Episcopal Church celebrates 40 years of women in the priesthood.
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Front Cover photo
The Rt. Rev. Laura J. Ahrens, first woman ordained bishop in CT greets the Rev. Joan Horwitt, first woman ordained priest in CT at the 40th anniversary celebration at the Cathedral in Hartford.

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Back Cover photo © Marc-Yves Regis
Karin Hamilton, Canon for Mission Communication & Media

This past summer Bishop Ian T. Douglas sought and received an evaluation of his ministry, at his request. The Rev. Gay Jennings, an Episcopal consultant as well as President of the House of Deputies, conducted a series of interviews with the other bishops, staff, and representatives from the key governing committees in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut. Afterwards, Gay summarized the information and presented it to Ian as a report for reflection and action. She led the same evaluation process for Ian two years ago.

Ian shared the results with those who were interviewed and with the Standing Committee.

One of her findings, which I reprint here with Ian’s permission, is that the language used by people is changing. Gay writes, “In the 2012 summary report, I noted that people were open to a new discourse. After two days in the diocese [in June 2014], the new discourse is measurable in terms of the use of language. Language change, or discourse, is extremely significant in terms of corporate identity.”

She goes on to detail some of those language changes that she found most striking:

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These words and terms help us understand ourselves differently. Gay notes in her report that a new collective identity is emerging and, as one of her interviewees put it, we’re embracing a new understanding of change as part of who we are.

We know we’re not doing this perfectly, nor all the time, nor everywhere – and that’s okay. But I think we’ve crossed a threshold. There’s momentum here.

There’s also yet one more change that hasn’t yet fully taken place and needs to. We still often talk about the “mission of the church” (as does our Book of Common Prayer), instead of the “mission of God.” “Mission of the church,” along with “outreach,” come from a church-centric framework. The purpose of the church is to serve God’s mission. Or as others have put it, “God’s mission has a church.”

Someday, more of us will talk more easily about God’s mission, but right now, for many of us, it’s like having to stand on your head in order to see what’s been there all along.

In this third issue of the magazine, we hear from all three bishops: A report from Bishop Jim Curry about his call to public ministry and what’s planned next in his life, in his retirement; reflections from Bishop Laura Ahrens on her recent trip to Macau and this past summer’s celebration of the 40th anniversary of women in the priesthood in the Episcopal Church; and from Bishop Ian Douglas about the big conversations taking place here in The Episcopal Church in Connecticut about the Missionary Society – its past and its possible future. Should we reclaim it as part of our new identity, in a new way for a new time?

Elsewhere in the magazine you’ll meet three leaders in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut – the vicar of the Cathedral in Hartford, a warden at the “jazz church” in New Haven, and a recent college graduate in Bridgeport. You’ll also hear about the trend toward collaboration; leadership; making choices; the role of emotions in valuing differences — and more.

Thanks be to God for all of our differences, as well as our emerging common identity. Thanks be to God for “setting us at tasks that demand our best efforts.”
Diversity
Ellen Painter Dollar

I am continually surprised when I get into a good conversation with someone I see at church every week, and discover layers of religious experience and insight that I could never have guessed were there.

Last spring, World Vision, a Christian nonprofit that enlists people to sponsor children in developing countries, announced that they were updating their internal policies to welcome employees in legal same-sex marriages. And the Christian blogosphere exploded. Because I write largely for an online audience, I watched and participated in the slew of blog posts, news analyses, status updates, and tweets commenting on this rapidly unfolding story.

World Vision is a popular charity with evangelical Christians. The organization already required employees to practice fidelity in marriage and abstinence outside of marriage. (Don’t ask me how they enforce that rule. I don’t know.) The new rule recognized that same-sex marriage is legal in more and more places, and welcomed gay and lesbian married employees alongside straight married employees. World Vision spokesperson Rich Stearns said that they did not intend the new rule to endorse gay marriage. Rather, he said, World Vision recognized a diversity of Christian perspectives on gay marriage, and also recognized that they, as a Christian nonprofit and not a church, weren’t in a position to make grand theological statements about what Christian marriage should or shouldn’t be. The new rule was intended to be a narrow policy change within their organization, not a theological or moral statement on gay marriage.

Many of World Vision’s conservative supporters weren’t buying it. One far-right blogger called World Vision’s decision the “collapse of Christianity.” In the first few days after the announcement, several thousand people dropped their World Vision child sponsorships, and one blogger blamed gay people for the fact that poor children were losing their sponsorships. A national leader of the Assemblies of God called on everyone in his denomination to shift their support from World Vision to other charities that support a conservative Christian agenda. Some evangelical Christian writers who are my colleagues voiced more thoughtful, less vitriolic criticism of the World Vision policy change. Meanwhile, progressive Christian bloggers (including me) praised World Vision’s move, and called on readers to sign up to sponsor a child through World Vision, to make up for other supporters who were leaving the organization.

Two days after their initial announcement, World Vision announced that they had made a mistake. They reversed the policy change that welcomed employees in same-sex marriages.

I was devastated by the reversal for a number of reasons, including but not solely because I support marriage equality. But this column is less about the decisions themselves than how they made me feel about many of my fellow Christians—those at World Vision and those whose vocal opposition to same-sex marriage brought about World Vision’s reversal. I was sad. And I was angry.

I was tempted to just sever my ties with Christians whose conservative theology and morals are so different than mine. I was tempted to fling bitter accusations at those whose ideology did such damage (in my opinion) to Christian unity, to hospitality and inclusion, and to the primary Christian call to serve the poor. I was tempted to surround myself with nice progressive Christians who see things the way I do, to stop putting energy into conversation with those whose Christianity looks so different than mine.

I’ve always liked being what I call a “mixed-label Christian,” with strong roots (and current membership) in The Episcopal church but enough immersion in evangelical and ecumenical communities to feel connected to many ways of expressing and practicing my faith. I interact...
daily with a virtual community of writing colleagues and readers with a wide variety of faith backgrounds, practices, and opinions on theological and sociopolitical issues. After World Vision’s reversal, I was tempted to abandon this diverse community to hang out only with people who see things as I do.

I am proud to be an Episcopalian. I’m proud of our liturgy and prayer book, our progressive policies and radical hospitality. But I suspect that for me and many of my fellow Episcopalians, our love of the Episcopal way of being Christian, combined with bewilderment and even disgust with some other ways of being Christian, can lead to a kind of Christian isolationism. We become uninterested in conversation with those who think and believe differently. We dismiss their theological and moral arguments out of hand. We put our heads down and do our work, our way, and pay no mind to those Christians whom we can’t understand or abide.

I see this isolationism at work when my fellow Episcopalians write off conservative evangelicals as closed-minded, ignorant, unsophisticated Bible thumpers. I see it when evangelicals dismiss us mainliners as cold intellectuals who only come to church so we can show off our designer duds and listen to some fancy old-fashioned music in dying congregations.

There are certainly some who claim the label “Christian” whose actions and attitudes are so far removed from the life and ministry of Jesus Christ that we can, in good conscience, question and even reject their practices, much as Muslims reject Islamic fundamentalism that justifies mass murder in God’s name. But while every ideology has its share of blowhards and troubled leaders, most Christians whose positions on sociopolitical issues I find hard to accept, and whose faith practices don’t match my sensibilities, are simply trying their best to follow Jesus Christ, just as I am.

In a recent Scientific American article, Katherine W. Phillips discusses multiple studies showing that diversity is good for us. When people discuss problems and make decisions in diverse groups, they are more innovative, more open, and more diligent. As Phillips explained, “The fact is that if you want to build teams or organizations capable of innovating, you need diversity. Diversity enhances creativity. It encourages the search for novel information and perspectives, leading to better decision making and problem solving. Diversity can improve the bottom line of companies and lead to unfettered discoveries and breakthrough innovations. Even simply being exposed to diversity can change the way you think.”

