

Episcopal JOURNAL

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'Purple' parish in Minnesota builds paths to compassionate political dialogue

By David Paulsen
Episcopal News Service

Within the politically "purple" state of Minnesota, the Rev. Devon Anderson describes her congregation at Trinity Episcopal Church in Excelsior as a "purple parish" — neither red nor blue, but with parishioners who bring viewpoints that touch all points along the political spectrum.

Parishioners at the church in Excelsior, Minn., where Anderson is rector, long felt uncomfortable sharing their political views, and some preferred avoiding such topics altogether at church, she said. But today, the parish is embracing its political diversity. Several church volunteers sported Trinity name badges as they helped stage a local candidate event in mid-October at a community center in the adjoining city of Shorewood, about five miles north of the convention center in Chaska where the Episcopal Church's Executive Council met in October.

The event, through a partnership with the local chamber of commerce and League of



Trinity Episcopal Church in Excelsior, Minn., jointly hosts a candidate meet-and-greet with the local chamber of commerce and League of Women Voters branch.

Photos/David Paulsen/ENS

Women Voters branch, was part of Trinity's effort to turn what could be a liability into an opportunity for promoting open, civil discourse. Anderson said she saw the congregation as an "incubator" for compassionate dialogue across political divides.

"If we have this parish — we care about each other, we celebrate the sacraments together, we're really focused on building relationships with each other — could we not also use that as a training ground for being out in the community as respectful, kind people?" asked

Anderson, who is a member of Executive Council.

On Oct. 16, that plan seemed to be hitting its mark. A roar of conversation filled the South Shore Community Center that evening as dozens of voters met with candidates for office in communities around the Twin Cities' west suburbs. Signs, buttons, postcards and banners — Tonka Bay mayor, Hennepin County sheriff, Excelsior City Council, Minnesota House of Representatives — decorated all corners of the room. Some candidates placed cookies on their assigned card tables to sweeten their pitches for support.

Kelly Morrison, who is running for a state House seat, is also a member of Trinity. Her church's efforts to encourage people to talk and listen without prejudging each other based on political beliefs inspired her, she said. "I'm a proud Democrat, but I don't want conversations to end before they begin. We're all on the same team."

Christian teachings, such as loving your neighbor and welcoming the stranger, help inform Christians' actions as they enter the public sphere, she said. They're "what all of this

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Episcopal Asiamerica Ministries convocation examines 'Asian' identity

By Lynette Wilson
Episcopal News Service

When the Rev. Bao Moua, the first Hmong woman ordained in the Episcopal Church, presided over the closing Eucharist at the triennial Episcopal Asiamerica Ministries (EAM) National Consultation, it was a big deal.

"One of my motivations is to encourage young women to go into ministry," Moua said after the service.

In the Asian-cultural context, which remains deeply rooted in patriarchy, women often struggle to hear the call, let alone follow it, she said. By example, she intends to show young women that they, too, can serve in both ordained and lay leadership roles in the church: "to find the balance in our culture and ourselves to stand alongside men," said Moua, who serves as a priest associate at Holy Apostles Church in St. Paul, Minn.

Throughout the consultation, women occupied leadership roles: serving at the altar, moderating the three panel discussions and leading workshops.



Photo/Lynette Wilson/ENS

The Rev. Bao Moua, the first Hmong woman ordained in the Episcopal Church, center, presides over the Oct. 1 closing Eucharist of the triennial Episcopal Asiamerica Ministries National Consultation. Assisting her is the Rev. Polly Shigaki, a deacon at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Seattle, right.

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CONVERSATIONS

How to be an angry Christian



By Pamela A. Lewis

BACK IN 1976, a friend and I saw the movie “Network,” starring Peter Finch as the fictional and rapidly unraveling TV news anchor Howard Beale, who was mad (in both senses of the word) about all that ails America. Along with everyone else in the theater, we laughed ourselves silly over the now-famous scene when he exhorts viewers to stick their heads out their window and yell, “*I’m mad as hell, and I’m not going to take this anymore.*” It was hilarious when Beale commanded people to do this; funnier still that they did it.

This country’s hackles have risen markedly over the last two years, and more recently during the Senate Judiciary Committee Hearings of then-Supreme Court nominee (and now Justice) Brett Kavanaugh. Even the American eagle looks fiercer than usual. Some observers have argued that this “anger” should be upgraded to “rage,” prompting author Rebecca Traister, whose recently published book “Good and Mad: The Revolutionary Power of Women’s Anger” to observe, “Rage is all the rage.”

Of course, anger is not new to America. Historically, it has been the driving force behind our civil rights movements and other expressions of activism.

We all get angry. If we recall our teenage years, we will remember that they often were marked by some amount of anger: anger about acne, anger over not fitting in, anger with friends, anger with parents, and the list goes on. Whenever I displayed pouty anger at home, my mother would tell me, “Your face will stay that way if you can’t stop being angry.” She was not indifferent to my anger, but she wanted to make the point that it can have lasting (and unattractive) effects.

But I also grew up hearing — especially from older, church-going adults — that God did not like angry people, that

anger was “not Christian” and that anger was a “sin.” This thinking is still alive and well, sustained not only by mainstream media that often takes a monolithic view of Christians as all meek and mild milquetoasts who never blow a gasket but also by some parts of the Christian community itself that regard anger as contrary to the Christian way of life.

Howard Beale and his fellow newscasters were not people of faith. But those of us who are and who may have difficulty reconciling anger with their faith identity need to know that it is possible to step away from lingering and damaging mythologies about being angry while being Christian.

Although there are many good books on the subject of Christians and anger, my primary resource is the Bible itself, where anger and wrath feature frequently in both the Old and New Testaments, and where the anger of numerous characters moves them to commit heinous acts that always produce disastrous outcomes. Jealous anger causes Cain to murder Abel. Moses’ anger and frustration with the Israelites causes him to disobey God’s command, resulting in his being denied entrance into the Promised Land. Haman plots the death of Mordecai and of all the Jews in Persia because Mordecai had not shown him respect — and ends up dying on the gallows prepared for Mordecai.

There also are several psalms where the author, in his anger and distress, calls upon God to rain down his retributive wrath on evildoers.

God also gets angry. In anger, God banishes Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden for their disobedience to his supreme authority. Jesus directs his anger at the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and at the moneychangers for defiling his father’s house. In these instances, God’s anger is righteous, not sinful; it is intended to correct human failure, rather than being self-serving. Yet in those examples of divine anger, there is an over-

lay of self-control. In this regard, I have found the Epistle of James particularly helpful: “Wherefore my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God” (James 1:19-20 – KJV).

We also might look to the numerous men and women throughout history who are towering examples of “angry Christians,” from Martin Luther King, Pauli Murray, Fannie Lou Hamer, Oscar Romero and Robert Kennedy, to (Mr.) Fred Rogers. These and countless others were, like Howard Beale, “mad as hell” about what was wrong in the world and in need of correction. Despite their differences, they held in common the man-

ner in which they wielded their anger, which reflected and was an extension of their character.

Anger is our God-given gift and a component of our humanity. To avoid expressing it can be detrimental to our emotional and physical health. But mature people of faith express anger without inflicting harm to themselves or to others. They ask whether their anger is aimed at the right target, and whether they indeed are feeling anger or something else.

We can be angry and not sin. We can be mad as hell without making it hell for everyone else. ■

Pamela A. Lewis, who is based in New York, writes on topics of faith.

OPINIONS

The “Conversations” page seeks a range of thought and opinion throughout the church. Letters to the editor and ideas for opinion columns may be sent to editorial@episcopaljournal.org.

The posts below are from the comments section of Episcopal News Service’s Facebook page. Some have been edited for length. Episcopal Journal encourages readers to write directly to us at the e-mail address above or to post comments on our Facebook page.

Church report shows attendance decline

The parochial report might consider renewal and growth in areas other than a body count and pledge count. It might do a new thing and count things like how much money is given away by the parish, how many hungry are fed in town and how many pounds of food are supplied to the food bank. These, more than the number of people in the pews, are an indicator of health in the parish.

*Robin Teasley
Petersburg, Va.*

At some point in time we have to ask whether or not God is big enough to transcend partisan politics and if our commitment to progressive democratic politics is worth making our church odious to that segment of the population that doesn’t share our partisan views.

*Kenneth Knapp
Alexandria, Va.*

Basic math lesson here: If attendance is dropping and average donation is rising, then only those who can donate more are staying. This begs a couple of questions. Are our parishes not serving the less fortunate? Is [the Episcopal Church] becoming more elitist?

*Erin Garlock
Cleveland*

Lessons should be garnered from other denominations that are not suffering our losses. What can we learn that will help us grow?

*Christopher Sonsteng
Portland, Ore.*

FROM THE EDITOR’S DESK



This month, the editorial is written by Sharon Sheridan, a candidate for holy orders in the Diocese of Newark

READING THE DAILY headlines as dying leaves coat our lawns and the days shorten, it’s easy to feel as though we’ve entered a season of fear.

Ugly partisan battles rage in advance of the midterm elections. A journalist dies under mysterious, and reportedly brutal, circumstances in a Saudi Arabian consulate. Migrants fleeing poverty and violence evoke impassioned resistance from government officials in the lands where they seek refuge. Hurricane Michael, one of the most powerful recorded storms ever to hit the U.S. mainland, batters the Gulf Coast, following Hurricane Florence, which flooded much of the Carolinas and beyond.

Everything from polarizing politics to changing weather patterns seems part of a frightening, downward spiral as we move toward winter’s darkness.

But Christians view such times through a lens of

hope. We are approaching Advent, which reminds us, even as the daylight dwindles, that Jesus — the light of the world that darkness cannot overcome — approaches as well. We know that the love of God casts out fear and that we are called, not to reject or torture or abandon our neighbors, but to embrace and serve them.

In this issue, we see examples of many Episcopalians living this out. In Minnesota, members of a politically “purple” parish are bring people of differing viewpoints together for respectful conversation. In Washington, D.C., the ashes of gay college student Matthew Shepard — whose killing sparked national outrage and awareness of hate crimes — are being interred at our national cathedral in a symbol of God’s love for all people. Members of Executive Council have undergone racial-reconciliation training. And across the South and in Puerto Rico, Episcopalians are helping hurricane victims recover.

Advent reminds us not to react to the impending darkness with fear. Yes, winter is coming; but so is Jesus, who beckons us to shine instead with love. ■

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NEWS

Matthew Shepard to be interred at Washington National Cathedral

By David Paulsen
Episcopal News Service

Twenty years after the brutal murder of gay college student Matthew Shepard sparked national outrage, his ashes will be interred at Washington National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., after a public service of remembrance.

Diocese of Washington Bishop Marian Budde and retired New Hampshire Bishop Gene Robinson, the Episcopal Church's first openly gay bishop and an acquaintance of the Shepard family, was scheduled to lead the Service of Thanksgiving and Remembrance for Matthew Shepard on Oct. 26. Until now, Shepard's parents had not settled on a

final resting place for his remains out of concern the site would be vandalized. As they approached 20 years since their son's death, Robinson helped the family make arrangements at the cathedral.

The tragedy of Shepard's death is still a call to the nation to reject bigotry and "instead embrace each of our neighbors for who they are," the Very Rev. Randy Hollerith, dean of the cathedral, said in a news release. "The Shepard family has shown extraordinary courage and grace in keeping his spirit and memory alive, and the cathedral is honored and humbled to serve as his final resting place."

Shepard, 21, was a student at the University of Wyoming in Laramie when a passerby found him beaten and tied to a fence in October 1998. He died later at a hospital. The crime ignited an outcry against the prevalence of anti-gay violence.

