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Cover photo © John Sarsgard: Obiju Ofonny Dan-Udekwe, Christ and Holy Trinity Church, Westport, CT. Inside cover photo © Marc-Yves Regis: (l to r) Bishops Curry, Ahrens and Douglas, leading the Stations of the Cross in downtown Hartford on Holy Tuesday with over 150 clergy.
Welcome to the new diocesan publication! Its name may seem a little jarring, but so is much in life these days. We have no time to lose: we must get to the crux of the matter—to God’s mission of restoration and reconciliation—before Episcopalians are doomed to irrelevancy in our culture and among young adults today. We have a wonderful gift to share with our hurting and broken world and God, as always, has prepared the way forward.

Episcopalians are not noted for change and moreover we’re in the “Land of Steady Habits.” But before you nod your head in agreement, remember what we did in 2009: Our clergy and parish delegates elected Ian T. Douglas as our next diocesan bishop, breaking a centuries-old voting pattern. Ian was an “outsider” by our old standards—not from Connecticut, but he will readily tell you that he saw the Holy Spirit already at work in Connecticut, starting to make changes, long before he was a nominee.

In fact, the Spirit is leading more than Connecticut into these changes. Sociologists and other scholars of religion have been watching this trend for some decades. The Episcopal writer Phyllis Tickle wrote in The Great Emergence that we’re in one of the major transitions in forms of Christianity that take place every 500 years or so. The old ways are dying. The new ways are “emerging.” With Connecticut’s vote to elect Ian, I believe that we implicitly said “yes” to being part of these changes.

That doesn’t make it easy, even for those who are embracing the changes. There’s anxiety when clear answers or directions can’t be provided. It’s easier to read about Israelites or apostles waiting on the leading of the Holy Spirit than it is to live it.

And yet, in this time of transition, new models and ways are finding room to take hold: Witness the ministry at St. Paul’s, Willimantic, which crosses old boundaries of property and community. Its story is in this publication. As are photos from Holy Tuesday when 150+ clergy spent the morning walking through Hartford to advocate against the death penalty instead of listening to mediations in the pews at the Cathedral.

I hope you will find in this issue writers and subjects that encourage you as we walk together in this new time, brought by a fresh wind of the Holy Spirit.
Contemporary culture opens a conversation about theology

For the past five years, I’ve taught a class at Yale entitled “Christian Theology and Harry Potter.” The first year I offered it, students lined up outside the door to enroll, and last year, interest reached record highs, with close to 100 students trying to gain a slot in the course, their applications full of sentences like:

I read the series 20 times and know every word by heart.

I can’t think of a better way to spend a semester than studying my favorite books.

I wrote my college admission essay on how Hermione’s passion for knowledge formed me as a child.

I know I’m a freshman and seniors get privileged for a slot, but Harry was an underdog and so am I, so can you please consider my application?

At the beginning of each semester, I take my place in front of the 18 students, most of who, I know, enrolled in the course to discuss the Harry Potter series. If I’m honest, I know theology has nothing to do with why a majority of them are in my classroom—they don’t love theology the way they love Harry Potter, but to be fair, they don’t know theology the way they know this pop culture phenomenon.

Indeed, most of them have never been exposed to theology: They grew up away from organized religion and attended secular schools, and now they study molecular engineering or economics, and I know a religion class would never have caught their attention except….

Harry Potter was in the title.

In fact, what I’ve learned over the years is that pop culture is a fantastic way to start the discussion about matters of faith because the starting point feels relevant...

So there they are, and there I am, and off we go, flipping through pages of Augustine and Aquinas, debating the purpose of evil, the nature of sacrifice.

Every time I’ve taught this course, it’s transformed my life, and it’s transformed my students’. In fact, what I’ve learned over the years is that pop culture is a fantastic way to start the discussion about matters of faith because the starting point feels relevant: Pop culture phenomena like the Harry Potter series or The Hunger Games or even the latest Madonna album have already captured our attention. Put differently, the course I teach is essentially an introduction to theology, but by pairing that introduction with popular culture, I can teach the same material in a way that’s more accessible. It gives students a context for the discussion that they’re excited about while at the same time exposing them to a number of great theological thinkers.

But intriguingly, I think the other reason pop culture can be such a successful vehicle through which to discuss matters of faith is because there’s simultaneously relevancy and distance. Case in point: It is much less personal to discuss the significance of Dumbledore being gay than it is to discuss homosexuality in our own world. Likewise, it’s easier to discuss exploitation and injustice in The Hunger Games than it is to discuss exploitation and injustice in our society. It takes some of the pressure off—my students are discussing books, they reason, not real life, so the stakes feel lower, even though they’re just as high.

At the end of each semester, I tell my students that I know theology is not what brought them into our classroom, but I hope it kept them here. Because the questions theology asks are life-giving, vital, essential questions, questions like, “What does it mean to love your neighbor?” “How does death transform our relationships?” “Why do evil things happen?”

I tell them that regardless of whether they are Christians—and my goal is not to make them Christians—these questions will haunt them one day, if they don’t already. These will be the questions that keep them up at night, a mug of hot cocoa in hand, staring out a dark window and searching for answers that don’t seem to come. What I hope, I tell them, is that this class gave them a vocabulary for asking those questions they didn’t have before. So that while they’re sipping that hot cocoa, they don’t feel quite as lonely, quite as unable to describe what they’re feeling and thinking. And maybe, just maybe, they’ll feel something of God as well.

The Rev. Danielle Elizabeth Tumminio is an ordained Episcopal priest and author of God and Harry at Yale: Faith and Fiction in the Classroom. She is a three-time graduate of Yale University and her book grew out of an undergraduate course on the Potter series she taught at Yale. She is currently completing doctoral work at Boston University in the field of practical theology and serving as priest associate at Christ Church in Quincy, MA. She is also a certified Spinning instructor, life and career coach, and popular blog contributor. See more at danielle tumminio.com.
This is the time for mission

Otis Gaddis III

The Episcopal Church’s opportunities for missional development and growth are the greatest they have been in generations, as the number of people who currently do not have a spiritual path or a spiritual home has vastly increased.

For example, according to a February 2010 Pew Religion Research Survey, the current generation of 18 - 29 year olds is the least religiously affiliated generation since the 1930s. Twenty-eight percent claim no religion at all, and only 18 percent attend a religious service twice a month or more. In other words, less than one in five young adults has more than a marginal relationship with any spiritual path, let alone Christianity: the functional number of religiously unaffiliated young people is larger than ever before in the United States.

In addition to young adults, our church has significant missional opportunities among those interested in choosing a new spiritual path, immigrants seeking spiritual welcome in their new contexts, and LGBT Christians looking to join a community participating in God’s mission. In this vast mission field, The Episcopal Church has distinct advantages.

First, it has demonstrated openness to people from a wide range of perspectives—nearly 70% of those who attend an Episcopal Church now did not grow up Episcopalian. This number is even higher in our growing congregations.

Second, The Episcopal Church professes an incarnational theology and upholds common liturgical practice rather than a monolithic belief as the unifying force of a Christian community. Thus, The Episcopal Church offers Christianity as a religion of authentic spiritual practices, many of which have ancient roots.

This aspect is especially appealing to the vast numbers of younger adults who identify themselves as spiritual but not religious. Many young adults who identify in this way want spiritual connection but are not finding an accessible community of spiritual practice. In other words, when they know it exists, outsiders find The Episcopal Church quite attractive, as demonstrated by Episcopal congregations’ strong track record of integrating the newcomers from other traditions into its fold.

Moreover, The Episcopal Church’s theological orientation allows it to easily answer the question the emerging generations are asking: “Where is a community of spiritual practice that will help me live a transformative life, connected with God, other people, and all of creation?” Our increased clarification of our social theology, especially concerning our capacity to receive the gifts and spiritual presence of LGBT people in our congregations, is also having a positive effect as well as it helps to positively signal to people outside our walls the kind of welcome anyone can expect from The Episcopal Church.

These traits give The Episcopal Church a strong foundation upon which it could easily establish the leading American missional movement of the 21st century, where people can come to recognize transformative experiences of the Triune God.

So what is holding us back? We have opportunities for missional development, and we have developed significant resources in our tradition, yet The Episcopal Church continues to experience significant decline, a decline that is also being experienced here in Connecticut. The answer may lie in how many of the resources we have from a missional development perspective are more like potential energy rather than kinetic energy. We have the spiritual resources as a denomination, but they need to be effectively deployed to their best current use. Our resources need to contextually and relationally connect to the people in our communities.

One of the most effective ways for our Church to perceive the contextual and relational connections that are possible is to initiate a strategically coordinated regional and nation-wide campaign of building new Episcopal spiritual communities. In other words, start new churches.

Although some may associate a church start with the construction of buildings and the creation of bureaucratic structures like vestries, historically, the vast majority of our churches have started as small spiritual communities of people who began gathering in a home or other non-church building space until it outgrew that space and a dedicated building was deemed necessary. These days a church start can mean regular meetings in a bar or art gallery, or a network of house gatherings, perhaps organized around an intentional living community.

The process of starting new spiritual communities requires a fresh engagement with a local context. Through that engagement planting teams come to more deeply understand what exactly about our tradition is spiritually enlivening and transformative. Church starts also offer opportunities for experimentation. Because they must relationally connect to their communities, they become places in the larger Church that demonstrate effective models of making ourselves known and accessible by the public.