The studies she cites largely refer to racial and other traditional categories of diversity in business settings, but these findings, I believe, apply also to the value of diverse expressions of Christian faith. In a world in which large numbers of people in developed nations are abandoning organized religion, religiously motivated violence is near-daily front page news, and the siren songs of technology and prosperity are heard more and more loudly everywhere, Christians need to be open to new perspectives and new ways of doing and being (or perhaps, in some cases, revitalization of old ways).

We need wise decision making and problem solving if we want the Gospel to foster light, healing, and resurrection in the dark, wounded, and dead corners of the world. If, as the studies tell us, diversity helps us to foster new perspectives and innovative problem solving, then we ought to seek and cultivate diversity of many kinds, including diversity of faith practice and expression.

When World Vision reversed their policy on same-sex marriage, as much as I wanted to distance myself from anyone who influenced and/or supported the retraction, I couldn’t. They are my brothers and sisters in Christ. Just as we can’t choose our biological family, we can’t choose our Christian family. A commenter to one of my blog posts on the World Vision controversy wrote this:

All too often we forget that God calls us all to his table and that we don’t get to choose who he seats us next to. No one loves you like family and no one can break your heart like family.

For me, that was the truest thing that anyone said in response to this World Vision mess. God’s seating chart poses a challenge to all Christians. It is a challenge to those who spoke out so vehemently against World Vision’s initial decision to err on the side of inclusion, for them to recognize that Christians in same-sex marriages are invited to sit at the table alongside those in traditional marriages. And it is a challenge to all of us, to continue building relationships with and listening to our fellow Christians, even when they break our hearts.

We can approach other Christians not as embarrassing neighbors whom we’d like to avoid, but as little-known yet welcome members of our family.

Ellen Painter Dollar is a writer whose work explores the intersections of faith, parenthood, disability, and ethics. She is author of No Easy Choice: A Story of Disability, Parenthood, and Faith in an Age of Advanced Reproduction (Westminster John Knox, 2012), and blogs for the Patheos Progressive Christian Channel.
When I was a little kid, I wanted to grow up to be a fireman. Well, a fireman and a garbage man. Well, a fireman, a garbage man, and a baseball player. Well, a fireman, a garbage man, a baseball player, and a paleontologist. I wanted to be a baseball playing, dinosaur-fossil finding, fire fighting trash collector. And you know what? That didn’t happen. Something even better happened. I got to be someone whose job it is to walk with people during the most important moments of their lives and point out God’s movement in those moments. I got to be a priest.

But getting back to my childhood’s occupational dreams, I can tell you one absolutely essential thing about them, which is this: My parents never quashed them. They never told me to stop dreaming. They never told me I was being silly or that I couldn’t, in fact, be a baseball playing, dinosaur-fossil finding, fire fighting trash collector. Instead, they encouraged me to reach for the stars and to fuel my dreams with all the fodder of my boundless imagination. When so-called “reality” set in years later, I didn’t feel betrayed by this encouragement, as one might expect; rather, the early training in dreaming big helped me retain the capacity to imagine more and better possibilities than so-called “reality” presented.
Jesus offers two paths to choose: division or reconciliation?

Depravity or virtue? Isolation or relationship?

Dishonesty or truth?

Each choice builds the kind of life we lead.

Such a capacity involves consciously making choices about what kind of life you want to live. Do you want to live a small life boxed in by the scarcity inherent in subscribing only to the notion of the currently possible? Or do you want to live a full life unbounded due to the abundance inherent in trusting in the creativity of our God? What kind of life do you want to live?

Let’s ask both Moses and Jesus for guidance here. Moses has stood on the mountaintop and looked on the vista of the Promised Land. But he knows he himself will never get there. He’s about to die, but before he does, he has a few more words to say to the people of Israel who have been walking with him through the desert for forty years. “See, I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses...” And then Moses, with all the fervor of someone who knows his time is short and his words precious, implores the people, saying: “Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him.”

Well, we know those people and their descendants had a, shall we say, checkered history with this choice. Sometimes they listened to Moses’ final invitation, but more often than not, they didn’t. The rest of the Hebrew Scriptures trace the trajectory of this choice and of God’s constant and persistent calls through the prophets to renew it and once again “choose life.”

When Moses issued the original invitation before his death, he was speaking about all the fullness of life with God and one another that the Law was designed to promote. But over the centuries, people interpreted and reinterpreted the Law into smaller and smaller boxes. By the time of Jesus, the Law of Moses had been parsed to within an inch of its life. The people, against whom Jesus spoke, had gotten lost in the minute details of the Law and forgotten its original intent to promote the fullness of life, the dream that God always had for God’s people.

And so we watch Jesus ascend the mountain, sit down, and begin a long sermon. He speaks of blessings for people not normally considered blessed (what we call the “Beatiitudes”). He speaks of the salt of the earth and the light of the world. And then he says something curious: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.” To fulfill the law. To complete it. To make it what it was always designed to be. In his fulfillment of the law, Jesus takes one step past Moses’ original choice. For Jesus, the choice isn’t simply between life and death because he has already chosen life for each of us. His choice is what kind of life.

And now we hear Jesus offer examples of the kinds of life we might lead. In each one, he takes a piece of the law and expands it, deepens it. Not just “do not murder,” but also, be reconciled to those you are estranged from. Not just “do not commit adultery,” but also, act with virtue and fidelity in all things. Remain in relationship rather than looking for easy outs. Speak truthfully always rather than trying to convince people through deceptive oaths.

In each example, Jesus offers two paths to choose: division or reconciliation? Depravity or virtue? Isolation or relationship? Dishonesty or truth? Each choice builds the kind of life we lead. Our lives can be small – empty of meaningful relationships, bursting with regret, littered with the collateral damage of strife, envy, and enmity. Or our lives can be full of all the good things God yearns to share with us – the abundance of lives lived with and for others, the joy of trusting and being trustworthy, the simple grace of acting virtuously.

Jesus’ invitation here offers us the expansive dream that God yearns us to be a part of – the kind of dream where someone might actually grow up to be a baseball playing, dinosaur-fossil finding, fire fighting trash collector. Or more to the point, the kind of dream where someone might actually choose the abundance of reconciliation, virtue, positive relationship, and trust.

If we are to take a step today to not only choose life, but choose the abundant life that Christ offers us, what might we do? Let’s start with a baby step. A mentor of mine, the Rev. Dr. David Lose, suggests this: think of two relationships you currently have. One should be the most wonderful, fruitful, mutual, and loving relationship of your life. The other should be one that’s on the brink of failure because of neglect or hurt feelings or betrayal. Take both of these relationships to God in prayer. Ask God to help you see what sustains and strengthens the first one. Why is that relationship important to you? What about it do you have to thank God? For the second relationship, don’t try to place blame, but instead hold the other person up in prayer to God. Offer God the brokenness of the relationship as something that can’t be mended without God’s help. What actions and choices can you make to move that second relationship to better health?

As you pray about these two relationships, remember the choice that Jesus puts before us. What kind of life do you want to lead? A life full of reconciliation, virtue, uplifting relationships, and trust? A life of abundance? Yes. All that and more. A life of dreams that are so big only God can contain them.

