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By the time you get this copy of CRUX, Diocesan House may have a new address. If not, it will soon. More than 10 years of trying to work with different plans to upgrade the building so it will be safe and accessible, working with neighborhood associations and city officials, have led nowhere. The diocesan convention voted two years ago to move, and committees worked hard since then.

Diocesan House is clearly not the Diocese of Connecticut (which is all of us together), nor the annual convention (which is our democratically-elected decision-making body). It’s the name given to the building where your bishops and staff have office space and meet with you and that can provide space for small - to medium-sized meetings and other gatherings. A grand, three-story mansion in West Hartford doesn’t reflect current diocesan-wide values of collaboration, transparency, and mutual accountability. So we’re sojourning forward and leaving this building behind.

And as we do, it’s ok to remember 1335 Asylum.

The woodwork is beautiful and the 1913 house is gracious. The bathtubs in the washrooms remind staff and visitors alike that this used to be a home. Miss Mabel Johnson lived in it with her sister, her aunt, and servants. In the 1950s, Bishop Walter Gray talked with Miss Johnson about donating her house for diocesan offices, and she chose to do that. Before that, Diocesan House had been on Farmington Ave, closer to downtown Hartford.

Her sunroom was then converted into All Saints’ Chapel. People have been baptized there. Priests have been deposed there. A handful of staff said Daily Morning Prayer, with more joining Wednesday Eucharists. Bishops and clergy on staff took turns preaching and celebrating. Stained glass window pane inserts on the glass walls, installed over the years, depict saints and other notable leaders. The last addition was of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, who established the first permanent school for the deaf in 1817, in West Hartford. (There will be a chapel in the new space, too, and there are plans to take the stained glass inserts.)

Miss Johnson stipulated that her house’s caretaker must be allowed to continue raising his family there, and he did. They lived on two floors in one section near the front. Former diocesan staff in earlier times still remember being kicked out of the house at 5 p.m. because it was “family time.”

Pipes that ran to the tubs were shut off, except for one - and that one had no hot water. Wires that ran through the house became ever more challenging to maintain as the world went digital. Bats occasionally darted out of the attic and flew through the hallways, so people working late at night knew to keep their doors shut. Paper towels in the washrooms were placed in a neatly folded stack on a glass shelf for most years, until industrial paper towel dispensers were installed.

The four staircases, including a grand central one, were great for discovering the building but not so great when someone had a heart condition, disability, or broken leg. One year, four staff people with offices on the second floor had various injuries or surgeries on their legs and feet, and each had to sit on the stairs and bump up or down.

Generally, choice corner offices went to the bishops. For more than a decade now the diocesan bishop has not taken a corner, but has been at the center of the building, horizontally and vertically. Suffragans have corner offices with private bathrooms, and a bishops’ assistant works out of a nearby former breakfast nook.

In the basement amid the archives there’s an alleged lock of Bishop Samuel Seabury’s hair and his alleged miter, fashioned with a top hat as its base. (Those are coming, too.)

Once, a group marched on 1335 Asylum Ave to protest votes by The Episcopal Church. Another time, a homeless man somehow snuck into the building and started living on the third floor. He’d only been there about a day before he was discovered from the trail of water and dirty paper towels he left in the nearby washroom. Staff called police to take him to a shelter, but he decided to go back into the streets, instead.

Thanks for the memories, 1335 Asylum. Now, it’s time to make new ones.
Once while not in uniform, rather than simply offering the usual cocktail party conversation stopper of “priest,” I responded reflectively: “hatching, matching, dispatching.” With a quizzical look my conversation partner replied, “So, you’re in mass marketing?” “Well, yes, in a manner of speaking,” said I. “Packaging and distribution?” he continued. “That’s one way to look at it,” I nodded. Then I came clean. And as I suspected, he was at a loss for words, but then found his footing: “So, what exactly do you do between Sundays since you don’t have to work?” We clergy are a contradiction to the world.

The work of a pastor brings together diverse patches of the human experience creating a deeply-textured tapestry forming the people of God. We baptize new life, officiate at marriages hinging on blissful hope and stand on the precipice blessing souls embarking for the other side. And then there is all that lies in between. Yet the poignancy of endings especially tests our mettle.

Coming alongside a person facing the mystery of death, we preside over the fabric of our divine connections undergoing a tear. Sometimes this is quite sudden, while at other times the renting of mortality’s garment is gradual, with time to reflect and prepare for the journey ahead. As pastors, we engage the division between this life and the next by proclaiming an eternal seamlessness withstanding all visible separations of body, mind and spirit through the promises of God.

Being a pastor can be a heartbreaking venture, leaving us a bit frayed as our common life is ever stretching under inexorable change, both inside our own perspectives and in the surrounding diversity of faces we call the church. We don’t choose them, rather, God chooses us for this family. Balanced by the sheer joy that comes with the daily touching of eternity, to oversee and commend to God person after person, year after year, taking leave of our spiritual families can nevertheless take its toll. Loss is very sad, and we pastors experience more than most, even in all of the hope we declare.

Jesus wept at the grave of his friend. We are in good company when we do as well. Christ-centered wellness, an integrated, healthy and balanced approach to life, with plenty of laughter, seems essential if we are to joyfully fulfill our vocation witnessing to Christ’s resurrection power over death. As the Spirit works through us, we become the healing, reconciling stitchwork God brings forth holding us all together, a sign of wholeness within a fragmented existence for far too many. And we could not be who we are without the laity framing God’s work in us.

A recent exchange occurred in an elevator as I rode to the 26th floor in a Manhattan office building, and a young woman nervously looked at my collar: “Did someone die?” “No,” I chuckled, “Just here for lunch.” “Oh, that’s good,” she exhaled with relief, then changing gears asked, “Is the lunch up there any good?”

Taken from the sublime to the mundane on a daily basis, “boring” is not in our lexicon. We are entrusted with what I believe is the world’s most privileged calling, each day bringing its own adventure in a world still trying to understand us.

The Rev. Joseph Shepley is currently rector of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Brookfield, CT. Prior to that he served as an urban missioner in NYC, which was borne out of his experience as a first responder at Ground Zero. Serving parishes in NYC and Tacoma prior to that, Joe has a heart for seeing relationships restored through Christian community.
The Rev. Danielle Elizabeth Tumminio is an ordained Episcopal priest and author of *God and Harry at Yale: Faith and Fiction in the Classroom*, and the just-published collection of spiritual stories, *When Two Or Three Are Gathered*.
Joining God’s mission
Read the Bible; learn from your neighbors; share your stories
Ian T. Douglas

The words: “God’s mission” are echoing around our diocese. In a wide variety of venues and conversations across the Diocese of Connecticut, people are talking about God’s mission.

Yet there seems to be some confusion as to what we mean when we speak of God’s mission. There is vagueness and lack of clarity when we talk about God’s mission. This is not surprising since understandings of the nature and shape of “mission” are changing radically. In the past we have generally spoken of: “my/our mission,” or “our parish’s mission,” or even “the mission of the Church.” Now, however, we are increasingly hearing the words “God’s mission” or “the mission of God” being uttered.

This change of language is more than semantics. For moving from “my/our mission” or “the Church’s mission” to the mission of God reflects a profound theological shift, a radical change of perspective. In the former, we as individuals, or the Church as an institution, are the focus of mission. We speak of our parish’s mission (re: parish mission statements) or an important outreach activity undertaken by our congregation for a community other than ours – think of a parish or deanery’s “overseas mission,” or the building of Habitat for Humanity house, or collecting school supply backpacks for needy children.

All of these “mission activities” are commendable and are wonderful expressions of our Christian love for our neighbors. While these outreach activities might serve the mission of God, they are not, however, in and of themselves God’s mission. In the mission of God, God is the focus, not us and our activities. God’s mission starts with God and what God is up to.

So what then is God up to; what is God’s mission? As Christians we believe that the mission of God is none other than God’s action, in and through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, to restore and reconcile a broken, hurting, alienated, and divided world. God’s mission is to make all things new - to bring about wholeness, healing, right-relation, and unity to all people with God and each other in Christ.

Mission is first and foremost about God and God’s action in the world. And as Christians, baptized into the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we are invited to join God in this work of wholeness, healing, right-relation, and restoration to unity. Baptism is our co-mission, commission into the Mission of God.

Now all of this might sound good theologically, even if it upsets and de-centers our old definitions and understandings of “our mission” or “the church’s mission.” The nagging question, however, is: So what does all this talk about God’s mission mean for me, or for my parish?

This question sometimes becomes more urgent if there is anxiety in the parish system because of declining membership or a decrease in financial resources. In such circumstances, outreach and church growth might be seen as a way to save the parish. But what we are focusing on here is God’s mission, not outreach and church growth as institutional fixes. Thus the question is: How do we get beyond our anxieties and join God in God’s mission?

The first thing we need to do is focus less on ourselves or on the Church, and more on God. And how do we do this? What is our source document for knowing about who God is what God has been up to from the beginning of creation, in the world today, and to the end of time? Of course the answer is: The Bible.

In Holy Scripture we find the story of a loving God who has created all things. We learn about how we too often seek our own will instead of the will of God thus distorting our relationships with God, each other, and with all creation. And we are told how God makes all things new, first through God’s covenants with a treasured people, and then ultimately through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God incarnate.

In Holy Scripture we are given a glimpse into how the Body of Christ can join in God’s restoring, reconciling mission. So to join in God’s mission, we need to know God through studying the Word of God, the Bible. There are many good Bible study tools available for individuals and parishes as we come to read, mark, and inwardly digest Holy Scripture. The Bible Challenge (http://thecenterforbiblicalstudies.org/ and the Anglican Communion’s “Bible in the Life of the Church” project (http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/theological/bible/index.cfm) are important resource that can help better engage God’s word. Reading and studying the Bible invites us more deeply into the mission of God.

Another thing we can do to join God in God’s mission is ask: what is it that God is up to in our community and various contexts today? Just as we read the Bible, we must also read our contexts. There is no text without context. How often do we take the opportunity as parish leaders to ask those in our broader community outside the church about what is going on in our neighborhoods? How often do we look outside our church buildings to discover what God might be up to, or what/who is in need of God’s healing love?

Recently two parishes in our diocese closed as a result of declining membership and finances. After both parishes had closed, bishops, diocesan staff, and individuals responsible for property matters in our diocese, invited a broad spectrum of community leaders to gather with these dioc-
esan officials to discern together what God might be up to and how the property resources of the former parishes might be best used to extend God’s mission in the wider world.

These community listening and discernment gatherings were filled with the Holy Spirit as we began to glimpse new ways by which we might join in God’s restoring and reconciling action in our different communities across Connecticut.

What would it look like, how would our life as parishes in the Diocese of Connecticut be transformed, if we all took time to ask our broader communities: What is God up to in the world around us? How can we join God as God goes about restoring and reconciling the various contexts of our communities?

Joining in God’s mission requires us to be engaged with text (the Bible) and contexts (what God is up to in our communities.) But joining in the mission of God requires an additional key step – and that is: sharing our own stories of how each and every one of us has been drawn into, experienced the restoring, reconciling love of God in Christ Jesus.

Over the last year or so, your three bishops, in our weekly parish visitations, have met with vestries to share personal stories about being caught up in God’s mission.

As lay and ordained leaders we have shared our own stories of encountering God’s restoring and reconciling love in the world around us. As we shared our “stories of self” we came to discover a common story, a “story of us.” Sharing our personal stories of healing and wholeness, we discovered a new commonality in what God is up to in the world around us.

This new sense of communion in God’s mission led us to ask: What would God have us do now to join in God’s mission?

And this question has driven us back to the Bible for more insights and leading as to what God would have us do now. So this year in our visitation conversations we will be asking vestry members and clergy what their favorite stories of Jesus are, and why are these stories meaningful to them. As we together break open Holy Scripture, we trust that we will be given new insights into how we might join God in our various contexts at this time.

And so we come full circle: text » contexts » stories in God’s mission » text » contexts » stories in God’s mission » text » contexts » stories in God’s mission » and on and on and on... Scholars might call this cycle a “hermeneutical circle” by which we interpret what God is up to in the world and how we find our place in it. I prefer to call it: joining God’s mission.

So let’s all jump into this redemption circle. What could be more exciting, what could be more hopeful, what could be more wonderful than to participate with God in God’s mission of restoration and reconciliation in a world so much in need of the love of God in Jesus?

Led by the Holy Spirit, let us all join in God’s mission.

QUESTIONS FOR BISHOPS’ CONVERSATION WITH VESTRIES

In The Episcopal Church the vestry plays a key leadership role, spiritually and canonically, in helping the congregation discern, and be faithful to, God’s mission. The vestry’s conversation with the bishop at the time of the Episcopal visitation is meant to help parish leaders become more effective in their ministry. These sets of questions were sent to vestries in advance of their parish’s Episcopal visitation, to help prepare for the bishop’s conversation with the vestry.

