



HOLY NATIVITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

THE REV. STEVE BATES, RECTOR
THE REV. TOM WELLER, ASSOCIATE

December 10, 2018

The Rev. De Freeman
St. James Episcopal Church
860 N. Section St.
Fairhope, AL 36532

Dear De:

Words can't express my thanks to you and your parish for your help in this difficult time. Your gifts of manpower, supplies and financial support have made all the difference in the world. We know we still have a long road ahead of us, but your assistance and the help of those like you, gives us hope. Your work crews in the early days gave us enough stability to be able to begin helping our neighborhood. Because of your contributions, we were able to spend almost a month distributing supplies from the church. We were able to serve hot meals every day for over three weeks to anyone who needed one. The pre-cooked meals you brought were probably the biggest hit of the entire first month. They fed a lot of people. We began winding down our supply center when we saw most of the demand had been met and as we prepared for the school to move onto the church campus. The school will not be able to be back on their campus until next school year. Currently almost 300 kids are having school in every nook, cranny and creative space they can find at the church. It's glorious chaos, but worth it. Who gets to come to work every day and get 300 hugs? They have leased 15 portable classrooms which will be located on the Church campus and they will be moving into them over the holidays.

We're still in the maze of insurance, estimators and trying to get in line for contractors. Once the school moves out we'll be able to start on our facilities. While progress is daily, the enormity of this can sometimes be overwhelming. The largest of our two hospitals has been closed since the storm and announced last week that they would only be opening back up with 75 beds. That resulted in over 800 layoffs. Also, last week the only in-town mall closed permanently resulting in another 500 layoffs. Over half of our parish are not able to live in their homes (including Lori and me) and are scattered everywhere from beach condos to Destin and Fort Walton. Our military members have either been re-deployed or are in limbo waiting to hear orders. It was announced last week that 80% of all buildings were either destroyed or heavily damaged. About half of the public schools are uninhabitable. Schools are sharing space, with high schoolers attending in the mornings and elementary students in the afternoon/evening. The school system estimates they have 3800 homeless students. The county

published a report last week that said 75% of all trees were lost in the storm. Only one nursing home remains and parishioners who lived in nursing homes have been scattered far and wide.

While all this sounds bleak (and it is), this has been a time where we've also seen the very best in people; not only with those like you who have been assisting but with the community as a whole. As a parish we've thought it important to maintain a sense of normalcy (I refuse to use the term new normal as there is nothing normal about this) as best we can. Our new motto is "blessed are the flexible, for they shall not be broken. We've gone ahead with pre-planned events like our Pig Roast for Camp Beckwith, our Lessons and Carols service, Morning with St. Nicholas, Advent pajama party and rehearsals have begun for the Christmas pageant. Most all of our church programs and outreach ministries have resumed. We've had weddings and funerals despite floors missing and school supplies scattered everywhere. Folks are graciously adapting. Our annual Advent outreach will be able to help a number of families this year in need. With the help of a grant we're going to be able to make sure all of our backpack buddies have some sort of Christmas this year. And one of my favorite things about this season has been that we've decided to skip Advent (don't alert the Advent police). As a community we've had more than our share of waiting, anticipation and talk of end times. So, this year, the tree's already in the church and we're singing Christmas carols to the top of our lungs every Sunday and pretty much ignoring John the Baptist. It's been very meaningful and healing.

Thank you for everything. Please thank your parish. Continue to hold us in your prayers. I am grateful for you all and take comfort in the knowledge that if we need anything I can pick up the phone.

With much love and gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve" with a small cross or plus sign at the end.

Steve+