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Missionary Society 4.0
Re-imagining for the 21st century
Ian T. Douglas

Over the last year a new, urgent, and exciting conversation has emerged across the Episcopal Church in Connecticut inviting us to “re-imagine” our identity and relationships as Episcopalians serving God’s mission together. This conversation is encouraged and coordinated by the Taskforce for Reimagining the Episcopal Church in Connecticut (which flies under the name “TREC-CT” borrowing its acronym from a similar venture in the wider Episcopal Church known as the Taskforce for Reimagining the Episcopal Church, or simply TREC.) Both TREC-CT, and the more general TREC, are committed to helping Episcopalians discern how God might be calling us to be a new kind of church in the 21st century.

One of the imperatives that led to the forming of TREC-CT was a call by the 2013 Diocesan Convention for a new constitution for the Missionary Society of the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut. This call presupposes that Episcopalians in Connecticut know what our Missionary Society is, where it came from, and what its current and future function might be. Without such knowledge we cannot seriously engage in the work of re-imagining the Missionary Society.

The advent of missionary societies
At the turn of the 18th century, individuals and groups in England began to come together in voluntary associations or organizations known as “societies” to advocate for particular religious and social concerns such as the abolition of slavery or missionary work in English colonies. In 1698 the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) was formed to communicate the Christian faith through education and the provision of Christian literature. And in 1701, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) was founded to meet the needs of the Church of England and its missionary expansion in English colonies.

Connecticut was one of the earliest, if not the first, foreign mission field of the SPG, and Church of England congregations organized in colonial Connecticut villages were often served by a SPG missionary. These missionaries, usually born in the colonies, had to travel the perilous trip to London for ordination since there was no bishop in the Americas. With a meager salary from the SPG augmented by in-kind contributions from their Anglican farmer and village parishioners, missionary priests usually served more than one congregation. Many parishes in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut today can trace their roots to this pioneering work of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel missionaries.

Missionary societies and The Episcopal Church
In the wake of United States independence and with the election and consecration of Samuel Seabury in 1784 as the first bishop in Connecticut and the first bishop

WHERE WE’VE BEEN

CONNECTICUT’S COLONIAL ANGLICANISM

1662-1818
Puritan (Congregational) Church is the locus of identity and economic life is the local meeting house and village

1701
Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) missionaries shape the Anglican Church in Connecticut and religious identity is recognized as greater than the local parish, part of the catholic (universal) church

1775-1783
Crisis of the Revolution forces Anglican colonists, mostly Tories, to disappear or adapt to the changing context and culture of the new nation

1784
Samuel Seabury elected bishop, a profound structural innovation

1785
First clerical convocation

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IS BORN
One of the imperatives that led to the forming of TREC-CT was a call by the 2013 Diocesan Convention for a new constitution for the Missionary Society of the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut.

The growth of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut in the 19th century paralleled the experience of the national Episcopal Church. With its many rivers providing transport and power, the state of Connecticut became a center of skilled manufacturing and a leader in the emerging industrialized United States. New parishes in the river mill towns and industrialized urban centers meant that the Episcopal Church in Connecticut followed the model of the growing vitality and unity of The Episcopal Church in the United States. Replicating the DFMS constitutional change of 1835, the constitution of Connecticut’s missionary society was similarly changed in 1866 making all Episcopalians in Connecticut members of the newly reinvigorated “Missionary Society of the Diocese of Connecticut.” The reinvigorated Missionary Society, with new membership and financial support, extended the church across state throughout the remainder of the 19th century.

Missionary societies as holding companies

At the turn of the 20th century The Episcopal Church in the United States increasingly embraced a new unity as a national church with a corporate organizational model. The General Convention of 1919 passed sweeping canonical reforms that created a National Council to oversee the church’s united work.
In this new missional age, a reinvigorated missionary society might just be the primary vehicle we need to foster our common identity and service in God’s mission.

administered through fourteen deaneries.

The increasing centralization of diocesan program required a corporate center and in 1952, Miss Mable Johnson gave her stately home at 1335 Asylum Avenue in Hartford to become Diocesan House. For the remainder of the 20th century most of the affairs of the Diocese of Connecticut were organized and supported through this centralized structure while the Missionary Society increasingly receded into the background as a vehicle for service in God’s mission.

A new missionary society for the 21st century?
In today’s church, many of the organizational models that we have historically relied upon in the 20th century have begun to lose their efficacy and meaning. In the 21st century, flatter, networked, collaborative ventures are replacing top-down, centralized, more authoritarian models of organization. The new imperative to be more focused on God’s mission, more “missional,” is increasingly replacing old preoccupations with keeping the church in business. It is an exciting, if not a bit scary, time of change.

And Connecticut Episcopalians are embracing change. In 2010 a significant downsizing of diocesan staff resulted in a move away from the delivery of centralized programs and the emergence of new forms of collaboration across the church in Connecticut. To foster collaboration and the development of new leadership capacity, in 2013 the previously disconnected diocesan boards or committees known as the Executive Council, Standing Committee, Commission on Ministry, and Trustees of Donations and Bequests began to meet together regularly as the Diocesan Leadership Gathering.

In 2014, Diocesan House in Hartford was sold and the bishops and staff moved into an open, flexible, and collaborative research and development loft in a former ball-bearing factory in Meriden. Called The Commons, this new space has quickly become a beehive of activity and innovation for Episcopalians across Connecticut. To underscore our common identity and collaboration in the 21st century, a rebranding effort has given us a new graphic image, a reclaimed moniker as the Episcopal Church in Connecticut, and a new watchword of “Participating in God’s Mission.”

In light of all these changes and new energy, we return to the question of how we Episcopalians in Connecticut can best participate in God’s mission across our state.
and around the world in the 21st century. TREC-CT is helping to focus our discussions about who we are and how we want to come together to serve God’s mission. Basic to TREC-CT’s work are questions related to the nature and shape of the Missionary Society of the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut. Such questions include but are not limited to: does a missionary society still make sense today? Should the Missionary Society of the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut remain a holding company for diocesan financial assets and properties, or become something more? Can a reimagined missionary society really help all Episcopalians in Connecticut to participate in God’s healing and restoring action in the world? If so, what would such a missionary society look like? These are crucial questions that are at the heart of our common identity and relationships as the Episcopal Church in Connecticut today. Perhaps a reimagined, renewed, and reinvigorated Missionary Society just might be the voluntary organization we need to help each and every one of us participate more faithfully in God’s mission in the 21st century.


WHERE WE ARE


Diocesan House established as EDCT corporate center

National Church and EDCT become regulatory agencies: Increasing Committees, Commissions, Agencies and Boards (CCAB); A culture of hierarchical dependency develops

EDCT elects first female bishop

EDCT elects first bishop not canonically resident in CT since 1896

Leadership (Executive Council, Standing Committee, D&B, and Commission on Ministry) meet quarterly to explore what God is up to and how EDCT may more fully participate in God’s mission

Diocesan Convention updates Canons, first significant revision in 30+ years

New Ops & Finance team, Diocesan HQ relocates to building embodying accessibility both in location & architecture; reclaim ECCT as name

In 1784 Samuel Seabury was consecrated bishop for the Episcopal Church in Connecticut (ECCT). In 1818, “Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut” (EDCT) was used in the Missionary Society charter. In 2014 the ECCT name was reclaimed, although the legal name remains EDCT.
The short answer is that I hope to work with a wide continuum of faith communities to organize against violence in our cities and towns (beginning in Greater Hartford) and to help to re-create communities that celebrate the worth of every individual and acknowledge our need for one another. I feel both a sense of urgency about this work and a sense of “the right moment.” Three elements have worked together to send me in this direction: participating in public witness; the stories of three children; and my understanding of what it means to be a bishop.