When this information is effectively shared with established Episcopal congregations the entire Church benefits from the spiritual and organizational knowledge gained by the entrepreneurial-missional edge of the Church. Indeed, research shows that when a new church starts is under-way in a locale, established congregations of the same denomination in that area also experience growth. In other words, there is a positive relationship between church starts and congregational rebuilding.

The vast expansion of the Church’s missional presence in our society through the building of literally thousands of new Episcopal communities would create a whole web of relational connections with people who are looking for us. It would also profoundly refresh our institutional capacity to help established congregations to reconnect to their contexts.

What would it take to launch such a strategically coordinated church planting campaign that would help The Episcopal Church, as a system,
The Rev. Otis Gaddis III is a recent graduate of Berkeley Divinity School at Yale where he was one of the co-founders of the Episcopal Evangelism Network (EEN), a missional organization that gathers, equips and networks lay and clergy entrepreneurial-missional leaders for progressive evangelism and contextual missional development. A graduate of Harvard College (2002) and Georgetown University Law Center (2005), Otis is profoundly interested in young adult ministry and congregational rebuilding. Currently, Otis is the Episcopal Chaplain at the University of Maryland, College Park. He can be reached at ogaddis@umd.edu. Information on EEN can be found at www.episcopalevangelismnetwork.org.

Indeed, research shows that when a new church start is underway in a locale, established congregations of the same denomination in that area also experience growth.

to build and rebuild our relational connections to the vast missional opportunities that are before us?

The Church must recruit, train and deploy a large corps of entrepreneurial-missional clergy and lay leaders capable of directing and sustaining a missional movement. And we must reorganize our resources in order to support these leaders as they build what is coming next and to network them back to our established congregations, so that what is learned on the missional edge is effectively digested and communicated back to the existing system so that everyone can grow.

Currently there is no institution-wide structure in The Episcopal Church that supports the recruitment, training, or deployment of such entrepreneurial-missional leaders nor is there a coherent system of organizational learning that analyzes the successes and failures of these entrepreneurial-missional leaders and communicates that information to the whole Church for everyone’s benefit.

Now is the time for mission. We have the opportunity, and we have many spiritual and communal assets that we know people value. What we require is a systemic effort of the recruitment, training, support and networking of our entrepreneurial-missional leadership so that we can build the contextual relational connections that a sustained campaign of building new Episcopal spiritual communities would allow us to create.

If we do this, I am confident that we will become a great conduit for the love and reconciliation that the Spirit wishes to release into our society and our world.
The Meaning of mission
Changes in understanding over the past two centuries

Ian T. Douglas

I find it fascinating that there is much conversation in The Episcopal Church about mission today. Thanks be to God for that.

The fact that the word mission rolls off of Episcopalian tongues so easily today is nothing short of miraculous. For when I started studying mission in the mid-1980s, the “M-word” was hardly ever mentioned in most Episcopal circles. Twenty years or so ago, mission in The Episcopal Church was seen as, at best, some nice, “do good” activity done by well-meaning Christians for those who are not as fortunate as we are. Or at worst, mission was disparaged as insensitive proselytism, an extension of imperialism and the culture-bashing of some romanticized other.

Thanks be to God we have begun to get beyond some of those stereotypes.

I believe, however, that there is still a great deal of confusion about the nature of mission and how we, as followers of Jesus Christ, are called to participate in mission today. So let us look a bit more closely at different understandings of mission over the last two centuries. For if we consider mission through the ages, I believe we will better be able to articulate what we mean when we talk about mission today.

the churches’ missions

Mission in the wake of the Enlightenment made sense. It was something that the churches of Europe and North America did. Conversion of “the heathen,” the spread of churches, and the advance of Western “civilization” went hand in hand. The abuses (and contributions) of missionaries and the close connection between mission and imperialism in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific are well documented and need not be rehearsed here.

Suffice it to say that throughout the nineteenth century and for the first half of the 20th century, churches of the Western industrialized nations had their missions, the churches’ missions, (missiones ecclesiarum) overseas, on the frontier, and in the cities. These missions, as dependent outposts of European and North American Christianity, sought to extend church models and cultural world-views of the Enlightenment.

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The mission of the church

In the middle of the 20th century, significant shifts in the theological and ecclesiological terrain of an emergent global Christianity began to shake the ground of mission thought and experience. Quakes occurred and fissures opened up between older established models of mission and new understandings of mission in the emerging post-colonial and post-modern world. Discussions in ecumenical church councils and missionary meetings turned from the role of the churches’ missions to wrestling with the nature of the mission of the Church, (the missio ecclesiae).

Mission was seen less as something done by voluntary associations of Christians, often as a side interest of the churches, and more as the central calling of the Church. In other words, mission was now the domain of the Church as a whole: the Church’s mission, the mission of the Church.

Such theological shifts led individuals such as Emil Brunner to state: “The Church exists by mission as fire exists by burning.” And Stephen Neil, the great Anglican missionary bishop in South India and mission scholar, to proclaim: “The age of missions is at an end; the age of mission has begun.”

What is God’s mission? What do we mean when we talk about participating in God’s mission? As part of exploring these ideas, a working group in the diocese that was asking these questions gave itself an exercise: Try to explain it in 100 words or less. Another version was crafted during an Eastertide discussion in the spring of 2011 (below). Try it yourself!

God loved into creation – the universe, earth, humanity. It was diverse, and it was good.

Human sin entered and distorted our relationship with God, one another, and creation.

God yearns to make all whole again. This is God’s mission.

God chose and liberated a people, sent the law and the prophets.

God came in Jesus, fully human and fully divine.

In Jesus’ life, death and resurrection we are restored to unity with God and each other.

God sent the Holy Spirit, empowering the Body of Christ.

God co-missions us in baptism to participate in God’s mission of restoration and reconciliation.

The age of missions is at an end; the age of mission has begun.
The missio Dei

The predominance of this church-centered, or ecclesiocentric, view of mission in the immediate post-World War II era was short-lived. While the International Missionary Council promoted the coterminous nature of Church and mission, individual theologians and mission thinkers were beginning to look beyond the Church for the locus of God’s action in the world. Increasingly, the Church was seen as adjunct to God’s saving intervention in the wider struggles of the world. The Church’s mission (missio ecclesia) was to give way to the mission of God, God’s mission (the missio Dei).

In his article, “The Call to Evangelism,” printed in the International Review of Missions in 1950, Johannes Hoekendijk led the charge against prevailing mid-20th century definitions of mission. He criticized church-centered mission theology as leading to a form of evangelism whose goal it was to maintain and extend the bridgehead of the Western Enlightenment church.

Hoekendijk said:

To put it bluntly; the call to evangelism is often little else than a call to restore “Christendom,” the Corpus Christianum, as a solid, well-integrated cultural complex, directed and dominated by the Church. And the sense of urgency is often nothing but a nervous feeling of insecurity, with the established Church endangered; a flurried activity to save the remnants of a time now irrevocably past. vi

In short, Hoekendijk argued that “evangelization and churchification are not identical, and very often they are each other's bitterest enemies.”

Hoekendijk wanted to move mission from an ecclesiological to an eschatological point of departure. For him, the goal of evangelism, the goal of mission, was not to extend the Church as the Corpus Christianum, but rather to participate with God in God’s new creation, to work for God’s shalom. Hoekendijk was the first of his generation to suggest that it was God’s mission in the world to bring about God’s shalom, God’s Kingdom, God’s Reign.

Most mission thinkers today would affirm that the mission of God, the missio Dei, is God’s action in the world to bring about God’s Reign. The Trinitarian God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, has effected a new order, a restored and reconciled reality in which all people and all creation find new unity with God and each other.

Unlike earlier proponents of the missio Dei, today’s mission thinkers affirm that the Church, as the Body of Christ in the world, does have a central role to play in the salvation work of God. The Church is called and empowered by the Holy Spirit to participate with God in God’s mission of restoration and reconciliation.

If the vocation of the Church as the Body of Christ is to participate with God in mending the brokenness of creation and healing the rift between humanity, nature and God, then our Catechism or “Outline of the Faith” found in the back of the Book of Common Prayer has a pretty good and simple summary of the nature of mission. While the question is, not surprisingly, church centered (What is the mission of the Church?) the answer is spot on.

The mission of God in which the Church is privileged to participate “is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ — to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.”

The Episcopal Church has gone on record to declare that the mission of God, as manifested in the Church as the Body of Christ, is no less than the eschatological restoration of all people to unity with God and each other in Christ. In our baptisms we are commissioned, “co-missioned” in this restoring, reconciling work of God in the world.

Over the last two centuries we have had a changing view of how we understand the nature of mission, moving from the churches’ missions, to the mission of the Church, to God’s mission. We should not underestimate how profound the theological shifts are in the progression of these three understandings of mission.

The meaning of mission is God’s action in Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit to restore and reconcile all people, and all creation to God and each other. And thanks be to God we are invited to share in that mission through baptism.

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iii The meetings of the International Missionary Council in Whitby, 1947, and Willingen, 1952 were particularly concerned with the missionary nature of the Church.


vi Ibid., 171, Italics in original.


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The Rt. Rev. Ian T. Douglas is bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut. He was elected in 2009. Prior to his election and consecration he was for 22 years a professor of mission and world Christianity at Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Mass. He has also worked in the world mission office of the Episcopal Church Center in NYC and as a missionary in Haiti.
God’s porous love
Crossing old boundaries at St. Paul’s, Willimantic

Stephanie Summers

It’s the fourth Sunday of Lent, and the readings are tough. The first one, from Numbers, depicts the Israelites in the wilderness, wiped out and complaining. God sends poisonous serpents, and many of the people are bitten and die. Moses intervenes for them, God tells him to set a bronze serpent on his pole so that any who are bitten can look at it and live.