2012 - 2013 QUESTIONS

1. Tell one story about when you, as an individual, felt caught up in God’s mission of restoration and reconciliation in your own life. Be as specific as possible in telling the story. Tell the story in the present tense, using the first person (“I”).

2. Tell one story about when, as a part of the Body of Christ (your parish, some part of your congregation/vestry, the Diocese of Connecticut, an ecumenical group, etc) you were actively involved in God’s mission.

3. Given these stories, what is God up to now, in your life and in the life of your community? How might you/we better join God in that mission?

2013 - 2014 QUESTIONS

1. As individuals, answer these initial questions: What is your favorite story of Jesus? or, what is your favorite Gospel story?

Why did you choose that story of Jesus/Gospel story? What does it mean to you?


3. Consider these additional questions: With respect to our participation in God’s mission, what does the “Introduction” of People of the Way say to: you? your parish? our diocese? What might it mean for you personally, and for your congregation communally, to focus on “the one thing” that Jesus calls us to do now (Zscheile, page 15)? Refer to your favorite story of Jesus/Gospel story.
After 215 years, member of St. John’s Episcopal Church, Waterbury, finally laid to rest

Karin Hamilton

The Rev. Amy Welin started as the newly called priest-in-charge of St. John’s, Waterbury, in September 2012. A few months after that, she received a call from the recently retired director of the Mattatuck Museum in Waterbury, Marie Galbraith, asking Amy if she would be willing to bury a man named “Fortune” who had died in 1798.

Fortune was an African American man enslaved by Waterbury physician Dr. Preserved Porter in the late 18th century - but neither his true name nor the full extent of his heartbreaking story were learned until recently.

There was an account, from an old reference book known as Anderson’s History of Waterbury, that a slave named Larry had died by drowning in the Naugatuck River and that his bones had been “prepared for anatomical study” by Dr. Porter, who was a bone surgeon at a time when access to skeletons for medical study was extremely limited.

After research begun in the 1990s, the bones were determined to actually be those of Fortune.

Amy Welin also learned that Dr. Porter’s wife, Lydia, was a member of St. John’s Episcopal Church in Waterbury and it was likely thanks to her that Fortune had been baptized there in December 1797.

“When I realized he had been baptized at St. John’s,” Amy said, “I thought, ‘Oh my heavens, this man is actually my parishioner!’” She gladly agreed to bury “Mr. Fortune,” as she called him, out of respect.

“We are giving a parishioner the decent and respectful burial that he was denied 215 years ago.”

The burial service, followed by interment at the Riverside Cemetery, was set to be held at St. John’s Church on September 12, 2013.

The gruesome details
Amy said that according to the story in Anderson’s History, when the body was recovered, Dr. Porter “processed his body at the riverside,” brought the bones back to his estate on the east side of Waterbury, and had them boiled. The bones were then used for anatomical study. The generations of bone doctors that followed in Porter’s family passed the bones down over the years.

In the 1930s, one of Dr. Porter’s descendants, also a physician, sent the bones to be reticulated - put together to make a skeleton - in Germany and then gave the skeleton to the Mattatuck Museum. It came with the name “Larry” written on his forehead, and each bone bore identification, in writing.

The skeleton was put on display in the 1940s and it became a popular attraction. During the 1960s the museum’s collections were refocused and the skeleton was displayed as Waterbury’s first “medical museum” and “a tangible reminder that slavery existed in the North.” Out of respect for the remains, and the community, the museum director took the skeleton down in 1970 and stored it in the basement.

Community-based history committee takes the lead
In the early 1990s, Maxine Watts, who was then the president of the Water-
“This is a story marked by paradox. It is the story of a man held as a slave, who was free enough to own a home, marry a wife and have four children, and who had no control over the disposition of his own body when he died.”

The Rev. Amy Welin

Left, St. John’s Episcopal Church, Waterbury, where Fortune was baptized in 1797 and where his burial service was held in 2013; right, Fortune’s final resting place in Waterbury’s Riverside Cemetery.

The committee, working with the museum, took up the challenge and sought the assistance of anthropologists, archeologists, and other scientists and historians. They learned the bones were really those of Fortune, and then they wanted to learn where he had been born, how old he was when he died, the kind of work he did, and how he died.

**Fortune’s bones**

Fortune’s remains were taken to Howard University where the late Dr. Mark Mack, who taught there, carefully washed off the words and numbers on the bones. Washing off glue that held the bones together revealed a damaged vertebra at the top of his spinal column.

“Dr. Mack believed this was the cause of Fortune’s death,” said Marie Galbraith.

But as there was no investigation at that time, drowning was listed as the cause of death on the death certificate, issued in 2013.

Other scientists who examined Fortune’s remains included Connecticut state archaeologist Dr. Nick Bellantoni, Dr. Leslie Rankin-Hill of the University of Oklahoma, Dr. Warrenerry and Dr. Michael Parks of Central Connecticut State University, and Dr. Alan Goodman of Hampshire College in Massachusetts.

In the spring of 2013 a team of diagnostic imaging professors and students from Quinnipiac University in Hamden, Connecticut, studied the skeleton. The bones were X-rayed and given CT scans, and a 3-D printer was used to make replicas of the bones. DNA analysis is currently underway, as well.

Between historians and scientists, they learned that Fortune, who was 50 to 60 years old when he died, owned a small house on the Porter’s land. He lived there with his wife Dinah and their three children, Jacob, Mira, and Roxa. Fortune also had an older son, Africa.

Early researchers said that Fortune was a strong, rugged man, who had suffered several injuries before his death, and speculated he worked on the Porter’s farm. The more recent analysis suggested Fortune was not an agricultural worker, and identified the injuries as a fractured left hand, a severely sprained left ankle, and lower back pain. Continuing studies may provide more definitive answers, but there may always be questions, as well.

Two years after Fortune died, only Dinah and a young man named Luke were listed in the Porter’s household. The museum has searched for relatives, but hasn’t found anyone. They are hoping someone’s genealogical studies will lead them to Fortune.

**Deciding it was time for Fortune to be buried**

In 2003 the museum launched an exhibit, “Fortune’s Story: Larry’s Legacy.” They commissioned Marilyn Nelson, Connecticut’s Poet Laureate at the time, to write an elegy honoring Fortune, which she called, _The Manumission Requiem_. The Waterbury Symphony commissioned composer Dr. Ysaye M. Barnwell to set it to music.

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In 2012, the *Fortune's Bones* cantata was performed by the University of Maryland “by a full symphony, two choirs, seven soloists, and a chorus of African bells.” The community there had again raised the question of why Fortune had not been buried and the performance, as described on Dr. Barnwell’s website, was a way for the artists there, together, to “metaphorically set Fortune’s bones to rest.

At about the same time, back in Waterbury, the committee was making the final decision to literally set the bones to rest, and contacted Amy Welin. A local funeral home donated the casket and their professional services, and St. John’s donated a cemetery plot in Riverside Cemetery.

“We all agreed that it was time for him to be buried,” said Marie. “I think the committee and the museum made the right decision. We can now tell a real story about a real person, instead of a mythical skeleton.”

Maxine Watts admits she had been a holdout for not burying Fortune because of how much the scientists have learned about his life and his death. With new advances in science taking place all the time, she said, she was optimistic about how much more might be learned in the future. But after work done this past spring at Quinnipiac University to create lasting records, she finally agreed that there was sufficient information to continue research after his burial.

“Fortune’s talking now,” said Maxine. “Not Dr. Porter, and not Anderson’s History.

The museum is working on a documentary and new resource material, and scientific research will continue using information now recorded. Although Maxine is glad they will continue to learn from science, she said that there are other questions that still need answers – such as, What was Fortune doing at that river? Why was the doctor there at the same time? And why did he have his medical instruments with him?

“I’m not a detective,” she said, “but something is wrong in the story there.” While those parts of the story still trouble her, another part encourages her.

“He proved a point,” she said. “African American slaves were not considered fully human, but isn’t it ironic that the doctors used his bones for human study? Underneath the skin, we’re all the same. Mr. Fortune proved it in death, even though he never consented to it.”

**A funeral for Mr. Fortune**

Mr. Fortune earthly remains were buried on September 12, 2013. Earlier in the day Mr. Fortune’s casket lay in state at the Capitol Rotunda in Hartford, where people came to pay their respects. A brief prayer service was offered, along with remarks, and a solo by Miss Nora E. Mullins. The casket was officially escorted to St. John’s Episcopal Church in Waterbury for the 4 p.m. service. There was a full house, racially diverse, and both local and national media. Members of Connecticut’s Union of Black Episcopalians and Waterbury’s African American History Project stood in for Mr. Fortune’s family. Poet Marilyn Nelson and composer Dr. Ysaye M. Barnwell attended; as did scientists who worked on Mr. Fortune’s bones, pastors from historically Black churches in Waterbury, Mattatuck Museum officials, people who had grown up in the city and remembered the skeleton from school field trips, and many others.

Following the service, despite light rain and distant thunder, there was a brief graveside service at Riverside Cemetery. Mr. Fortune was finally laid to rest with the respect he deserved.

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There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one. (Galatians 3:28)

Well, my friends, this is where the story has brought us.

We gather in St John’s this afternoon, to give thanks for the life of a man we never knew personally. We gather to express gratitude for the work of the committees and scientists and artists who have made this day possible. We have come together in church to remember the man named Fortune, and to remember who we are.

It would be difficult to hear the story of the man named Fortune and not to be changed. This is a story marked by paradox. It is the story of a man held as a slave, who was free enough to own a home, marry a wife and have four children, and who had no control over the disposition of his own body when he died.

A man who was baptized as an Episcopalian, and never given a dignified burial.

A man whose life and manner of death remain a little mysterious, yet whose bones have yielded significant and valuable scientific knowledge.

A man who teaches us today about the long and convoluted path to justice and reconciliation.

Our scripture lessons today speak to our experience of Mr Fortune’s story. They are the selections used by the Episcopal Church to commemorate the feast of Absalom Jones. Absalom Jones was a contemporary of Mr Fortune. Born into slavery, owned by a Dutchman, the man named Absalom taught himself to read as a teenager. He married another slave, and bought her freedom so their children would be free. He took the surname Jones when he purchased his own freedom in 1784. It was a very American name. Treated shabbily by his own church, Mr Jones left and organized the African Church in Philadelphia. The new church was received into membership by the Episcopal Church in 1794, and Mr Jones was ultimately ordained in 1804, the first ordained priest of African descent in the United States.

The Hebrew scripture from Isaiah was written to a people held in captivity. The word of God to those people is that their oppression will not last forever. God will remember them, and they can expect restoration. Our brother Mr Fortune has been remembered, and it is with restored dignity his bones shall be buried.

The verses we read from Psalm 137 tell part of the story of the forced exile and enslavement of a whole people. Even as they are led away from their home, they remember who they are. Their identity is in their relationship with God. We bury Mr Fortune not as a slave, but as a blessed child of God.

St Paul’s letter to the people of Galatia is actually quite radical. In one sentence, St Paul dismembers all division between peoples, insisting that through Christ all are united as if they are of one body. Paul declares useless all the absolutes and opposites that his contemporaries assumed were true. You have identity, and you may not use that as a tool to divide us. There is no Jew or Greek, no slave or free, no male or female. There is only unity in Christ Jesus. We can almost imagine their response: People need to know their place! It has always been this way! Along with Paul, we must refuse to give in to the forces that separate and diminish us.

The Gospel of St John gets right to the heart of the matter. Jesus simply says: love one another as I have loved you. Please note, he does not, even once, say IF. If you can manage to like one another. If you approve of one another. If you understand one another. In fact, he tells them that their unqualified love must be so profound that they are to be willing to lay down their lives for one another. The final commandment of Christ is to love: to love the stranger, to love the enemy, to love the people we know well who still irritate us. Love. Always. No exceptions. We come here in a spirit of that love, which is the foundational source of God’s justice.

Each of us, here today for our own reasons, need to hear this word from God and to take it to heart, because funeral services are not for the dead. They are for the living.
Walking forward in peace
Challenging violence in our world, society, churches, homes, and selves

Karin Hamilton

Unthinkable violence took place in Newtown, Connecticut at the Sandy Hook Elementary School last December 14, when Adam Lanza killed his mother, then 20 children and six teachers – wounding others – then killed himself. His terrible actions traumatized the entire town and surrounding community. As the news broke, their loss and devastation was shared and felt across the country.

Trinity Episcopal Church, Newtown, lost a young member that awful day, Ben Wheeler, a vibrant 6-year old. Trinity’s rector, the Rev. Kathie Adams-Shepherd, spent most of December 14 in the town firehouse next to the school, listening to and ministering to people. Our bishops went to Newtown that afternoon to support Pastor Kathie and offer their own prayers.