Public ministry

Every year, on the Tuesday of Holy Week, the clergy of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut gather for prayer and the renewal of our ordination vows. Traditionally that service has been held at Christ Church Cathedral in Hartford.

In 2012, as the Connecticut House and Senate were debating a ban on the death penalty in this state, your bishops invited clergy of our Church and other denominations to join us out on the streets of Hartford to pray the Stations of the Cross with special intention for the welfare of our communities and for the abolition of the death penalty. As over 180 clergy and laypeople processed out from the Cathedral through downtown Hartford, we prayed for the victims of violence and for perpetrators of violence. We prayed for civic leaders and the people of all of our communities. We prayed for the poor and the homeless, and also for decision makers and people in positions of authority. We prayed for children and teachers, for peace in our homes, hope on our streets, and the courage to work for justice in our society. At each station of the cross, we made a connection between Jesus’ journey through Jerusalem on the last day of his life and the work of God’s mission of restoration and reconciliation in our own state and our own capital city.

That day I realized in a way I never had before that God has been leading me deeper and deeper into public ministry on the streets and in the neighborhoods of our communities. Four days later I participated in the annual march of Mothers United Against Violence to remember the victims of gun violence in Hartford. A group of about 60 people, mostly African American, carried crosses with the names of 350 men and women killed in Hartford since 2000. The march ended at the State Capitol with prayers and speeches, and a pledge to keep working to end the violence. It felt like we were just speaking to ourselves.

In Holy Week 2013, following the unfathomable tragedy and horror of the killings at Sandy Hook Elementary School, Bishop Ahrens, Bishop Douglas, and I organized another prayer walk. We invited people from all over the East Coast to join us in Washington, D.C. to pray “Way of the Cross.” Two buses from Connecticut went to Washington, D.C. More than 20 bishops from across The Episcopal Church joined our witness of faith. Bishop Sengulane and his wife came from Mozambique to pray with us. As hundreds of us marched from the White House to the United States Capitol in freezing rain, we prayed for an end to gun violence, we prayed especially for the victims of the shootings in Newtown and their families. We prayed for the victims of violence in Washington, D.C. and in our own cities and towns. We remembered the victims of domestic violence, the victims of war and racism, and those who work for justice and peace. We prayed for courage to continue to challenge violence of every kind. We promised to move forward together uniting cities and suburbs, towns and rural areas in the work to end the violence.

Later that week, Mothers United Against Violence again held their annual march in Hartford. Parents of victims of the Newtown shootings and parents of victims of gun violence in Hartford, Bridgeport, and New Haven stood together calling for resources and action to stop the violence. A new
understanding that we have to work together to challenge violence was beginning to take hold in the aftermath of the tragedy of Newtown and the crisis of gun violence in our cities.

Child victims
Three children, victims of gun violence in Connecticut, have shaped how I want to build on the work that has begun in our communities.

Twenty years ago, Marcelina Delgado, a seven-year-old, was shot and killed as she sat in the back seat of her father’s car on the way to see her grandmother in Hartford. The car had been mis-identified by the shooters as belonging to a member of a rival gang. The tragedy of her death soon was dropped from our community’s collective memory. Perhaps that was because she was a person of color or maybe it is just because life moves on. By God’s grace, Marcelina’s face and story have been seared into my soul — a reminder of the claim our children make on us, and the work that still needs to be done.

In 2008, Tyrek Marquez, a seven-year-old, was shot and seriously wounded as he watched the West Indian Day Parade in Hartford. Tyrek has survived and has fought back against his injuries. He has spoken out against gun violence in Hartford and in Washington. His courage gives me hope.

In 2012, Ben Wheeler, a child of Trinity Church in Newtown, and 19 other first-graders and six teachers were killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Their deaths underscore the urgency of challenging gun violence in our society. Ben loved lighthouses and that symbol of his life has become a beacon for me that our society must change.

The role of a bishop
I like to use the image of “connective tissue” I believe that we as citizens of this state and members of this Church have the responsibility and opportunity to reach out beyond ourselves as agents of God’s mission.
The Rt. Rev. James E. Curry is the recently retired (as of Oct. 1, 2014) Bishop Suffragan of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut. He was ordained to the diaconate and priesthood in 1985 in Connecticut, and elected and consecrated bishop here in 2000.

To describe the ministry of bishops. It seems to me that at the core of “episcope” are the ministries of connection and support. Just as tendons and ligaments help connect different parts of the human body do their work, so the ministry of bishop has been given to the Church to help connect and support the myriad expressions of God’s mission in the world.

The ministry of connection and support are especially important in a society like ours where the specters of violence, economic and educational inequality, and xenophobia have built strong walls of division and hostility. In Connecticut we have an added factor of separation that goes back to colonial times. We are a state of 169 towns and a diocese of nearly 170 parishes. We are rightly proud of local control, initiative and development, but sometimes our focus on “the local” keeps us from collaboration with others that can truly address the shared issues that plague our society.

I believe that we as citizens of this state and members of this Church have the responsibility and opportunity to reach out beyond ourselves as agents of God’s mission. We must work together if we are ever to realize a society at peace.

When I was ordained bishop suffragan, fourteen years ago, I was charged to proclaim and interpret the Gospel of Christ with boldness in the church and beyond. I was called into a ministry to support and encourage all Christians in their gifts and ministries. I was challenged to be merciful to all, show compassion to the poor and strangers, and defend those who have no helper. (Book of Common Prayer, p. 518) These are vows that have shaped my life as a bishop.

I thank God for every relationship and action in these years that have furthered God’s mission, and pray that God’s intention for God’s people may continue to be realized in the ministries of all the baptized.

I don’t know exactly how the components of my life in retirement will unfold. My prayer is that I can be of service to God’s continuing work of re-creation in our cities and towns. May His word be a lantern to my feet and a light upon my path.
Celebrating 40 years of women in the Episcopal priesthood, July 29, 2014 at Christ Church Cathedral in Hartford.
Seventy years ago, Florence Li Tim Oi was ordained as the first woman priest in the Anglican Communion. Thirty five years ago, Joan Horwitt was the first woman in Connecticut ordained priest.
We passed on the casinos, spent a little time at the remains of St. Paul’s, and spent most of our time at Morrison Chapel, a small Anglican Church tucked away in a quiet corner of the bustling community. This was our pilgrimage site, and the reason we had come to Macau.

We were humbled and overwhelmed by the privilege of visiting the site, not of her ordination (which was in Zhaoping, Guangdong, China), but more importantly of her ministry. The walls held the echoes of her prayers and the altar seemed to acknowledge both her priestly presence and her faithfulness to the presence of Christ. Did we dare sit in the chair that witnessed to her trailblazing and incredibly faithful service?

Seventy years ago, on January 25, 1944, Florence Li Tim Oi was ordained as the first woman priest in the Anglican Communion. Bishop Ronald O. Hall, the Bishop of Hong Kong and Macau, recognizing her call, ordained her to the priesthood and then informed Canterbury of his action. She had been ordained as a deacon in 1941 and given charge of the Anglican congregation there during the war. When no priest was able to travel there, Bishop Hall licensed her to preside at the Eucharist.

Tim Oi faithfully served the congregation in Macau throughout World War II and briefly after. Not recognized at the time by the Anglican Communion, she returned her license at the request of her bishop after the war. Notably, she never renounced her orders and when, years later, she moved to Toronto, she returned to active ministry when the Anglican Communion recognized women in the priesthood.

Li Tim Oi (1907-1992) served in Macau from 1940-1946, first as a lay person, then as a deacon and then as a priest. Macau was a Portuguese colony. Built between 1602 and 1640, it was destroyed by a fire in 1835. Only the front remains standing, but it is a powerful testimony to the ministry of the Jesuits in this Portuguese colony.