His 1998 funeral was held at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Casper, Wyo., the congregation where he had served as an acolyte. Shepard also had attended the Canterbury Club while at college.

"Matt loved the Episcopal Church and felt welcomed by his church in Wyoming," his mother, Judy Shepard, said in

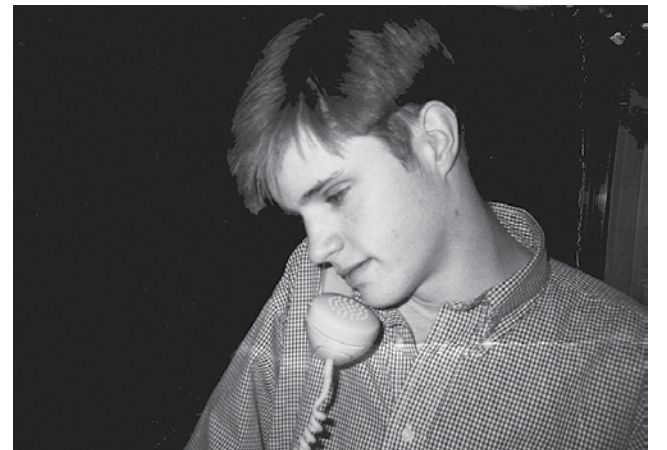
a cathedral news release. "For the past 20 years, we have shared Matt's story with the world. It's reassuring to know he now will rest in a sacred spot where folks can come to reflect on creating a safer, kinder world."

About 200 people are interred at Washington National Cathedral, including President Woodrow Wilson and Helen Keller. Shepard's interment will be a private ceremony, but the service of remembrance will be open to the public and could draw a capacity crowd of 1,500 to 2,000 people, the cathedral's chief communications officer, Kevin Eckstrom, told Episcopal News Service.

The site may become something of a pilgrimage stop within the LGBTQ community, Eckstrom said.

Budde expressed gratitude that Shepard's family would trust the cathedral to protect his ashes.

"If it were an open site anywhere in the country, there's no guarantee" the remains would be protected, she said. "A lot has changed in 20 years, but not everything has changed — we're still prone to the kind of violence that dehumanizes people."



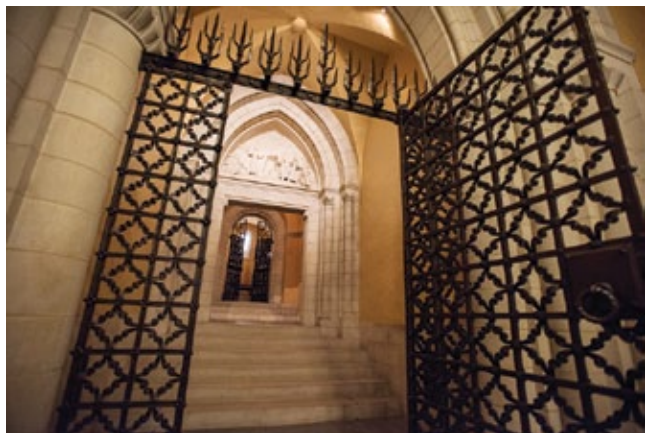
Photo/courtesy of Washington National Cathedral

Matthew Shepard was active in his Episcopal congregation in Casper, Wyo.

While the Episcopal Church has expressed "shameful" anti-LGBTQ sentiment in the past, it is now in a "vastly different place," she said. The denomination has ordained openly gay priests since at least 1989 and instituted two new marriage rites in 2015 that can be used by priests to wed same-sex couples.

Quoted in The New York Times, she concluded, "It felt really important for us to say that we believe LGBTQ people are beloved children of God, not in spite of their identities, but because of who they are — who God created them to be." ■

Religion News Service contributed to this article.



Photo/Danielle E. Thomas

Matthew Shepard will be interred in Washington National Cathedral's columbarium crypt, located in the Chapel of St. Joseph of Arimathea.

Council addresses issues of finance and racial reconciliation

Canon reports migration ministries may lose federal contract

By David Paulsen
Episcopal News Service

Executive Council, in its first meeting since July's General Convention, spent four days in mid-October focused primarily on orientation, training, leadership appointments and relationship-building at a conference center in suburban Minneapolis. It approved a handful of resolutions on financial matters, including the 2019 church budget, the House of Deputies president's salary and diocesan assessment waivers for six dioceses.

Members also received briefings from church officers and staff members, including a bleak assessment of the future of the church's refugee resettlement work from the Rev. Charles Robertson, the presiding bishop's canon for ministry beyond the Episcopal Church.

Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM), one of nine agencies with federal contracts to resettle refugees in the United States, expects to learn in the coming weeks if its contract will be renewed. This comes at a time when the Trump administration has dramatically reduced the number of refugees being resettled. The odds are not in EMM's favor, Robertson told the council's Ministry Beyond the Episcopal Church

Committee.

"If we were going to bet on it, we'd bet we're not going to make the cut," Robertson said. He predicted only two of the nine would receive contracts. Though unlikely, he said, it is still possible Episcopal Migration Ministries will be one of the two.

Executive Council is the church's governing body during the three years between General Conventions. In July, the convention adopted a \$133.8 million 2019-2021 budget that reflects the presiding bishop's priorities of evangelism, racial reconciliation and justice, and creation care.

"Council's job is to take that three-year budget and make it into three one-year budgets," the Rev. Mally Lloyd of the Diocese of Massachusetts said during her Finance Committee report.

The council approved a 2019 budget, as well as compensation for the second half of 2018 for the Rev. Gay Clark Jennings, the House of Deputies president, based on a plan endorsed by General Convention. The Executive Council resolution approved \$210,000 a year for Jennings' position.

The issue of diocesan assessments generated extended discussion. Under the current triennial budget, each diocese is expected to contribute 15 percent

to churchwide operations. This is a reduction from past budgets, and some dioceses historically have fallen short of even the lower target.

Dioceses that fail to pay their assessments may be excluded from churchwide grant programs, though they also may apply for waivers allowing them to forgo some or all of the required amounts.

"The only criteria for receiving a waiver is financial hardship," Lloyd said,

emphasizing that the process is not intended to be punitive. The committee in charge of following up with dioceses about their assessments emphasizes listening and conversation and welcomes "baby steps" toward full financial participation, she said.

The council granted waivers to six dioceses: Arizona, Haiti, Mississippi, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands and West Texas.

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AROUND THE CHURCH

Youth corps seeks applicants



Episcopalians ages 21-30 can apply for 2019-2020 placements with the Young Adult Service Corps, the international missionary program of the Episcopal Church. YASC volunteers serve throughout the worldwide Anglican Communion, working alongside partners in administration, agriculture, communication, development and education. Potential placements include (but are not limited to) Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, England, Honduras, Hong Kong, Panama, the Philippines, South Africa, Taiwan and Tanzania.

The application deadline is Jan. 11. For more information, visit www.episcopal-church.org/young-adult-service-corps.

— Episcopal Church Public Affairs Office

Grant boosts N.C. program

The Diocese of North Carolina has received a nearly \$1 million grant to help establish Reimagining Curacies, a program designed to form newly ordained clergy into community-conscious leaders dedicated to cultivating authentic community and racial reconciliation. It is part of Lilly Endowment Inc.'s Thriving in Ministry, an initiative to support religious organizations as they create or strengthen programs to help pastors build relationships with experienced clergy who can serve as mentors and guide them through key leadership challenges in congregational ministry.

While traditional curacies place new priests in one congregation for two or three years, this new model will assign cohorts of three priests to three vibrant congregations near each other for three years, with each priest serving one year in each congregation. These placements will be geographically proximate to one another but differ in size, liturgical preference, racial and ethnic composition, community context and specialized ministries. This will allow priests to experience the range of challenges and gifts North Carolina communities offer.

— Diocese of North Carolina



OBITUARIES

Sherry Denton

Former Executive Council member Sherry Denton, 75, of Salina, Kansas, died Sept. 26. Born in Abilene, Texas, she worked as a Registered Pharmacist for 50 years. She



Denton

served as president of the Kansas Pharmacists Association in 2002 and was named Pharmacist of the Year in 2005. She was also the second recipient of the University of Kansas School of Pharmacy's Distinguished Service Award, which is presented for selfless and sustained professional service and leadership.

Denton was a member of the Episcopal Church of the Incarnation and was a licensed lay reader for the Diocese of Western Kansas. She served on Executive Council, as president of Province VII and as General Convention deputy. She also served on the diocesan Commission of Ministry and standing committee, as a board member of St. Francis Community Services, and as diocesan secretary for 10 years. A memorial service was held Oct. 11 at Christ Cathedral Church in Salina.

— Episcopal Journal

Mary H. Miller

Presiding Bishop Michael Curry preached and Diocese of Maryland Eugene Taylor Sutton officiated at a celebration of the life of Mary H. Miller on Oct. 3 at her home parish of St. James' Church in Baltimore. Curry noted Miller's role in getting the church on board with its current priorities, including reconciliation.

Miller was a revered leader of the Episcopal Peace Fellowship, where she was nicknamed "Mrs. EPF." In 2012, she received EPF's John Nevin Sayre Award for her exemplary witness to nonviolent peacemaking. She served as the fellowship's executive secretary from 1989 to 2001 and then as a member, treasurer and chair of its executive council. She also served on Executive Council and helped champion the registry for Conscientious Objectors. And she provided leadership for The Consultation during the latter years of her ministry.

— EPF, Diocese of Maryland

Dennis Glen Michno

The Rev. Canon Dennis Glen Michno, author of "A Priest's Handbook: The Ceremonies of the Church," died Sept. 26 at age 71.



Michno

The son of Polish Roman Catholic parents living in Mount Prospect, Ill., he started piano lessons at age 5 and was playing in Chicago-area churches by age 8. He completed degrees in piano, harpsichord and organ performance at the Juilliard School in New York and served as musical director of a synagogue in Brooklyn while attending General Theological Seminary.

Michno was a consultant to the Standing Liturgical Commission as it prepared the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. He wrote "A Manual for Acolytes: The Duties of the Server at Liturgical Celebrations" as well as "A Priest's Handbook." During 11 years at Christ Church, Bayfield, Wisc., he composed more than 700 gradual psalms.

— The Living Church

EPISCOPAL LIVES

Kansas, Arizona elect bishops

The Rev. Cathleen Chittenden Bascom, from the Diocese of Iowa, was elected on the second ballot on Oct. 19 as the 10th bishop



Bascom

to lead the Diocese of Kansas. Bascom is the first woman to be elected bishop since the diocese formed in 1859. This also marked the first time in the history of the Episcopal Church that a bishop heading a diocese was elected from an all-female slate of candidates.

On Oct. 20, the Diocese of Arizona elected its first female bishop. The Rev. Jennifer Anne Reddall, rector of Church of the Epiphany in New York, was elected to be the sixth bishop of the diocese on the first ballot from among three candidates.



Reddall

Bascom is assistant professor of religion and philosophy at Waldorf University in Forest City, Iowa. She previously was dean of the Cathedral Church of St. Paul in Des Moines, Iowa, and rector of St. Stephen's in Newton, Iowa. From 1993 to 2001, she led ministry efforts at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas.

Reddall grew up in California. After graduating from Yale University with a degree in theater studies, she joined the Episcopal Urban Intern Program in Los Angeles. She graduated from General Theological Seminary in New York with a Master of Divinity degree in 2002.

— Dioceses of Kansas and Arizona

Public affairs officer named

Nancy Davidge of Marblehead, Mass., has been named Episcopal Church public affairs officer.

"Nancy proved herself extraordinarily capable during her tenure as our interim, and I'm truly excited she's joining us full-time," said the Rev. Geoffrey Smith, chief operating officer of the church. "Nancy's strategic thinking, and her years of expertise working with the press and communicators across the Episcopal Church have earned her respect and trust from around the church."