Since that time the community has found ways to come together, grieve, honor, and keep going, albeit as a changed community.

March for Change
Two months afterwards, on Valentine’s Day 2013, Connecticut’s Episcopal bishops, along with a number of Episcopal clergy and lay persons, joined thousands of others from Newtown and other towns and cities across the state at the March for Change rally at the Capitol in Hartford. Green hats, green ribbons, and signs with a green heart, broken but still holding its form, were everywhere.

The Way of the Cross | Washington, D.C.
On March 25, the bishops, clergy and people of Connecticut went to Washington D.C. to walk The Way of the Cross, stopping 14 times to read scripture and meditations that helped them remember Jesus’ last hours. They started outside the White House, walked along Pennsylvania Avenue, and ended at the Capitol. They prayed and promised to challenge the violence in our culture, especially gun violence. Joining them were others from the D.C. area and across the church, including Washington’s Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde and over a dozen other bishops from other dioceses.

Challenging Violence
The shockwaves from Newtown continued and were resulting in new and renewed action. Among the many, with ties to Connecticut: a Facebook page “Episcopalians Against Gun Violence” was created and Connecticut parishes posted their events, the Rev. Molly James in CT set up a resource website, “challengingviolence.org,” Bishop Jim Curry and Caitlin Ciella of Cheshire joined more marches in Hartford led by groups including Mothers Against Violence. There will be an Episcopal Church-wide conference in Oklahoma next April called, “Reclaiming the Gospel of Peace: An Episcopal gathering to challenge the epidemic of violence.” Caitlin is serving on the event’s planning team.

Ben’s Lighthouse
In the meantime, back in Newtown, Trinity Church’s warden Rick Haylon had laid the groundwork for a new foundation that was designed to help the children and youth of Newtown and the surrounding communities to heal. It’s named Ben’s Lighthouse Fund, in honor of Ben Wheeler.

At the funeral service for Ben last December, all those who came learned about the love Ben had for lighthouses. As Pastor Kathie and Bishop Laura J. Ahrens wrote as part of another meditation, for the Ninth Station: “Those who attended the service that day were given a lighthouse ornament as a reminder of Ben's delight. It is also an image of the Light of Christ. May we seek to be lighthouses, vessels of Christ's light. May we seek to bring Christ's light to the world, revealing God's love. Our hearts are broken, but our spirits are not.”

The purpose of Ben’s Lighthouse Fund is to create a perpetual endowment to support children in the Newtown community. It operates as a ministry of Trinity Episcopal Church – building on the parish’s already-successful programs for children, youth, and families – and is for the whole community. It’s stated purpose and mission is “to promote the long-term health of Newtown’s young people and families and nurture a culture of non-violence and caring through a series of community-building events, workshops, and community service activities.”

On June 15, six months after the shootings (plus a day), Ben’s Lighthouse organized and held a Lighthouse Festival for Newtown-area families as its major kickoff event. It was held at Trinity Church. In addition to a slew of family-friendly activities and crafts, there was artwork from Newtown’s children, music, food, and a custom-built 20-foot interactive lighthouse. The lighthouse, designed by two of Trinity’s parishioners and...
built with the help of many others, has six sides to remember the six teachers who stood tall to protect the children, and twenty windows, one for each of the children who died. Each window was individually painted and is unique, as were the children. The panels are green and white, the colors of Sandy Hook Elementary School. The Festival committee later estimated that more than 1,000 children walked through the lighthouse that day, each leaving a drawing or note on the whiteboards and chalkboards that comprised the base of the lighthouse.

Since that big event, Ben’s Lighthouse has been true to its mission. In July, it paid for a group of high school students from the town to join a mission trip to Moore, Oklahoma and help with the cleanup following the devastating tornados that tore through the area in May. In August, Ben’s Lighthouse hosted a back-to-school Ice Cream Social, with town dignitaries and celebrities serving up the scoops and other organizations partnering to provide activities, information, and support. The 20-foot lighthouse came out of storage and was a featured part of the day. In September, Trinity Church, with Ben’s Lighthouse, took part in the town’s annual Labor Day Parade. A grant from Episcopal Relief and Development has allowed Ben’s Lighthouse to hire a staff person to run the afterschool and evening programs this fall.

As for a big event in December, Rick said they’re taking their lead from the town, which has asked that there not be any major events on the one-year anniversary.

“There is an urgent need now and there will continue to be for the long term,” he said. “We are working very, very hard to get programs and events in place as quickly as possible while still trying to make sure we do things the right way so that they work to meet both short- and long-term needs.”
In March 2013, hundreds of Episcopalians, ecumenical partners, and others converged on Washington, D.C. in the cold rain to walk the Way of the Cross. They stopped at 14 stations along a route between the White House and the Capitol to pray and reflect on the violence in our world; to repent; and to pledge to work for change. The prayers and meditations were written specifically for the occasion.

The event built on a related event in 2012 when the bishops of Connecticut led a group of clergy and laity through downtown Hartford to focus on social justice and call for the repeal of the death penalty. In 2013, following the killings in Newtown, the Connecticut bishops wanted to take their message of peace to the nation’s capital. The focus of the day was on challenging violence in all its forms.

In the meditation for the First Station, written by Trinity Episcopal Church, Newtown Pastor Kathie Adams-Shepherd, she wrote: “...We are not innocent of the blood of others when we do not stand up against violence. Pilate was wrong when he said that he was innocent of Jesus’ blood - Pilate did nothing to stop the violence that took Jesus’ life, and so his hands were not clean, not at all. The gospel calls us to carry a cross of hope and peace, and to care deeply for every human life – the lives of people we know personally and the lives of those we may never meet. We are called not to wash our hands of the violence of this world but to raise our hands and our voices tirelessly in protest against it. We are called to claim every life as a life worthy of our efforts to ensure that every single one of God’s children is safe, whole, loved, and living a life of peace. We must see in every life the very life and breath of God.”

In their letter of invitation to participate in the Way of the Cross, the bishops wrote “Our faith calls us to be ministers of reconciliation, to give voice to the voiceless and to strive for justice in the name of our Lord. The horrific slaughter of children and adults in the Sandy Hook section of Newtown in our home state, and the day-to-day shootings and deaths of our children and young people in cities and towns across our nation, call us to prayer and action and to work for peace.

“...We are taking our witness to our nation’s capital to say to our political leaders and to our country that we will no longer be silent while violence permeates our world, our society, our churches, our homes and ourselves.”

Over 20 Episcopal bishops took part, coming from as far away as Los Angeles. Many were already active in their own diocese’s efforts to reduce gun violence. Before the walk, the bishops attended a meeting with White House staff to discuss related legislation. The walk ended in an upper room in a Library of Congress building where the crowd heard from legislators and other leaders who shared the urgency of this work.
...“We are not innocent of the blood of others when we do not stand up against violence.”

The Rev. Kathie Adams-Shepherd

Heading toward the Capitol, from the White House, walking the Way of the Cross as a spiritual devotion as well as a public witness challenging violence in all its forms. About 200 people including more than 20 bishops participated.

The booklet with meditations is still available online:
https://www.ctepiscopal.org/Content/Holy_Week_Witness_Liturgy.asp
Wearing a traditional black clerical shirt and collar, and less-traditional black shorts and sandals, the Rev. John Mennell sits near a portable altar, waiting for stragglers. About a dozen people — one with a leashed dog named Gideon at her feet — sit facing him in two rows of folding chairs. Backed by the sounds of diners chatting outside a nearby eatery and passing vehicular traffic, Mennell rises and greets worshipers at the corner of Church Street and South Fullerton in Montclair, New Jersey, to the July 28 Worship Without Walls.

From the weekends of Memorial Day through Labor Day, St. Luke’s Episcopal Church in Montclair is holding 5:00 p.m. Sunday Eucharists in public, outdoor spaces. Similar to “flash mobs,” participants are alerted to the location each week via text message. Passersby are encouraged to join.

“It’s fun to see different people’s reactions,” said Mennell, the church’s rector. “Last week, we ended up in the park in a walkway. ... This one woman walked through with her dog, and her dog desperately wanted to join in the service.”

When the woman walked through a second time, Mennell invited her to join them. “She politely informed me how the dog leads her to the temple each Saturday.”

Such invitations, accepted or not, are among the points of Worship Without Walls, Mennell said. “Part of it is getting people used to inviting people in in ways that are uncomfortable.”

“In our beautiful Episcopal reticence,” he said, churchgoers don’t stand on street corners talking about Jesus. “This is about as close as people comfortably get.”

“If I told my congregation, ‘Go out on a street corner and witness,’ they’d run me out on a rail,” he said. But worshiping together publicly, “it’s really doing the same thing.”

On this particular Sunday, nearly 20 people ultimately joined the service, with a few passersby stopping briefly to check things out.

“As people come by and look curious, invite them into what we’re doing,” Mennell instructed the congregation. “We will sort of go with the flow.” Mitch Goodrich was running an errand in town when he stopped and joined the service with his sons Henry, 8, and Calvin, 19 months. Turns out, he knew Mennell years ago at Church of the Redeemer in Cincinnati, before the Montclair priest attended seminary.

“This is fantastic. It’s so good to get out and let people see what’s going on and see who you are,” Goodrich said. “We need to do more of this in the Episcopal Church.”

One man in a baseball cap interjected comments several times during the service. Listening to the Old Testament reading on Abraham bargaining with God about the fate of Sodom, he announced: “We’re doomed.” “No we’re not,” Mennell reassured him. “We’re saved.”

Later, during the sermon, the priest asked the congregation what stopped them from praying. One woman replied that her concerns are “too small and insignificant.”

“Alcohol and chicks,” said the man in the cap.
“Different addictions often stand in our way,” Mennell replied. “Guilt,” said another congregant. “Satan,” added the man in the cap. “Jesus has power over Satan,” said Mennell, spurring a brief dialogue over this theological point. Such engagement, if sometimes challenging, is not unwelcomed.

“Part of breaking down walls is we can’t use the walls of the church as a barrier to keep people out and keep ideas out,” Mennell said later.

For the first time that summer, weather interrupted the service. With the onset of a rainstorm, the worshipers brought the prayers of the people to a speedy conclusion. Then about half of them headed to a nearby diner to conclude the service and eat together. They ordered food, then completed the Eucharist.

Worship Without Walls recently prayed near the intersection of Bloomfield and Mission Streets, the scene of two Montclair shootings.

At the peace, besides greeting each other, they followed an extra ritual: pulling out their cell phones and texting “Peace be with you” to someone. The offering, as always, went to a local organization, this time Montclair Conversations on Race. Another week, the congregation worshiped near where two shootings had occurred. Worshipers prayed for an end to gun violence and designated the collection to CeasefireNJ, an anti-gun effort.

Often the group will follow worship with a meal, Mennell said. “It’s a fun way to continue the fellowship.”

That night’s dinner conversation ranged from an explanation of what “catholic” means to the spiritual journeys of young people. St. Luke’s member Michelle Cruz, a recent college graduate, discussed how what she had learned through science confirmed her faith. “It is so complicated,” she said. “I don’t think it could have come up by itself.”

Attending her first Worship Without Walls with her father, Felix, she said she appreciated being outside.

“Texting’s cool,” she added. “I texted one of my sorority sisters. She’s a Silesian Catholic.”

Elsie Lockett also attended for the first time. “I like it. It’s different, and it makes it less structured,” she said.

The Rev. Joseph Harmon, rector of Christ Episcopal Church in East Orange, attended the July 28 service with an eye toward starting a similar ministry with his congregation. “We’ve been discussing how Christ Church can become a more missional church and in particular how we can engage the East Orange community more effectively,” he said.

Len Roberts, a regular Worship Without Walls participant, said he thought that’s just what St. Luke’s was doing in Montclair. Taking the Eucharist out into the community lets people know that the power of Christ is in the community, “not just in church,” he said.

St. Luke’s is one of multiple Episcopal churches within several miles and is reaching out to some of them to join in a nearby Worship Without Walls. Worshipers from Christ Church, a mile and a half away in Bloomfield and Glen Ridge, joined St. Luke’s for one service.

“The Rev. John Mennell speaks to worshipers July 28 at the corner of Church Street and South Fullerton in Montclair, NJ, during Worship Without Walls.
Caring for this fragile earth, our island home
Laura J. Ahrens

All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small, all things wise and wonderful, the Lord God made them all. The purple-headed mountain, the river running by, the sunset, and the morning that brightens up the sky.

Cecil Francis Alexander, Hymn 405

It’s a childhood favorite! Such beautiful words set to delightful music, our congregational voices soar as we offer our praise to God of the mountains, the rivers, the sun and all that God has offered to us in creation. The hymn takes us both to scenic places and to the joys of offering our thanks to God.