“Well, how’d you like those readings,” the Rev. Jaclyn (“Jaci”) Sheldon asks her flock at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Willimantic, going on to explain that the people before this moment were trying to manage for themselves, “turning away from God.”

The Rev. Sheldon, part-time priest-in-charge, is all about not turning away, from God or God’s people. And in this eclectic town of 18,000, more than its share of poor and homeless, that include some longtime parishioners, visitors from neighborhood halfway houses and Covenant Soup Kitchen guests. The door between the sanctuary and community room where people await a meal is always left open during services, and the priest delivers communion to the waiting diners in both rooms. Jaci says, “I believe God’s love is porous.”

In recent years, the church has reclaimed its engagement with God in new ways. Thirty years ago, members of the church began the Covenant Soup Kitchen as part of the Isaiah 58 Ministry movement. The soup kitchen flourished, but the congregation struggled financially and suffered an exodus of families who were uncomfortable with the abrupt change in their parish life. Now the soup kitchen owns the church building, and spiritual and social ministries blend inside and outside its walls.

Jaci calls the situation freeing, a chance to focus on loving God and not on fixing the roof. “Organized religion isn’t all about being in a building,” she says. “I will never deny the importance of church or the worshipping community. It truly is the anchor or the nurturing point. But there’s always going to be people who love God, too, who are never going to feel that going inside church is the way to go,” Jaci explains. “So who’s going to bring church to them? Us.”

On a beautiful June Sunday, a handful of soup kitchen guests sit or wander around the bright and clean community room, listening to Jaci preach about Samuel and the Israelites’ plea for a king, other than God, to lead them. Tom the coffee bar volunteer, and also the building maintenance man extraordinary, stands by. He says normally a crowd of 20 or 30 gather to listen and await a continental breakfast in this casual side chapel, but today is too beautiful and they’re outside on the steps of the basement soup kitchen or elsewhere on the grounds. One man travels between rooms, going into the Norman stone sanctuary, drenched in a soft morning light, to listen for a while and then comes back to the side room.

Jaci, as she is known to them, sweeps through, delivering communion to those at tables and standing by the coffee bar, saying to each, “This is truly the body of Christ and the bread of heaven,” before she circles around through a back passage to the altar.

One communicant, Julio, a muscular man dressed in a Chicago basketball jersey, says he bounced around for a dozen years on the streets of Hartford, New Britain, Meriden, Manchester and Norwich—doing things to survive that he can’t relay to you—before he found help in Willimantic and in this place. Now he has a home, a room, a girl. “Everything now is better for me,” he says. He often will ask Jaci to pray for him when she visits the soup kitchen on Wednesdays. “She’s got a minute to sit down with you,” he says. “I got a question, she got an answer.”

An attractive couple, Taylor, 19, and Brendon, 26, also left other places—Mansfield and Old Saybrook—to find help with addictions. They come to the community room for coffee, communion and to listen to Jaci’s after-church talks. Taylor attended church growing up in Pennsylvania; Brendon was raised Catholic. He says he relies on his time at St. Paul’s to help him in his fight to stay clean.

Jean Henderson, dressed in a gauzy orange outfit, enters the side room after the service. She is approachable, open and loves photography. She is a soup kitchen regular, having found support there in her 18-year struggle with severe depression and homelessness. Before then, she was communications officer for the Episcopal diocese. “It just goes to show you, you don’t know what’s on the other side of the day,” she says.

As others eat breakfast, Jaci sits with her large vestry. Today is the day they vote on whether to continue this new ministry, if it is viable as is or needs tweaking. The vote is cast energetically to continue forward.

Their view is consistent with the evolving understanding by Episcopalians in the Diocese of Connecticut of God’s mission of restoration and reconciliation. By engaging with the pains of the wider world, the church discovers its faithfulness and vocation in this mission of God. This is the invitation Jesus gives to his followers.

Bishop Suffragan James E. Curry calls it the “work of being active agents of reconciliation in the world.”

He says, “The good news of Jesus is that life can be different than the systems of the world tell us...We’re
going to focus on the community outward to welcome in and include folks who traditionally have not felt included in the life of the church."

A tough transition

Jaci calls the difficult transition at St. Paul’s its “ancient wound.” It was a time when some people coming to the church for daily meals brought in street elements, leaving evidence of addiction in restrooms and other areas. Bringing people in pain and recovery inside the doors presents its challenges, but, Jaci laughs, “We’re all a pain in the ass... There’s always going to be friction. We have to get over that church isn’t all nicey nice.”

But then the teacher in her says, “When you’re in your darkest hour, somebody else is Christ for you. And when other people are in their darkest hour, are you Christ for them?”

Attendance among regulars dropped to a low of about a dozen and now has rebounded to 30, she says, but adds, “The question of success is not actually about numbers. Did Jesus worry about numbers? He cared about bringing the message.”

The numbers increase when you factor in the Covenant Soup Kitchen, a non-profit community linchpin funded by private and corporate donations and some grants. It became independent in 2006 and purchased the church building in 2008. Along with its emergency food pantry, it served 120,000 meals in the fiscal year just ending and expects a 20 percent increase in the next year, with a proposed budget of $340,000, says executive director Paul Doyle. On average, the kitchen serves 65 for breakfast and 100 for lunch daily, with 80 for dinner twice weekly.

Paul, also a pastor for a United Church of Christ congregation in Scotland, Conn., is thankful for the ongoing relationship with St. Paul’s. “It’s been a unique switch. But much of who we are and who St. Paul’s is and how we fit together has remained the same.”

Jaci, noting Mother Teresa’s broader ministry to thousands of poor in Calcutta, people not sitting in pews, puts the unofficial membership at St. Paul’s at 150-200. “Do we have them listed in the annual registry? Are they confirmed and baptized? No. But I would never say they’re not members, because we love them.”

St. Paul’s today

“There have been exoduses about different things,” Deacon Ellen Adams says. “To the parishioners who grew up here, there was a period of mourning. I think we’re coming out of that period of mourning now.”

Ellen talks about life at St. Paul’s today. No one is asked to pay for food at any functions. But people support the church, giving what they can, whether it’s $100 a week or a quarter. “That’s part of respecting people, when we say, ‘We’ll take your quarter,’” she says.

The men of the parish prepare brunch on the first Sunday of the month. A liaison group manages issues that come up between the church and soup kitchen. Parishioners offer to make sandwiches twice a month, and the priest visits the soup kitchen on Wednesdays to gather prayers of the people. Small groups meet for meditation and prayer on Wednesdays and compline on Friday evenings. Members of the parish run a community garden at Taylor Court to grow vegetables for the kitchen, and cooking herbs are being planted in pots on the church grounds.

continued on page 10
Ellen is on the Windham County Re-entry Council, helping prison and substance abuse halfway house residents in the area. For local people in need, parishioners give rides to appointments, shop for clothing and goods at the Windham Area Interfaith Ministry center and pick up medicine.

On May 20, at its Do the Spring Thing event, the church invited the community to join them in celebrating the creator’s work, with services, a plant sale, tree planting, luncheon, garden tour and neighborhood cleanup.

Church treasurer Liz Charron has raised her family at St. Paul’s. “I am actually more excited now about mission here in Willimantic than any time through my 20-year history,” Liz wrote in a stewardship letter to parishioners last fall that detailed crossover ministries. “We may be smaller in numbers than in the past, but [the] mission of bringing God’s love to the world carries on more than ever.”

Jaci sees her role as a teacher of the faith to both literate and illiterate, some who are hearing the Bible’s stories and lessons for the first time. “We offer a healing community to all, a place where it’s safe to be yourself, where there won’t be any religious tests or coercion,” the St. Paul’s website proclaims.

On Palm Sunday, rather than replay the celebration of Christ coming into Jerusalem outside the church and then moving inside to read the Passion, Jaci decided the story needed to be told to the people. So, the congregation processed to the community room, where a modern narrative form of the Passion was read. Some

“Society is saying that those marginal groups aren’t worth as much as the established middle class. The church is saying that if you look at what we believe as people of resurrection, looking at God’s work of justice, mercy and compassion, we have to be much more open than the world in ways that value every person. ... I think that’s the call.”

– The Rt. Rev. James E. Curry

Left, the Rev. Jaclyn Sheldon, with Liz Charron, step through the open church-doorway, visible in the back, to bring Communion to people in the community room.

The Rev. Jaclyn Sheldon stops at each table in the community room to ask for prayer concerns, and afterwards prays individually with anyone who asks for prayer.
church members found the change in tradition disruptive.

But Jaci asks, “Isn’t Jesus uncomfortable? Bringing Christ to people is uncomfortable, and we have to get over that.”

A new call for Episcopalians

Bishop Curry knows this call for Episcopalians to leave the building, to cross parish lines, perhaps share clergy, merge ministries and build a new sense of community, is challenging. “I don’t want to make light of it at all. Yeah, this is hard work,” he says.

And it requires people to both work on their inner spiritual life and reach outward to do God’s work. “It’s not an either or,” he says. “If it’s just action, it’s not going to be sustained. If it’s just working on our stuff, it’s not going to be sustainable either.”

The bishop believes the church’s message is especially attractive right now, a time of anxiety and fear and a deepening chasm between rich and poor. “Society is saying that those marginal groups aren’t worth as much as the established middle class. The church is saying that if you look at what we believe as people of resurrection, looking at God’s work of justice, mercy and compassion, we have to be much more open than the world in ways that value every person...I think that’s the call.”