Davidge

Davidge is part of the Office of Communication, with responsibility for disseminating news and messages from the Episcopal Church and providing information and other resources to media representatives reporting on the church.

Davidge most recently served as principal of The Davidge Group, which offers strategic marketing and communications services to help organizations and businesses tailor messaging to target audiences.

She began her career working for the Girl Scouts, and then spent 20 years in senior level marketing and communications positions for regional and national health care companies. Davidge then made a career shift to educational institutions, including Episcopal Divinity School, where she served as director of marketing and communication for eight years before joining the Episcopal Church Foundation as founding editor of ECF Vital Practices in 2010. An active member of Episcopal Communicators, Davidge served for six years on the board of directors, including three as president.

— Episcopal Church Public Affairs Office

Development director retiring

Tara Elgin Holley, Episcopal Church development director since 2016, was scheduled to retire Oct. 31.



Holley

Holley researched and increased the church's mailing list, adding close to 2,000 qualified donors. She also introduced an annual appeal supporting the mission and ministry of the Episcopal Church as well as raising funds for historically black colleges and universities and Episcopal Migration Ministries.

Holley will continue on a contract through the end of this year to complete several development projects she has spearheaded, while the Executive Leadership Team assesses the scope and structure of the continuing work. Treasurer and Chief Financial Officer Kurt Barnes will provide oversight supervision of the department during this transition.

— Episcopal Church Public Affairs Office

Nashotah House appoints president

Garwood P. Anderson has become the first layperson to be appointed provost and president of Nashotah House Theological Seminary in Nashotah, Wisc. Anderson had become acting dean in August 2017 and interim dean in January 2018. During his tenure, Nashotah House has reversed its enrollment decline and had a 50 percent growth in its residential student body in the last year.



Anderson

The seminary also is launching a new institutional structure, dividing the office of dean/president into the work of two executive leaders. As provost, Anderson will tend to the seminary's academics, formation, worship and community. A chief advancement officer will be hired to nurture the seminary's constituencies and advance its reputation, providing resources to support its growing programs.

— Nashotah House

AROUND THE CHURCH

Numbers decline, but what does it mean?

By David Paulsen
Episcopal News Service

When the annual report of church attendance and membership showed a continuing downward trend across the Episcopal Church, a familiar mix of hand-wringing, naysaying and soul-searching about the denomination's future ensued.

"Facing more Episcopal Church decline" was the headline in the biweekly publication *The Living Church*, on an analysis of the latest numbers by the Rev. David Goodhew, director of ministerial practice at Durham University's Cranmer Hall in Durham, England.

"The church deserves congratulation for the detail, accuracy, and especially candor it shows in sharing its data," Goodhew wrote. "Beyond that, it has to be said that the news is bad."

Churches annually submit parochial reports of data including active members, average pledges and average Sunday attendances. The church releases the cumulative data yearly. The numbers released in August show that, over five years, the number of active baptized members in the church's domestic dioceses has dropped 10 percent to 1.7 million. Sunday attendance is down 13 percent. There are 175 fewer parishes and missions reporting parochial data than in 2013. The 10-year trend is even more sobering, particularly in dioceses hit by sharp membership drops following splits over doctrinal disagreements, including

Forth Worth, Pittsburgh, San Joaquin and South Carolina. The one bright spot churchwide is that the average pledge has been increasing each year.

Such data generates a fair amount of discussion within the church each year. On Aug. 30, Kevin Miller, an Episcopalian from Massachusetts, raised the issue in the Episcopal Evangelists group on Facebook.

"What can we do to buck this trend? Lord help us!" Miller said while sharing *The Living Church's* analysis.

Responses ranged from the hopeful to the practical. Stop promoting "gimmicks" like Ashes to Go (distributing Ash Wednesday ashes at train stations, street corners and other locations outside churches), some said. Others suggested looking beyond the walls of the church for evangelism opportunities rather than obsessing about filling the pews.



Photo/Mike Patterson/ENS
Presiding Bishop Michael Curry begins an impassioned sermon before a packed audience at a revival held at General Convention on July 7 in Austin, Texas.



Photo/Mary Frances Schjonberg/ENS

Diocese of Pittsburgh Bishop Dorsey McConnell, right, and the congregation at Calvary Episcopal Church in Pittsburgh listen to Presiding Bishop Michael Curry during Eucharist on Feb. 5, 2017.

The Rev. Chris Arnold, rector at Trinity Episcopal Church in Oshkosh, Wisc., issued a back-to-basics call. "The church will shrink until it rediscovers its primary purpose, which is to be a community of pilgrim disciples, supporting one another in the art and craft of prayer," he said.

The Episcopal Church is not the only mainline Protestant denomination suffering from decline. In an ABC News/Washington Post poll released in May, 36 percent of Americans identified as Protestant — down from 50 percent in 2003. Overall, the number of Americans identifying as Christians declined from 83 percent to 72 percent over the same period, while those who claim no religion doubled.

Weekly attendance at religious services of all faiths dropped from 39 percent in 2007 to 36 percent in 2014, according to the Pew Research Center's Religious Landscape Study. In a separate Pew survey released in August, 37 percent of Americans who don't attend religious services frequently said it was because they practiced their faith in other ways. An additional 23 percent said they hadn't found a place of worship that they like.

Seen in this broader context, the Episcopal Church is not alone in facing the "challenge of understanding broad social changes" that are affecting American Christian churches, said the Rev. Michael Barlowe, executive officer of General Convention, whose staff collects the parochial report data.

Declining membership and attendance numbers represent one snapshot

of the Episcopal Church, and much can be learned from that data, Barlowe said. "We shouldn't be afraid of that. It doesn't mean we're doing something wrong."

Those numbers don't tell the full story of the church's good work, Barlowe said. The Episcopal Church, like other denominations, still emphasizes measurements and funding models established hundreds of years ago, when the Christian church was a more central institution in American society, he said. Today's church is engaged in ministries that expand its spiritual footprint in ways the parochial reports may miss, such as food pantries or Bible studies in coffee shops.

"We need to grow in every way," he said.

An important way to grow is by starting new congregations, said the Rev. Michael Michie, the Episcopal Church's staff officer for church-planting infrastructure. The Episcopal Church has approved more than \$8 million to start new congregations and regional ministries from 2013 through 2021. Michie works closely with recipients of those grants to ensure they get the backing they need.

Even the 86 new ministries planted from 2012 to 2017 likely wasn't aggressive enough, Michie said in a blog post about the parochial report data.

"Just imagine how [the Episcopal Church] would change if we set this as a priority," he wrote. "It would change the way we look for leaders, educate and train clergy, allocate resources and run dioceses. Decline makes us want to circle

continued on page 11

Atlanta center to memorialize lynching victims

The names of 600 victims of lynchings in Georgia will be read aloud Nov. 2 during a service at the Absalom Jones Episcopal Center for Racial Healing in Atlanta.

Four bronze panels to be unveiled at the service are inscribed with the names of each person known to have been lynched in Georgia between 1866 and 1964, along with an acknowledgment that other people whose number and identities remain unknown also were lynched.

"The service concludes the diocese's three-year commitment to making pilgrimages, marker placements, memorial services and educational programs to remember the lynched and to explore lynching's support of the terrorism associated with racism," said Catherine Meeks, executive director of the center.

"The purpose of this work is help us to make the connection between the intersection of slavery, lynching, the prison-industrial complex, the death penalty and 21st-century police killings which are known as extrajudicial killings," Meeks said. "Along with this, we create the possibility for healing to oc-

cur as we remember and call the names of the lynched and move away from the state of denial that makes healing impossible."

In October 2016, a pilgrimage to the Douglass Theater in Macon, Ga. visited the spot where a 1922 lynch mob dumped the body of John "Cockey" Glover. A marker in front of the historically African-American theater was dedicated commemorating the lynching of Glover and 14 other men in the Macon and Middle Georgia area, along with an unknown number of others whose names may never be documented.

Last October, a pilgrimage to Athens, Ga., included a service, workshops and dedication of a marker commemorating 56 people lynched in Clarke County and surrounding counties along with those whose names remain unknown.

For almost two decades, the Diocese of Atlanta has required anti-racism training and created a commission to accomplish that mandate. The work of that commission was folded into the Absalom Jones Episcopal Center for Racial Healing at its creation in 2018.

— Diocese of Atlanta

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NEWS

Gulf Coast churches assess damage after Hurricane Michael

By Lynette Wilson
Episcopal News Service

In the days after powerful Hurricane Michael slammed the Gulf Coast, Episcopal churches there continued to assess the damage in its wake, with some in the hardest-hit coastal areas still in the rescue phase.

“We’re at a time when every tree is down and every roof is compromised,” said Dwight Babcock, diocesan administrator for the Episcopal Church of the Central Gulf Coast. “This [recovery] is a marathon, not a sprint. We just don’t know what we’re looking at.”



Photo/Christ Church via Facebook

At Christ Church, Monticello, Fla., workers board up windows as Hurricane Michael approaches.

On Oct. 10, Hurricane Michael made landfall near Panama City, Fla., as one of the strongest hurricanes ever to hit the mainland United States, killing 19 people. A Category 4 hurricane packing 155 mph winds, Michael wiped out trees and flattened buildings. Five days later, thousands of people remained without electricity.

On Oct. 12, Babcock and Central Gulf Coast Bishop Russell Kendrick traveled east from Pensacola to Panama City and other affected areas to visit some of the 11 affected churches. The bishop made a second trip the following day with a small group to distribute generators and other emergency supplies, said Babcock.

Ten of the 11 damaged churches held services “in one form or another,” on Oct. 14 — some inside the churches, some outdoors in pavilions, he said.

“From Highway 79 to the eastern edge of our diocese, the road conditions are still not safe for anyone to travel,” said Kendrick in a video posted on the diocese’s website. “Please be patient. Let’s let the trained responders do their jobs and make the conditions safe so we can get in there and help as necessary.”

The Episcopal Church of the Central Gulf Coast created a Hurricane Relief Hub, listing ways to donate to hurricane relief efforts. The diocese also offers emergency-preparedness and response resources. The diocese includes the Florida Panhandle and parts of southern Alabama.

Some of the inland communities in



Photo/Carlo Allegri/REUTERS

First responders and residents walk along a main street following Hurricane Michael in Mexico Beach, Fla., on Oct. 11.

Georgia and further into the Southeast that Hurricane Michael affected already were working to recover from Hurricane Florence. That storm made landfall as a Category 1 storm on Sept. 14 near Wrightsville Beach, N.C. The Diocese of East Carolina, which covers North Carolina’s coast, also has issued an appeal for support.

The Diocese of Georgia reported significant damage from Hurricane Michael in Albany, Brainbridge, Americus and the surrounding counties. Tree damage was significant in Albany, affecting the infrastructure and leaving many without pow-

er or potable water. In Bainbridge and Decatur County, roofs were blown off and trees took out power lines, blocked streets and crashed into houses, Episcopal Relief & Development reported.

“The local dioceses are continuing to assess the damage caused by the storm,” said Katie Mears, senior director of Episcopal Relief & Development’s U.S. Disaster Program, in a statement on its website. “Disasters have three phases: rescue, relief and recovery. We are prepared to support them as we move into the next phase of providing relief to affected communities.” ■

A year after Hurricane Maria, churches still beacons of hope

By Lynette Wilson
Episcopal News Service

In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Maria last year, Puerto Rico Bishop Rafael Morales Maldonado issued an order for all Episcopal churches on the island to open their doors to the community. In doing so, the churches became points of distribution for emergency supplies — and symbols of hope.