Yet, when I slow down and offer this hymn in prayer, my heart goes first to sadness and then to a call to action. Sadness first. The thought of purple-headed mountains takes me to West Virginia and other places where the mountain tops have been mined away to extract coal, depleting a natural resource and destroying natural habitats. My heart aches as I think about water sources being polluted. Conversations about global climate change and the environmental crisis lead to me to wonder if I am caring for this fragile earth, our island home as deeply as I believe God wants us to when God entrusts as stewards of creation.

Where do we begin? For me, I always begin with prayer. The House of Bishops wrote a Pastoral Teaching on the Environment in 2011 inviting us “to lift up prayers in personal and public worship for environmental justice, for sustainable development, and for help in restoring right relations both among humankind and between humankind and the rest of creation.” Adding prayers about creation to our liturgies and prayerfully exploring our choices about carbon footprints, energy conservation and use of clean, renewable energy are ways we might respond to this invitation.

I think we are also called to educate ourselves about Climate Change and how changed weather patterns create drought and floods leading to rising food prices here and around the world. We can incorporate conversations about the environment to our adult forums and look at educational resources for our vestries, property committees and investment committees.

We are called as disciples of Jesus to love our neighbors as ourselves. People all over the world are being negatively impacted by our choices. This may start as conversation about the environment but it includes conversations about the destruction of resources that feed and sustain communities as well as conversations about overconsumption of some and the lack of food and other resources for others. This becomes a conversation about children, the next generation and what we will leave them. This earth our island home is God’s fragile and beloved Creation. Are we being the stewards God has called us to be?

The House of Bishops pastoral teaching in 2011 invites us examine our “own participation in ecologically destructive habits.” We are called to repent of our choices which negatively affect God’s Creation while working for environmental justice and to strive for more environmentally sustainable practices. This is not so much “environmental work” but really environmental ministry as a faithful response to God’s calling.

Beyond our prayer and our educational exploration, is God calling us to be a prophetic witness, raising our collective voices to advocate “for those most negatively affected by climate change (Bishops Pastoral Letter, 2011)?”

Can we covenant with God and with one another to pray, learn and act, seeking to make our impact on God’s Creation both locally and around the world (the environment and the global community) more positive. I can do that.

Will you join me?
Praying for the peace of Jerusalem

Laura J. Ahrens

Wake up my spirit; …; I myself will waken the dawn. I will confess you among the peoples, O Lord; I will sing praises to you among the nations.

Psalm 108:1-3

I awoke at dawn and took at quiet prayerful walk. My destination was the Church of the Nativity. The sun was just coming up and her rays were bringing light to the city of Bethlehem. When I arrived at the church, I went first to the holy site marking the birth place of our Lord. I was only able to descend a step or two on the small staircase leading to the sacred space as another group had gathered for worship there. I listened to the beautiful offering of prayers in a language I did not understand, and I offered my own silent prayers. It was a simple and holy moment. I prayed for a deeper awareness of how I might serve God and God’s church given all that I had seen and experienced in my visit to the Holy Land.

I was glad when they said to me; Let us go to the house of the Lord. Now our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem.

Psalm 122:1-2

It was the trip of a lifetime, but not one I had planned! A last minute invitation, filling in for a bishop who could not attend, I joined women bishops from all over the United States (mostly Methodists, I was the sole Episcopal bishop) to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Our goal was to meet Christian, Jewish and Muslim women from Israel and Palestine seeking and working for peace. I learned of struggle and fear. I heard stories of hope and transformation. I heard honesty and a longing for peace. I wrestled with my own faith and how God was calling me both to appreciate the new knowledge of Biblical geography but more significant—how I could be more in tune with the 21st century struggles and hopes in the Middle East. How would I speak to those struggles and hopes spiritually and as an advocate? It opened for me a desire to explore with our diocese, “How is God calling us to serve God’s Mission in the Holy Land?”

Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem…Peace be within your walls and quietness within your towers.

Psalm 122:6-8

How is God calling us to serve God’s mission in the Holy Land? I believe we are first and foremost called to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. And then commit to work for that peace. How we will work for that peace is diverse and varied. It can include…

Collaboration

Working with Bishop Suheil Dawani, the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, the people of his diocese and the American Friends of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem (AFEDJ) we can support schools and hospitals throughout Israel and Palestine which seek to care for all who come to their doors. These life-giving ministries are grounded in the teaching and healing ministries of our Lord.

Visiting

The financial cost of visiting Israel/Palestine is steep. And yet, I hope we can explore together how we might make more trips possible. Some of our parishes are leading trips. Bruce Shipman is hoping to take a group of young adults from the Episcopal Church at Yale. I hope to lead a trip in 2015. Meeting the people there, hearing their stories, their hopes and their longings, we move closer to our own stories, hopes and longings. Seeing some of the struggles, some of the holy work that is present every day in this holy land, a place in the heart is awaken and we pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Our prayer can transform not only the world, but our own hearts as well. Peace. For you, for me and for Jerusalem.

Relationship-building

Learning relationship models from priests such as the Rev. Nicolas Porter, former rector of Trinity, Southport, who runs camps for teens in Vermont and Texas called Jerusalem Peace-builders working with the organization Kids 4 Peace. The camps offer opportunities for Christian, Muslim and Jewish youth from the United States and Israel/Palestine to get to know one another and one another’s traditions. As the teens learn to know and respect one another, God’s peace is revealed. How can we model this learning in our communities?

The Rev. Lisa Hahinemann, rector of Church of the Holy Spirit, West Haven and others in our diocese have been involved in the Abrahamic Partners program at Hartford Seminary. The Seminary is a willing partner in our exploration of how we might build and strengthen interfaith bridges and relationships here in Connecticut. There is so much we do not know about one another, so much we share and so much listening and learning we need to do. Our prayer is deepened by these relationships as we seek relationships of love and understanding, building bridges and making connections, seeking God’s peace. What opportunities for interfaith dialogue are you already exploring in your faith community and how might we share those resources, opportunities and learnings with one another?

Advocacy

General Convention Resolution B19 states: Resolved, That the General Convention encourage all dioceses…to engage actively in the discipline of advocacy, education, and prayer for peace between Israelis and Palestinians, as well as the provision of humanitarian aid that promotes peace and reconciliation.”

How might we address these questions of advocacy within our diocese?

Jesus set his face to Jerusalem and embarked on a journey that changes all of our lives. How shall we set our face to Jerusalem? How shall our collaborative work, our pilgrimages, our interfaith relationships in CT and our advocacy, how shall we, in heart and mind and body, pray for the Peace of Jerusalem?
Connecticut Episcopalians announce new interfaith partnership

On September 7, 2013 the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut announced a new interfaith partnership with the Farmington Valley American Muslim Center, Inc. (FVAMC). The initiative includes interfaith educational programs and the leasing of a building in Avon, a former church on Harris Road.

This is part of a broader diocesan effort of recommitting itself to interfaith initiatives in new ways. The partnership with FVAMC began when leaders of the Episcopal Diocese asked about the needs and resources of the Church and community in the greater Farmington River valley. Episcopal parishes in the local area, including Trinity Episcopal Church in Collinsville and St. John’s Episcopal Church in Bristol, immediately joined in the conversations and planning with the FVAMC.

“The initiation of this partnership with the Farmington Valley American Muslim Center is an incredible gift to us as Christians, because when we come into conversation with the religious ‘other’ it helps us to speak even more clearly about our own faith in the Triune God,” said the Rt. Rev. Ian T. Douglas, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut.

The initiative builds on and expands the interfaith work that is taking place in other areas of the Diocese that include special educational programs, guest speakers, refugee resettlement, and shared space, as well as participation in interfaith coalitions.

FVAMC members, which include doctors, college professors, businessmen, and other professionals, live in Farmington, Avon, Canton, and surrounding towns. They have been worshipping in Berlin and have been looking for a place closer to their neighborhoods where they could establish a center “dedicated to worshipping God, interfaith understanding and dialogue, service to community and country, and creating a secure, nurturing environment where our community can congregate.”

“Our partnership with the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut is an exciting new venture for our Center,” said Khamis Abu-Hassaballah, Ph.D., FVAMC President. “We look forward to further strengthening our community’s interfaith coalition and joining together on new initiatives.”

To find open house dates and other events, visit the Farmington Valley American Muslim Center on Facebook.

Parishes in Transition

Top 10 FAQs

Across our diocese there are several dozen parishes currently seeking new clergy leadership. For decades the Church has provided a process whereby parishes in transition may assess their gifts and desires and tell their story to clergy seeking a call to leadership. Recently, we’ve retooled our process and trained a cadre of Transition Consultants to assist congregations as they seek raise up strong leaders – lay and ordained – to serve God’s mission of restoration and reconciliation.

Why the change from ‘search’ to ‘transition’?

The time between a rector’s departure and the welcoming of a new rector involves several key phases, of which only one is the actual “search” (recruiting/interviewing/calling). By emphasizing transition – the time between a rector’s announcement of departure to the Celebration of New Ministry – we can more easily step away from the impulse to “fill the gap” (i.e., search) and experience the entire continuum of efforts and activities that comprise this important time in the life of our parishes (i.e., including everything from discernment and prayer to recruitment and celebration, or transition).

What happened to the Search Committee?

In the recent past, Search Committee was the title for those parishioners (wardens and lay leaders) who worked with the Transition Consultant throughout the interim period. The task was to work with all parishioners to create its story (including a brochure), interview candidates, and present the list of finalists for the vestry to call. In our new model, there are four teams suggested, the first two are mandatory and for smaller parishes may be filled by the same members:

- Discernment Team — to use parish-wide and community interviews, gather data, and develop a story around parish identity, vision, and how it imagines participating with God’s mission within its particular context and culture.
- Recruitment Team — to develop a series of questions and list of criteria, prayerfully vet the initial list of candidates, and present a slate to the vestry to interview, from which the next rector will be called.
- Prayer Team — to commit to daily prayer for all serving the process, select or write a parish transition prayer, and assist with various liturgical celebrations throughout the transition.
- Hospitality Team — to plan and lead a variety of gatherings and celebrations, from the departing rector’s farewell to the Celebration of New Ministry.
The Rev. Timothy Hodapp is diocesan Canon for Mission Leadership. He previously served as Canon Missioner for Mission in the Episcopal Church in Minnesota. He has a background in writing and strategic communication serving the marketing, business, and brand sectors.

**WHAT ROLES DO THE WARDENS AND VESTRY PLAY?**

The wardens, in concert with the vestry, play a critical role in leading the congregation throughout the transition and help guide the life of the congregation as the canons (church laws) proscribe. From the first phase, they will ensure that priests are available for Sunday services and pastoral care, monitor the temporal needs of the congregation, and assist the bishops in calling an interim rector. At least one member of the vestry serves on the Discernment and Recruitment teams, acting as liaison to the vestry throughout. The vestry receives the list of finalists from the Recruitment Team, interviews the candidates, and calls the next rector.

**HOW ARE INTERIM RECTORS CHOSEN?**

The Canon for Mission Leadership works with the Bishop of Record to present candidates for interview to the wardens and vestry (or an ad hoc committee of the vestry). Two or three candidates are offered, interviewed, and called. If none is viable from the vestry’s point of view, additional candidates will be solicited for interview.

**WHO ARE THE TRANSITION CONSULTANTS?**

Transition Consultants are women and men from our diocese who have expertise in our diocesan Transition Process, generously offering their time and talent to serve our parishes in transition. Some have served in this capacity for many years and others are newly trained. Each parish is assigned two Transition Consultants, who share the ministry and work the Transition Process together, shepherding parishes through the steps of the process.

**WHAT’S A “BISHOP OF RECORD”?**

From the selection of interim rector candidates to reviewing the parish profile and conversations with finalists and bishops to signing the Letter of Agreement, one of our bishops serves as Bishop of Record, shepherding the parish throughout the Transition Process.

**HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO GET A NEW RECTOR?**

The timing of a Transition Process, beginning to end, is determined by many factors and is impossible to predict. That said, the new process is set up to take 12-18 months between the Sunday the departing rector leaves to the Sunday the parish receives its new rector.

**WHO DECIDES WHICH CANDIDATE TO CALL?**

The vestry elects the rector. Before the vote may be called, the vestry is obligated to share the name of the candidate with the bishop, and the bishop has up to 60 days to respond (Canon III 3.9.3 Of the Life & Work of Priests). Our Transition Process details a process that fulfills this requirement in a manner that is best for the parish and our diocese.

When the Recruitment Committee makes its initial cut, narrowing the list to six or eight candidates, the names are shared with the Bishop of Record, who calls the candidates’ bishops to discuss the candidate. This ensures that the candidate is free to be called, it ensures the integrity of the slate of candidates, and it safeguards the parish from any otherwise foreseeable complication.