Andrew Seeling is a member of St. Paul’s vestry and leader of the Friday Compline services. He also is studying to do overseas ministry. When asked about God’s mission at St. Paul’s, he writes in an email, “We are all about working toward wholeness and reconciliation in the world.”

The best for last

Jaci is comfortable in her skin and in this place and time. She came to St. Paul’s three years ago, after diverse church experience, five years at St. James’ in Preston and a difficult year off following the death of her husband of 33 years. He and their two sons, grown and now living near her home in Waterford, taught her “to love life right where it is.”

She speaks informally and from the heart, sings the hymns loudly, dresses in jeans and boots, and a collar, for a Wednesday service, and credits her age, 62, for making her more at ease as a vessel for God’s work. She feels closest to God when she puts herself aside and says, “Ah, God, I’m just going to be with you today.”

“It comes down to this: We have to fall as deeply and madly in love with God as we possibly can and then let God have his way with us.”

And as much as she cherished life with her family, she loves this phase. “I say to myself every day, ‘Really, God? You saved the best for last?’”
Progressive lay evangelists Adrian Dannhauser, left, and Matthew Lukens with their “Want Prayer?” sign.
Want Prayer?

Progressive lay evangelists take church to the streets

Pat McCaughan

progressive lay evangelist Adrian Dannhauser has been known to stand on a busy Stamford, Connecticut street at lunchtime with a sign: “Want Prayer?”

Sometimes she’d add a verbal invitation to those who approached. Others sometimes passed her by, slowed, turned around and returned.

“You’d hear about the loss of a loved one just the day before,” she recalled during a recent telephone interview. “Or, ‘my wife is having trouble getting pregnant.’”

“It’s a beautiful form of evangelism,” she said, her voice breaking. “To bear witness to people’s souls is such a privilege. You’re looking to share an experience. You try to facilitate an encounter with God.”

“Progressive evangelism is connecting my story, your story and the great story.”

The former Wall Street bankruptcy and restructuring attorney now attends Berkeley Divinity School at Yale and, along with her “partners in evangelism” Otis Gaddis III and Matthew Lukens, is among a growing number of progressive evangelists in the Episcopal Church who are taking church to the streets and the people.

“You’re not trying to change anyone’s mind or belief system,” said Adrian, 34. “I will pray with anyone of any faith in whatever mode they’re comfortable.”

Progressive evangelism, says Otis, now a transitional deacon and chaplain at the University of Maryland at College Park, means first and foremost, living out in a very visceral way, the baptismal promise “to seek and serve Christ in all persons and loving your neighbor as yourself.”

“It assumes that Christ is already present,” Otis said during a recent telephone interview. “The goal is not to bring people to church but to reveal the presence of church between you and the person you’re talking to.”

It can be as simple as striking up a conversation with the person beside him in line, or on an airplane, or in a café — something he has done many times.

“To be a progressive evangelist means that I am ready and able and desire to hear someone else’s spiritual story and their authentic being through that story and to reply with a story of my own that shows that I was really present.”

“Most people don’t have people to talk about that with,” said Otis, 32, a former lawyer. He founded the Episcopal Evangelism Network (EEN) in 2009 while a Berkeley seminarian.

Initially, the organization grew out of the students’ own practice of getting together and creating a safe place to share their own personal experiences of God, their spiritual stories.

“We built a lot of pastoral care skills in a lot of ways,” said Otis. “We started hearing each other in a way we didn’t anticipate. We became the community, we discovered that the issue is that we don’t talk to each other about stuff that really matters, including our spiritual matters.”

By May 2010 the EEN had spread to the Church Divinity School of the Pacific in Berkeley, California. Presently there are chapters at the Seminary of the Southwest in Austin, Texas, at the General Theological Seminary in New York, and at Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria. Otis hopes EEN will have a presence at all the Episcopal seminaries and also to involve laity and clergy in creating new Episcopal spiritual communities.

EEN recently convened a missional development conference Sept. 20-22 at the General Theological Seminary, aimed at equipping leaders in the church to develop spiritual communities, and to witness to and share the image of God in one another, engage people and communities across lines of difference, and form missional leaders who can nurture others’ pursuit of their authentic vocation, Otis said.

The conference was sponsored by the Berkeley Divinity School at Yale; Episcopal Young Adult and Campus Ministries; and the dioceses of Connecticut, Long Island, Maryland, Newark, Washington and Virginia.

Progressive evangelism is part of Matthew Lukens authentic vocation; he spent much of the summer giving away lemonade and engaging passersby in conversation on the steps of the Cathedral of St. Paul in Boston.

He served as an intern with The Crossing, an emergent worship community of St. Paul’s.

“The goal was to try and create a moment where people could stop and have this different thing encounter them in their day, to simply have a conversation with someone and give them something, usually lemonade. Also water. We wanted to know who they were, how they were doing and how far we could get into that conversation with them.”

Matthew Lukens, 25, was raised Southern Baptist in Alabama and is well aware of the connotations the word “evangelist” can evoke. “In some traditions it is the job of the evangelist to transform you into being my way. But in progressive evangelism, I need to have an openness to being transformed because other people are bringing God’s light to the conversation in the way they’ve experienced it.”

He recalled, laughing, that after his first “want prayer” street experience with Otis and Adrian, he realized that “it took The Episcopal Church to get this former Southern Baptist out on a street corner praying for people.”

Progressive evangelism is not, however, about converting or getting people to church, he said.

“To me, progressive evangelism is primarily a posture toward encountering other people. I think of it as a spiritual practice. The opportunity to go deeply into conversation with other people, to hear their passions, where do they hear God speaking to them, whether or not they become an Episcopalian. Those conversations get at precious places in our lives that I find people don’t have an opportunity to share.”

Mostly, it is about forming spiritual community. “It’s something people are also hungry for,” he added. “One hears about the large number of people that don’t identify with any religion or say they’re spiritual but not religious, but the thing that’s always missing in those places is a community to have that conversation.”

Otis agreed. “Your listening ears become the soil for the word that is already there,” he said of the spiritual conversations. “And it’s fun, because you’re watching people literally become alive in front of your face, and that’s what church can be.”

Bishop Eugene Sutton has commissioned a lay evangelist in the Diocese of Maryland, Buddy Coffey.

He had been in the discernment process but had concluded that, “ordained ministry was not for me,” said Buddy, 62, a former engineer.

But the bishop recognized Buddy’s “extraordinary gifts in introducing the gospel to people,” and commissioned him to serve as a lay evangelist, teaching, preaching and writing about evangelism, as well as engaging others in spiritual conversation and how to communicate their faith to others.

“I’d like to commission more lay evangelists,” Eugene Sutton said during a recent telephone interview. “For one thing, it helps the whole church, it helps individuals, because a number of these individuals are seeking a way for the church to recognize their gifts and even support them in continued on page 14
some way, even if not financially. It could ease the pressure we have on the ordination process.”

Buddy describes his vocation as being a lively witness who proclaims by word and example the good news of God in Christ. “People always ask, ‘what’s this about?’ It lets me begin a conversation that may or may not lead to a spiritual conversion.”

In Southern California, Randy Kimmler “unintentionally” helped plant the Community of the Holy Spirit in the Silver Lake district of the Diocese of Los Angeles about six years ago. Mostly, he just listened to the Holy Spirit, he said.

“It’s not a church. It’s not a mission. It’s an anomaly and dioceses around the country are trying to figure out what to do with groups like us that are springing up all over the place,” he said during a recent telephone interview.

The Community of the Holy Spirit (CHS) “started off as a Lenten study group for about six or seven lay people,” he recalled.

It was so much fun that they wanted to continue after Lent. And they wanted to add Eucharist. A local priest celebrated and “then we said, ‘why don’t we keep doing this?’” Randy recalled.

Lay-organized and led, the group is considered an emergent progressive Christian community, he said recently.

CHS continues to meet regularly on Thursday evenings in a space above a local restaurant. “We call it the Lord’s Supper in three courses. The first thing we do is offer them bread and wine.”

The first course is a gathering time, with beverages and hors d’oeuvres, fellowship and conversation. Newcomers are greeted and introduced to the group by those with whom they’ve been speaking.

The second course includes hearing the word, a five-minute response or reflection to it, followed by time for sharing by group members. A priest — from an established rota of about 20 — celebrates the Eucharist.

The final course “is dessert. We clear the altar and set it up with dessert and people can stay and talk as long as they want,” Randy said.

The group’s evangelism is also unique — by sharing their space for monthly art exhibits featuring the work of local musicians, writers, sculptors and painters, he said.

Want Prayer? continued

 Ministry focus on...

...prayer life

Reconnecting with icons; connecting more deeply to Christ

Laura J. Ahrens

This year my prayer life has been rich and full, drawing mostly on my practice of reading the daily office. Finding time most mornings to sit in prayer and quiet and read the office has been a sustaining and life giving connection point for me in the busyness of “Life.”

At the General Convention of The Episcopal Church in Indianapolis this year, however, I was reminded of another spiritual practice that has been a wonderful window and connection point for me in my spiritual journey. Every day as we gathered for the Eucharist in the converted ballroom, the hanging behind the altar revealed a beautiful image of the icon the Virgin of Vladimir, Mary holding her son.

This 12th century Russian icon, also known as the Virgin of Tenderness, is moving for any number of reasons. As I participated in the worship there I found Mary’s eyes piercing my soul. Her eyes looked out at the gathered congregation and spoke of love, compassion, sadness and hope. I felt very held by her gaze.