Bishops Dena Harrison (Suffragan, Texas), Diane Bruce (Suffragan, Los Angeles) and I made a pilgrimage to Macau as part of our House of Bishops meeting in September. The House of Bishops meeting this year was in Taipei, Taiwan. Several of the bishops chose to stay a few days longer in Asia and visit either Japan, Korea, the Philippines, or Hong Kong. I chose to visit Hong Kong with the specific goal of making a pilgrimage to Macau in this the 70th anniversary of Li Tim Oi’s ordination. Dena and Diane joined the pilgrimage for similar reasons.

Macau. Maybe you have heard of it? If the soundtrack from the James Bond movie Skyfall begins to play in your head it’s because the movie’s casino scene takes place there. The casinos are the first thing you see when you arrive by ferry from Hong Kong. There are more than 35 casinos in Macau! Not far from some of the casinos is a huge towering facade of St. Paul’s Roman Catholic Church. Built between 1602 and 1640, it was destroyed by a fire in 1835. Only the front remains standing, but it is a powerful testimony to the ministry of the Jesuits in this Portuguese colony.

The Rev. Joan Horwitt was there, the first woman in Connecticut ordained priest by a Connecticut bishop. The Rt. Rev. Arthur Walmsey ordained her on June 1, 1979. She died on September 19, 2014, at the age of 90. How blessed were we that she could be a part of our celebration of 40 years. So many of us looked to her as a role model and friend.

The Rev. Page Rogers preached at the 40th anniversary service. She gave all of us a gift in her honest words and her hope-filled, Gospel-based reflections.

After the Eucharist, and a lunch, we heard from a panel with clergy representing the past 40 years in Connecticut who framed our past, present, and future in God’s faithful service.

This past year I have dedicated a considerable amount of time to the affirmation and support of women in ministry, lay and ordained. For me, it seemed the logical next step in building up a new collaborative community in Connecticut to participate in God’s mission. The early years of my episcopacy were focused on collaboratively re-envisioning parish partnerships, particularly with the community East of the River. We’ve invited the Rev. Audrey Scanlan to work with us to move this conversation deeper into our vision for the Episcopal Church in New England. Early on I also worked with a newly formed Deacons East of the River. We’ve invited the Rev. Molly James has expanded that vision not only for Connecticut, but for all of Province One, the seven dioceses in New England.

Seven years into my episcopate, it seemed time to embrace an incarnate reality for me. As the first woman bishop in Connecticut, what does it mean for me to support and nurture the ministries of women, lay and ordained who seek to participate in God’s mission? I was raised up by women and men who affirmed my ministry. I began to wonder how I could support and create communities that will support others, not just the ordained, but helping all women in Connecticut claim their voice in this mission. A mission that calls us to be collaborative with all God’s children.
This recognition in me took me to places I did not imagine. I’ve led a retreat in the Diocese of Southwest Florida for clergy spouses (primarily women), a women’s clergy group has emerged in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut to talk, study, and pray together, talking about ministry, mentoring, and discernment. I hope that other communities of support and encouragement will emerge in Connecticut, particularly ones that seek to mentor others in ministry, helping all of us discern how we can most abundantly serve God’s mission. I am a passionate supporter of the Women’s Global Mission Network begun by Kim Polhemus not just for the Episcopal Church in Connecticut, but for all of The Episcopal Church. This demands of me that I engage in conversations about such important topics as human trafficking and the abuse of children, particularly but not exclusively women and girls. I wonder what other communities of practice might emerge as this pattern of support and encouragement replicates itself in other places around the Episcopal Church in Connecticut.

Back to Macau. Li Tim Oi found her ministry with the marginalized in Macau. The church will always find its ministry with the marginalized and the lonely, addressing the places of brokenness in the world. I believe the church will be its most authentic self when it is discerning how to share God’s love and empower others to collaboratively imagine how to embrace, reveal and share that reconciling love. I feel blessed to be a part of this mission and am committed to continually discerning with all of you how we can courageously serve Christ and continue to embrace God’s invitation to new life.

The Rt. Rev. Laura J. Ahrens is Bishop Suffragan of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut.
Leadership is not an institutional position with power and authority over others — that is management. While managers can also be leaders, there are many leaders who are not managers. “You don’t need a title to be a leader” is a common refrain in secular leadership circles. This refrain acknowledges that leadership involves influencing and empowering others, while moving toward a goal.

And yet, as members of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut, each of us does have a title: “baptized Christian.” It this from this identify that each of us is called to lead; there is no need for any additional title, election, or service in a specific position to be a leader.

Leadership, along with learning and change, happens on four levels: intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional and cultural. We are each called to lead on the intra- and inter-personal levels. Intra-personally we know God’s unconditional love through which we are moved to lead our own lives as Christians; living out our Baptismal covenant. We are also called to lead by expressing our Christianity on an interpersonal level, in relationships with others. I take great comfort in St. Francis’ assurance that we can do this by our actions, and need to “use words only when necessary.”

Before serving on your diocesan staff, I spent many hours sitting in a waiting room at housing court as a legal aid lawyer representing tenants in eviction actions. Courts can feel “Godless.” After getting my feet on the ground as a new lawyer, I recognized that many of those waiting were rarely treated with dignity and respect, in any setting. I made a conscious decision that while waiting in court, I would attempt to treat each person with dignity and respect. This often meant answering the same questions and giving the same explanations, over and over. It also meant being present to individuals in those interactions. I looked at them, and they often looked at me.

I immediately recognized that this decision, to lead my life as a Christian while waiting in court, transformed my experience. Within a few months, an attorney representing an opposing party said to me, “You believe in our Lord, don’t you. I can tell.” I share this story with some trepidation — I am not sharing it to boast, or show that I am a “better” Christian than others. I share it as an example of leadership that is often overlooked. While I can’t say for sure how my interactions influenced the lives of those waiting, I believe it did, and I know there are many members of our Church effectively leading everyday on an intrapersonal and interpersonal level.

Often underestimated, leadership in one-to-one interactions is powerful. It can influence others, empower others and move us toward the goal of engaging with God to restore all of God’s creation to one another and God. Institutional and cultural change can begin on this interpersonal level, in one-to-one relationships, before institutional or cultural change ever occurs. This is how community organizers lead, by building one-to-one relationships. This is how Christ led, not by being elected or having an institutional title, but by building relationships one-by-one, being true to His word, and being faithful to God the Father.

Some of us are in positions of institutional leadership, serving as a warden, vestry member, parish officer or delegate. Leading in these capacities is enhanced by an understanding of the responsibly and authority inherent in these roles. (Look for learning and training opportunities on our diocesan website www.episcopalct.org.)

Each of us, as a baptized Christian, is equipped and called to lead intra- and inter-personally. I invite you to claim your Christian leadership, even if you have not thought of yourself as a leader before. Reflect on how, often in quiet ways, your influence and empowerment of others engages in God’s mission to restore all to unity with each other and God. Share this with a brother or sister in Christ, and ask how they lead as baptized Christian.

Robin Hammeal-Urban serves as Canon for Mission Integrity & Training.
Feelings as entry points to engaging and valuing differences

Bill Kondrath

When I was growing up, my father’s mother lived with us for several years. I have fond memories of coming home from school with my brother and a couple of our friends to the smell of Grandma’s homemade donuts. My memories from that time are tinged with sadness because Grandma spoke very little English and my father refused to teach my brother and me more than a few words of Hungarian.