**IS THIS PROCESS FLEXIBLE?**

Yes. While some components are required for all parishes in transition, the process is built to be both pliable and organic. If the Transition Process is working as intended, it flexes according to the context and culture of each parish, accommodating a variety of situations while maintaining the integrity of the discernment and recruitment that will invite the best rector candidates possible.

**WHERE CAN WE GET THE DETAILS?**

Visit our diocesan website and the content specific to Transition Ministry. Here you will find the entire Transition Process detailed, including dozens of assets used by our Transition Consultants. Remember, this is a living document. As our parishes work the process and offer feedback, we expect that this initial outline will be refined and serve our parishes in transition even more faithfully.
I spent a few days this summer with my husband at a reunion of his college roommates—six old friends who, three decades ago, shared a house in the south end of Hartford while attending Trinity College. The reunion was on a farm owned by one of the roommates in southern Vermont. We’ve gathered on this family farm for an annual weekend since the 1980s and spend our time picking apples, mowing the fields, hiking in the woods, swimming in the pond and piling into a big old wooden cart drawn by the tractor for an old-fashioned tractor ride over the bumpy dirt roads. We always spend some time working on the farm while we are there, and this time was no different.

On Saturday morning, I was assigned the job of “brush hauler.” I was given a pair of leather work gloves and teamed up with my friend Peter who had a bow saw and brush clippers. Peter and I, along with two other teams similarly equipped, were about “reclaiming” an 18th century stone wall in the eastern pasture near the orchard. As Peter clipped and pulled grape vines, stands of blackberries and phlox off of the wall, I picked them up and dragged them to a “burn pile.” Small saplings grew out from the sides of the wall, dislodging some of the stones, and as Peter and I sawed through these trees, I grabbed their piano-leg-sized trunks and moved them to the burn pile, too. Oak, hemlock, maple, locust and ash trees grew in and next to the wall.

This wall was fashioned from the stones that surfaced when the field was originally cleared for pasture—probably around 250 years ago. The pasture might have held livestock cows, sheep or goats back in the day, or the field might have been cleared for agricultural purposes. The stones were probably rolled onto a sled and dragged to the edge of the field by a team of oxen and then, at some point, the farmer laid stone upon stone, carefully fitting them together like a jigsaw puzzle, in a surprisingly sturdy form called “dry stone wall construction.” The interplay of gravity and friction would keep this wall together for centuries. The wall we were assigned to work on runs up and over the hill, to a border of trees and meets another stone wall which defines another large field on the other side of the gently sloping knoll. The whole farm is divided into parcels—parcels of pasture, orchard, meadow, field, forest— and there are miles and miles of walls. On this bright August morning, it would take three hours of non-stop work for our crew of six adults to reclaim and clean up 50 yards of wall.

Naturally, this led to some theological musing. I thought about how we are working, in the Church, to break down walls. While I was working, physically, to re-claim a wall and to re-establish its primacy in the landscape, I was considering how, in the past two years as Canon for Mission Collaboration and Congregational Life, I have been working to dissolve boundaries and tear down walls. My work is in creating alliances that focus on God’s Common Mission for us as we work to be agents of restoration and reconciliation and to encourage us to step out of our buildings, to open the gates and to join in God’s Mission with our neighbors.

This work is taking place on a number of levels. Episcopalians are coming together across our diocese in Communities of Practice to share common interests in content-related ministry: a network that focuses on the practice of healing has met several times to pray and share best practices, an energetic group focusing on Global Mission to Empower Women is taking shape, a new group studying Relational Evangelism is meeting, and previously identified groups focusing on Environmental Stewardship and Social Justice are going strong. In this past winter and spring, gatherings of church wardens with our bishops have been led by Robin Hammeal Urban, Canon for Mission Integrity and Training, and the support offered to each other and the connections made in this new network are exciting.

The deanery system, one of the structures in our diocese that has served to create stone walls around regional clusters of churches, is under examination. Some of the deaneries work well to provide regional support and missional identity for congregations. For example, the Seabury Deanery is enthusiastically participating in a study about the best use for the now-vacant Bishop Seabury Church in Groton. The deanery’s research, investigation and prayers are a fantastic support for the Diocesan Property Committee, whose members are leading this discernment and will ultimately make a recommendation to the Missionary Society for their consideration. And while the Seabury Deanery “works,” there are many others that exist in name alone. Might there be better way to organize? Do we need to draw boundaries, to hem-in our churches with walls that, in some cases, seem to thwart collaboration?

The way that we address our buildings as assets and resources for mission is another way in which we are tearing down walls and dissolving boundaries. The Diocesan Property Committee, formed last year, has been holding community meetings in areas where we have vacant church buildings. Meetings in Avon, Canaan and Norwalk have been held to ask the question “What is God up to in your town/village/city?” and the response has been great. Town officials including mayors, selectmen, members of the Boards of Education, social services, arts groups, senior citizens, young parents, business owners and non-profit directors are coming together to tell us about the blessings and challenges in their communities—where God’s hand is at work and where we might continue God’s holy work of healing and restoration. The stories that we have heard in these meetings as the community has shared with us, have helped to inform our choices and to underscore that we are One.

Finally, in recent months, there is new work afoot as members of a newly formed Islamic group, the Farmington Valley American Muslim Center, has been eager to develop interfaith relationships with Christians and Jews in their area. The FVAMC invited Episcopalians to join in sharing meals and prayers during the season of Ramadan and there were conversations about expanding interfaith programming to deepen our understanding and respect for each other as children of our one God. That led to a new partnership, launched in early September, which now also includes leasing the property in Avon to FVAMC. This work builds off the good model of Christian-Muslim relations in our local Hartford Seminary and is informed by other congregations in our diocese, like Christ Church, Norwalk, who have long standing relationships with Muslim congregations.

A day in a Vermont field working to re-claim a stone wall was good, hard, work. My legs suffered a few scratches, my clothes smelled like sap and wood smoke and I gained a new appreciation for the farmers who, centuries ago, labored (without the benefit of diesel powered tractors) to define their land with beautiful stone walls. I’m glad that I could help to preserve this bit of history. But in the Church, I’m ready to make new history—that won’t include laying stone upon stone.

**Dissolving boundaries**

Audrey Scanlan

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The Rev. Dr. Audrey Scanlan serves as Canon for Mission Collaboration and Congregational Life. When she is not reclaiming stone walls, Audrey can be found cooking, running or playing the cello.
Offering a prayer in a time of conflict
Mission partner asks Connecticut to pray for peace in Mozambique
James E. Curry

By God’s grace, warring leaders were able to hear the words of Jesus that Bishop Sengulane had so often quoted: “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God.”

Mozambique is now facing political disturbances again. Dozens of people have been killed and there’s been material destruction in one of the provinces. The Bishop has been engaged in a dialogue between the parties in dispute, both with the other Christian churches and on his own.

He has also written a Litany for Peace, which he believes covers the areas of concern from both sides, and is asking the people in the Diocese of Connecticut to join in praying it.

“Troops from the opposition and from the government have been in confrontations, and this calls for prayer and action,” said the Bishop. “It is our call to be channels and instruments of peace at all times and in all places.”

Earlier this year in Mozambique, small armed bands with ties to government opposition attacked buses and trucks along the major north/south highway in the country. In September the people of Mozambique asked an Anglican bishop, Bishop Dinis Sengulane, to help mediate an escalating conflict between the government and leaders of the opposition party.

Bishop Sengulane is bishop of the Diocese of Lebombo, a personal friend, and a partner in God’s mission with many parishes in Connecticut.

It has been 21 years since the end of Mozambique’s civil war. In all that time the Anglican Diocese of Lebombo has worked to encourage people across the country to give up their weapons and to join together for the development of a society at peace with itself. The ceasefire of 1992 has held until this year.

During the years of civil war (1975-1992) Bishop Sengulane led the Anglican Church in prayer and fasting for peace. He and other church members sought out leaders of the warring factions, calling them to peace talks. Over and over again the bishop’s overtures were rebuffed. But he would not give up.

Finally, at one meeting with opposition leaders, there was a breakthrough. By God’s grace, warring leaders were able to hear the words of Jesus that Bishop Sengulane had so often quoted: “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God.”

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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 over a decade.
Prayer for Peace

Bishop Dinis Sengulane

God the Father, Creator of all
Have Mercy upon us
God the Son, Redeemer and Converter of the World
Have Mercy upon us
God the Holy Spirit, Counsellor of all
Have Mercy upon us

Jesus Who took human nature to be the Emmanuel, God with us
Give us Your peace, Lord
Jesus Who was born of the Virgin Mary in the poverty of the World
Give us Your peace, Lord
Jesus whose birth was proclaimed wishing peace on earth and good will among people
Give us Your peace, Lord
Jesus the Prince of Peace
Give us Your peace, Lord

Jesus Who taught fraternity among all
Teach us the ways of Your peace
Jesus Who taught us that whatever we would like others to do for us we have to do it for others
Teach us the ways of Your peace
Jesus Who was glorified when you entered Jerusalem, riding a donkey to symbolize that you are the king of peace
Teach us the ways of Your peace
Jesus Who accepted suffering and death so that human beings and God live in Peace and Reconciliation
Teach us the ways of Your peace
Jesus Who at your death you forgave a thief and all who caused your much suffering
Teach us the ways of Your peace
Jesus at whose resurrection you greeted your disciples wishing them Peace
Teach us the ways of Your peace
Jesus Who gave us and left us your Peace
Teach us the ways of Your peace

Holy and Glorious Trinity, we beseech you to hear us and pour your blessings upon our land
We beseech You to hear us
Free our land from war and all disagreements which destroys fraternity
We beseech You to hear us
Free our land from all guns and destruction
We beseech You to hear us
Free us from all theft and exploitation
We beseech You to hear us
Free us from the spirit of vanity and falsehood
We beseech You to hear us

Free us from starvation which harms body, mind and spirit
We beseech You to hear us
Increase wisdom and zeal in our Leaders
We beseech You to hear us
Comfort all those who have been abducted, detained and those who are forced to be away from their homes
We beseech You to hear us
Comfort those who have lost their homes, fields, cattle and other goods
We beseech You to hear us
Enlighten those who seek peace according to the Gospel
We beseech You to hear us
Enlighten those who seek to develop this and other Countries so that the resources of land, sea, rivers, lakes and air may be sources of the wellbeing of all
We beseech You to hear us
Prepare us for a peaceful and peace raising death
We beseech You to hear us
Prepare us for an abundance of peace and joy in the fullness of the Heavenly Kingdom
We beseech You to hear us

Our hope is in you, Messiah
Because You were born to bring peace and reconciliation
Our help is in you, Messiah
Because You left us Your peace
Our help is in you Messiah
Because You are the Emmanuel, God with us

LET US PRAY:
GOD
The fountain of all peace
(Peace with you, with ourselves, with our neighbours and nature)
We give you thanks for sending Jesus Christ as the Prince of Peace
And for sending the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth.
Forgive us for trusting on guns which destroy.
HELP US
To put our trust in the saving and reconciling blood of Jesus poured on the cross and to turn our instruments of death and domination into means of saving lives and of promoting human dignity
IN YOUR COMPASSION
Protect and free the prisoner, those abducted and refugees; and lead us to see and follow the ways of peace.
All this we ask to the honour and glory of your name, through Jesus Christ the Prince of Peace and our Saviour,
AMEN
There are so many facets of Marsha McCurdy’s life – campaign worker, golfer, firefighter and wine connoisseur – that it is difficult putting her in a box. But the one thing that she is most proud of is being an Episcopalian.
This was not something that happened overnight. About two years ago at a community diversity and inclusion event, an Episcopalian invited Marsha to her church, but she didn’t decide on going until she woke up one morning and decided to attend the earliest Sunday service at Trinity Church in Hartford.

Before making a commitment, she researched online and discovered that it was founded in 1859 as a “free church,” meaning they decided not to have pew rents common at that time so that it could be open to all persons “no matter what his or her wealth or poverty.” Marsha breathed a sigh of relief when she walked in and saw the friend who invited her and sat next to her. She was patient in explaining to Marsha the service’s protocol, for example, that the pillows in each row were for kneeling to pray.

Although she signed the church’s visitor’s books, she never expected to hear from anyone. So, she was surprised when former Assistant Priest Barbara Briggs contacted her via email three days later. Marsha said Barbara told her that it was great meeting her that Sunday and invited her to get together in a less formal setting to discuss more about the church and what Marsha’s spiritual needs were. Eventually, they met over lunch and Marsha decided that she wanted to make Trinity her church home.

Marsha’s journey in search of religion, faith and spirituality culminated in a church home where she feels welcomed and comforted. She also followed in the footsteps of her father, who grew up Episcopalian.

Marsha, who is single with no children, is a visionary who wants to make a difference in the things that matter to her. She has a background in diversity management, serving as the chairwoman of the West Hartford human rights commission, and on the board of West Hartford’s initiative on racial and ethnic diversity. She is strongly interested in diversity and was a member of the diocesan anti-racism committee.

