been taken from the [Living Church](#).*

*[Continued from front page]* CEN also published an editorial, “Lucy Letby must be forgiven,” about a nurse who was found guilty of killing seven newborns and trying to kill another seven.

“[There] is now a convincing analysis of the fate of those babies in Chester ... those who monstered Letby must realise that this may have been a mistake,” CEN said. “We must profoundly hope that establishment self-defensiveness will not set in and prevent speedy dealing with this situation.”

In announcing CEN's stepping back from publication, Carey mentioned that its latest owner, the wealthy entrepreneur [Keith Young](#), had kept the paper alive by subsidizing it.

“Keith was generously the sole provider of additional finance to continue supporting the paper and we are now exploring all options to secure a future and hope that you will bear with us as we seek an orderly transition to serve our readers and subscribers, our advertisers and all other partners,” Carey wrote.

Carey said he would continue to send a weekly newsletter “for the foreseeable future.” He does not invest much hope

in CEN continuing as a web-only publication. “That has been considered many times over the years and put into practice during COVID lockdowns,” he said. “It's not workable as far as I'm concerned.”

Nevertheless, he expressed some hope that the paper will have a future.

“And there are talks that are taking place with regard to a new future for CEN,” he said. “I'm optimistic that the CEN—or at least some sort of media presence representing the CEN's generous, orthodox, open evangelicalism—will carry forward in some form or other.”

Carey told The Living Church that the paper's struggle was on his mind as he wrote an obituary about former CEN editor John Kingsley Martin on July 3.

“We've sadly lost a succession of editors of the CEN in the last few years, beginning with Colin Blakely, who tragically died on the job in 2022,” Carey wrote. “Philip Crowe and John King—editors from the 1960s followed and now John Martin, who edited the CEN from 1988 to 1995 and left his mark on religious affairs journalism and church communications.”

## **QUIZ ANSWERS:**

The following questions were taken from Fun Trivia [The Day of Pentecost Quiz](#) and [Gospel II Quiz](#).

**Question 1:** According to the Book of Acts, how many days after Jesus ascended into Heaven did the disciples celebrate Pentecost?

**Answer: D.** Ten

The disciples were accompanied by Jesus' mother Mary and the other members of His family as they traveled to celebrate the Pentecostal feast. The celebration was held early in the morning at Mount Zion where Jesus celebrated his last supper. On that day, one hundred and twenty people were gathered in the room.

**Question 2:** While everyone was gathered together in a room celebrating the [Pentecostal] feast, what sound was heard all around them, as described in Acts?

**Answer: A.** Rushing winds

In Acts 2:2, while the disciples and Jesus' family were gathered in a room celebrating the Pentecostal feast, they all heard the sound of rushing wind swirling around them. The wind was from Heaven and flames hovered over their heads.

**Question 3:** Which of these people were with Jesus (NOT watching Jesus) at the transfiguration?

**Answer: C.** Moses and Elijah

Matthey 17:1-2 describes it this way: "There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus."

The Transfiguration happened shortly before Passover. Jesus was crucified a few weeks after the Transfiguration, days before Passover.

**Question 4:** How many people were visibly present at the Transfiguration (NOT counting God the Father)?

**Answer: B.** 6

In Matthew 17, Matthew tells us that there were six people present visibly and/or physically: Peter, James, John, Jesus, Moses, and Elijah.

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faith, worship, and service.