

# In the Spiritual Side

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## St. Philip's New Hope celebrates 100th anniversary

Andrea Strout

Its size sometimes makes people ask, "Is St. Philip's a real church?"

Oh, yes. Dubbed "the little church that could" by some of its parishioners, St. Philip's not only could and would, but has been and intends to keep on serving Bucks Countians for generations.

Small is a big part of the church's gestalt. There is an intimacy to worship at St. Philip's that is evident the moment you step through the door.

The interior of this Episcopal church is Quaker-like in its simplicity, and it looks like the one-room schoolhouse it once was, from 1810, when the building was erected, until the Phillips School closed in 1919 due to falling enrollment. The building was acquired by the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania in 1921.

As its location on Chapel Road in Solebury Township suggests, St. Philip's began life as a chapel — officially a "mission" — becoming a fully-fledged church in 1958. By long tradition, all pledging members are part of a nonprofit corporation called The Friends of St. Philip's and pay dues of \$1 a year, typically collected at the church's annual meeting.

In 2013, The Friends of St. Philip's oversaw the erection of a separate parish house a quarter of a mile up Chapel Road, where the current rector, the Rev. Rev. Michael Ruk, lives. (By somewhat shorter tradition, the rectors of St. Philip's are generally called by their first names: Kyle, Peter, Michael.)

The church's name has historical as well as ecclesiastical significance. St. Philip's is a stone's throw from the Inn at Phillips' Mill and sits on land the Phillips family donated to the school. The decision to name the church after Philip the Apostle, therefore, was



Heads are bowed in prayer outside St. Philip's Church.



The Phillips School was a one-room schoolhouse in what is now St. Philip's Church.

a no-brainer. A small icon in the back of the church depicts St. Philip holding the two barley leaves from the feeding of the 5,000 as told in John 6:7. A fitting patron for a church that has a mini food pantry in its parking lot, open to all 24/7.

Except for the addition of a patio, the church building has kept its original footprint — a fact that

has mostly served it well, as many mainline churches have sagged under the weight of large and aging structures. With the arrival of COVID-19, however, St. Philip's modest square footage became a challenge when the number of worshippers was capped in the low double-digits to keep people six feet apart. At one of St. Philip's Christmas Eve services, the Eucharist was celebrated outside in



Spring is in bloom outside St. Philip's in New Hope.

the rain to avoid turning anyone away.

Since the start of the pandemic, St. Philip's has held most of its regular services, and not a few of its special ones, outside on its seven-circuit labyrinth, designed and installed by late longtime parishioner Elizabeth Bowman. Many people come to sit quietly in St. Philip's meditation garden or walk its labyrinth, especially on World Labyrinth Day.

In addition to its in-person services, St. Philip's live-streams its 8:15 and 10:15 a.m. services on Facebook — a practice it will continue post-COVID to ensure it serves as many people as possible.

The church takes its motto seriously: "All are welcome. And we really mean it." St. Philip's founding year, 1921, had a lot in common with this one. The 1918 flu pandemic was a recent memory (indeed,

many people still suffered sequelae and mourned loved ones). The stock market was headed for dizzy heights; many ordinary people struggled. And the Tulsa Race Massacre, which left as many as 300 Black Tulsans dead, made a mockery of the guarantee of equal protection under the law.

A lot has changed since then, too, much of it for the better. The Episcopal Church — and St. Philip's with it — has leaned into the struggles of the poor and scorned, the marginalized and "othered." Inevitably, this work-in-progress has been imperfect, uncomfortable for some.

On this late April day, however, the church is focused on upcoming plans to celebrate its 100th birthday. In the coming weeks and months there will be the return of St. Philip's original bell, a new banner and a visit by the bishop — joyous but muted events in keeping with pandemic-tide.

## St. Philip's invites public to observe World Labyrinth Day

St. Philip's Episcopal Church (stphilipsnewhope.org) invites the public to observe World Labyrinth Day on May 1 with a prayerful walk of its labyrinth, located on the church lawn at 10 Chapel Road, Solebury.

No specific events are planned, as labyrinth-walking is ideally a contemplative and silent act.

The Labyrinth Society (labyrinthology.org), an international organization headquartered in New York State, has called for people around the world to "Walk as One at 1" o'clock that day for peace and reconciliation.

"Of course, people are invited to walk our labyrinth every day," the Rev. Michael R. Ruk, rector of St. Philip's, said, noting that the church's labyrinth is "open" 24 hours a day, 365 days a week. "But on May 1, they can do so in communion with people all across the globe. Silence in community

is powerful," he added. Labyrinths are spiritual aids that have been around since antiquity. Churches have had labyrinths in their floors since medieval times. One of the most famous labyrinths, at Chartres Cathedral in France, dates from the 13th century.

As early as the 8th century, Christian writers like Boethius saw in the labyrinth a symbol of life itself: a path of light and darkness, confusion and guidance. Pilgrims were encouraged to walk or crawl the path of a labyrinth as a meditative, prayerful search for direction and enlightenment.

The labyrinth at St. Philip's is a 7-circuit design modeled on the one at St. Vitale in Ravenna, Italy, which dates from the 16th century. It is made of brick pavers with a center cross. So central has its labyrinth become to St. Philip's, the church has adopted it as its

symbol. Participation on May 1 is simple. "Simply show up — at 1 p.m. or another time that suits you — and open yourself to the possibilities," Ruk said.

He noted that St. Philip's has created a brochure on the use of its labyrinth, which includes the following instructions: Stand at the outermost ring, become still and center yourself. Try to clear your mind. Begin slowly, prayerfully walking the paths of the labyrinth. Notice how you get close to the center at times, then move away as you proceed. It is not a maze, but a guided route leading to a goal that is not the center, but to return to the place where you began, changed by the experience.

The church hopes to add to the ranks of those who already walk its labyrinth and are changed by the experience. To share insights with the St. Philip's community from your walk, write to info@stphilipsnewhope.org.

For information about St. Philip's and its outreach programs, contact Michael Ruk at 215-862-5782 or michael@stphilipsnewhope.org.

## UUCWC welcomes minister

The Unitarian Universalist Church at Washington Crossing (UUCWC) will welcome the Rev. Yadene Hailu to its online pulpit from May 2 to July 18, while the Rev. Kimberly Wildzewska, parish minister, is on parental leave. Hailu is the community minister of blk earth, a Black centered spiritual wellness project in Tulsa, Okla. She has served Hope Unitarian Church and All Souls Unitarian Church in Tulsa, and was ordained by the three Unitarian Universalist churches of Tulsa, including Church of the Restoration, in 2019.

Her ministry is to be an oracle for ease, liberation, and healing; the pathways to wholeness — to life. Hailu identifies as bi-cultural, Ethiopian-American, cis, Black and a woman. These identities, as well as the privileges with which she moves through the world, shape her perspective and



THE REV. YADENE HAILU

insight on a theology rooted in healing and wholeness. To learn more about her, visit blkearth.org. UUCWC, 268 Washington Crossing-Pennington Road, Titusville, N.J., serves communities in Mercer, Bucks and Hunterdon counties. A Sunday online service is held weekly at 10 a.m. For information, call 609-737-0515 or visit uucwc.org.

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