“God’s word is universal and should attract all kinds of people,” she explained. “That’s where I want to be. The homogenous churches have rich histories and strong ties to the community, but so does Trinity. I would love to start a program that focuses on inclusion. I don’t mean recruitment, I’m talking about how we can best serve a community that is diverse so anyone who wants to can engage and be encouraged to. It would make people feel welcome, not forcing them to do anything.”

Marsha, who attended college in Vermont, studied sports medicine. She also went to Cornell University and earned a certificate in diversity management.

“I always had a special interest in diversity and inclusion,” she said. “I have an issue with the word diversity because it stigmatizes and is divisive. When you talk about inclusion, it feels like anyone can walk through the door. Inclusion promotes diversity, because it attracts people who want to be included and that crosses all kinds of demographics. You will get diversity once you have an inclusive environment. When you include everyone I feel that the church in itself is a blessing.”

Marsha has found that diversity at Trinity.

“You will see people wearing African garb, Brooks Brothers…,” she said. “There is lots of diversity whether it’s age, sexual orientation or mode of transportation. There is a cross section of young, old, black, white. Gay families are also welcome. … The experience of coming to Trinity and commuting with brothers and sisters in Christ and taking that with you after service is great. At the bottom of the bulletin it reads, “Worship is over, now service begins.”

Marsha takes that statement to heart and curiously seeks out opportunities to satisfy her interests. She began serving on the Deacons’ Council, which is in charge of deacon formation and includes the discernment process and placement. A bishop asked her to join after she began asking questions about it. The poise that Marsha has in her speaking engagements are the skills she learned from her mother, who attended Catholic school, and taught Marsha about public speaking and presentation through plays and presentations at their Pentecostal church.

“I love learning about the church and faith,” she said. “I’ve been in my current position in the church for a year now. It’s been very rewarding.”

On the other hand, Marsha loves the Episcopal Church because of its structure and consistency, unlike her career.

“My career is so unpredictable,” she said. “My life has little consistency. What I love about the Episcopal Church is the consistency. When I get to church, I know the routine. I love that structure. I love having structure at church. It’s part of the serenity.”

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.

THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF CONNECTICUT
Figuring out ways to engage God’s mission

The Rev. Mark Byers

Frankye Regis

The Rev. Mark Byers, rector of St. Peters-Trinity in Thomaston, initially had no interest in becoming a priest but re-discovered his faith in college and began his career as a church planter in California.

Now, he oversees a congregation in Thomaston that is working ecumenically in the community.

“I didn’t go to divinity school to be a priest originally,” he explained. “I was interested in faith. I went back to church in college [and] had a faith experience during the fall semester as a freshman in Haverford.”

He was interested in religion courses and asked a professor about good divinity schools to attend. Yale was mentioned. After a year of seminary at Yale Divinity School, Mark didn’t know what he wanted to pursue as a career. Although ordination was not one of his choices, he had a field placement in a church and loved it. While at Yale, he was placed at Grace Church, Norwalk where the rector and church leaders encouraged him to go through the ordination process.

After becoming a priest, he served as a curate at St. John’s, Essex, then was invited to San Diego to plant a church. Mark rented a real estate office and started with 12 people, all family and friends. The church grew to more than 20, then 90. When he left, there were more than 100 congregants. He brought people in through networking events at the Chamber of Commerce, restaurants and by word of mouth.

It takes from seven to 10 years for a church to grow to financial self-sufficiency,” said Mark, adding that he enjoyed the congregation he built. “We were in year three when we got shut down. But, lots of people’s lives were changed for being a part of it. I led them into something I would want to be a part of as a lay person. I wanted them to be comfortable and to love each other. I was interested in what was going on in their lives and wanted to share their faith journey with them, not just on Sunday morning.”

Mark has brought that same philosophy to his present congregation and often stays an hour after Sunday service is over talking to people.

“Everyone is different, he said. “Some people need quiet and prayer time before worship. I spend time talking to people. What goes on on Sunday morning is community.”

As a pastor, Mark said that the first order of business is to “think about how we’re doing with God’s mission. You can’t change a congregation overnight that’s been around for hundreds of years. You have to change the culture so that people are able to come up with their own ideas. If you think out loud with people and say ‘I wonder how we can do this better’ and they come up with five things and two were on your list, too, then you have something to work with. It’s not like you’re putting thoughts in people’s heads. We’re already in the same ballpark.”

Mark’s motto is “If you have an idea, we can try it.” He thinks ministry is helping people become what God wants them to be. When trying to establish mission objectives, he likes to work backwards from the objective or outcome and then figure out what needs to be done differently to reach the objective.

In addition to supporting one another in the church community – such as when the congregation helped to raise money for a family in need to pay its medical bills – parishioners participate in a local initiative called New Beginnings, an ecumenical effort that equips dozens of young children with new clothes and supplies for the school year.

The church also formed a partnership with Covenant to Care.
“It’s something that just started up,” Mark added. “The idea came from the congregation. My church school director had a relationship with Covenant to Care, and she wanted to make up gift bags. We realized there were other opportunities.”

So the church adopted one of its parishioners who is a case worker in Waterbury; she had a case load of nine families who were transitioning from homelessness, and the congregation partnered with her and Covenant to Care for Children to provide families with birthday packs that included cake mix and presents. The church helped her with resources beyond the basic things she normally provided, such as Christmas presents, holiday treats, etc. The congregation and church school also put together hygiene packs for Covenant to Care, the outreach organization that encouraged them to “adopt” the case worker.

“We want to let people out there know that we want them to do well,” explained Mark. “Our parishioner (social worker) tells us about other needs. Our aspirations are for every kid in the program to get birthday and Christmas presents and to have a holiday dinner.”

About four years ago, the Thomaston Clergy Association and local churches started an ecumenical partnership. They rehired one of the social workers who had lost her job because the town cut the entire budget and all social service personnel. For two to three years, the town provided no social services. The churches, which are also involved in the local food pantry, banded together and re-hired her part time.

“That’s the kind of stuff, I think, that moving forward we see pastors having conversations about with town government,” said Mark, who is on the town’s social services committee. “We want to step up with other things in the community. We would love to help people navigate life a little better.”

Mark, 47, said that in today’s church, God invites us to collaborate in sharing his mission. He said that clergy and lay people should get together and figure out how to be more effective as God’s people.

“Culturally, I think we are like every other organization,” he said. “We tend to define success as what we are already doing.”

Mark grew up Episcopalian. After graduating from high school, he worked for about a year then served in the Navy for six years. Afterwards, he went to Haverford College in Philadelphia and earned a degree in history before going to Yale Divinity School. He taught nursery school for four years – two while in seminary and two years after and has held lots of odd jobs to pay for school. He has been at St. Peter’s–Trinity for two years. Before that, he was at the Diocese of San Diego for five years.

Although he and his wife Jessica consider the northeast home, Mark moved around a lot growing up. He and Jessica met in college and married in 2001, nine years after they first met. She was living in Manhattan, her hometown, and Mark proposed right after he was ordained a priest. They have three daughters, ages 9, 7 and 3.

Mark’s hobbies are playing rugby, hiking, bike riding and power lifting; he participates in meets about once a year.

Over the years, Mark has discovered that it is important to receive generosity and well as give it and to forgive and ask for forgiveness. It was something he realized before he went to seminary. It put his head and heart in a better place.

“If you look at history and study the scriptures, God didn’t aspire for human beings to be the way we are,” he said. “We do both great and terrible things. …Humanity is broken as a result of how we’ve chosen collectively not to live in right relationship to God and one another. It’s our job as people of faith and the church to figure out how God is calling us to be in right relationship with Godself and the world, if we want to be part of God’s Kingdom.”
Karin Hamilton

Cathy Ostuw, a Stamford resident and member of St. Francis’ Episcopal Church there, is proud of her city’s diversity: people have come there from countries in Central and South America, Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean including Haiti. And diversity, as it says on St. Francis’ website, was God’s idea.

But what pulled at her heart and soul were the day laborers.

“You see people standing outside, desperate for work on hot, hot days in the summer and cold, cold days in the winter, and it’s just wrong,” she said.

“Some just want ‘those people’ off the street so they don’t have to see them, but for me, it’s an issue of human dignity. I love the diversity of Stamford, but realize that with that comes new people who are scared, helpless, and taken advantage of.”

Cathy got involved with a group of like-minded people she’d known from previous work and she respected. Initially they planned just to provide a place for day laborers to wait for work.

“Some towns have a room, sometimes in a church,” Cathy said. “But we thought, wouldn’t it be great if we could do more.”

In 2011 they launched “Neighbors Link Stamford” (NLS) and it has become a community center for recent immigrants. The rector of St. Francis’, the Rev. Mark Lingle, was part of the organizing group as was the Rev. Kate Heichler of Christ the Healer, Stamford. Both continue to be involved. The site is the first satellite of a similar organization in Mt. Kisko, New York.

In addition to being a safe place for day laborers to wait, NLS offers English classes during the day and in the evenings. Child care is provided during the morning sessions. NLS has offered eight-week skill-building sessions on topics such as specialized English for housekeeping jobs and woodworking skills. On Saturdays the building is open for sewing classes and computers are available. People come in to send and receive email or check Facebook pages, and there are mentors who can teach computer skills.

NLS networks and partners with other nonprofits – health clinics, family services, and more. “It’s whatever people need,” said Cathy. “It’s hard for many people to find services but if you don’t speak English, it’s much more difficult.

One partner, Connecticut Legal Services, has a group of lawyers who take unscrupulous employers to court.

“What happens in Stamford and all over the country is that individual home owners, restaurants, landscape owners, pick up people for work, have them work all day for a day or a week, then drop them off and say, ‘I didn’t like the work you did’ and don’t pay them. These guys just want an honest day’s pay for work. People take advantage of them.”

TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCES

Cathy said that Neighbors Link Stamford currently has the equivalent of five full time staff persons, and hundreds of volunteers. While initially more hands-on, Cathy is now the organization’s treasurer. In two years since opening in 2011 they have served over 2000 people, she said. The organization is evolving and responding to people’s needs with new projects planned for the future.

Episcopalians have been very supportive of the organization, Cathy said. St. John’s, Stamford, organizes and runs an English class on Sundays for those who can’t attend during the week. In addition to Mark Lingle and Kate Heichler, she estimates there are about 20 other Episcopal lay people and clergy from the region who are tutoring or training.

Sometimes that participation can be life-changing. That’s what Cathy said happened to a high school student named Emma who’s a member of St. Francis.

“She decided to become a tutor and the experience has transformed her,” said Cathy. “She’s become an advocate for what we do, and now designs techniques for her work there. And last Christmas at church, I turned around and there she was, with her parents, sisters, aunt and uncle, and the man she tutors.”

Cathy tells another story about how participating has been life-changing. “One of first women in the English class at the center was a mother of two young children. She was very shy and barely spoke any English,” Cathy said. “Two years later, her English is amazing, she is happy and cheerful and confident.”

Reflecting on what she’s seen and experienced, Cathy says simply, “It’s God’s work.”

“...It’s an issue of human dignity
...it’s whatever people need
...it’s God’s work.”

Cathy Ostuw
Connecticut parishes adopting Nike’s approach to change – “Just do it” – in their own ways
Karin Hamilton

What is God’s mission? What does it mean to “join God’s mission”? What does it look like? What does it mean to be a “missional” church? What does that look like? And mostly: How do you talk about this?

I talked to mostly clergy and some laity in a small sample of parishes to see how they’re talking about and working through these questions: Christ Church, Redding Ridge; Trinity Church, Hartford; St. Paul’s, Southington, and St. John’s, Essex. I learned some about Trinity-St. Peter’s, Thomaston through the profile of their rector, The Rev. Mark Byers, which is published in this issue, and tossed in a few others. (To these you can add your own stories, and those you’ve read or heard elsewhere. This should only be a starting point.) Admittedly it was a tiny sample; still, there were some common elements. Here’s my list, with examples.

The churches started without a grand plan, a defined expectation for a result, or a timetable, and they were okay with that. They just started...

The Rev. Don Hamer (Trinity, Hartford) recalls that the Rev. Ron Kolanowski, then on staff there, did a vestry retreat in 2010 and started the conversation about the missional church. Now they talk about it a lot, and he preaches about it. But that’s not the end of the story. As a next step, Trinity recently put together a group of 15 people to understand “who we are as a people of God,” said Don. Trinity warden Mark MacGougan added that the group will also be “engaged in the critical issues of where we are going, and what God’s call is to us in that.” Vestry members weren’t included because Don didn’t want them to have any conflict with their canonical responsibilities. Because of the diversity of Trinity’s members, including diverse understandings of God, Don said they’re starting by reading Theological Worlds: Understanding the Alternative Rhythms of Christian Belief, by W. Paul Jones, which says there are five different, common Christian perspectives. The book helps people to identify and understand their own, and appreciate others’. “Where will it lead? I don’t have any idea,” said Don. Mark (not in the group because he’s a warden) said he appreciates the process of discernment alongside current activity. “We don’t say that we’ll do nothing until we see the white smoke and get a definite answer. [I appreciate that] we have a process going on and people are thinking of it. It’s my expectation that what people are going to conclude will probably not be a surprise, but it’s best to go in with an open head and mind.”