Mary’s hand and eyes invite the seeker to move into a deeper place, to move closer to Jesus. The icon has so much to say to each one of us, so much to reveal about Jesus and our relationship with him. I found that Mary was not only calling to me to know his story, but also to tell his story and seek to live his story in the world. Her invitation was not only to go deeper into my own personal spiritual journey, but to see the precious, sacred story as one that I need to proclaim. It’s a love story that I am called to reveal tenderly and compassionately to a world that knows the truths of suffering and loss. The icon called me to see in the holiness of the story, a calling to share its love and hope with the world.

I am refreshed by my reconnection with icons. This summer I visited the Weston Priory, a community of Benedictine monks, when I was on vacation in Vermont and bought an icon that invites me to see Jesus embracing the world. I wonder where my prayers with this image will lead me?

I invite all of you to reflect on your spiritual practices. What is helping you move deeper into your relationship with Jesus? What new ways might God be inviting you to know him more fully? How might you be called to share His love with others?
The Deacons’ Council, made up of deacon, laity, priests, and myself, worked hard to recreate the formation program for deacons, which has been shared with the Diocese. Our broader challenge was in rethinking, “What is the diaconate in Connecticut?” We asked ourselves questions, such as, “What is the life of a deacon?” and “How are our deacons living out their call to serve God’s mission in Connecticut?”

While we continue to have some deacons serving in the traditional role of pastoral support and outreach liaison in parishes, the focus of our ministries going forward includes a much broader spectrum of “trying on” new ways to empower others to join God’s mission of restoration and reconciliation in our local contexts.

Two examples of deacons in non-traditional roles include the Rev. Donald Richey and the Rev. Doug Engwall.

Donald is assigned not to a parish, but to Church by the Pond, a mission-focused ministry of the Cathedral that shares the Holy Eucharist, fellowship and lunch with those gathered in Bushnell Park on Saturday afternoons. He works with parishioners of the Cathedral, other deacons and other churches to encourage people to learn more about their own gifts for ministry and to try on new ways of being church and serving God.

Doug is the protestant chaplain at Central Connecticut State University. He is also the deacon assigned to St. Mark’s, New Britain, contiguous to the CCSU campus. One of the great blessings that Doug brings to CCSU is his love for music and his new-found passion for drumming. Through drumming, Doug invites the students, faculty and others associated with CCSU to tap into (pun intended) their musical gifts and give voice to their passions.

I spent a day recently with Doug at CCSU and had the chance to join one of his drumming circles. We each picked a drum or some other small percussion instrument and were asked to use the instrument as a way to introduce our name and ourselves to the group. Athletes used sports imagery and a drum beat to share their name, others used humorous poetry and a wood block. We built on each other’s melodies and made a band. Then, after some repetition, louder and softer, we moved to silence — a Holy Silence. Our hearts still beat rapidly with the music and then gradually slowed to the silence. As the music ended, I could hear the call, “Peace, be still.” The circle became a safe space for people to explore their own relationships, with themselves, with others and with their God. Sharing God’s love, Doug empowers others to know and feel God’s love and share that love with the world.

What gifts and strengths has God bestowed upon us that we can share with others to help them find their gifts and strengths to serve God’s mission?
On Holy Tuesday, over 150 Connecticut clergy took to the streets of Hartford in public
witness to pray the Stations of the Cross with our bishops. The procession made stops at
Church by the Pond in Bushnell Park, the heart of the business district, government offices,
schools, City Hall, the Ribicoff Federal Building, and the Church of the Good Shepherd. As we re-
membered the last events in Jesus’ earthly life, we prayed for victims of violence and degradation,
for justice and compassion in our cities and towns, for the abolition of the death penalty in our
state, and for the courage to take the Gospel message of restoration and reconciliation out into
the world. One priest said, “This is where we should be as we renew the vows of our ordination
and contemplate the death and resurrection of our Lord.”

The last Station of the Cross was prayed on the steps of the State Capitol as the legislature pre-
pared to debate a bill to abolish the death penalty in Connecticut. We prayed for wisdom and
guidance for our state representatives and senators who carry the burden of responsibility to enact
laws for our common good. And we prayed for ourselves in words attributed to St. Francis:
Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let us sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is discord, union;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.
Grant that we may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.
As the new fire is kindled, “East of the [Connecticut] River” parishes gather for the celebration of the Easter Vigil at St. Mary’s, Manchester. Across the Anglican Communion local communities are rediscovering the power and beauty of this service which provides space and time for retelling the story of God’s saving deeds from creation through the death and resurrection of Jesus into the unfolding of God’s work among us today. The full expanse of God’s mission of restoration and reconciliation is grounded in words of Scripture, ancient and modern prayers of the Church, and our affirmation of the Baptismal Covenant.

Parish collaboration is one of the ways that the Diocese of Connecticut has been changing. The “East of the River” parishes, for example, aren’t a deanery or an officially designated ministry, but an informal and voluntary group that enjoys collaborating on worship and Christian formation, in particular. The parishes included St. James’, Glastonbury; St. John’s, Vernon; St. John’s, East Windsor; St. John’s, East Hartford; All Saints’, East Hartford; St. George’s, Bolton; Grace Church, Broad Brook; Grace Church, Stafford Springs; Emmanuel Lutheran, Manchester; Concordia Lutheran, Manchester; and St. Mark Lutheran, Glastonbury.

Clergy and parishioners from the “East of the River” parishes listen to a Godly Play story during a joint Easter Vigil service held at St. Mary’s, Manchester.

The Rt. Rev. James E. Curry is bishop suffragan of the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut. He is active in grassroots advocacy groups and has worked with Bishops for a Just World for ten years.
Christian duty as outlined in the *Book of Common Prayer* calls us to spread the kingdom of God with our active participation. We vow, in our Baptismal Covenant, to “seek and serve Christ in all persons”... and one of the Five Marks of Mission in the Anglican Communion call us to “…respond to human need by loving service.”

This is not new news for most of us.

In this age of the changing church, we are looking for new ways to do things. Parochialism is out. Collaboration is in. Daring to cross deanery borders and town lines, we are finding a new way to witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ and to join together with our brothers and sisters in mission for strengthened witness and action. We are called to encourage each other, to build each other up... (I Thess 5) and to be united in mind and purpose (I Cor. 1). And, at the end of the day we might find when we try something new that it is good to get out, to meet some new people, and to expand our horizons while building the kingdom.

Here are three programs in our diocese that are looking for help. These three represent the tip of the iceberg of how, in our diocese, we are participating in God’s mission. Perhaps you will find something here that calls you to try on something new.

**Ascension House and Church on the Hill**
77 Lamberton Ave. New Haven, CT 06519
A Church “re-plant” and Community Mission Center
Interns have been hard at work for nearly a year under the direction of Fr. Robert Hendrickson to restore Ascension Church in the Hill section of New Haven and to make it ready for worship and as a site for social service and mission. This re-planting of a dormant Episcopal church (a mission of Christ Church, New Haven) requires an enormous amount of work in preparing the physical plant and coordinating volunteers to staff the variety of programs that will serve the residents in the neighboring community. Community meals, tutoring programs, food relief, and a new home for “New Haven Reads” a literacy program, are among the efforts that Robert and his corps of interns are preparing to launch. He is seeking help from individuals, youth groups and others who can help to paint, cook, garden and volunteer in the social service programs. Contact Robert through the Ascension website: www.ascensionnewhaven.org.

**Shepard Meadows Therapeutic Riding Center**
733 Hill St. Bristol, CT 06011
Our Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Connecticut is host to a fantastic center where persons with cognitive, emotional and/or physical dis-
abilities take part in equine assisted activities. Administrative Director Petra Shearer refers to Shepard Meadows as “The Miracle Farm.” She describes the miracles in terms of the following “Recipe for Miracles.”

**Ingredients:** Six horses, two goats, three bunnies, two barn cats, 150 volunteers, eight part-time staff members and 35 people with cognitive, emotional and/or physical disabilities.

**How to prepare:** Mix carefully, with special attention to individual abilities and goals. Keep a positive attitude, speak with encouragement, smile often and communicate clearly how each ingredient can contribute to a miracle.

**Recipe’s Yield of Miracles:** The number of miracles coming from this recipe is endless. Shepard Meadows is a place where each being, whether animal or human, puts its best feet forward given what each of them has to contribute.

Shepard Meadows is looking for individuals or groups who are available for feeding, grooming and exercising the horses as well as barn work and general farm maintenance. Contact Nancy Vicino, volunteer coordinator at n.vicino@shepardmeadows.org or call 860-314-0007 to find out how you can help.

**A Festival of Learning: The Saturday School at St. John’s**

As this multi-generational tutoring program enters its ninth year, it is looking for volunteers to work with children and their parents on Saturday mornings from 9 - 11 a.m. The Rev. Michael Carroll, deacon at St. John’s, directs the Saturday School, a drop-in center where children in grades K-6 receive homework help and skill building in reading, writing and basic math. Serving primarily Latino and inner city families, the Saturday School also directs its attention to the parents of the children and offers help in a computer center located on the upper level of the parish house. Occasional workshop presentations also support the parents as they learn about reading readiness in their children, how to communicate with the school system and other relevant topics.

Volunteers are needed to work with both children and their parents and need not be bilingual.

Please contact Michael at St. John’s, 203- 754-3166.

For more information on how you can participate in God’s mission, connect with others and post your own program’s efforts, join our networking platform at www.ctmissionconnect.org.