“I believe the Episcopal Church in Puerto Rico was, after the hurricane, and is a great beacon of hope in this country,” said Morales in an interview with Episcopal News Service in his office in Trujillo Alto, a municipality within metropolitan San Juan.

Many people, he said, came to know the Episcopal Church as a result of Maria. The Diocese of Puerto Rico has 52 congregations located throughout the island, in hard-to-reach remote mountain regions, in small towns, on the island of Vieques and in the cities. The priests and church members reached out to everybody in the community, “offering love,” he said. And, as a result, the church has welcomed new “brothers and sisters.”

Those efforts continue as the diocese, in partnership with other agencies and organizations, offers mission and education fairs in communities across the

island. One recently took place in Yabucoa on Sept. 20, the one-year anniversary of the hurricane. On that date in 2017, Hurricane Maria made landfall as a Category 4 storm in Yabucoa, on the island’s southwest side, bringing 155 mph winds, massive rains and flooding across the island.

The diocese, with assistance from medical staff from St. Luke’s Episcopal Hospital, its facility in Ponce, has conducted regular mission and education fairs over the past year. The fair on Sept. 20 included a special service to remember the thousands of lives lost and the survivors still affected and mourning.

On Sept. 23, in partnership with the Diocese of New York, Morales participated in a Eucharist in remembrance of Maria’s victims at Church of the Intercession in Manhattan. New York is home to more than 700,000 Puerto Ricans, the largest diaspora on the mainland.

Though the initial death toll stood at 64, thousands of others died in the storm’s aftermath, some from medical needs that went untreated. A recent study recorded 2,975 deaths. Many residents were without electricity for months, and some in remote regions still don’t have power.

Puerto Rico is a U.S. territory; its 3.3



Photo/Lynette Wilson/Episcopal News Service

Elisa Sanchez of Episcopal Social Services and Puerto Rico’s Occupy Movement explains plans to retrofit a closed school for housing and a community center.

million residents are U.S. citizens. The Diocese of Puerto Rico — with 5,000 Episcopalians — is part of the Episcopal Church’s Province IX. Of the diocese’s 87 buildings, 66 sustained damage. Emergency repairs were made so that the doors could open; if the structures weren’t safe, the bishop’s mandate was to set up a table outside.

When Maria hit, neither the government nor nongovernmental institutions, including the diocese, had disaster plans in place.

“There was no plan, but everyone came together — not just the diocese,” said Yaitza Salinas, diocesan administrator. Hurricane Maria “brought the

church and community together.”

Loíza, a town of some 4,700 people, was one of the hardest hit areas on the northeast end of the island. Many of its residents still live with blue tarpaulins on their roofs.

“Nobody was prepared for Maria,” said the Rev. Ana Rosa Méndez, vicar of St. James and St. Philip the Apostles in Loíza. “The church was responding to Irma.”

Loíza was one of the communities affected by Hurricane Irma, which hit on Sept. 6, 2017. The Virgin Islands bore the brunt of Irma, but it also caused major

flooding in some areas of Puerto Rico. Loíza and nearby areas were already struggling, and their need increased after the hurricanes.

Méndez, who now coordinates the diocese’s disaster-response program, already has made inroads into the community, providing services to teenage and single mothers and training them to be self-sufficient. The church also provides meals to some 500 housebound people.

“It’s been a difficult year,” said Méndez. Scarcity of building materials is one of the major challenges. Still, even in the hurricanes’ aftermath, Méndez said, “the churches worked together and there was some good that came out of it.” ■

NEWS

ASIAN continued from page 1

It's not easy to find Asian female priests, said the Rev. Yein Esther Kim, parish associate at St. Athanasius Episcopal Church in Los Angeles. Despite coming from a family of priests — her father is the Most Rev. Paul Geun-Sang Kim, Anglican bishop of the Diocese of Seoul and former archbishop of the Province of Korea — Kim didn't always see herself as a priest, she said. She was inspired in 2001 when South Korea began ordaining women and by the examples of former Diocese of Massachusetts Suffragan Bishop Barbara Harris, an African-American priest who was elected the first female bishop in the Anglican Communion, and the Rt. Rev. Diane Jardine Bruce, suffragan bishop in the Diocese of Los Angeles.

The role of Asian women as clergy was only one of the issues of identity explored during the Sept. 27-Oct. 1 consultation held in Honolulu. Registrations for the event topped 267 participants representing Asians from the United States, Canada, England, South Korea and the Philippines and including 40 American and Canadian teenagers.

"We assembled a cast of great plenary speakers and workshop leaders. We wove the tapestry of a program that combined academic and experiential learning," said the Rev. Winfred Vergara, the Episcopal Church's Asiamerica missionary and the consultation's co-dean, during the Oct. 1 closing Eucharist.

"Our theme, 'Piko — Celebrate Christ, Community and Creation,' was



Photos/Lynette Wilson/ENS

Lake Randall, 15, of Vancouver, British Columbia, center, and Asupa Mila, 15, of San Francisco, left, were among 40 youth from the United States and Canada attending the triennial Episcopal Asiamerica Ministries National Consultation in Honolulu.

aptly captured by the youth who performed last night. They said, 'We came from different places and myriad cultures, and many of us met each other for the first time, but now we are friends.' That is what Christianity is all about ... real relationships."

Some 22 million Asians live in the United States, and Asians are its fastest-growing racial group. California has the largest Asian population at 6.8 million. In Hawaii, Asians are the majority at 57.1 percent, according to the most recent U.S. Census data.

Seven consultations make up the Episcopal Asiamerica Ministries Council: Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Korean, South Asian, Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander. The council operates in part-

nership with the Episcopal Church's Office of Asia-America Ministries.

Asian American or "Asia-merican" describes Asian immigrants in the United States as well as Asian Americans born in the United States — Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Japanese, Southeast Asian (Vietnamese, Laotian, Hmong, Burmese) and South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan). It also describes the relationship of Asians in the United States with Asian Episcopalians and Asian Anglicans in the global community.

Close to two-thirds of the world population identifies as Asian.

The strong youth presence made the consultation one of the best ever, said Bayani Rico, EAM Council president and the consultation's co-dean. The younger generation speaks to "the pan-Asian experience," and EAM may add an additional convocation for those Asians who don't identify with a single ethnicity, Rico said.

The Episcopal-Asiamerican church is an immigrant church that in reality speaks one language, said Yunjeong Seol, EAM's digital media consultant. Oftentimes, the second and third generations don't "speak the language of the mother country" and wonder how they can serve Asian-American ministries. And, realistically, she said, "bilingual services are hard to maintain." Seol, who was born in South Korea and earned a Master of Divinity degree from Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Mass., also favors adding a broader convocation.

Many people, she said, "identify as interracial. ... They don't know if they are in the Korean or Japanese convocation."

For Asupa Mila, 15, of San Francisco and Lake Randall, 15, of Vancouver, British Columbia, identity doesn't really matter so much, they said. What they found in serving alongside one another in service to the community made them come together as friends.

Asian identity is something Asiamerican Episcopalians are grappling with on both the East and West coasts. In New York, the Episcopal Asian Supper Table invites all people of Asian ancestry to come together, to build "a united community by sharing stories, developing spiritually and lifting up our membership as leaders in the Episcopal Diocese of New York," according to the diocese's website. In the Diocese of Los Angeles, the Asian ministries group is called the Gathering.

Nationally, the EAM leadership is pushing to train new leaders in evangelism, church planting and church



The Most Rev. Moses Nag Jun Yoo, primate of Korea, preaches on Sept. 30 at a service at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, the first Korean mission in the Episcopal Church, in Honolulu.



The Rev. Winfred Vergara, the Episcopal Church's Asiamerica missionary and the Episcopal Asiamerica Ministries National Consultation's co-dean, preaches at the closing Eucharist on Oct. 1.

revitalization. To that end, during the consultation's opening Eucharist held at the Cathedral Church of St. Andrew, the EAM network introduced the ANDREWS program and its first group of 70 mentors.

ANDREWS, an acronym for Asiamerica Network of Disciples, Revivalists, Evangelists, Witnesses and Servant Leaders, is a mentoring program of the Asiamerica Ministries Office in partnership with Episcopal Asiamerica Ministry Council and the Thriving in Ministry project of Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, Va.

ANDREWS' goal is to develop a

network of well-trained mentors and disciple-makers from among the EAM ethnic convocations. "Rice and Sing," an anthology of diverse, Asian-cultural hymns and spiritual songs, is in development, as are in-person training and a virtual classroom.

"Vision and dreams are the language of the Holy Spirit," said Vergara in his closing sermon. "If we don't dream, how can our dreams come true?"

EAM convocations will meet separately in 2019 and come together again as a national consultation in 2021. The consultation last met in Seoul, South Korea, in 2015. ■

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ADVENT RESOURCES



Advent: The faith-filled countdown to Christmas

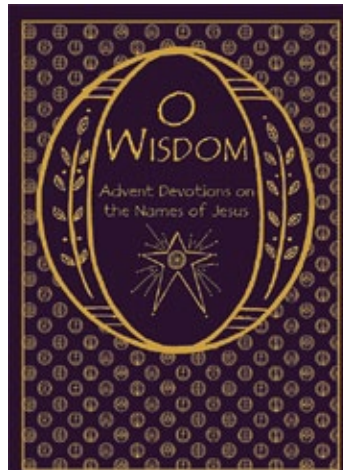
Dec. 2 is the first Sunday of Advent, the Christian season of spiritual preparation before celebrating the birth of Jesus at Christmas. Episcopal Journal presents some resources suitable for the season.

Books from Forward Movement:

O Wisdom: Advent Devotions on the Names of Jesus

Edited by Rachel Jones

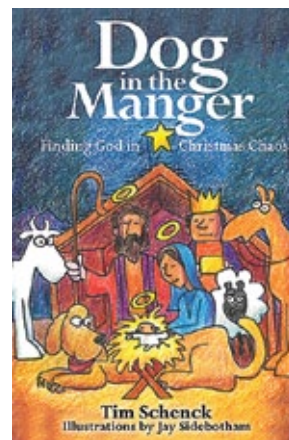
Songs of thanks and praise, of lament and longing, of restoration and return have been on people's lips for millennia. The verses of the ancient hymn, the O Antiphons, explore and celebrate the many names of Jesus and present a way to sing along with the story of God. Drawn from the scriptural words of Isaiah, the O Antiphons have been sung in churches and monastic communities since at least the eighth century. Through meditations, art, poems and photos created by people from across the church, this book offers space and time to embrace Jesus' presence among us now — and await his coming in glory. One can enjoy these prayers and praises throughout the seasons of Advent and Christmas as they beckon: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.



I Witness: Living Inside the Stories of Advent

By Kate Moorehead

Many have heard the story of Jesus' birth, but have they lived inside it? Episcopal priest Kate Moorehead invites readers to enter the story of salvation with hearts and minds wide open, experiencing the miracle of Jesus through the eyes of witnesses: Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the Wise Men and others. Moorehead encourages readers to bear witness — both then and now — to the marvel and majesty of a babe born in a manger, of Christ the king. These daily devotionals offer a companion through the seasons of Advent and Christmas and urge the faithful to keep reading, keep listening, keep learning, experiencing the story of Christ's birth as both familiar and new in each retelling.



Dog in the Manger: Finding God in Christmas Chaos

By Tim Schenck,

with illustrations by Jay Sidebotham

With humor anchored by spiritual truths, author Tim Schenck helps readers maintain spiritual sanity through the often-frenetic chaos of Advent and Christmas. Illustrated by cartoonist Jay Sidebotham, "Dog in the Manger" also explores the major characters of the season in new ways, including John the Baptist, Mary,

continued on page 9





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ADVENT RESOURCES

ADVENT continued from page 8

Joseph and Jesus. Questions following each section make “Dog in the Manger” appropriate for personal or group use.