…and they used a variety of processes including Bible study, discernment processes, public narrative, consultants, and book study groups. It didn’t seem to matter. They worked in small groups, and with the whole parish.

The Rev. Dr. Suzannah Rohman (St. Paul’s, Southington) started with a discernment committee who read books about the missional church, and held a series of parish meetings. Later, the group read Diana Butler Bass’ Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening. With the two-year term of the initial discernment committee now up, a new one is forming.

The Rev. Jonathan Folts (St. John’s, Essex) had a unique resource: He was finishing his dissertation on the missional church, and used concepts included in that.

The Rev. Marilyn Anderson (Christ Church, Redding) asked Steve Dominiek (St. Andrew’s, Madison) to come as a consultant for a parish exercise.

Some churches had a head start because they had already been in a pilot group using a paid process called “Partnership for Missional Church.” (St. John’s, Vernon; St. Mary’s, Manchester; St. Mark’s, New Britain).

The Rev. Sandy Stayner (St. Peter’s, Cheshire) was impressed with the public narrative process taught by Marshall Ganz and thought that would be helpful.

The Rev. John Donnelly (Christ Church, Quaker Farms) leads Bible studies, and uses study programs from Rick Warren.

They paid attention to language but didn’t get stuck on it. The leaders said that sometimes people got confused by the words and terms that scholars and students of this field are using, so they found other words.
Tips on understanding a missiologist

Karin Hamilton

Suzannah Rohman (St. Paul's, Southington) said that their parish has a mission and outreach committee, and if she used language about the mission of God they might think she was talking about another outreach project. Suzannah had another experience about two years ago with the power of language. That’s when she had eight or nine pastoral appointments almost in a row with people who were long-time members and loved the parish, but weren’t sure they believed any more. Suzannah said she went back to Marcus Borg, author of Speaking Christian: Why Christian Words Have Lost Their meaning and Power – And How They Can Be Restored, “to help people to find a language for their faith today,” she said. Later my interview with her she added, “I could spend a lot of time on language, but I use language that people can hear more readily. ‘Missional’ can fall in the same category as ‘narthex’ for some people.”

Lay leader Mark MacGougan of Trinity, Hartford said the parish was invited to read Verna Dozier’s classic book, The Dream of God: A Call to Return, and take part in discussion meetings, so that they’d have a common vocabulary.

They really welcomed and listened to ideas from all kinds of people in the parish. In the same way, they welcomed increased lay involvement.

According to the profile elsewhere in this magazine, Mark Byer’s motto is, “if you have an idea we can try it.” (Trinity-St. Peter’s, Thomaston) “If you think out loud with people and say ‘I wonder how we can do this better’ and they come up with five things and two were on your list, too, then you have something to work with,” he said. “It’s not like you’re putting thoughts in people’s heads. We’re already in the same ballpark.”

At St. John’s, Essex, Jonathan Folts uses David Allen’s natural decision-making process, which includes the steps of defining the purpose, envisioning the outcome, brainstorming, organizing the ideas, and identifying next actions. That may be in a meeting with a parishioner who’s made a suggestion, or with an established group. Invitations to brainstorming sessions are regularly included in Sunday bulletins. When they’re organizing ideas, said Jonathan, they’re looking for themes, and, they’re looking for which ones have the most energy and people to do it. “By insisting on that, we only do things that people are passionate about,” said St. John’s lay leader Suzy Burke.

At Saint Paul’s, Southington, Suzannah Rohman said that some people have asked to be lay preachers (she now has four) and others have asked to be able to share their stories on Sundays (she said she writes a column in the weekly email newsletter when she doesn’t preach). She’s also noticed that lay people at St. Paul’s are now more open to looking

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They asked “why” a lot. They reframed. It led naturally to conversations about faith.

Parishioners of Christ Church, Redding Ridge did a report card exercise. They graded their parish in how it did in a number of areas (worship, fun, evangelism, etc.) then they graded themselves in those areas. That opened up conversation about their personal spiritual lives that they said they didn’t usually have, yet they also said they appreciated it and wanted more of it. Afterwards they went back to each area to ask why they did each of them.

Jonathan Folts (St. John’s, Essex) asked the parish outreach committee to look at why they had a mission partnership with a hospital in Haiti, since it could be something that the Rotary Club did. They realized that healing was what Jesus did; that restoration was a sign of the Kingdom of God, and that God was already active in the hospital. St. John’s lay leader Suzy Burke said that it was important to them not just to “do good works,” but they had to understand why, and that meant talking about faith. Suzy and Jonathan said that the practice there is to do this with every group.

After the series of pastoral visits from people who loved the parish but struggled with their faith, Suzannah Rohman (St. Paul’s, Southington) read Diana Butler Bass’ Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening with the discernment group. “We asked, why do we do that? Why do we do what we do?” Now, different groups around the parish are asking themselves the same questions, and they’re trying to create a constant discernment into the culture there. For example, said Suzannah, “members of the altar guild said they found that the real reason they served was that it was a very spiritual experience for them.”

The biggest challenges that I heard named in my sample were these:

Language: There was unfamiliarity and confusion about the mission/missional language (see above) and other words were unclear. In Redding Ridge, a participant in the Report Card exercise asked why they were asked to grade the church, and themselves, on “evangelism” when Episcopalians were not supposed to be “evangelical.” (The consultant explained the differences.)

New England culture: Jonathan Folts (St. John’s, Essex) said “the New England culture was a challenge to communicating the gospel portion, why we’re doing what we’re doing.”

Buildings: Don Hamer (Trinity, Hartford) said the “reality of the buildings” was the biggest challenge. He asked, “How do we back out of this infrastructure we already have and look with new eyes – but we still have responsibilities for the institution?”

Generational differences in understanding “church”: Suzannah Rohman (St. Paul’s, Southington) said that she sees the gaps between the generations as bigger than ever. “Older people are perplexed, because for them, you always come to church. The newer generations feel no obligation to come to church. It’s tough balancing.”

at what works and what doesn’t work – and when things don’t work, talking about what they can do to make it better.

**Sinner and Saint:**

An Interview with Nadia Bolz-Weber

Deborah Arca, excerpt reprinted with permission, Patheos.com

[Nadia Bolz-Weber is the pastor of House for All Sinners and Saints (HFASS) in Denver, Colorado. It is part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).]

Pastrix, the much-anticipated spiritual memoir of one of progressive Christianity’s most talked-about and unconventional pastors, Nadia Bolz-Weber, hit in September 2013 from Jericho Books. The cover, featuring a gorgeous, backlit photo of a pensive Bolz-Weber baring her stunning shoulder-to-wrist spiritual tattoos, is worth the price of the book alone. But once you open the cover and read the first sentence...you’ll be doubly rewarded by perhaps one of the most honest, riveting and convicting stories of faith and redemption you’ve ever read.

Let’s start with the title: Pastrix. Where did that come from? Were there other titles in the running?

Oh, that’s the term that some rather unimaginative and hateful Christians who don’t think women should be ordained have given me and other female pastors. Pretty much any time you can take an insult and claim it as your own, you win...

The stories you tell, page after page, about reaching out, screwing up, getting healed and finding God’s grace in even the most broken of situations were so moving, so honest, and felt so “real Christian” to me. Why did you decide to share your messy and beautiful story with the world at this time?

I just suspected that there’s so many more people than myself who have a longing for this kind of faith; who have a longing for it to be more real and beautiful and paradoxical than it’s sold as being in popular media. The popular conception of Christianity is so different that the Christianity you encounter in this book. And I just suspected that there were more people who had a longing for that and for whom that might actually be transformational, and literally that’s why I wrote the book. In some ways, I’m evangelical in my cultural faith; but I’m evangelical for this expression of Christian faith.

Also, we’re in this cultural moment now where people are willing to let go of things they’ve been clinging to for a long time. We’re shifting the way we’re thinking about things. And I think that’s happening by necessity in the economic sense – we have a DIY (Do It Yourself) movement, we have a locovore movement. And we see it in the societal sense in terms of gay rights and civil unions. And I think we’re also seeing it in a religious sense. In a way, House for All Sinners and Saints is DIY church. There’s an ethos of wanting to create things for yourselves; wanting to have things be meaningful in a really personal way and not in an institutional way. We’re in this moment of re-thinking a lot of things.

Your particular journey to ordained ministry has been less than traditional, and in some sense, rather incredible. At one time you were a college drop-out alcoholic, living in a dirty commune and doing stand-up comedy for a living. It’s remarkable that you are “here” when you were once “there.” In fact, you
"This bigger story of God, and Gods’ people, and redemption and Jesus – that always interprets us. We think we’re interpreting it, but ultimately we submit to being interpreted by it. And that’s powerful and freeing.”

Nadia Bolz-Weber

wonder about that in your book…how you managed to pull your life together, when many other people from your past didn’t.

Yeah, I have survivor guilt in a way. There were different people in my life at one time where we were almost the same person. We were in the same place, doing the same things, having the same story at one point in our lives. And something happened where I went on this path, and they went on another path. And...I end up burying them, or their mom calls and says they’re dead. Or they have this really horrible, horrible, desperate life. And I have everything.

And I can’t say it’s because I just made better choices, or worked the 12 Steps better than they did, or that the fiber of my character is so much stronger than theirs. You can’t do the math; it doesn’t make sense. So all I’m left with is there’s something about it that has to do with grace, and that I’ve been given a huge gift. That’s all I can do. It doesn’t make any sense to me sometimes, that I’ve been given a huge gift. That’s all I can do. It doesn’t make any sense to me sometimes, and then at other times I think, it doesn’t have to make sense, I just have to live in response to it and be faithful.

Yeah, I don’t imagine in your wildest dreams you imagined you’d be where you are today.

Oh my God, no way! If you had come to me 20 years ago and told me that I was going to become a Lutheran pastor and be married to a nice man from Texas and have two kids, I’d have said “Oh that’s hilarious, you have the wrong girl. There’s no way, there’s no way.”

It strikes me that this book really speaks to the power of telling our stories as a way of confessing our faith, instead of doing it by quoting and interpreting Bible verses or claiming to know what God thinks about any number of issues.

Yeah, this book is like theology done in the first person. It’s just me saying, this is what I’ve experienced to be true.

Human experience has an authority it’s never had in history right now, in the post-modern age. Part of that is due to the cynicism after Watergate, after the clergy sex scandals, after the economic meltdown. All of these things we were supposed to trust – the government, religion, the education system, Wall Street. The more and more we find out we can’t trust these institutions because they’re more interested in protecting themselves than in serving people, the more we look to our own experience. Why would I trust you to tell me the sky is green if I can see that it’s blue? Some people might see that as problematic for Christianity, because “well, some religious authority should tell you what to believe, and the Bible is very clear about what you should believe.” But if there’s something in the Bible that says Nadia is 5’4 and nothing in my lived experience would say that’s true, am I going to then remove the part of my brain that’s tied to experience? In a way, we have to resort to trusting our own experience – but not exclusively. It’s important to look at our human experience and interpret it in community, in conversation, and in the biblical text, and being in scripture. It’s not like we disregard these like they don’t have anything to say to us. But we have to look at what we’re actually experiencing too, because we can’t trust the institutions to do that for us anymore.

I think there’s something so important in helping people find language for their stories. The Bible was people telling their stories and their experience of God. And somehow we’ve gotten afraid of talking that way anymore.

Well I think that’s because a lot of progressive Christians are mortified of sounding like evangelical Christians, so we sort of let them have the Bible, and we let them have Jesus, and we let them have any kind of personal expression of faith because we don’t want to be confused with them. And I think that’s really misguided. It’s really powerful to talk about our own experience of God. And we can create own language that feels really authentic to us.

I had flashes of other spiritual writers like Sara Miles and Anne Lamott while reading your book. Who’s influenced you as a writer?

Sara Miles and I are in conversation a lot. More than my writing being influenced by her, I think my idea of what it means to be Christian has been affected by my relationship with her, and maybe vice versa, I don’t know. But more than certain writers being an influence, I have people in my actual life who are an influence. I have amazing conversation partners and I really cultivate that. Anything I do is never done in a vacuum. My sermons that I write that become meaningful to other people are not written in a vacuum. I have a friend Justin that I talk to almost every week. My conversations with him are the way in which I figure out what I want to say in my sermon.