Dad grew up on a farm in Ohio. His first language was Hungarian, though he also learned English early from his five older brothers and sisters. At school, he spoke only English in order to “fit in” and be a “real American.” Later, dad wanted to be sure that my brother and I did not experience any of the suspicion or prejudice he experienced growing up as a child of immigrants. The price I paid was not learning a second language, when it would have been easy as a child, and not being closer to my grandmother.

Though he spoke English with no foreign accent and continued to be able to converse and write in Hungarian all his life, he never thought of himself as bi-lingual or bi-cultural. And when my older daughter went to Japan at age 16 for a year, he couldn’t understand why she gave up a year of high school, family, and friends to do such a strange thing. (He wouldn’t have been any happier if she had gone to Hungary.) He died before she went to Cambodia with the Peace Corps. I don’t think he would have understood that either.

Having learned English and bought into his U.S. citizenship 120 percent, I think he believed that being American and speaking English only was superior to any other way of being. He would not have understood that he had “internalized” the language and cultural oppression that he experienced as a small child — that he had bought into other people’s notion that he was less than they were because he was the child of immigrants and knew more than one language.

I suspect my parents, especially my dad, experienced shame, growing up as a son of immigrant farmers. He saw his own ethnic difference as inferior to those around him. I think he was afraid of religious, ethnic, and racial differences. He didn’t have much patience for, or curiosity about, cultural differences. And, as a shop manager, he was angry because he believed that newer immigrants (from Mexico and China in particular) had not worked as hard as he had to leave behind their language and culture.

As a white, heterosexual, economically-comfortable, and ordained male, I have a lot of unearned privileges and benefits in society and in the church. The messages I received as a child planted and reinforced the idea that being straight, white, male, English-speaking American, well-educated, wealthy, and Christian were better than any alternatives.

I grew up without the fears or anger of my father toward people from other cultures and without the internalized oppression he absorbed in his childhood. Instead I learned not to notice differences, to be “color blind,” which meant not noticing how groups of people are treated based on their skin color, gender, language, or country of origin. I believed that the hard work ethic and rugged individualism that helped my father fully accounted for his success in accomplishing the American dream.

I was mildly curious about people different from me. But it was not until I was in college

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For an explication of this theory, see William Kondrath, Facing Feelings in Faith Communities (Alban Institute, 2013).
that I ventured into living in and working in an African American and Latino congregation, where I was one of just a few white people. Though the experience enriched my life enormously, it was only years later that I saw that it had given me the desire and skills to more see and understand differences, the humility to realize I didn’t know everything and didn’t need to pretend that I did, and the longing to live in a more technicolor, multicultural world, where differences, even the ones that are challenging and stir up uncomfortable feelings, add value to my life.

As I reflect on my daughters, now adults, I see the role emotions play in recognizing and valuing differences. My daughters are not scared or angry when they encounter people who are radically different from them. They are excited and curious. They see the possibility of personal and professional relationships that will add value to their lives and improve the quality of their work projects. They find joy in diversity.

So what does this mean to congregations, the diocese, and the wider church?

I suspect that learning to understand, value, and celebrate all the differences in our various communities will require exploring the feelings we harbor, but do not often express, about people we think we are not like. It will mean asking new questions: What are we afraid will happen when we engage with those who are different? What anger do we carry when we are/were treated as less than by someone else? What shame do we feel when we realize we have treated others as less than? What sadness are we willing to name when we have to give up some pattern of behavior that is familiar in order to make room for new relationships and interactions? What joy may emerge when someone new brings gifts and talents to our community that we did not previously have? How might our community be empowered in new ways when each person is able to show up as fully themselves with all their diversity?

When I have taken the risk to name and to come to terms with my own feelings and what they tell me I need, I have become more open to the people around me who have different attitudes, values, and beliefs. When I have asked others not only what they think, but what they feel about worship, community, work, or family, I hear stories told differently and I open myself to empathy rather than comparison and judgment.

The path to a more multicultural church travels through the landscape of emotional awareness — knowing what we are feeling, and being responsive to the feelings of others.

The Rev. Bill Kondrath is an Episcopal priest who taught leadership, supervision, and multiculturalism at Episcopal Divinity School. He is author of God's Tapestry: Understanding and Celebrating Differences (2008), Facing Feelings in Faith Communities (2013), and Congregational Resources for Facing Feelings (2013). He is a consultant with VISIONS, Inc., and has worked within the Episcopal Church in Connecticut. His work can be accessed at www.billkondrath.com.
personal satisfaction, pride in the efforts of the group and a deepened sense of respect and collegiality.

Numbers support the trend towards working together: Marketing and digital media guru Shiv Singh cites a study showing the prevalence of collaboration in the 21st century workplace noting that 82% of corporate workers partner with co-workers to get the job done and 47% say they do it because they learn from each other. Gender indicators reveal that 51% of women and 40% of men say that they enjoy collaborating and generational indicators report that 60% of 18 - 22 year olds and 44% of 25 - 64 year olds choose collaboration as preferred strategy.

A study performed by IBM says that approximately 75% of CEOs say that collaboration is very important to their innovation efforts (www.ibm.com/services/us/cio/pdf/new-collaboration-white-paper.pdf) and in a recent survey asking millennials in the workplace to comment on their experience of collaborative processes, 65% said that “My company makes it easy for employees at all levels to share great ideas and take them to the next level” and 82% of respondents believe that brainstorming meetings are effective. (www.samclar.com/sitefiles/files/IdeaPaint-2013-Millennial-Survey.pdf)

But who says that what works as a teaching tool in fifth grade to teach higher-order skills or what appears to be the latest business craze is right for the church? Why should we collaborate?

Because we are one. In spite of our 168 different buildings across Connecticut, we are one Body in Christ as the Episcopal Church in Connecticut. We have diverse gifts and particular charisms that allow us to express ourselves individually as members of that Body, and, praise God, we are not all the same: We are Spanish and Creole speaking, versed in four-part Anglican chant and gospel music, leaders in movements against gun violence, missioners in Haiti, directors of daycare centers, and experts at Godly Play.

We have after-school programs and we feed people on the town green and in the park. We use Rite One and Rite Two and Rite Three to worship. We are located in cities and suburbs and exurbs and in corners of Connecticut that are rural. We are low church, broad church, high church.

And we are one. We claim Jesus as Lord and work to accomplish God’s mission on earth. Sometimes that work is best done in our own places, honoring the local context and the immediate need. And other times, we are called by the Holy Spirit to move beyond ourselves to work together, collaboratively, to accomplish that which God wills for us.

In the past couple of years I have learned of collaborative projects in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut that give me great hope: congregations joining together to feed the hungry at Church by the Pond in Hartford and Chapel on the Green in New Haven; churches joining together to discern the best use of empty church buildings in their region — in Groton and Norwalk and New Haven. There are churches working together in groups of two and three and four parishes to study how they might share a future together as one congregation. Another group is collaborating and sharing resources to hire a common youth minister and train pastoral care teams. Other informal groups have formed to collaborate in areas of interest: healing, parish administration, and finance.

We are well on our way to living into Paul’s declaration in Romans that “we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” (Romans 12:4) It turns out that a fifth grade science project in collaboration was good training for the Christian life. Who knew?

...we are one. We claim Jesus as Lord and work to accomplish God’s mission on earth.
Once upon a time you might have been able to put the Rev. Miguelina Howell’s ministry in a single category, although you’d have to make some choices. Perhaps “Latino/Hispanic ministry,” or “youth and young adult ministry.” They are part of who she is, but there’s so much more. She grows congregations and communities; she reflects Jesus’ radical hospitality, she believes that ministry must be shared, lay leaders empowered, roles and responsibilities clear. That everyone is welcome at the Lord’s table, and that we must respect the dignity of every human being, serving Christ in others.