Dawn from on High

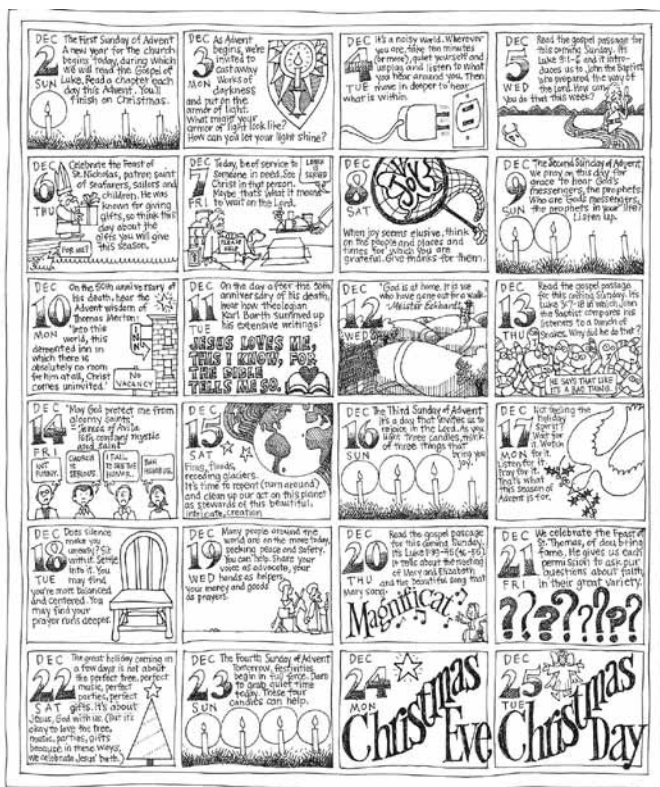
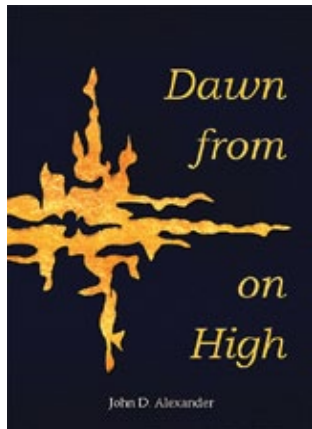
By John Alexander

Through inspiring and accessible meditations, John Alexander provides a theologically rich and biblically grounded journey through Advent, Christmastide and the first days of Epiphanytide. Based on the eucharistic lectionary of the Episcopal Church, Alexander takes the reader into the heart of Advent’s focus on “last things” and then the incarnation of Jesus. Preachers may find this volume a useful resource for preparing sermons, but any Christian may benefit from these homilies while seeking a focus on the great mysteries of salvation.

Calendar Slow Down. Quiet. It’s Advent!

(2018 Advent Calendar posters)

Created by Susan Elliott and Jay Sidebotham, this colorable Advent calendar poster



suggests ways to mark the days through Advent. The calendar offers ideas for prayer, helping others and being thoughtful about the true meaning of Christmas. It offers advice to take to our hearts and walls: Slow down. Quiet. It’s Advent!

For information on ordering these resources, go to www.forwardmovement.org.

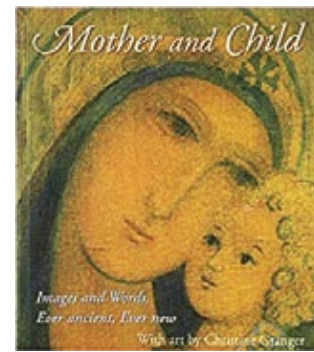
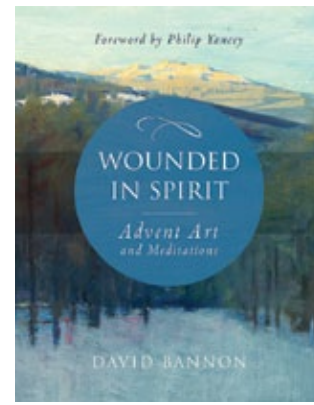
Books from Paraclete Press:

Wounded in Spirit: Advent Art and Meditations

By David Bannon, foreword by Philip Yancey

Christmas can be a time not only of joy but also of tears, memory and prayer. Celebration does not always come easily. In 25 illustrated daily readings, “Wounded in Spirit” offers the opportunity to commune with Scripture and the wounded artists that gave the world

masterpieces of hope: Gauguin, Tissot, Caravaggio, Tanner, Delacroix, van Gogh, Dürer. While the artists’ names and paintings may be familiar, this book provides an inspiring look into the humanity of the artists themselves. They were flawed and often troubled people: a widower that saw a vision of Christ; a murderer who painted himself as Peter; a grieving father who drew his sons as Jesus and John; an orphan who saw his salvation in the Holy Family. Despite their wounds — perhaps because of them — these artists achieved the sublime. Based on the



latest research in history and grief, “Wounded in Spirit” returns readers to where Christian art began. From mourning in Roman catacombs to works of the masters, readers may join the world’s great religious artists on their pilgrimages of hope and brokenness, encountering in the artists’ wounds — and their own — “God with us.”

Mother and Child: Ever Ancient, Ever New

Art by Christine Granger

Christine Granger’s artistic portrayals of Mary and her infant son Jesus, paired with the words of sages, saints, and sinners through the centuries, lead the reader

to moments of intimacy with the divine Mother and Child.

For ordering information, see www.paracletepress.com.

Meditations from Seminary of the Southwest:

Each Advent, Seminary of the Southwest in Austin, Texas, produces a free pocket-size Advent Meditation booklet. The contributors are a mix of faculty, students, alumni and friends who offer perspectives on the Scripture of each day. The meditation authors also record themselves reading their submissions, and the seminary shares these on its website and through its Sowing Holy Questions blog.

For ordering information, contact Katherine Bailey-Brown at katherine.brown@ssu.edu.

COMMENTARY

Telling eternal stories

By Kristin Fontaine

My daughter and I watch a lot of nature TV shows about human evolution. As a species, we seem to have been telling stories through art since the dawn of our time. Cave paintings, jewelry, body art, pigments, stone circles and carvings are all things that have been left behind by human and proto-human societies.

We have a drive to make art, to tell stories and to develop rituals that goes back to our beginning.

It comes to us at our end as well. One of the many things I learned as part of helping to take care of my mom during her last weeks was that it is common for people to start using metaphorical language. They talk about going home or packing for a trip, or they might ask about their passport or airline tickets.

This happened to me when I was sitting with my mom in her last days. She suddenly asked me if she was all packed for her trip. Even though I had read the hospice guide many times over the previous week, I was still caught off guard by how clear and cogent she sounded

when she asked the question. This was one of the few times I was unsure of what to say. However, since she seemed worried about it, I decided to address the worry and not the words. I told her that everything was taken care of and that she didn’t need to worry. She relaxed after that.

Even though I had been prepared for the idea that Mom might use a journey or travel metaphor as she neared the end of her life, it still hit me harder than I expected. We had already had a lot of frank and sometimes difficult conversations about her coming death. She and I were able to talk about death and dying in a very straightforward (if sometimes darkly humorous) way; and, while it made me sad to reflect on losing her, I rarely had a problem talking about death and all of the related logistics. So I was surprised when I had such a strong reaction to Mom’s almost unconscious use of metaphorical language to tell me that she was ready to go.

This past week, my husband heard from his parents that his grandmother had started talking about “going home,” and she pretty clearly wasn’t talking about trying to move back to her apart-

ment from the nursing home.

It makes me both wonder and appreciate our human ability and need to tell stories.

Humans throughout the ages have made up stories to explain the world around them. We have created rituals to retell and re-enforce those stories. We use just about anything we can get our hands on to make art that tells stories. Even Jesus tried to communicate his teachings through parables, telling stories to try to get his disciples and followers to understand more fully what he was trying to say.

And when we reach the end of life, our minds, bodies and spirits work together to tell one last story: the story of leaving everything behind and going on one final journey.

Neither Mom nor I really believed in an afterlife — at least not the ideas of “heaven” that seem to have grown up around Christianity over the past 2,000-plus years. Mom was a big proponent of living and working in the here-and-now. She said many times that we should be working to create



heaven on earth and not be waiting around to go to heaven after death.

I don’t have any good answers to what might happen after death. I don’t know if Mom’s spirit went anywhere or if she lives on only through the love of her family and the friends that remember her.

I do know she, like millions before her, set out on a journey, and for once I couldn’t go with her.

However, while she may be traveling beyond my reach on earth, I maintain my connection with her and with all of our human and proto-human ancestors by telling stories. ■

This column was first published at Episcopal Café. Kristin Fontaine describes herself as an “itinerant Episcopalian.” She and her husband own Dailey Data Group, a statistical consulting company. Her mother, the Rev. Ann Fontaine, was active in many Episcopal ministries, including parish work and online communications.

NEWS

MINNESOTA continued from page 1

should be about,” Morrison said.

Fellow Trinity member Bev Lane, who volunteered as a greeter at the candidate event, shares that support for the congregation's efforts.

“When you know the people, you understand them,” Lane said. “I think that we have to be more civil. We have to get along, even though we have differing opinions.”

Gary Veazie, who works part time as facility manager at Trinity, was in charge of setting up refreshments in the community center room. Standing watch over the table of snacks and drinks, he joked, “I’m running for doughnuts and water.”

Veazie started attending worship services at Trinity in 1980, and he had high praise for the congregation's several rectors over the years. Anderson is known for giving a “top-level sermon,” he said — including sermons that draw connections between the gospel and current events, “which is a hard line to walk.”

One particularly difficult sermon in November 2016 helped focus the congregation on its civil-discourse work.

The presidential election left Anderson in a “panic,” she said, because she wasn't sure how to unify a congregation with such divergent reactions to Donald Trump being elected president.

Some parishioners were cheerful, while others were in shock. “How are we going to continue together?” she asked.

She found her answer in the very congregation that seemed so divided. “We need church and Christian community more than ever, because within it we can practice the kind of peace and unity we so desire for our country,” Anderson told her congregation.

Minnesota narrowly voted for Hillary Clinton in 2016, but the state's counties are a patchwork of blue and red, with the bluest centered around the metro areas of Minneapolis, St. Paul, Rochester and Duluth. Hennepin County went solidly Demo-

cratic, but Excelsior and other west suburbs are more politically diverse and lean more to the conservative side than Minneapolis, Anderson said.

Trinity Episcopal Church already had begun encouraging parishioners to be more open about their political views and listen to each other respectfully. An early catalyst was Minnesota's adoption of a law in 2013 legalizing same-sex marriage in the state.

As with other political issues, parishioners' views on gay marriage varied widely, and “the congregation had never had a conversation about it,” Anderson said. Trinity would need to decide whether it would offer same-sex ceremonies, but first it enlisted a consultant through the University of St. Thomas' civil discourse lecture series to coach parishioners.

“We needed to learn how to create a safe space for people to really be able to express how they felt, and so we learned a methodology for doing that,” Anderson said.

After strengthening the congregation's civil-discourse skills, the vestry called an all-parish meeting to discuss offering marriage ceremonies to all people. Parishioners were encouraged to put their newly developed skills to work as they listened to members sharing their views one at a time. The meeting felt like



Kelly Morrison, a Trinity Episcopal Church member and state House candidate, talks with a local voter.

a liturgical experience, Anderson said, as each speech was followed by a moment of silence and hymn singing.