One of my favorite chapters in the book is called “Demons and Snow Angels,” and it’s about one of your parishioners, a transgender man named Asher. It’s about identity, and how we often let the voices of the culture tell us who we are, instead of God. It reminded me how much I listen to those other voices as well…

We all do. That’s the culture we’re stuck in. And that’s why the church can be a really significant place. It’s like a de-programming center. It’s this one place where you get to touch this deeper truth than what we’re being sold all week. And we get to remember the big, big story that we’re actually a part of. We get to understand what’s happening in the world and our life through how it’s interpreted by this bigger story. This bigger story of God, and Gods’ people, and redemption

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and Jesus – that always interprets us. We think we’re interpreting it, but ultimately we submit to being interpreted by it. And that’s powerful and freeing.

You are an incredibly gifted preacher and I know you take it very seriously. What’s your process around preaching?

It’s such an honor to be a preacher. A lot of my identity is in being a preacher – more than a writer, more than a speaker. I’m a preacher. But it’s an extremely harrowing experience for me because it’s like my blood is in those sermons. I describe it as a wrestling match between me and the text, and I take my community into that wrestling match with me and I don’t walk away before demanding a blessing for them from that text. And when I walk away, I walk away limping. It’s like that story in the scriptures.

So to be a preacher is costly, because I have to find something in that text that breaks my own heart. I have to confront the thing in that text that I don’t want to look at in myself. It’s really easy to just gloss over and say the obvious thing, but I try to dig deeper and say, “What makes me uncomfortable?” I submit to that process on behalf of my community. And one of them once said, “I really appreciate how you preach to yourself and let us overhear it.” And it doesn’t mean that I’m this beacon of personal faith, like I just believe every single thing so strongly. I often do, but sometimes… Here’s the thing — I can’t preach something I don’t believe, but sometimes what that looks like, rather than me preaching from this rock solid faith of my own, sometimes it looks like preaching something I am daring to not be true. Sometimes that what faith looks like to me as a preacher.

It is a difficult thing for me. It’s never easy. And I always lack confidence. Every week when I look at the text, I think, well, I’ve had a good run and it’s over now. I’m not kidding! I’m convinced that every sermon is crap and that people are going to feel bad for me when they hear this. And then inevitably something happens in the hearing of it...

I want to go back to theology for a minute. You don’t have any problem with the concept of sin. You call yourself a sinner and your church claims that identity as part of their name. But a lot of us progressive Christians still squirm a bit around this word. What’s your take on sin?

I think it’s because in a lot of more conservative expressions of Christianity, they think sin is immorality. So sin means you’re doing something bad, and that you’re bad. And what goes along with that is that, if you can manage to not be immoral, and not commit any sins, then you’re not a sinner. So what a lot of people hear when conservative Christians say “You’re a sinner,” is that they’re immoral. And if I don’t cheat on my wife or I don’t cheat on my taxes, I certainly don’t want to spend Sunday morning having someone imply that I’m a bad person, when I’m not doing these big, huge bad things.

But what that does not address is the sort of brokenness inside every single human being. The thing that will seek for itself rather than for the other. The parts of us that have no thought for God or neighbor. The ways in which, as Martin Luther said, we’re curved in on ourselves. And we have many clever ways of masking being curved in on ourselves. You can be curved in on yourself and spend a lot of time doing charity work while on some level, and maybe only you know about it, and maybe it buried really deep underneath all the smiley faces when you write checks to charity, it’s in there.

Sometimes just speaking the truth about it – about how crappy our motivations are, how much we resent people, how selfish we can be – just speaking the truth of that is ten times more liberating than having to maintain the lie of the fact that it’s not there. So to me, it’s just about the reality of human beings, it’s not a judgment. It’s saying, yeah, we’re simultaneously sinner and saint all the time. We live in that paradox, we live in the tension of that. And that’s fine. There’s nothing wrong with that, it’s just who we are.

You started a church that is actually growing, and attracts young people – two rare-ities in a tradition that is losing members in record numbers. What do you think is so attractive about HFASS?

In a way, it would be better to ask that question of the people who go there. That question gets asked of them a lot, especially the people who don’t have a church background and for whom this community is now a central part of their lives. I think what people are attracted to is that there’s not a lot of clericalism there. There’s a democratization of the space and of the way we do liturgy. And the pastor is always speaking to herself first and letting other people overhear it. And I’m just as in need of God’s grace as anyone else and just as heartbroken by the beauty of the Gospel.

And they don’t ever have to get too cynical about me. They’ve heard me apologize when I’m wrong. My authority isn’t threatened or lessened by me admitting I made a mistake. I tell the truth about myself as much as I can. I think they want a place where the truth about themselves and the world and God ultimately can be spoken and held in a really holy space. There’s not a lot of pretending… There’s this enormous capacity to hold suffering and pain, and yet this enormous capacity to experience joy at the same time. People resonate with that for whatever reason. They don’t have to check their story at the door.

What have you discovered over the years about listening for God?

I’ve discovered that I need to be skeptical about whether the answer is really from God or some hidden desire of mine that I want to be the voice of God. I think listening for God often means listening for the thing that you don’t want to hear. The thing you’re trying to avoid. Sometimes I think listening for God means allowing yourself to be loved in a way that’s really uncomfortable, because you don’t feel lovable.

Pastrix is your story, but ultimately, it’s not a story about you. It’s a story about God. What do you hope people take away from this book about God?

I think the story of God and God’s people and the Gospel of Jesus Christ is so much more beautiful, and de-stabilizing, and life-changing, and devastating, and lush than you might have imagined, or been told before.

There are so many things in the world that make me not want to be Christian. And yet, sometimes when you hear these stories of what’s underneath all of the B.S. culturally around “the church,” and you see it and experience it in its actual power and beauty, what else would you want to be part of?

What other work would I even want to do? I can’t believe I get to do this as my job. It’s amazing. You ask me, what’s next? What’s next is hopefully I keep getting to do what I’m doing: pastoring a small church, spending a lot of time with my family, and getting to go out on the road sometimes and share some of my story.

Deborah Arca is the Managing Editor of the Progressive Christian Portal and Book Club at Patheos.com.
Since the beginning of time children have been rebellious, stubborn and prone to violence. Deuteronomy even provides a law allowing Israelite men to stone boys who disobey their parents after receiving punishment for misbehavior. Parenting has never been easy, but I feel that in this era of everyday gun violence it’s more difficult than ever before.

Roughly 40 children and teenagers are shot every single day in America and 8 of them die. One-third of all households with children younger than 18 have a gun in the house and 40% of those guns are not locked away. Every morning I read Joe Nocera’s “Gun Report” on the New York Times website and every morning I discover another child who has been shot accidentally. It even happened in our small town this spring when the son of a local pastor shot and killed his little sister.

Like many parents, my husband Eric and I were visibly shaken after reading the news from Newtown on December 14 and took the opportunity to talk with our children, Hill (4) and Pailet (2), about the danger of guns. We’ve never shied away from difficult subjects like death, the danger of strangers and sexual misconduct; using age appropriate language we have talked through all sorts of things over the past two years and the Sandy Hook massacre was no different.

A new friend of mine, Gena, approached the subject differently with her two children ages 11 and 8. Gena is the local chapter leader of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America and knows a lot about our country’s addiction to guns and the dire need for stricter gun legislation. After watching her 8-year-old daughter develop signs of anxiety post-Newtown, Gena’s tactic became one of protection and emphasizing her safety. “Other children in Connecticut are hurt,” she told her daughter, “but you are safe at your school.”

As the mother of two young children I think about safety all day long. “Please walk down the stairs. Put down that giant stick. Do not touch the snake. Please stop hanging from the sanctuary hand rail.” Hill understands that my primary job as his mother is keeping him safe, and that I can only keep him safe if he listens to my rules. But, he’s a 4 year-old boy and there is only so much listening and rule following he can do. I know even though he’s been repeatedly told never to touch a gun and to immediately tell a grown up immediately if he discovers one, he’s most likely going to pick it up first to see how heavy it is or to see if it works.

Psychologist Marjorie S. Hardy has studied and written about children and their fascination with...
For these reasons, I’ve pledged to always ask if there is a gun in the house and if it is securely stored before sending my child on a play date. In our house, guns are not allowed; the adults do not own real guns and the children are not allowed their toy counterparts. Similarly swords, knives, slingshots and all other instruments of violence are forbidden because they inevitably will be used to inflict pain.

This steadfast rule has been part of our parenting approach from the very beginning: as Christians we are not a family who hurts other people, we help them. We return to the myriad of children’s Bibles for further support and by now Hill knows the stories of The Good Samaritan, Jesus’ teaching to turn the other cheek and the narrative of Joseph and his brothers by heart.

Whenever he asks to read David and Goliath or any other story in which acts of violence are committed we talk about the decisions people make and their consequences. There are no bad people, we say, only bad choices. God made every single one of us so there can’t really be any bad guys. From Captain Hook to Naaman the Leper everyone is capable of making good decisions if they choose to do so (I understand that due to mental illness or addiction that some people truly are incapable of making good choices and in due time we will explain that to our children).

Several Episcopal friends echo emphasizing Jesus’ teaching to love one’s neighbor rather than harming them. Pailin, the mother of sons Jensen (11) and Fyn (8), says the lesson most articulated in response to violence, from school yard bullying to casual unkindness among siblings to gun violence around them in Baltimore is one of compassion. “We express compassion for the victims and the perpetrators and find opportunities to take action afterward ensuring that the violence doesn’t continue.”

These two messages, compassion and action, allow their family to empathize with those who have experienced violence and explore possible motivations of the perpetrators with compassion, and then to empower their sons to be advocates for change, whether on the playground or in the political realm.

I understand from talking with Pailin and a former parishioner of mine named Amanda the importance of bringing older children into the discussion, moving away from a dictator model of parenthood. With young children my parenting approach involves issuing decrees rather than inviting dialogues. And for Amanda, the same was true when her sons were younger. She kept violence out of her home by limiting the vehicles for entrance, controlling the games they play, toys they bought and shows they watched. But this tactic changed when Jess, her eldest son, came home from a birthday party describing a video game he played that turned out to be Grand Theft Auto.

“I realized at that moment how different my values for Jesus were from the other parents,” said Amanda. “This family was one who professed their Christian morals to everyone. A family who would never utter the F-word because it’s not Christian, but who evidently lets their 9 year old play a horrifically violent video game.”

She admits it’s been hard for their sons (now 12, 14 and 18 years old) to have parents with such a different understanding of Jesus’ message. “I’m weird” is something Jess began saying as he entered high school several years ago when he realized how dissimilar his family’s set of values was from his friends. But because he was brought into the conversation around the same time, Amanda says their approach didn’t backfire. Now at 18 years old Jess owns these values as his own. He understands the difference between his .22 long rifle that’s used to hunt deer on his family’s farm and an automatic handgun that has no practical purpose at all beyond shooting people.

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Do you consider yourself to be a Christian? I consider myself a Christian because I believe that everyone should be looked at as equal and that is what I was taught from being at L’Eglise de l’Epiphanie. Growing up around them taught me what I believe. I chose because of the way the Episcopal religion is. You can be anything you want to be and you are capable of doing. I felt like I wanted to be part of that.

You are confirmed in the Episcopal Church, was the preparation helpful for your decision? Yes. It made me think more about my faith, in a positive way. I found ways that the confirmation class contributed to my life and that's when I chose [to be a Christian]. …We were part of a group with St. John’s (Stamford) and went on a mission trip to Haiti. It was good, especially reaching out to people. We went to school for three days with the kids there, it was so different to see how they learned. They were more advanced.

So what does that mean to you, in practical terms, to be a Christian? What responsibilities do you have? Being a Christian makes me see everyone as equal - everyone should be treated equally. One of my friends, she is lesbian, and she was being judged one day by a couple of other people. She was being judged about having a girlfriend. I stood up for her. Nobody else would, they were just looking around. God doesn’t look at people the way that some people do. I felt uncomfortable for her. In my head I was thinking, what if God was standing right here, looking at this situation, to see who would stand out for her. I wanted to stand out, and use God’s words to help someone. Also, I feel like I need to pray about everything, no matter what’s going on, no matter where – in your car, the lunch room, anywhere, you can pray and God will be listening to you.

What kind of relationship do you have with the Church? I am the trainer of acolytes at my church and I am in love with being an acolyte. I love being in the service and having a role; it means a lot. I first became an acolyte about 5-6 years ago, slowly moved up to higher roles. I felt proud of myself, and knew I wanted to do this for some time. When I was asked to hold the cross for the first time and be the crucifer, for Palm Sunday, I felt so much joy. It made my week so much brighter, knowing on Sunday I would be holding the cross.
Bishop Laura Ahrens and others at a rally in Hartford hold crosses with the names of those who died from gun violence in that city.