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**Ordinations** (with appointments & assignments)

**AMY WELIN** Appointed priest-in-charge, St. John’s, Waterbury, effective September 1, 2012

**GREGORY WELIN** Appointed interim, St. Paul’s, Woodbury, effective September 1, 2012

**ADAM YATES** Appointed rector, St. Stephen’s, East Haddam, effective September 15, 2012

**Resignations & Retirements**

**JOHN BRANSON** Retired as rector, Christ & Holy Trinity, Westport, effective June 30, 2012

**BENNETT BROCKMAN** Resigned as priest-in-charge, Grace, Stafford Springs, effective July 16, 2012

**DONNA DOWNES** Retired as rector, St. Paul’s, Woodbury, effective July 22, 2012

**MARK SANTUCCI** Retired as rector, St. Mark’s, Mystic, effective August 1, 2012

**BRUCE TORREY** Retired as rector, St. John’s, East Windsor, effective July 1, 2012

**JANET WAGGONER** Resigned as rector, St. Paul’s, Shelton, effective July 31, 2012

**JANE WHITE-HASSLER** Retired as rector, Grace, Newington, effective June 30, 2012

**Deaths**

**BLANCHE HAMILTON** died July 14, 2012, in Longmont, Colorado.

Registry information is for the period of June 1 - September 30, 2012 and is provided by the Bishops’ Office.
The Rev. Amanda Akes never dreamed of working in ordained ministry. However, God called her to do just that and more. Amanda, assistant rector at St. James’, Glastonbury since October 2011, primarily focuses on Christian formation for youth and adults. Her call to parish ministry occurred in college. Originally from Houston, TX, she attended Austin-based St. Edward’s University, a small Catholic and liberal arts school. Although she grew up Episcopalian, Amanda attended the college for its creative writing program, because writing is one of her passions. After taking a religious studies class, she loved it and changed her major.

While participating in youth groups in church, she was encouraged to become a parish priest, but at that time, that was not what she wanted to do. Her idea of ministry was limited, and she was more interested in learning about theology and deeply exploring her faith. In addition, some of Amanda’s professors who served in the Peace Corps or Jesuit Volunteer Corps intrigued her.

“I admired them and said maybe I could do something like that,” Amanda recently recalled in her parish office.

She discovered that The National Episcopal Church had a similar program. She applied and was placed in the Office of Women’s Ministries in New York City, where her focus was on social justice. Amanda recognized that ordained ministry was only one facet of ministry in the Church. She found a wide plethora of opportunities, including advocacy and social justice.

“I didn’t want to be a parish priest or a youth minister,” she pointed out. “When I saw what the Church was engaged in, it changed my life. The Diocese of Texas in Houston said that you couldn’t be gay and ordained. It was ingrained in me that that was not a possibility. By going to New York, I saw that not only white men in their 40s with kids were doing this church thing. There were all genders and ethnicities.”

After a discussion about ordained ministry with people at The Episcopal Church in New York, Amanda decided that she wanted to go to seminary. The next year in 2007, she enrolled in Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge. The Diocese of New York sponsored her for ordination and she graduated in 2010 with an M.Div.

Within the ordination process, Amanda had one year before she would be ordained. During that year, there was nothing prescribed for her to do. So, the Diocese of New York gave her the freedom to do whatever she wanted, and she chose...
Ministerially, I think God has called us beyond where we have to be and more into collaborative relationships. He wants us to break out of our communities and work together with other people.

- The Rev. Amanda Akes

Amanda is in charge of Christian formation for youth and adults. This year, confirmation classes will rotate from congregation to congregation. In addition, they plan to hold a local retreat, or go out-of-state on a spiritual pilgrimage for spiritual bonding. St. James’ is also considering partnering with churches in Hartford and hosting activities year round.

“We will give them another breath of experience,” said Amanda. “We will get outside of the four walls of St. James’, beyond our selves. We are so ingrained to go to one church and then check out for the rest of the week. We need to put ourselves in the community.”

Her congregation did just that this past spring with adult formation, hosting an event called “Theology on Tap,” and invited the community. It was held at a local Irish pub near the parish. The church advertised the event in fliers and in the local newspaper. More than 50 people attended, said Amanda. The theme was God in taboo. The discussion was on politics from the Church’s perspective. The discussions during other weeks ranged from religion to sex.

“For adult formation programs at church, maybe 12 people show up,” Amanda said. “[But at the restaurant], we talked to the community and brought people in by the droves. It was really exciting for us and the community to break out of the four walls and bring a spiritual message to the world. We broke out of our comfort zone and shared Christ’s message to the world in many ways; we formed partnerships and found new ways of being God’s people.”

The Rev. Nancy E. Gossling, rector of St. James’, Glastonbury, said that Amanda has been a welcomed addition to the church.

“She is a true gift to God’s mission, Christ’s ministry, our Church, and the world,” said Nancy. “I love working with Amanda! I find Amanda deeply committed to collaborative ministry, well organized, accepting of and seeking diversity and engagement with “the other,” and a person of authenticity and integrity. She is both a pastoral and spiritual presence to all people. It is a joy and a privilege to be in ministry with Amanda.”

Personally, Amanda is making a difference in God’s mission by thinking outside the box and outside the walls. Her vision for a church community is to be honest and authentic.

“I found in my life being open and sharing my experiences has been healing,” she confessed. “There are real places where there has been hurt. There needs to be an opportunity to talk about these things, an opportunity for people to get real and address different issues of hurt and fear. God wants us to be restored and reconciled to him and ourselves. It’s important to be open. I wasn’t open about [being a lesbian] while growing up in Texas. I told my parents before I went to New York. Coming out was a big deal for me. My parents have been great, supportive.”

Most of Amandas’ family still lives in Houston, including her parents and brother. She has a sister in Australia. Amanda, 28, lives with her girlfriend, whom she met in South Africa, in Hartford. They both went through the Episcopal Church’s Service Corps. In her spare time, Amanda enjoys reading and exploring Connecticut. She loves the state’s beautiful parks, rivers and hills.

The things that define Amanda are “a book that continues to be written.” In that book, she includes her year-long services in New York and South Africa, her three years in seminary, embracing who she is, which includes her sexualities, and her desire to be an ordained leader in the community. Something that she never dreamed she would do.

Frankye V. Regis is a freelance writer, editor and author of two books Dancing With Granny, and A Voice From the Civil Rights Era. She is currently an associate instructor in the Humanities Department at the Academy of Aerospace & Engineering in Hartford. She is a Central Connecticut Writer Project Fellow and reading consultant. A former journalist, she worked for several newspapers, including the Los Angeles Times, Cox Newspapers and the New Haven Register.
A multicultural embrace of the Church
Carlos de la Torre

Karin Hamilton

Three years ago, then 19-year old Peruvian-born and US-raised Carlos de la Torre was content with his bilingual, bicultural life and his Roman Catholic faith. He was living at home in Port Chester, New York, a small city on the New York/Connecticut border, and was a sophomore at Manhattanville College.

He loved the way people could base their whole life on faith in God, so it wasn’t a surprise to his family and friends when he told them he planned to major in religion.

Then, God made it personal and invited him to consider a new direction.

In one of Carlos’ classes, a professor mentioned The Episcopal Church (TEC) in passing. It struck Carlos as he listened that TEC kept some of the catholic elements that he “held in [his] heart” and was also “similar to the ways [he] thought.”

Curious to learn more, Carlos went to the bookstore at Christ Episcopal Church in the neighboring town of Greenwich to buy a book about Anglicanism. He was warmly welcomed and invited to chat with a priest. He spoke with the Rev. Mark Fitzhugh, an assistant.

He bought a book about Anglicanism and for about a month he kept returning to talk with Mark. Finally, Carlos decided to attend a service.

“That was it for me,” Carlos said. “God had plans for me.”

After worshipping a while, he felt called by God to consider ordination.

“After being in the Episcopal Church for a few months I realized I could not only be part of a congregation, but I could use my life experiences, my history and traditions, and truly work for God’s mission,” Carlos said. “I felt called to that, to enter into that mission.”

He formed a discernment committee at Christ Church, Greenwich, and immediately had to deal with his own preconceptions about what a priest should be.

“I’m interested in social justice and urban ministry,” he said. “I’m from a small, Spanish-speaking community. How could I bring all those gifts to this church? I couldn’t break up who I was.”

Carlos was born in Peru and moved here with his mother in 1996. He has returned to Peru every year for a month or two in the summer. Because he was raised and educated here he didn’t learn Peruvian history, but in recent years, he’s been making an effort to reconnect with his heritage.

“I’ve embraced my culture a lot more,” he said. “It’s interesting to me to live in a dual world. I thought it would be harder, but I’ve been blessed by God.

“[Being bicultural] gives me an understanding of God, of the world, as a proud Latin American and poor Roman Catholic. It’s rooted in a different character and culture. I’m truly happy that I was raised in Peru and shaped here. “

As part of his discernment process, Carlos met with Bishop Ian T. Douglas and had to explain that he wasn’t following a traditional model. It was perfect timing, however, as the priesthood ordination process in the Diocese of Connecticut is changing and open to new understandings of priesthood.

All of who he is—bicultural, bilingual, raised in the Roman Catholic church—he sees as the gifts he brings with him to serve God’s mission. He’s found support and encouragement as he continue to explore his vocation.

Carlos graduated from Manhattanville in May 2012 with a degree in world religion and philosophy, and received the blessings and approvals to move forward in discernment. He’s now a first-year seminarian from the Diocese of Connecticut at Virginia Theological Seminary, pursuing the call to ordination as a priest in the Episcopal Church. Christ Church, Greenwich is his sponsoring parish.