The Rev. Devon Anderson, rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in Excelsior, Minn., checks in at the candidate event co-hosted by the church at the South Shore Community Center in Shorewood.

The meeting was well-attended and lasted several hours, she said. When the vestry later voted to offer same-sex ceremonies, it was not the divisive decision it otherwise could have been, she said. “It was a real moment for the parish, because it was like: We can actually do this. We can be diverse in our opinions, in our political opinions, and we can still be a really close worshipping community.”

Such an approach need not end with Trinity, supporters said.

“I think this kind of thing should be the leading edge of the Episcopal Church,” said Betty Bright, a vestry member volunteering at the candidate meet-and-greet event. “For me, it's about being open to each person's heart.”

Fellow vestry member Christopher Williams said he was pleased by the turnout at the event. Some Episcopalians may attend worship services and just want to hear the gospel, without talking about how it may apply to contemporary life, he said, but opening paths of conversation across differences can broaden people's thinking, within the congregation and beyond.

“I think it's great,” Williams said. “I think it adds a lot to any conversation you're going to have, with anybody about anything.”

A small team of volunteers from Trinity had been working to host candidate forums at the church, but they struggled to get candidates to commit, Anderson said. In the meantime, the volunteers turned their focus toward supporting the Oct. 16 event.

Monica Wiant, a vestry member and one of the event volunteers, credited Anderson for pressing the congregation not to shy away from conversations that may seem uncomfortable. The all-parish meeting on same-sex ceremonies was a big step, she said. “It was just terrific, because not everybody agreed, but there was a lot of mutual support and listening.”

Wiant, who described herself as “proudly liberal,” was among those parishioners shocked and unsettled by the presidential election. She appreciated Anderson's invitation to come together as a faith community, she said. “The church needs to be a place where we can bring those emotions and work through it. I think spiritually we have a lot of common ground, regardless of how we vote.” ■

Churches to commemorate WWI armistice centennial

Churches and organizations are planning events to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the signing of the armistice on Nov. 11, 1918 that ended World War I. More than four million American families sent their sons and daughters to serve in uniform during the “Great War,” according to the website www.worldwar1centennial.org. More than 116,000 U.S. soldiers died from combat and disease. Another 200,000 were wounded, a casualty rate far greater than in World War II. More than 350,000 African Americans served in the U.S. military, as did Native Americans and members of other minority groups. For the first time, women joined the ranks of the U.S. armed forces.

National cathedral service

A “sacred interfaith service” is scheduled to take place on the morning of Nov. 11 at Washington National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. The service “will remember the sacrifices of the 4.7 million Americans who served in the Great War and honor the role the U.S. military has played in preserving

peace and liberty around the world for the last 100 years,” according to the cathedral's website. Information is at www.cathedral.org.

Tolling bells

The National World War I Museum and Memorial is inviting churches to toll their bells on Nov. 11 at 11 a.m. local time, wherever they may be, to commemorate the end of what was known as the “war to end all wars.”

This commemoration is part of the World War One Centennial Commission's “Bells of Peace: A World War I Remembrance.”

The National World War I Museum and Memorial is located in Kansas City, Mo., and is one of the few national memorials not located in Washington, D.C.



Photo/courtesy of National WWI Museum/wikimedia commons

National World War I Museum and Memorial

Requiem Mass

The combined choirs of Grace Episcopal Church, Madison, N.J., under the direction of Anne Matlack, will perform the U.S. premiere of British composer Paul Mealor's requiem Mass, “The Shadows of War,” on Nov. 3.

Mealor's music has been commissioned and performed at many festivals and by many orchestras and choruses and has been broadcast widely on TV and radio.

“The Shadows of War” was written in 2016 to mark the centennial of World War I's Battle of the Somme. The concert also will include the children's choirs singing “In Flanders' Fields” by Canadian composer Alexander Tilley. The poem of the same name, by Canadian doctor John McCrae, was written during World War I and inspired use of the red poppy to commemorate those who died in war. ■

NEWS

NUMBERS continued from page 5

the wagons. I'm calling for the church to head 'em up and move 'em out! More than ever, we need pioneers, not settlers."

New churches also should be planted in the right places, reaching congregations where they live, and with entrepreneurial leaders, Michie wrote.

He also threw out a target of more than 900 new church plants, based on a statistical analysis of what might be required to reverse the Episcopal Church's decline. Michie told Episcopal News Service that he cited that figure "just to communicate the hill that is ahead of us to climb," but added that an aggressive approach to church planting would redefine how the Episcopal Church operates.

"The way that would impact and change our church would be terrific. It would supercharge our existing churches," he said. "If they're doing this and innovating in this way, we can, too."

Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, during his first three years leading the Episcopal Church, has pushed for initia-

tives to expand the church's reach in new ways. He often talks of the church being part of the larger Jesus Movement and recently unveiled the Way of Love, a rule of life to help Episcopalians live into the calling of that movement.

Curry also has led a series of revivals that serve as the cornerstone of his emphasis on evangelism, seeking to reach new people outside the church with Jesus' message of love. Racial reconciliation is another top priority of the church under Curry, as detailed in the Becoming Beloved Community framework that launched last year.

Despite such activity at the church-wide level and the dozens of new church plants, some say many existing congregations still may not be meeting the spiritual needs of all their parishioners, particularly newer ones.

"We are an old denomination, age-wise, so I think I have a feeling that would be part of what is behind the decline," said the Rev. Jay Sidebotham.

Sidebotham, who serves part time as associate rector at St. James' Parish in

Wilmington, N.C., has studied the dynamics at play in congregation vitality through his work leading RenewalWorks, a ministry of Forward Movement. RenewalWorks released a study in January that found more than half of Episcopal congregations could be classified as "restless," meaning parishioners were hungry for spiritual growth but might not receive the support they are looking for from clergy or church leaders.

They remain active, for now, but "don't actually expect that much to happen in their own spiritual experience," Sidebotham said.

For the past five years, RenewalWorks has worked to help more than 200 Episcopal congregations focus more intently on the spiritual life of their members. Curry's talk of evangelism and discipleship has helped lead the way, Sidebotham said. RenewalWorks' report suggested four catalysts for supporting Episcopalians on their spiritual journeys:

- Engagement with Scripture,
- The transforming power of the Eucharist,



Photo/David Paulsen/ENS

Church planting "is crock-pot work, not microwave work," the Rev. Michael Michie, staff officer for church planting infrastructure, said in July at the 79th General Convention in Austin, Texas.

- A deeper prayer life and
 - The heart of the congregation's leader.
- "A focus on discipleship is just critical," Sidebotham said. "That's job one, and that's what we're all about." ■

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL continued from page 3

"Arizona has a big burden of past due assessments," Lloyd said, so the church agreed to forgive those past obligations over three years if it keeps up with its current payments.

Haiti, in recognition of the country's poverty, has an agreement with the church outside of the assessment process to pay at least \$5,000 a year, with the hope of increasing that to \$11,000 by the end of the triennium, she said. Mississippi, still dealing with the financial effects of Hurricane Katrina, aims to contribute 13 percent by the end of the triennium, Lloyd said. Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands received full waivers because they are recovering from last year's Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

A decision on West Texas split the voting members of Executive Council. The diocese's past participation — six percent last year — has fallen well short of the church's target, and, though the diocese was hit last year by Hurricane Harvey, financial hardship is not a primary factor, Lloyd said.

Jennings asked why the church should grant the Diocese of West Texas a waiver if it was able to pay multiple bishops and maintain a sizable endowment fund. Other council members raised similar concerns and suggested amending the resolution to eliminate the waiver for West Texas.

North Carolina Suffragan Bishop Anne Hodges-Copple spoke in favor of the waiver, saying it was about diplomacy and "strengthening the hand of some good bishops" in West Texas who have been encouraging "recalcitrant" Episcopalians to see themselves part of something larger than what is in their own backyards.

The vote to drop West Texas' waiver failed, 14-18, and Executive Council proceeded to approve all six waivers.

In other business, the council cut its committees from five to four. The new committees are Finance, Government &

Operations, Ministry Within the Episcopal Church, and Ministry Beyond the Episcopal Church. It also elected three at-large members: Julia Harris of the Diocese of Oklahoma, Rose Sconiers of the Diocese of Western New York and Utah Bishop Scott Hayashi.

The daily sessions also tackled the ethical questions raised by the role-playing scenarios that Russell Randle, a senior member from the Diocese of Virginia, included in his training on Oct. 17. That training was followed by a session on racial reconciliation led by the Rev. Stephanie Spellers, the presiding bishop's canon for evangelism, reconciliation and creation care.

After a presentation by Spellers on the Episcopal Church's Becoming Beloved Community framework, council members broke into groups to share their experiences and think about how they are called to work for racial healing.

During a meeting of the Government & Operations Committee, members offered feedback on the racial-reconciliation training.

"At our table, it got a little raw," said Pauline Getz, a member from the Diocese of San Diego. "Some of our conversation was hitting some rather deep chords."

Spellers told the committee that the church had moved away from a past emphasis on "anti-racism" in favor of the language of racial healing, encouraging Episcopalians to interact graciously with each other without demonizing people for struggling with their own racism. Such a Christian approach can be applied beyond the work of racial reconciliation, she said.

"If we do this work the way we as a church have said we want to, it will change how we relate to everything," Spellers said. "This is about us living in the Jesus way."

In his presentation on EMM, Robertson said they were "preparing for the worst" — that being the end of its con-

tract to continue the resettlement work it has done for the federal government since the 1980s.

The U.S. Department of State announced Sept. 17 that it would lower the ceiling to 30,000 refugees for the fiscal year that began Oct. 1, down from a ceiling of 85,000 two years ago. And that 30,000 is just the upper limit, Robertson said, noting that actual number of refugees to be welcomed into the United States likely will be much lower.

EMM once oversaw 31 resettlement affiliates in 26 dioceses, but that number has dropped to 14 affiliates in 12 dioceses. With even fewer refugees to resettle, the federal government isn't expected to keep all nine of its contracted agencies, and EMM, though well-equipped to do

that work, is one of the smaller of the nine, Robertson said.

If the resettlement work ends, the agency may find other ways to support refugees and, possibly, other immigrants, Robertson said. He estimated it would take about a year to fully realize that new vision for the agency.

In the meantime, he suggested that Executive Council recognize the exemplary work of the agency's employees. The council passed a resolution Oct. 18 commending Episcopal Migration Ministries, "whose dedicated staff, during a season of flux and uncertainty, have worked tirelessly and in a sacrificial manner to support refugees in many parts of the world who seek resettlement in the United States." ■

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FAITH AND THE ARTS

New York cathedral exhibits ‘treasures’

By Episcopal Journal

Items from a Mexican chalice from the mid-17th century to a Restoration two-handled cup from 1660 to an alms basin given to the Cathedral of St. John the Divine by King George V are on display in the New York cathedral’s latest exhibit: Treasures from the Crypt.

While visitors might admire the goblets and chalices, rings and dishes for their beauty alone, each object has a specific function in the day-to-day life of the church.

These rarely-seen objects are part of the physical and spiritual heritage of the cathedral, included in worship services, baptisms, ordinations and consecrations. The work of artisans and metalworkers, jewelers and craftsmen enhances the grandeur of the cathedral while providing the physical tools required to carry out the duties of the church.

Some of the pieces were gifts from congregants. Other donors include members of the royal family of England, supreme governors of the Church of England and the descendants of Peter Stuyvesant, the Dutch director-general of New Netherland from 1647 until 1664, when it was renamed New York.

On display since May, the pieces tell a story of community and of the continuity of history: from the origins of English Christianity through the independence of the Episcopal Church to the founding of the city of New York and the chartering of the cathedral, intended as a house of prayer for all people. ■



Far left, a silver alms dish donated to the cathedral in 1927 by Britain’s King George V.