Since last year, Miguelina — also known as Lina — has been the vicar of Christ Church Cathedral in Hartford, a diverse, downtown church that speaks both Spanish and English and is building connections in the congregation and with the community.

A lifetime of church connections on every level
Lina grew up across from St. Andres Episcopal Church and school in Santo Domingo, in the Dominican Republic. Her father insisted that his three children get the education he could not. He had to drop out after eighth grade. Today, they are a banker, an engineer, and a clinical psychologist who is also a priest.

She had a sense early of a call to ministry and used to “play church” when no one was around. She was also part of a youth group that helped all the students in her Episcopal school to participate in the school’s liturgical services, held each Monday. She attended adult Bible study while still in high school and was a children’s ministry assistant. “I felt called to serve, to be helpful,” she said. “I remember telling my parish priest I wanted to be a nun.”

He didn’t think that was the right choice. Later, he arranged for her to attend a church event in the eastern part of the Dominican Republic, knowing it would open a new door for her. “For the first time, at that event, I saw women who were ordained to the priesthood. When [the woman priest] was celebrating the Eucharist I realized this was possible for me, too.”

Lina’s involvement with the church expanded beyond her local youth group to the diocesan youth committee. Later she served as the diocese’s first
young adult ministry coordinator.
Introduction to the global Anglican Communion also came early. She was invited to attend the South to South Conference in 1994, in Kenya. From that, she was invited to be the coordinator for youth ministry in Province IX, working from Diocesan House in the Dominican Republic with the office at the Episcopal Church Center in NYC. She served in that position for over a decade.

During those years, in 2005, Lina met her husband, Daniel Howell, at an Episcopal Youth Event (EYE) hosted by the Youth Ministries Office of The Episcopal Church (TEC). He is a production assistant in lighting design for theater, television commercials, films, and video; since moving to Connecticut from NYC he has been working in East Hartford.

Lina has also served on the Executive Council of The Episcopal Church, on the President of the House of Deputies’ Council of Advice, and as Associate Program Officer for Young Adult Ministries: Vocational Discernment and Recruitment, on the Presiding Bishops’ staff. More recently, she was invited to serve on the Taskforce for Reimagining the Episcopal Church (TREC), which was established after the 2012 General Convention.

Building communities
Lina started college in 1994 and received degrees in psychometrics and clinical psychology in 2002. A focus of her work was geriatric depression, an interest she believes started while in youth group, visiting people in nursing homes every month.

Prior to entering seminary she took a lay theological education course. In its second year, students were required to establish an Episcopal presence where there was none. It was a task where Lina was clearly gifted.

She began by offering Bible studies in a neighborhood, in people’s homes. It grew to the point where they needed to ask the local school for a room to use. The bishop sent a priest once a month. “It continued to grow,” Lina said. “There’s a functioning Episcopal Church there now.”

In 1999 she entered seminary in the Dominican Republic, graduating in 2002. She completed her CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education) at a hospital in Puerto Rico.

Bishop Julio Holguin ordained her to the transitional diaconate in 2001 and Bishop William Skilton ordained her to the priesthood in 2002. Her first assignment was to serve at a camp and conference center in the countryside. Again, she started small and grew the ministry, this time working with partner dioceses in the U.S.

“We asked what else could be done besides summer camp and VBS programs,” she said. “We decided that the kids needed a year-round school, so I spoke to the bishop.” She asked if he’d be open to having her fundraise and build a school on a portion of the land.

They wanted a fund not only for construction of the school, but for a church, with enough to pay for teacher salaries and provide a scholarship program. The parents would contribute by gardening and cooking and other work.

“He said he’d double the money, up to $20,000,” she said. She raised her share in three weeks.

“We saw a shift in culture there, with the school as a beacon of hope,” she said, reflecting on the project. “It’s amazing.” She helped create an endowment to provide for three years of salaries, books, and more fundraising.

Parish priest in the States
Lina’s first parish position in the U.S. was associate rector in Patterson, New Jersey. Later she was called as priest-in-charge, and then, rector, of the Church of the Epiphany in Orange, NJ.

And given her passion and experience, last year she was successfully recruited by Connecticut to serve as vicar of the Cathedral. Her job is “to provide leadership for the spiritual welfare, overall programming, growth and life of the Cathedral faith community” … as well as the day-to-day operations and financial oversight of the Cathedral. The priest-in-charge, currently the Rev. Harlon Dalton, and the vicar function as a clergy leadership team, “to lead the Cathedral into a deeper discernment of its role in the 21st century.”

One part of her work is leading the Spanish language Mass at the Cathedral. In addition to her work there, Lina remains involved in Latino/Hispanic ministries in The Episcopal Church, serving on their Council of Advice, and has coordinated the bi-annual Nuevo Amanecer conferences. She has started to learn what’s going on with Latino/Hispanic ministry in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut.

“There’s a disconnect,” she said, about how The Episcopal Church predominantly considers the Hispanic/Latino population. “In the last 20 years, Latinos have become the largest minority population in this country. That’s a target for church growth and evangelism. There’s a need for cultural competency.”

As a member of the Council of Advice she was part of putting forward the Strategic Vision for Reaching Latinos/Hispanics (2009 General Convention Resolution D038). “We brought the point that the Latino face is different from what it was 20 or 30 years ago, and that we need a shift in approach. The face of Latinos is a rainbow.”

Though it remains a vital interest, Lina doesn’t see herself defined or limited by that, here in Connecticut, or in TEC.

And while she doesn’t focus on youth or young adult ministry exclusively, either — as she has in the past — she knows how essential it is to make those connections. “Young people in their 20s and 30s have a broader view of presence, spirituality, and reaching out,” she said. “They have a different perspective. Young adults experience God through service.”

So, she and others from the Cathedral are engaging in conversation with Capital Community College in downtown Hartford, offering their space for students to come and do their homework. Lina is hoping that by providing a space for the young adults to come together for conversation and collective mission it will make a difference locally for people “to feel part of a network, feel a sense of belonging.”

“Hospitality is the beginning of many ministries,” she said.

She realizes, however, that just opening your red doors open doesn’t necessarily mean people will come in. “We have to get out into the community, too.” To that end, she helped to plan a Blessing of the Animals on Oct. 4 in Bushnell Park in Hartford. They invited the city’s Police horses.

“Young adult and Latino ministry are near and dear to me,” Lina said, “but there is so much more. Here, I am the vicar. There is new life, and a new sense of community. We have strong networks and seven working teams. We meet every month at someone’s house, building trust, and asking what God is calling us to do and be at 45 Church Street. There is laughter, and good and sound conversation.”

And given her experience and success in building communities by starting just that way, the door is open to what could be surprising new ways of participating in God’s mission.

Karin Hamilton is the Canon for Mission Communication & Media for the Episcopal Church in Connecticut.
An ecumenical journey of faith

Felix Rivera
Karin Hamilton

Felix Rivera is an engineer by training and by temperament, happily married for 43 years to Carmen. Although they both now are part of the Episcopal Church of St. James and St. Paul in New Haven (often affectionately known as “St. PJ’s”), they come to it from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

Carmen, who was born in Puerto Rico, is a lifelong Lutheran whose father was a pastor and theologian in Latin America, Chicago, and Puerto Rico. He used to teach some classes at the Episcopal seminary that was there. She has a brother who is a pastor and theologian and teaches at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, and a sister who is also an ELCA pastor and serves as director of Latino Ministries for Latin America for the ELCA.