He has attended several conferences for Latino/Hispanic Episcopalians sponsored by The Episcopal Church, and participated in the 2012 General Convention as part of “New Generation Latinos (NGL).”

This immersion into The Episcopal Church made him familiar with the work of the Latino/Hispanic Ministries of The Episcopal Church. An excerpt from a recent bulletin insert from TEC about that work stated that:

“The Episcopal Church’s Strategic Vision for Reaching Latinos/Hispanics” calls The Episcopal Church to be intentional about church planting and programming focusing on second and third generation Latinos. At General Convention this year, the focus was on New Generation Latinos (NGLs). This rapidly growing group represents about 62% of the U.S. Latino population, which accounts for nearly 30 million NGLs. “This group is between 14 and 34 years of age,” explained the Rev. Canon Anthony Guillén, missioner for Latino/Hispanic Ministries of The Episcopal Church.

The Episcopal Church is about hospitality and how he learned it from his mother. He also talks about his entry into The Episcopal Church and the hospitality of Christ Church, Greenwich and the wider Episcopal Church.

Watch Carlos on a short video taken at General Convention, “Moment of Hospitality,” on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9NE2-LBc1d-Q&feature=youtu.be. He talks about hospitality and how he learned it from his mother. He also talks about his entry into The Episcopal Church and the hospitality of Christ Church, Greenwich and the wider Episcopal Church.

Also, listen to two live radio interviews that included Carlos, available as podcasts on podcast.episcopalradio.com. Both conducted by the Rev. Daniel Valez-Rivera at the 2012 General Convention. Look up by date, both are 7/12/2012. One is on reactions of NGLs to a talk by the Presiding Bishop; the other is about their call to ministry.
Hispanic Ministries. “They are bilingual, bicultural, U.S. born, or came to the U.S. as children. They maintain their parent’s family values, faith and religious traditions. NGLs should be considered the mission field for The Episcopal Church.”

Carlos, who fits this model, knows there are challenges to the goal. Limited financial resources and a lack of ordained leadership are two of the top ones usually cited. But he sees a way forward.

“The Church is trying to figure out how we keep fighting for people, for God’s mission, with fewer resources,” he said. “Yes, we need funding, and we also need to be open to how we do Latino Ministry. We need to allow people to think in different ways.

“The old model of one priest for each congregation is not the future,” he said. “The future is bilingual, and bicultural. And it’s not a separate ministry; it’s a ministry of our Church. Part of the role of the priest should be [to serve as] a bridge between cultures.”

While the challenges are real, so are the opportunities for evangelism. Carlos recalled an experience from a few years ago that illustrates this.

He was at a party on a Saturday evening with friends and around midnight he started to say his goodbyes so he could go home and get some sleep before attending church the next morning. His friends asked him why he was going to church—they thought it must have been a baptism.

“No, I’m just going to church,” he told them. A young woman came over to him with more questions. She still wanted to know why he went to church and if church was the way it was portrayed in the media. He was able to share his experience with her.

“It was interesting to have the conversation,” Carlos said. “I told her that the church itself is not an angry mob. It’s welcoming and loving.”

He continues to experience that welcome at Virginia Seminary, where for the first time in his life—in this country—he’s with people from outside of the Northeast/NYC area. He appreciates the way they value diversity. He’s been taking advantage of new opportunities in the area including shadowing a case manager who works with homeless people as they transition to more permanent housing, and going out on weekends with a team to bring breakfast to people living on the streets.

The Rev. James B. Lemler, rector of Christ Church Greenwich, has high praise for their sponsored seminarian. “Carlos is precisely the kind of person seeking and discerning leadership in the church that we need today,” said Lemler. “He has great capacities in learning, prayer, and relationship building. His discovery of Christ Church and the Episcopal tradition was a delightful and divine serendipity and a fantastic fit for him and his identity. He, and young candidates like him, will bring a multi-cultural and post-modern dimension to our ministry for the future.”

Amen to that. And Carlos is not shy, so the whole Episcopal Church is likely to hear from him again.
A new understanding of Church leads to a need for new diocesan structures

Karin Hamilton

The world today references a new understanding of the Church as being missional—the missional Church. The emphasis here is on the mission of God, not the mission of the Church.

...Our vocation as Christians, by virtue of our baptism, is to participate with God in God's mission of restoration and reconciliation in the world; to heal the brokenness, division and alienation in the world around us, seeking right relation with God and each other in Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In short, our baptismal work is to restore all people, and all creation, to unity with God and each other in Christ. Our work is not to keep some 20th century, or even earlier model, of the Church in business. Our work is to put God's mission first, not the Church first.

...The 21st century invites us, no—requires us, to be a much flatter, networked organization where together we share with one another both our burdens and our bounty as one united Body of Christ in service to God's mission beyond the church.

The role and function of a diocesan structure now is to serve as a nodal point, a network router if you will (using a digital metaphor) whose purpose is to link individuals and communities together for more effective service to God's mission....

-Excerpts from Bishop Ian T. Douglas' Annual Address, October 2011
An overview of diocesan changes

A year earlier, in his first annual address in 2010, Bishop Douglas called the Diocese of Connecticut into a time of mission discernment to more fully discover our common life and common action in God’s. A related task force formed after the 2010 Convention began trying out new ways of talking about God’s mission. One of its creations was ctmissionconnect.org, a dedicated website, still a work in progress, designed as common digital space for Connecticut Episcopalians and friends to network and support and resource each other in God’s mission. It is has more than 500 members now, discussion boards, fledgling networks, and more.

By 2011, our longstanding committees, commissions, agencies and boards had begun to undertake a full review of their assumptions, current work, and possibilities in God’s mission. These have now included the Bishop and Diocesan Executive Council, the Program & Budget Committee, the Bishops’ Fund for Children, Church Missions Publishing Company, and others.

Official diocesan “processes” have undergone this same review with an eye toward the needs of the 21st century church. Our diaconal formation process has been reworked; others are still in progress including the priesthood ordination process and the parish transition process. There is a group working to create structures and support for new models of part-time clergy in parishes.

Some diocesan-wide changes have been directed by The Episcopal Church. This includes changes to the Title IV clergy disciplinary process and to medical insurance. By vote of the 2012 General Convention, there will be as-yet unknown structural changes to our denomination that will surely impact us. These will be proposed in late 2014 and voted on in 2015.

Convention changes

Our diocesan annual convention was re-imagined as less of a purely legislative event and more of an opportunity to learn and discern God’s mission together, as well as to conduct business. In one exercise at the 2011 Convention, for example, people sat at round tables in groups of 10 and shared an experience with God. They listened to each other, took notes on a paper tablecloth marked in concentric circles, and discerned common elements. At the end of the exercise each group wrote what they believed that we, as the Diocese of Connecticut, could do now to “Put God’s Mission First,” the theme of the convention. This was later shared with the Bishop and Diocesan Executive Council to inform their decision-making.

Using a list of all the words and phrases from the center circles of all 65 tablecloths, the “tag cloud” in the Connecticut map on the next page shows the top most-often repeated of those words. The larger the word, the more often it was repeated.

The 2012 Convention will again be held in a hotel, with people seated at round tables. The theme is, “Claiming, equipping, and sending leaders in God’s mission.” A follow-up event is being planned by the Canon for Mission Integrity and Training for the whole diocese in spring 2013.

Diocesan staff changes

Our diocesan staff has undergone significant change. In 2011, six positions were eliminated, two people retired (one after 30 years), and one resigned to take a new job. Two new positions were created and staffed, one in an “acting” capacity. The administrative assistants re-organized their work and took new titles. This year, the bishops and the rest of the staff worked on their priorities and several more were named canons. One is adding leadership training to her portfolio. Two new part-time assistants have begun to work at Diocesan House. The “acting” canon has chosen not to be considered for a permanent position, and a search is underway to fill that position. (For a list of current staff, see list on the next page).

The bishops have been working together as one episcopate as well as overseeing separate areas of diocesan life. They meet weekly whenever possible and are involved in all facets of these changes in diocesan structure. Sunday visitations provide opportunities for them to teach and talk about God’s mission. Among other changes, they have re-introduced parish confirmations; given permission for clergy to officiate at marriages of same-sex couples; and shared “Guidelines for Mutuality” in all their meetings and gatherings as a way to keep conversations open and safe. (See guidelines below).

Guidelines for Mutuality

These guidelines have been introduced to the diocesan staff, Executive Council, and to the clergy and have been posted online and recommended for vestries and other meetings. They’re from VISIONS, Inc., a nonprofit enterprise that provides training to achieve greater effectiveness in a multicultural setting. (see www.visions-inc.org for more information)

“Try on” new ideas, practices, etc.
It’s okay to disagree
It is not okay to blame, shame, or attack, self or others
Practice “self-focus”
100% responsibility for own learning
Practice “both/and” thinking
Notice both process and content
Be aware of intent and impact
Maintain confidentiality

Parish changes, initiatives

Parishes have established discernment committees, offered listening sessions, held vestry and parish leadership retreats and workshops, offered sermons, teaching series, forums and other opportunities to explore the beckoning change. Some have opted to work with Public Narrative as a tool. Some parishes have big youth groups and new chapels and others struggle with shrinking endowments and limited viability. One church has chosen to close and others may end up making that decision as well. There hasn’t been a diocesan-wide, top-down, one-size-fits-all program on parishes in part because that’s impossible to do, given the diversity parishes, and also because it’s no longer the diocesan model. It wouldn’t work that way anyhow: God speaks to each community with its unique gifts and resources and passions, in its particular local context, inviting them to join God’s mission of restoration and reconciliation.

