

Dear Fellow Parishioners:

The St. Thomas search committee and vestry are very pleased to announce that we have called the Rev. Dr. Stephen Edmondson to St. Thomas as our new Rector. We want to share with each of you why we are so excited to have Stephen come to lead us.

The search committee completed a long and thoughtful discernment process leading to this call. After questionnaires, focus groups, profile-writing and lots of prayer we came to understand that in many ways St. Thomas is ready for new challenges and ready to be led in expansive and inclusive ways to a fuller understanding of our faith, our calling and both our social and spiritual lives.

The committee began accepting resumes from candidates in March and committee members were struck by the letter received from Stephen. He had studied our profile, researched our parish and wrote a moving letter which captured the essence of St. Thomas:

“... You have a deep sense of community. You are committed to the care of those entrusted to you, and you are interested in deepening your outreach to the world. You have the capacity to commit yourselves to ambitious projects and see them through to a successful completion. You have embraced your call to lead one another, not resting content simply to follow the direction of the ordained. You are energetic, you embody the blessings of both youth and maturity, and you have kept in touch with your roots in life’s simple pleasures. Most importantly, you are open to challenge and to seeking God’s direction as your journey progresses and as you grow with its progression. All of this makes you an inviting community for me and my family.”

We sent a delegation to interview Stephen, an associate professor at the Virginia Theological Seminary, and to attend a service he led at Immanuel on the Hill. The delegation returned confident that this was a top candidate and someone we would be proud to call to lead St. Thomas.

In speaking with Stephen’s references we found colleagues and parishioners who remarked at how spiritual and prayerful he was. One VTS colleague noted Stephen had handled very controversial and “flammable” issues with deftness and sensitivity allowing all sides to dialogue constructively. His fellow parishioners at St. Mark’s noted his deep involvement with their youth group. Stephen’s career is summarized in the attached bio.

The committee invited Stephen, and each of the four other final candidates, to St. Thomas to meet the vestry and the full Search Committee. Each candidate sat for an intensive interview by the full committee. When the search committee met to make its call it was immediately clear to the committee members that Stephen would be the committee’s choice. On the following day, the search committee presented to the vestry the case for calling Stephen to be our Rector, and the vestry unanimously endorsed the search committee’s choice.

Stephen's first day with us will be Monday, July 16th, so his first Sunday with us will be July 22nd. Please join us in welcoming Stephen and his family that Sunday.

We will be saying goodbye to Jane Barr, our Interim Rector, on Sunday, July 8th, at a reception after the 10:00 a.m. service. We will honor her careful stewardship of our parish family over the last 20 months, and present to her a purse in thanksgiving for her leadership. If you'd like to contribute to the purse, please make your check payable to St. Thomas Episcopal Church and note "Jane's purse" on the memo line.

Thank you all for your patience and understanding throughout the search process. We are looking forward to giving Stephen and his family a great St. Thomas welcome!

In peace,

The St. Thomas Search Committee

The St. Thomas Vestry

THE REV. DR. STEPHEN BUD EDMONDSON

Stephen is currently an associate professor of Church History at Virginia Theological Seminary. He was ordained in 1989 and has served in a variety of churches in Texas, New England and the DC area over the last 17 years, developing programs for youth and children, for families, and for senior citizens, developing lay leadership, offering pastoral care and counseling, developing outreach programs, preaching, celebrating, and visiting people in their homes.

Stephen grew up in Longview, Texas, a small town east of Dallas. His father was a family doctor. After high school Stephen applied and was accepted to Stanford University where he majored in Classical Studies and graduated in 1984. Intensely interested in Theology and already contemplating a life in the ministry, he applied and was accepted to Yale Divinity School where he graduated with his Masters in 1988.

The following year Stephen was ordained in Texas and joined St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church as their assistant Rector. The departure of St. Cyprian's rector required Stephen to take on an early leadership role as lead priest at the church until a new rector could be named and as the headmaster of the Episcopal Day School. He led the worship, provided the pastoral care and led the youth group through an exciting period of growth in numbers and programs.

In 1991, Stephen returned to Yale to continue his studies and obtain his Doctoral degree in Theology. In Connecticut, he attached himself to a cluster ministry of five small congregations in central Connecticut, where he worked on building lay leadership, provided pastoral care and preached on a weekly basis while completing his doctorate, which he received in 1999. (*His thesis at Yale Divinity was on the Calvin's Christology; he subsequently published a book of that title through Cambridge University Press in 2004.*)

That same year, the now Reverend Doctor Stephen accepted a position at Virginia Theological Seminary as Assistant Professor of Church History. His eight years at VTS have been professionally and spiritually rewarding. Stephen taught courses in church history, theology and spirituality, wrote extensively, led the faculty in a comprehensive review and revision of liturgical practices and was promoted and tenured in 2005 as an Associate Professor of Church History.

However, Stephen has always felt the need to be closely connected to real parish life. He joined St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C. as an adjunct clergy where he served as deacon, developed and led the hospitality program and worked actively with the youth group.

Along the way Stephen managed to find time for romance! He met Cynthia Hess at Yale, fell in love, cut off his pony tail and got married. Cyndi, who also received a doctorate in Theology from Yale, has recently given up her position as a visiting professor at St. Mary's College in Maryland, where she taught in their department of Philosophy and Religion. She is currently editing a book manuscript and exploring vocational opportunities with non-profits interested in peace-building, race, and gender. Stephen and Cyndi have a strapping two year old son and another child "on the way". Their family now worships at Immanuel on the Hill in Alexandria where Stephen also serves as an adjunct Priest.