It was while they were living in Meriden and worshipping at Immanuel Lutheran Church that Felix was introduced to the Episcopal tradition. When the congregation at All Saints’ Church, Meriden, decided to sell its building and move out, Immanuel’s pastor invited them to use the ELCA facility. A small Anglo group worshipped in English early on Sunday, the Lutheran service followed, and a Mass in Spanish followed that. Felix helped out with the Spanish-language service at the invitation of the priest-in-charge, the late Rev. Vernella Alford Brown.

“What attracted me was the sense of spirituality in that congregation,” Felix said. I got a sense of calm when I participated in that service.”

After a time of attending both ELCA and Episcopal services, he decided to stay with the Episcopalians. He and Vernella talked about the Episcopal Church and she later asked him to consider discernment for ordination to the diaconate.

He did follow up, by attending an information session led by the Rt. Rev. Laura J. Ahrens, but
Karin Hamilton is the Canon for Mission Communication & Media for the Episcopal Church in Connecticut.

In 2011, Felix and Carmen started attending St. PJ’s. Interestingly, in 2006 a chance encounter in Latin America led to their first introduction to the New Haven church. Carmen was working in Chicago as the executive director for Latino Ministries of the ELCA. During the five years she worked there, Felix remained in Meriden and they saw each other whenever possible.

One of those times was the last week of 2006. Carmen had a business trip to Argentina and Felix took vacation time. While in Argentina they met a young man who was serving as a volunteer missionary under ELCA sponsorship. Actually, he was working in youth ministry, under the direction of Carmen’s sister. He and Felix began talking and the conversation turned to jazz, which Felix loves. The young missionary was a percussionist.

Felix’ father had been a jazz musician in the 40s and 50s in New York City — Felix was born and raised in NYC and he earned his engineering degree from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, which has since stopped offering it. He and Carmen enjoyed attending monthly jazz vespers at St. Peter’s ELCA church in NYC.

The missionary in Argentina told them about a church in New Haven, Connecticut that held some services with jazz music.

In 2011 they decided to start attending that church — St. Paul and St. James, while still living in Meriden. By then, St. PJ’s had jazz music at its main Sunday service every week. When Felix retired at the beginning of 2014 he and Carmen moved to New Haven.

Now, they’re both involved in the life of the parish.

“The people are very welcoming there,” said Felix, of the congregation. “They remember your name when you come back the next week.” He said he loves the jazz and the diversity there.

While he’ll tell you that he “went from 100 miles an hour to zero” after he retired, some might disagree.

He’s serving as the parish’s co-warden now, and he and Carmen have just signed up to be Lay Eucharistic Visitors to visit the elderly, shut-ins, and those in nursing homes and bring communion to them. Carmen is also a member of St. PJ’s stewardship committee.

Felix is active in the church’s weekly Loaves and Fishes ministry, which includes a food pantry, and is taking a Wednesday evening class led by the priest in charge, the Rev. Alex Dyer, on Benedictine spirituality.

Felix is also exploring Latino/Hispanic ministry in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut. He attended the Spanish Language Ministries retreat in Litchfield in September. “I am interested, particularly with the changing demographics,” he said. “[Latinos] bring a rich heritage, and it’s a great opportunity.”

Last year Alex invited Felix, and several others, to join the pilot training program in lay evangelism. Their final task was to go out two-by-two and knock on doors in and around Wooster Square, where the church is located. It wasn’t as easy as that sounds, though.

“It was quite an eye-opener,” he said. “We were saying that we were from the local church, and asked if they had any prayer requests. Some responded by giving us their prayer requests, some said, ‘we’ve already given money,’ although we didn’t ask for any, and some didn’t open their doors. For me, it was a little difficult to talk openly about God and Jesus.” Felix didn’t want to be seen as a stereotypical street preacher.

But he does know the importance of the conversations. “How do we communicate God’s and Jesus’ message – and, how do we live out that life?” Felix said.

He’s also aware that church can be insular. “It’s comfortable inside the four walls of the church and there are fewer unknowns inside, but outside, that’s where the challenges are.”

For example, he said, when you see what’s going on in the world, and work with people, you find relationships that are broken and people who are struggling. Some people are receptive, some are not. “It’s a work of love,” he said.

He draws strength from his parish. “You don’t do this work alone, you do it as a community,” he said. “[Being part of a church] helps us define who we are, as a person, and it helps us improve our relationships with others – to see a little of Jesus in everyone. Everyone brings something to the table.

“[St. PJ’s] has faced difficult challenges, but it’s still there. This church is an anchor in the community. We have a diverse group of people. It includes students as well as those who know the history of the church. There’s a sense of spiritual welcoming. We want to share that, unlock that energy, bring it out to the world. We’re looking to see what it takes to ignite that energy and go out.”

As for his future, it’s wide open now that both are retired. He and Carmen are happy where they are now. They’ve also talked about being volunteer missionaries. Perhaps there’s teaching in the future: Carmen worked a special education teacher for years before working for the ELCA; Felix has been a volunteer teacher of English as a Second Language, and has taught Adult Sunday School.

“I enjoy teaching,” he said. “Maybe it is a true calling; I think about it often.”

It’s likely there will be more travel in the future, and more blurring of the denominational lines. In early October they went to Chicago so that Carmen could be part of the ELCA Prayer Revival Service being held in the South Side of Chicago. Later in October, Felix will be at the Annual Convention of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut.

“It’s really a small world,” said Felix. 

Karin Hamilton is the Canon for Mission Communication & Media for the Episcopal Church in Connecticut.
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The photos on this page are from a traveling photo exhibition, which features 33 iconic images of Episcopal Relief & Development’s work, along with in-depth explanations and personal reflections through an accompanying e-docent app. See the entire photo exhibition at http://www.episcopalrelief.org/church-in-action/75/photo-exhibition.

For more information about the Episcopal Relief and Development 75th Anniversary Celebration, visit episcopalrelief.org/75.
Sheem Shorey, 25, started attending St. Mark’s Episcopal Church in Bridgeport when he was eight years old and still attends whenever he can. He lives in Bridgeport and graduated from the city’s Bullard-Haven Technical High School, then attended Saint Paul’s College in Lawrenceville, Virginia, where he earned a B.A.Sc. in General Studies/Mathematics. He’s currently working fulltime for a small agency in their billing and payroll department. Sheem, who describes himself as a big sports fan, also plays football in a league.

Q. Do you consider yourself a Christian?
A. Yes, I do. I was brought up in the church, with Christian parents. It starts with following tradition, but then you come to your own understanding.

Q. How did you come to that understanding?
A. Growing up I was an acolyte and I served on the altar. I worked firsthand with the priest [the Rev. Trevor Babb]. It came naturally, as a lot of answers are given to you.

Q. What does it mean, in practical terms, to be a Christian?
A. It means to be a follower of Christ. From time to time you ask yourself, what would Jesus do? You do the best you can. It’s impossible to be perfect. You try to better yourself and the people around you, as much as you can. For example, when I was growing up there were a lot of children in my church. I was one of the older ones. Some of the younger ones were going in the wrong direction, such as not caring what their elders would say. They looked to me as a peer, and I tried to get through to them. They didn’t want to listen to an adult, but would listen to me.

Q. Do you have friends and acquaintance who are not Christian?
A. Yes, I have some who are Muslim, and others who don’t consider themselves as Christian or grab hold of religion, but say they’re spiritual.

Q. What kind of responsibilities do you have as a Christian?
A. One responsibility is to be a role model – that was one of the first things I took responsibility for, with the younger crowd.

Q. Are there social consequences for being a Christian?
A. Whatever you do, people will have positive and negative things to say. You don’t have to pay attention. I’ve always felt comfortable as a Christian.
A view of The Commons in Meriden, CT.
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