Left, the New York Herald Tribune covers the donation of a silver alms dish to the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York.



A baptismal book that belonged to the 17th-century colonial Dutch governor general, Peter Stuyvesant.



Right, the historical items are exhibited in a chapel at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York.

Left, the cathedral’s exhibit was installed last summer and is ongoing.



Photo/Rebecca Merrill

Photos/courtesy of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine



Photo/Danielle E. Thomas

National Acolyte Festival

Acolytes, servers, clergy and vergers join in the church’s longest procession from the Great West Doors and down the center aisle of Washington National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., during an Oct. 6 Eucharist at the 2018 Acolyte Festival. The worship service included a dedication and blessing of acolytes and servers. The festival also included workshops on topics such as how to swing a thurible, the vocation of a vergers and Streamers 101; behind-the-scenes cathedral tours; and acolyte games such as the “Thuriball Races,” “Holey Water Bucket Challenge,” “Pass the Cruets,” “Dress the Bishop” and “Name that Object.” The cathedral has hosted the festival for about 40 years. This year, 800 people attended, including about 450 acolytes from more than 60 congregations across 13 states plus Washington, D.C., and Barbados.



Stained-glass commemoration

From left, All Ireland President of the Mothers’ Union Phyllis Grothier, Archbishops Michael Jackson and Richard Clarke and the union’s All Ireland chaplain, Dean Raymond Ferguson, flank a newly commissioned stained-glass plaque marking 130 years of the Mothers’ Union in Ireland. The plaque was dedicated during the All-Ireland Triennial Thanksgiving Service of the Mothers’ Union at Christ Church Cathedral in Dublin in October. It features a tree with 13 branches, representing the 13 decades of the family-support organization in Ireland. It echoes an initiative that took place to mark the anniversary last year: the planting of 12 trees across Ireland, one in each diocese.

FAITH AND THE ARTS

Houston cathedral youth photograph sacred spaces

By Victoria Ludwin

For young members of Houston's Christ Church Cathedral, pictures are more than the proverbial "thousand words." They provide a pathway to God.

Last summer, the young photographers were invited to exhibit pictures of places where they felt a connection with the Divine — whether in or outside the walls of a church.

"I knew we had several youth at the cathedral who were interested in photography and thought this would be a great activity for them to participate in and have their photos in an actual gallery," said Minister for Youth Jeremy Bradley. He co-curated the one-month show, "Sacred Places," with professional photographer Joe C.

Aker at the invitation of Robin Bullington, co-curator of the cathedral's Cloister Gallery, located along the walls of the fellowship hall.

"The photo gallery we had was great, it showed us that anybody can take photography anywhere at any time," said young photographer Cesar Avila. "I took a picture of a fountain. It meant a lot of things to me, but the main thing was that it was really old but was still standing all strong, and it shows us how we need to be."

Zoe Ferris-Hughes exhibited a picture from a lake in Maine.

"I am a very big camp person, and lakes have always brought me peace (when there aren't campers in them)," Ferris-Hughes said. "I just remember sitting on my cousin's boat and feeling peaceful and calm and happy. I consider it sacred because it feels like a place where I'm connected to God."

The cathedral gallery hosts art monthly art exhibitions throughout the year. The young photographers' show followed a spring exhibit of the same name by Aker, who photographed sacred places in Tibet, the Holy Land, South America and the United States.

"I have visited many places considered sacred to others. Some are man-made, and some are just a piece of land and sky.



View of Hermann Park, Houston, by Jeremy Bradley

Each is unique to the people that live and worship there," Aker wrote in his artist statement. "I was able to identify in these places with my own loving God and feel a presence that both comforted me and surrounded me."

Reflecting on the youth exhibit, Aker said, "Today's youth see the world in a different way than previous generations. They live in the quick snap and the fleeting moment; they are the digital generation. Hopefully, these images will give viewers insight into their thinking, how they look at the world, and what is sacred to them."

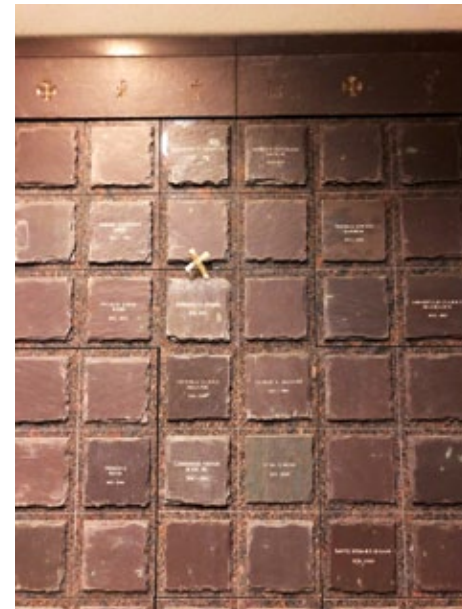
For Yuna O'Brien, who exhibited "a view of my bed that looks unique and whimsical," participating in the show "was a chance for everyone to show where they felt most connected to God, and seeing that was intriguing. Sacred spaces are a place where we can feel God and feel at peace, and it's important to have somewhere you can just be in tune with God."

"Taking photographs is fun," O'Brien added, "because you can completely alter the photo by taking it from a different angle, and there are so many possibilities." ■

Victoria "Torie" Ludwin is minister of communications at Christ Church Cathedral.



Bedroom at home, by Lillian Spiller



The cathedral columbarium with a palm cross, by Jairo Benitez



In the cathedral, the Bible used to read the Gospel, by Alonso Avila



A birdbath on the cathedral campus, by Cesar Avila



Far left, needlepoint panels decorating the cathedral's children's chapel, by Gabriel Perez



Left, candle reflections at the cathedral, by Christy Orman

BOOK REVIEW

Harris memoir traces historic journey

Review by Neva Rae Fox

“Hallelujah, Anyhow!” is the long-awaited memoir of one of the leading voices in the Episcopal Church. Barbara C. Harris is the first female bishop in the Episcopal Church, the first African-American female bishop in the Episcopal Church and the first female bishop in the Anglican Communion. She is a trailblazer in many ways.

At only 136 pages, “Hallelujah, Anyhow!” is a rather short book for such an influential and powerful person, not unlike the petite, powerful woman who wrote it.

This is Barbara Harris at her best — witty, insightful and on target. She is well-known for her sense of humor, able to come up with a quick barb at a highly appropriate time, and the book details many of those times.

The book title stems from a hymn by Joseph Pace. In her forward, Harris talks about the importance of hymns in her life — upon awakening, at day’s end and times in-between. Each chapter concludes with the words “Hallelujah, Anyhow!” as she weaves the phrase and hymns into her narrative.

Edited by Kelly Brown Douglas, the book is presented in an engaging style. Harris had embarked on writing a memoir but never completed the task. Douglas, Harris’ colleague and friend and the dean of Episcopal Divinity School at Union Seminary in New York, stepped in, providing an avenue for Harris to tell her story in her own voice and making room for her opinions to emerge. Douglas explains that Harris “wanted people to know the woman underneath the mi-

ter and behind the cope.”

Each chapter focuses on an aspect of Harris’ life, beginning with a verse from a hymn, followed by an explanatory intro from Douglas, a narrative from Harris and a Q&A with Douglas asking (sometimes tough) questions.

The book quickly delves into Harris’ life and, in the process, leaves few questions unanswered.

The great-granddaughter of slaves on both her maternal and paternal sides, and a third-generation Episcopalian, Harris grew up in St. Barnabas Church in Philadelphia. She talks about how the Episcopal Church helped in her formation as a Christian and a young woman but points out that, at that time, women were denied a seat on vestries and could not be acolytes. As for ordained ministry, she never imagined it was something “women could, should or would do.”

Her memories are poignant, with a close eye on the racism she endured at school and in church. For example, she was confirmed on a Monday night because the bishop didn’t make Sunday visitations to black churches.

She grew to be a successful public relations executive at a black-owned agency. Her hard work eventually led to her being named manager of public relations for a major oil company — quite a feat for an African-American woman in the 1970s. Despite her achievements, it was difficult for a black woman in corporate America, as she relates through describing some indignities she endured while traveling across the country.

In the sections dedicated to the process leading up to her election as suffragan bishop of the Diocese of Massachusetts on Sept. 25, 1988, she shares that she didn’t

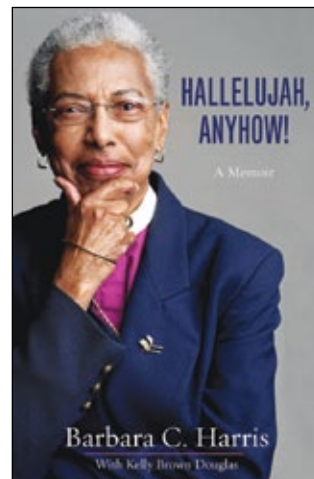
think she had a chance of succeeding. She was wrong. She was prepared to serve as a bishop, but, in retrospect, she notes “that I was stepping into a role the historic proportions of which I would never have dreamed of.”

Her consecration was witnessed by 8,500 people, including 62 bishops. She speaks about refusing to wear a bullet-proof vest despite death threats and hate mail, and about the steadfast strength and support she received from her mother and sister.

In her first address to the Diocese of Massachusetts convention, after the election but before her consecration, she laid the groundwork for her episcopacy by pointing to another strong African-American woman: “Harriett Tubman remains for me a model of faith, determination and audacity in the best sense of the word.”

Harris also addresses the gossip and what was talked about her, but not to her, primarily: her lack of a seminary degree; what was perceived as a lack of experience, even though she had chaired and led prominent Episcopal organizations, groups and initiatives; a brief marriage; and her experiences in the House of Bishops.

Among the selected photos is Harris as an acolyte at the historic and world-changing July 29, 1974, ordination of the Philadelphia Eleven — the 11 women ordained as the first female priests



Hallelujah, Anyhow!
A memoir

By Barbara C. Harris
with Kelly Brown Douglas
Church Publishing
136 pages, \$14.95

in the Episcopal Church years before General Convention authorized the ordination of women.

She shares many fascinating memories openly and honestly, such as the “dressing down” she received from activist and Episcopal priest Pauli Murray; that the Lambeth 1998 Conference, as a female bishop in the Anglican Communion, was “a painful and arduous experience”; her life-changing activities during the summer of 1965; and an incident in Dallas that she didn’t share for decades.

“Hallelujah, Anyhow!” takes off with a forward by the Rev. Edward W. Rod-

man in which he shares his own recollections of Harris. The book concludes with samples of her sermons, addresses and honors.

This book is critical for those who wish to understand the importance of the journey of all Episcopalians. It is a history that needs to be read and remembered — of African-Americans, female clergy and female bishops in the Episcopal Church. The history and insight that Harris provides is vital to understand the Episcopal Church and help it move forward in today’s society. ■

Neva Rae Fox is the principal of The Fox Group, a public relations and communications consulting firm. She previously served as public affairs officer for the Episcopal Church.

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BOOK-1118



Dioceses respond to Hurricane Florence

By David Paulsen
Episcopal News Service

Episcopal dioceses and congregations along the Carolina coast and further inland offered guidance, resources and prayers to Episcopalians in the line of Hurricane Florence, forecast to bring destructive winds, waves and massive storm surge to the eastern United States. The storm is expected to make landfall in North Carolina Sept. 14 and is downgraded to a tropical storm, meaning lower winds, but rain and flooding are still expected to affect North and South Carolina. The storm was linked to several deaths and hundreds of people in North Carolina.