It looks different in different places. Here’s a partial list of some of what’s been emerging in these new times: There are Episcopal residential communities of spiritual discernment for young adults at St. Hilda’s House and, for the newly ordained, at Ascension House, and a replanting of the Church of the Ascension, all of which have emerged out of Christ Church, New Haven. There are new locations for Rhythms of Grace, a

continued on page 26
God in CT

Putting God’s mission first.

Using a list of all the words from the center circles of all 65 tablecloths at the 2011 convention, this map shows the top 100 most-commonly listed words. The larger the word on the map, the more often it was repeated. These reflect our common diocesan values across our local communities of practice.

Across the state, priests and deacons went to coffee shops, malls, sidewalks and train stations on Ash Wednesday to offer “Ashes to Go.” A half-dozen clergy who like to lead retreats decided to work collaboratively as “Fresh Springs Retreats.” A new spiritual center has started at St. Timothy’s, Fairfield. St. Paul & St. James’ in New Haven has a jazz band at its main Sunday service. At least two churches have held “Theology on Tap” conversation series at their neighborhood bars; youth groups and churches are collaborating in new ways; the bishops appointed a Diocesan Poet; several parishes have started coffee houses, some just for teens; and churches are reclaiming the importance of the 12-step meetings they host, with at least three offering “Recovery Eucharists” and holding a special annual “Recovery Sunday.”

This is an amazing time to be part of the Body of Christ that we call the Church.

DIOCESAN STAFF | September 2012
offices at Diocesan House, Hartford

Bishops
Bishop Diocesan The Rt. Rev. Ian T. Douglas
Bishop Suffragen The Rt. Rev. James E. Curry
Bishop Suffragen The Rt. Rev. Laura J. Ahrens

Administrator for the Bishops’ Office Julie Burnep
Canon for Mission Collaboration & Congregational Life The Rev. Dr. Audrey Scanlan
Assistant for Mission Collaboration and the Bishops’ Office Jody Wynn Rodiger
Canon for Mission Leadership (open position as of 9/30/12) Linda Walley
Administrator for Transitions and Clergy Support Linda Walley
Canon for Mission Communication & Media Karin Hamilton
Canon for Mission Integrity and Training Robin Hammel-Urban

Administrator for Safe Church and Ordination Processes Deborah (Deb) Kenney
Secretary of the Diocese The Rev. Molly James, Ph.D
Administrator for Diocesan Events and Diocesan House Support Bonni McKenney
Diocesan Archivist Margaret (Meg) B. Smith
Canon for Mission Finance and Operations Cindy Winslow
Accountant Karolyn Dunn
Accounting Specialist–Cash Receipts, Revolving Loan Fund, Database Management Melissa Haas
Senior Accounting Specialist–Insurance, Investments, Accounts Payable, Pledge, Employee Benefits Shirley McGarry
Following Jesus
Forming for God’s mission at Camp Washington

Matt Cornish

On any given day if you were to step foot onto Camp Washington, the diocesan summer camp located on 300 acres in the northwest hills of Connecticut, you would find youth engaged in an endless array of activities. From hiking, canoeing, swimming, and arts and crafts, to sharing meals, every camper has an opportunity to engage in an activity that brings them joy.

This is equally true of the worship life at Camp Washington. As camp director, I found myself saying often this summer that to a number of our campers and staff, Camp Washington has become their worship home. While approximately half of our campership is Episcopalian, a number of the youth we serve may rarely, if ever, step foot into a sanctuary throughout the year. However, if you were to join in a morning worship period (affectionately known this past summer as “Wake Up, Shake Up, Raise Up”), an evening service of Compline, or a closing Eucharist, you would be hard-pressed to find a child or staff member who did not seem completely comfortable. This is true even though no two weeks are ever the same. Different chaplains, different songs, different themes, and different campers produce a wholly unique worship environment built upon exploration, communication, and celebration of Christ, of our world, and of one another.

Only when the clamor of the outside world is silenced will you be able to hear the deeper vibration. Listen carefully.

– Sarah Ban Breathnach

One of my favorite memories of the summer was Chaplain Keith Voets pausing at certain moments and simply giving us permission to “take a second and remind yourself you’re in God’s holy presence.” The act of reflection is a powerful tool in Christian formation, and a blessing of the camp environment that offers both our campers and our staff the chance for silence and the permission to think.

Two examples come to mind of this reflection-as-formation, one with younger children, and one with teens.

During Children’s Camp I, every camper received a small journal. Throughout the day they were encouraged to jot down a moment when they saw God. All week long, at Compline with the Rev. Kristin Miles, campers shared their “God Sightings.” Here are some of the wonderful examples:

“Today I saw the sun through the trees as it was setting, and I knew God has given us this beautiful day.”

“Tonight during the evening program, I made eye contact with a deer and I felt God in that moment.”

“I saw a bird today, and just seeing that bird helped me know that God would always be there and care for me.”

“Today I ran faster than anyone else in soccer, and I felt God as I ran.”

Through their reflection these campers came to understand that we can see God in all things we experience.

A second example came in the form of an all-day simulation we engaged in during our first teen camp. The simulation split the campers into three countries of different socio-economic statuses. The campers were then tasked with surviving the day as citizens of a first world, second world, or third-world country. They could get jobs to support themselves, purchase visas...
to visit other countries, and rent leisure equipment. Everything came at a cost though, and a camper could find themselves needing to take a costly trip to the doctor, or paying a high fee to leave their home country, simply because there was not enough work where they lived.

The United Territories of Top Camp (UTTC) had high wages, low taxes, and relative freedom to travel easily from country to country. The welfare state of Santandia had higher taxes, but low cost healthcare. The island nation of Aciamaja relied solely on tourism to survive, but jobs were few, and work was hard.

This simulation had its biggest impact during lunch. The UTTC had endless trips to the kitchen to get as many turkey burgers and sweet potato fries as they wanted. Santandia was given enough food to go around, but no option to get more if anyone was still hungry. Aciamaja had barely enough to get by: a couple bags of rolls, and pitchers of water…with no ice! Eventually the campers realized that the UTTC could help the other countries by sharing in the surplus of food and water they had. However the Aciamajans realized quickly that the relief that was coming to them was most frequently taking the form of high sodium potato chips…and very little meat, if any at all.

As we sat down and debriefed the activity at the close of the day, the campers reflected upon what it meant to them when they realized that, especially at lunch, they were freely giving not what was needed most desperately, but what they didn’t feel like eating anymore. They were able to honestly put themselves into the shoes of other citizens of the world, even if only to a small degree, and understand what it truly must feel like to be without. They began to ask questions. They wanted to know more! Those teen campers may have truly understood what it means to give of yourself sacrificially as opposed to conveniently.

Camp Washington stands as an example of work that we as Christians are called to do. The laughter, joy, courage, teamwork, and acceptance teaches us about our responsibilities as Christians, and the witness of its ministry provides insight into defining what God may be calling us to do in the world.

When campers and staff go their separate ways at the conclusion of the summer, we can only hope that the experiences and reflections they have had will have helped to form them for service to God’s mission.

Matt Cornish has just completed his first summer as camp director at Camp Washington. He has been a member of the CW community for more than 15 years serving in many roles as a staff member. Matt holds a BA in music and theatre performance from Susquehanna University, as well as an MFA in acting from The Chicago College of Performing Arts. He currently lives in Bristol with his wife Melissa (whom he met working at Camp Washington), where he serves as choirmaster at St. John’s Episcopal Church. When not devoting himself to Camp, he can be found locally on the stage of many community theatre companies or working as a paraprofessional for the Wethersfield Public Schools. Camp Washington staffer Gretchen Curry also contributed to this article.
An Interview with Carolyn Downs

Karin Hamilton

Carolyn Downs, 18, graduated from Christian Heritage School in Trumbull last May and is now a first-year student at Boston University. She’s studying political science. Her outside interests include tennis. She’s been a member of St. Paul’s, Shelton on the Huntington Green since she was three, and stayed there even after her mom, the Rev. Donna Downs, accepted a position in another town (she retired this past summer).

Why are you a Christian? I think that what God offers me is exactly what satisfies my needs. He offers reasons for why the world is what it is, he offers love...everything I learned from Him and His Word makes total sense.

Did you make a decision about it? I’ve been going to a Christian school since I was five years old. I grew up in the church and later, my mom became a priest. When I was 15, a sophomore, I decided it was what I wanted for my own life. The school I was attending has an emphasis on having a ‘close relationship with God.’ I wanted to know what that means. I sat down with myself and thought about what it means to be a Christian. I realized everything makes sense.

So what does that mean to you, in practical terms? As I live my life, to make decisions that would please God, all the way from the way I respond to people’s questions to the way I drive. If I say I am a Christian, I should be kind and show God’s love through myself. Respond to people lovingly. Be friendly to people.

What are the responsibilities of a Christian? As a Christian I have the responsibility to show Christ’s love through myself and to live my life according to what the Bible teaches me.

What kind of relationship do you have with the church? I’ve always felt welcome to be involved in the church. I was on the Diocesan Youth Council a few years ago, and I was on the design team for the Episcopal Youth Event [of The Episcopal Church]. Last spring, I organized a youth event in the Diocese of CT and would like to be part of the Official Youth Presence at a General Convention.

Do you like being a Christian? Yes. I like the community it brings me to. The serenity it gives to my questions. Knowing more what God can give me if I give him my life. I love the feeling I get. I get weird looks sometimes, when I tell people I’m a Christian. People don’t realize that being a Christian is incredibly rewarding. It’s being part of something much bigger than yourself.