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## Saint Nicholas visits St. Alban's Episcopal Church;



**The Rev. Jim Parks, a deacon at St. Alban's Episcopal Church, dresses as Saint Nicholas to add to the fun of free food distribution day in December. He is seen here carrying a bag of candy canes and chocolate coins.**

### **Story and Photos**

**By Jeff M. Hardison © Dec. 22, 2016 at 8:47 a.m.**

**LEVY COUNTY** -- One of the highlights of this month's third Wednesday (Dec. 21) food distribution at St. Alban's Episcopal Church on the west side of U.S. Highway 19 north of Chiefland and south of Fanning Springs was a deacon dressed as Saint Nicholas.

The Rev. Jim Parks is a deacon at the church and he has dressed as Saint Nicholas for the past few years during the monthly food distribution in December.

And so outfitted, he gives candy canes and chocolate coins to people.

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This monthly food distribution of groceries is free to people who feel they need it. There are no forms to complete or money to pay, Father Harold Ritchie said. Father Ritchie is the vicar appointed by the bishop of the diocese for this church.



**(from left) Father Harold Ritchie, the vicar; Craig Anderson, food distribution organizer; and Bishop's Warden Steve Lampros are among the many people who make the St. Alban's Episcopal Church Food Pantry a success. While members of the congregation bring in many canned items, most of the food is bought each month by the church to feed the needy.**

Bishop's Warden Steve Lampros, 67, of Trenton is the man who is among the people who established this free monthly food give-away program.

The program from St. Alban's Episcopal Church started in 2004 or 2005, Lampros said, and the program first was held at the depot in Trenton. The food was from the Trenton Food Pantry – back when the late Rick Weder was there, Lampros said.

Carlton Myers is the senior warden in the church. He was on hand Wednesday to help with the food distribution as well.

Over the years, the church moved the program from the Trenton Train Depot.

It was in 2010, when the Saint Alban's Food Pantry program started on the church's grounds, and the food is now purchased from the Bread of The Mighty Food Bank of Gainesville rather than from the Trenton Food Pantry.

When he first began this program, Lampros said, there was 66 cents in the budget. Lampros ran the church for 11 years, and he is still active as the bishop's warden. There is money budgeted every year for this program, he said, and it is always funded.

"God is good all of the time," Lampros said.

Father Ritchie said the church has fed between 90 and 130 people each month since 2010. They are provided with enough food for one week, he said.

"We are blessed by God," Father Ritchie said. "We all feel very blessed. It is more fun and so rewarding to us, that we see it as more for us as the people who are able to give to those who are in need."

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**The address of St. Alban's Episcopal Church is 7550 N.W. 149th Place (north of Chiefland). Saint Alban is venerated as the first recorded British Christian martyr, and is considered to be the British prototypical martyr.**

As for people not being mandated to meet some requirement to “qualify” for the free food, Father Ritchie said “That is between them and God.”

He is certain the food they give is going to the needy.

The church used to make baskets of food, with every basket having the same ingredients. Father Ritchie said they found there were people who threw away items they did not want.

The manner in which this mission works now, he said, is for each person to walk in as if they were going to a grocery store. They are allowed to get “two of these and three of these,” for instance, he said, as they walk passed table after table of bread, canned goods and other groceries.

One very interesting aspect of this food distribution program is that people can have an option to take frozen meat home with them for free.

In 2010, Lampros drafted Craig Anderson to lead organization and implementation of the efforts for the monthly free food distribution each third Wednesday.

During the most recent third Wednesday event, Anderson seemed to be everywhere at once as he directed other volunteers to put pallets here and stack other forms of food there.

Anderson said the truck usually arrives at 1:30 or so and the volunteers like to have the distribution start at 2 p.m.

There is an idea for an improvement in the future, Lampros said. The church would like to add a building to store the food, and it would like to have an electric generator for emergency situations.

Nothing goes to waste, Lampros said. Food that is not given away at this monthly distribution is taken to the Mount Pleasant Baptist Church in southern Chiefland.

The church invites everyone to worship services on Sundays. They are at 8 a.m. and 10:30 a.m.

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There is a special Christmas Eve (Dec. 24) Mass and Service at 10:30 p.m. and everyone is welcome.

As for Saint Nicholas (March 15, 270 - Dec. 6, 343), he was also called Nikolaos of Myra. He was a historic fourth-century Christian saint and Greek Bishop of Myra, in Asia Minor (modern-day Demre, Turkey).

Because of the many miracles attributed to his intercession, he is also known as Nikolaos the Wonderworker. The historical Saint Nicholas is commemorated and revered among Anglican, Catholic, Lutheran, and Orthodox Christians.

Saint Nicholas is the patron saint of sailors, merchants, archers, repentant thieves, children, brewers, pawnbrokers and students in various cities and countries around Europe.

As for the Episcopal Church, the beginnings of the Church of England, from which the Episcopal Church derives, date to at least the second century, when merchants and other travelers first brought Christianity to England.

It is customary to regard St. Augustine of Canterbury's mission to England in 597 as marking the formal beginning of the church under papal authority, as it was to be throughout the Middle Ages.

In its modern form, the church dates from the English Reformation of the 16th century, when royal supremacy was established and the authority of the papacy was repudiated. With the advent of British colonization, the Church of England was established on every continent. In time, these churches gained their independence, but retained connections with the mother church in the Anglican Communion.