As the storm approached, Episcopalians made the threat seriously. Services and church activities were canceled from the Episcopal Church in Olathe, S.C., near the Georgia state line to St. Timothy’s Episcopal Church in Greenville, N.C. Diocesan officials were in contact with Episcopal Relief & Development and communicated emergency information to their church members. Many Episcopalians on their church members’ evacuation orders, while others were being used as evacuation centers in the Bahamas.

At the same time, other major hurricanes were being used as evacuation centers in the Bahamas. Mangrove trees have been destroyed in the Marshall Islands.

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FAITH AND THE ARTS

Amazon's 'Forever': When the Good Place gets too good for comfort

By Cathleen Falsani
Religion News Service

SPOILER ALERT: This column contains spoilers about the Amazon Studios series "Forever."

"Forever," the dramedy series that premiered last month on Amazon, is the most spiritually intriguing new TV show you should be watching this fall.

Starring SNL alums Maya Rudolph as June and Fred Armisen as her husband, Oscar, the eight-part series, which dropped in its entirety in September, does a deep dive into the meaning of life by exploring what happens when it ends.

Oscar is first to arrive in the afterlife after he skis into a tree. His beloved June joins him about a year later after she chokes on a macadamia nut during a flight to Hawaii.

For the couple, the hereafter is ambiguous — neither heaven nor hell. Rather, it seems a lot like their former life in a subdivision of tidy ranch-style homes in suburban Riverside, Calif.

Familiar, safe, comfortable.

"What are we supposed to be doing?" June asks Oscar soon after she arrives, lying on her back on the manicured front lawn of their (apparently) eternal home.

"I don't know," Oscar says.

Is there a God? Oscar doesn't know that, either.

But there is a shuffleboard court.

At first blush, it appears as if life just goes on on the other side of the veil in much the same way it had before, except they don't have to work, and food simply appears in their well-appointed kitchens and pantries — including some of their favorites.

For June, it's oolong tea.

For their neighbor Mark, who died in a car crash in the 1970s when he was a teenager, leaving him to spend eternity as a perpetually moody 17-year-old, the hereafter includes an endless supply of Reggie bars.

June and Oscar's home is decorated in mid-century modern perfection with its soothing green-blue and earth-tone palette, clean lines and whimsical Bitossi pottery.

"It's really nice — there are so many seating options," June exclaims when she sees their living room for the first time.

"Yeah, I had nothing to do with it," Oscar says. "It was like this when I got here."

Oscar spends his days struggling to do crossword puzzles at the dining room table. June teaches herself how to make vases and bowls on a potter's wheel on the back patio (a nod, no doubt, to the famous Demi Moore/Patrick Swayze scene from "Ghost"). They go for strolls through the neighborhood, where the weather feels perpetually like early autumn with its amber light and just enough of a nip in the air to make you reach for your flannel shirt or lightweight

cashmere pullover.

Cozy.

What the Danes have taught us to call "hygge" — a comfy, convivial atmosphere that fosters well-being.

It would appear to be a deliberate choice by "Forever" creators Alan Yang and Matt Hubbard to assemble a mise-en-scène that projects comfort. One of the first things I noticed is that June almost always wears clogs or clog-boots — so much so that I tweeted about it.

Amazon Studios responded with a tweet that said: "No matter where we are, we're striving for comfort."

Aha! I knew I was on to something. There's more to this coziness than meets the eye.

Soon (a relative term when speaking of eternity), for June, familiarity and hygge morph into monotony and routine.

June is bored.

And the prospect of eternal boredom,

‘What are we supposed to be doing?’



Fred Armisen and Maya Rudolph walk their eternal neighborhood in "Forever".

‘I don't know.’

well, that's just hell.

Maybe Riverside isn't The Good Place it appears to be, even if Oscar believes it is.

"It's safe here, it's nice. ... I like where we are," he says. "It's not so bad. Look at this house. Look at the flow from the kitchen to the living room."

June isn't having it.

"We do the same things every single day, and I don't see that changing literally forever," she says. "And that bothers me."

When Catherine Keener's character, Kase, moves in next door in all her acerbic, misanthropic glory, she is the catalyst that stokes June's discontent. Eventually, the two women ditch Oscar and take off for another place — Oceanside — after meeting a mysterious valise-carrying traveler (Peter Weller doing his best impression of the ferryman from the River Styx).

"You might find it interesting," he tells them.



Photos/Colleen Hayes/Amazon Studios

Fred Armisen and Maya Rudolph star in "Forever" on Amazon.

While the "Forever" universe appears to be nontheistic or at least agnostic, there is a kind of secular dogma that runs through it.

Think of it as a theology of comfort.

"Comfort is an easy thing to value when you have a fleeting life," said Brett McCracken, senior editor for The Gospel Coalition and author of "Uncomfortable: The Awkward and Essential Challenge of Christian Community." "But our ideas of satisfaction and comfort are really actually quite anemic. ... Comfort, in the grand scheme of things, is a sad, little thing to emphasize."

Watching Oscar, June and Kase struggle with the afterlife's endless mundanities reminds McCracken of something C.S. Lewis said. In "The Weight of Glory," Lewis wrote: "We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

It's an image that comes to life (or at least afterlife) in "Forever," McCracken said.

"They eventually make it to a holiday by the sea and a seaside castle, and, up until that point, June is literally making mud pies with her pottery," he said. "They're living as half-hearted creatures, fooling around with these things that they think bring happiness, while neglecting, potentially, the availability of a more intimate, true, lasting joy."

Ultimately, comfort for comfort's sake, whether in this life or the next, the show seems to suggest, is at best a vapid pursuit. Humankind needs something far greater than pastimes and sugary confections (literally and metaphorically) to

give life — and death — real meaning.

We need relationship. And while the familiarity that relationships bring — even with the people who bring us the most comfort — can breed contempt, relationships also foster intimacy.

"Intimacy is something we strive for," said Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg, author of "Nurture the Wow: Finding Spirituality in the Frustration, Boredom, Tears, Poop, Desperation, Wonder, and Radical Amazement of Parenting." "You can find God in going into and through your relationships. The deeper you can go into another person — that can be your doorway into everything."

Only there are our possibilities both endless and eternal.

The first season of "Forever" ends with June and Oscar reunited in Oceanside. Despite its bottomless supply of champagne and bon temps, it turns out to be less heavenly than it did at first blush, and the couple strikes out together for an unknown Third Place, if you will.

"There was a sense of something beckoning them to keep looking and daring further. To where, I don't know," McCracken said. "Is there a season two?"

That's the question.

Because the show airs on a streaming service, there are no ratings available publicly the way they are for network shows, so it's hard to say how the show's doing.

Surely there is an audience for this spiritually clever, intellectually intriguing comedic fare — after all, most Americans believe in the afterlife (according to Pew Research, 72 percent say there's a literal, physical heaven, and 58 percent believe in an actual hell), so the subject matter is evergreen.

As of this writing, Amazon has yet to announce the fate of "Forever." But hope springs eternal. ■

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BOOK REVIEW

Fall season brings books on stewardship

Reviews by Shelley Crook

It's that time of year again — the traditional *asking* time. Pledge cards have been mailed, and stewardship talks are being presented in churches across the land. Two excellent books — one a more conventional church publication, one an unquestionable wild card — may just help your own church formulate a winning stewardship strategy.

“One-Minute Stewardship” is a thoughtfully written, engaging book, full of the extensive wisdom and experience of its author. The Rev. Charles Cloughen Jr., an Episcopal priest for more than 48 years, is the director of planned giving for the Diocese of Maryland. His book presents a blueprint for practical stewardship, which, crucially, Cloughen sug-

gests should be a year-round endeavor, not merely the focus of a few weeks in the fall.

In his opening chapters, Cloughen carefully details, often with the use of personal anecdotes, his theology of stewardship. The rest of the book comprises a set of meditations, contributed by a small army of distinguished laity and clergy as well as Cloughen himself. The varied and inspirational meditations — a gem of a collection — are arranged thematically under the headings Stewardship, Giving, Special Occasions and Planned Giving. An excellent set of indexes makes the selection of a suitable meditation for any day of the church year an easy proposition. This is a wise, user-friendly and deeply practical book.

And the wild card! Amanda Palmer

is a punk rock star, a prolific artistic collaborator and a controversial figure — although being unconventional and assertive whilst female isn't *actually* a crime, and that's what criticisms of her often boil down to. Her memoir “The Art of Asking” — and the TED talk it is based on — is a few years old, but it has interesting implications for church and would be a provocative read for stewardship committees wishing to shake things up.

A few years and a failed recording contract ago, Palmer asked her fanbase to support her, with the goal of releasing all future music for free. The resulting Kickstarter campaign, with an original goal of \$100,000, raised \$1.2 million. Today, Palmer's art is continuously supported by 12,000 Patreon supporters (of which I am one) who contribute money but also expertise, musicianship, food, transportation and sometimes a couch to crash on.

“The Art of Asking” tells that story. It is a long, winding and sometimes uneven book, but it is also heartfelt, honest, touchingly moral and a blueprint for good stewardship. Palmer loves art, loves people and loves love, and her enthusiasm for life is infectious.

Her story demonstrates how people will joyfully and gratefully contribute when they connect to a movement — which is what makes this book relevant to church. Palmer wouldn't sound out of place in a pulpit: “Our first job in life is to recognize the gifts we've already got ... and then turn around and share those

gifts — sometimes in the form of money, sometimes time, sometimes love.”

Cloughen and Palmer are, beneath their respective clergy robes and body paint, peddling remarkably similar messages around the issue of money. Both believe deeply in community and human connection, and both demonstrate a deep respect and love for the people walking the journey alongside them. As Cloughen states, “[My theology of stewardship ... can be found in six key words that permeate my book: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.”

And as Palmer writes, “[A]sking for help with gratitude says: ‘We have the power to help each other.’”

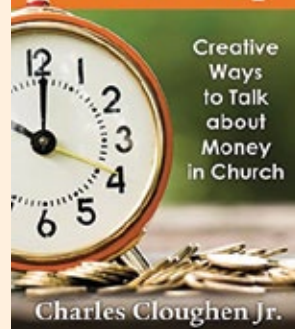
Shelley Crook is a New York-based writer.

One-Minute Stewardship: Creative Ways to Talk about Money in Church

Charles Cloughen Jr.
Church Publishing
200 pages, \$16.95

ONE-MINUTE Stewardship

Creative Ways to Talk about Money in Church



Charles Cloughen Jr.



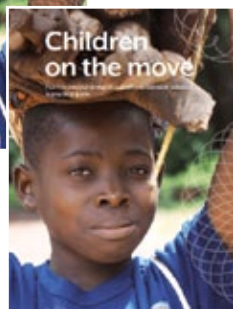
The Art of Asking

Amanda Palmer
Grand Central Publishing
352 pages, \$15.99

Guide aids those helping migrant children

Children on the Move — a detailed guide of best practices to aid those working with migrating children and families throughout the Americas — is now translated into Spanish and available free for distribution to those working to safeguard migrating children and prevent further trauma due to family separations.

The 120-page guide recommends step-by-step procedures, from assessing a migrant child's health and wellness needs, to determining quality care arrangements in the host country, to establishing a sustainable solution in the best interest of the child. The manual outlines the intake questions workers should ask and the clinical assessments that need to be made.



It also offers guidance in minimizing the long-term trauma caused by lengthy separations.

Originally developed by the International Social Service (ISS) General Secretariat in collaboration with ISS network members, the Spanish translation and distribution are made possible, in part, through a partnership with Salina, Kansas-based Saint Francis Ministries and a grant from the Jessie Ball duPont Fund. Both English and Spanish versions of Children on the Move can be found at saintfrancisministries.org.

— Saint Francis Ministries



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