

Building Community, One Project at a Time

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by Kristin Sausville

Many parishes throughout the Episcopal Church in Delaware either serve as Charter Organizations for Scouting programs or have children and youth in their congregations who are members of troops. These relationships can strengthen bonds between parishes and their communities, and parishes can also benefit when a Scout completes an Eagle Scout Service Project.

“The Eagle Scout Award is the highest award available to youth members of Scouting America. It is the rank that every scout works toward through advancement in the program,” according to the Scouting America [website](#). Scouts must earn at least twenty-one merit badges, fourteen of which are mandatory, and then they must complete a service project. The scout must demonstrate leadership of others while performing a project for the benefit of their community.

For scouts who belong to a parish in the Episcopal Church in Delaware, that parish is part of their community, and several parishes have benefited from an Eagle Scout Service Project. One such parish is St. Thomas’s, where Matt Sausville recently completed a project.

“We built a labyrinth out in the grove of St. Thomas’s,” said Sausville. “I was inspired from the labyrinth at Camp Arrowhead. I’ve really enjoyed that; it’s one of my favorite activities for Christian education.” His hope is “for people to have an opportunity to reflect, pray, and have a space where the church is more open to the community.”

St. Thomas’s owns a parcel of land adjacent to the church which has a grassy area and large trees. Working together with the property committee and vestry, Sausville chose a location close to a side door from the sanctuary. Together with family, fellow scouts, and several parishioners, Matt led the construction of the labyrinth over a weekend in early August. In addition to determining the location, he had to find a design, lay it out, research and purchase materials, and then direct and take part in the construction. It is a requirement that the scout be the project leader for an Eagle Scout Service Project, handling the research, approval, purchasing, and then leadership of those working on the construction.

Sausville appreciated all of the support he received from the congregation. Members helped with the digging, laying out the bricks, and pouring sand to keep them in place. Other parishioners contributed drinks and snacks. “Even if they weren’t explicitly helping dig, they were still showing their support and appreciation for what I was trying to do,” he said.

Parishioners at St. Thomas's had wanted a labyrinth for a very long time, but it was the kind of project that never seemed to come together. It would come up at meetings where the congregation gathered to discuss hopes and dreams for the future or in conversations among members, but actually moving forward with funding and construction was daunting. An Eagle Scout Service Project, however, requires that the organization benefiting from the project is not responsible for covering any of the cost. It is a gift from the scout, who has the task of securing funding as part of the project. For this project, Sausville specifically researched ways to build it that would minimize ongoing maintenance cost and work for the parish.

St. Thomas's isn't the only parish in Delaware to have a labyrinth worked on by scouts. "Several years ago, the Boy Scouts reconstructed our labyrinth. They did a wonderful job," said Mariann Marston of Christ Church, Dover.

The organization has renamed itself in recent years to Scouting America because of its inclusion of girls in 2018.

St. Barnabas's Parish is the Charter Organization for Troop 1923, which was the first troop for girls in the state. One of their Eagle Scouts, Olivia Jordan, "led a team that built a fire pit and patio at the church in 2022 for her Eagle Scout Service Project," said Patrick Kaser.

Scouting projects — and it's important to remember that the Girl Scouts have the equivalent Gold Award, which requires a "Take Action" project to provide a benefit to the girl's community — are a way for a scout to reflect on their faith communities as they approach adulthood. Eagle Scout Service Projects must be completed before the scout's 18th birthday, so they happen at a time when the scout may be preparing to move away from the parish where they grew up. "This church community has done so much for me throughout my childhood. It meant so much to me to return the favor with something that they had wanted for a long time," Sausville reflected on his project. "It was also a privilege to be able to leave a more lasting impact on my church community."

These projects are a wonderful way for a parish to strengthen ties between the congregation and a scout who is a member or a sponsored troop. These gifts to parishes can serve as reminders of those bonds for many years to come.