Trinity Church, Hartford opens Trinity Academy — a tuition-free day school for children in the community.
Some years ago, as a volunteer church-related magazine editor, the writer of the lead article asked for suggestions on what to write about. Based on other content, I recommended an article on generosity.

I received a great first-person essay with wonderful anecdotes, and it was all about gratitude.

Thanks, I said, great article, but we’d discussed an article on generosity.

Of course! The writer agreed, recalling that decision as well.

Soon enough I received another terrific article. On gratitude.

We did this three times; finally I decided to use “generosity” in the title of the article, and let it go, trusting that God certainly must be behind it. (It was a great story and it worked out just fine.)

Earlier this year in a regular meeting of our bishops and canons, before Bishop Douglas left on sabbatical, I shared the then-current plans for the upcoming issue of CRUX and said the theme of “generosity” seemed to be emerging (even though it later changed.)

As we took a few minutes to discuss proposed articles and profiles and brainstorm others, one person started suggesting ideas for writing about gratitude.

Generosity, I said, immediately wondering how this happened again.

Oh yes, of course! the person said.
So what is it when I say “generosity” some people reflexively hear “gratitude”? They’re certainly different. Generosity has to do with giving; gratitude has to do with receiving.

Both of the people who heard “gratitude” are generous people. So that’s not it.

Google (thank you, Google) offered up an article posted October 20, 2015 with an answer. Its title: “Small acts of generosity and the neuroscience of gratitude: Brain scans can map the neural mechanism of gratitude activated by generosity,” by Christopher Bergland of The Athlete’s Way, writing for Psychology Today. An excerpt:

“Recent studies have shown that generosity and gratitude go hand in hand both at a psychological and neurobiological level. Generosity and gratitude are separate sides of the same coin. They are symbiotic. Fortunately, each of us has the free will to kickstart the neurobiological feedback loop — and upward spiral of well-being — that is triggered by small acts of generosity and gratitude each and every day of our lives.”

So maybe the two writers just took the leap to the next step. They heard “generosity” and immediately went to “gratitude.” (Which, if Bergland is correct, likely triggered their next act of generosity.)

It’s as good an explanation as I can find. It won’t solve the issue of writers getting their assignments mixed up, but the world is a better place for it.
The strength of our doubts
Emily Boring
December 22nd, 1:30 a.m. 35,000 feet in the air, somewhere above Iowa or Nebraska, on a JetBlue airplane. I’m sick. I’m exhausted. I’m in pain.

We’ve all experienced a form of this situation: to put it poetically, “A dark night of the soul.” I think this phrase probably was inspired by a cross-country red-eye after Yale finals in the Economy class of a JetBlue plane. But I carried some heavier emotional baggage: my family’s recent move from my childhood town, my brother’s disability, my own ongoing struggle with depression.

The light had gone off. There was no way out and no point to keep going.

I found myself asking:
Is college the right place for me?
Will I ever feel happy again?
Is there anywhere I truly belong?

Eventually it occurred to me: this is probably the time I’m supposed to pray! So I bowed my head on the tray table, closed my eyes, and spoke:

“Dear God,
I am lonely.
I am broken.
I am lost.
Come to me in the darkness.
Help me see the light.”

For twenty minutes, I repeated these things.

No one answered. Apparently God wasn’t booked on this flight.

I don’t know why, sometimes, God feels visible and close by. Then other times — maybe when we need Him most — it seems like the connection is broken. Maybe He is answering, and we just can’t hear. Or maybe He operates on his own timeline. Any one of these could explain why I didn’t feel His presence on the plane that night.

The plane ride was a moment of doubt. It’s a moment that finds expression in the Gospel of John. Last spring, I delivered a sermon based John 20:24-29, “Doubting Thomas.” In this passage, Thomas the disciple won’t believe Jesus has returned. “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

It’s easy to dismiss Thomas as unfaithful. That’s what Jesus does, doesn’t He? “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” Unlike generations of good Christians to come, Thomas won’t just take Jesus’ word for it. We are forced to ask: Is Thomas’s faith weaker, lesser, for his doubt?

I brought up this Gospel with my mom, a religious history professor who thinks about these things. Her reaction surprised me:

“Weak? No, Thomas is brave! Just think of the risk he was taking!”

I agreed. It reminded me of a classic college scenario. Have you ever been in a class where there’s a burning question that everyone wants to ask but no one is asking? Think of the Gospel like a seminar. The lecture topic? Christ’s resurrection. All the disciples are dying for evidence. Only Thomas speaks up:

“Yes, but...Could you give me some tangible proof?”

Of course this is risky! Jesus could have become angry and called him an unbeliever. Thomas could have been thrown from the ranks of the true disciples who don’t need to see and touch to believe.

I got halfway through saying this when my mom interrupted. “Wait, stop,” she said. “That’s such a Yale thing to say.” It’s true: the risks I’d been voicing were the fears of any good student. What if you’re seen as stupid? What if no one else is wondering the same thing?

The real risk, as my mom saw it, was worse. When he asked his question, Thomas did not know what Jesus would answer. He had no guarantee that when he reached out his fingers, they would indeed touch the risen body of Christ. In asking, Thomas had to face the risk that the story of Christ’s rebirth was just that — a myth without proof, a tale to be taken on blind faith.

We hide in fears of loneliness and inadequacy, like nervous students in a seminar room. But what we’re really afraid of is that we’ll reach out for help and find that nothing and no one is there to answer.

This fear is real. This fear is at the core of centuries of reflection on the meaning of faith. It’s at the core of each of our own spiritual journeys. This fear sat beside me on the airplane. But speaking as a Christian, a member of The Episcopal Church, a fellow doubter and believer, I want to offer an alternate answer.

First, we have the testimony of Thomas. Read on, and we find Jesus says, “Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” And Thomas answers, “My Lord and my God!” Thomas’s question isn’t a dead end. His greatest fear is not realized. More importantly, the answer that results brings a whole new dimension to Thomas’s faith. Through doubt, he touches Christ. Through doubt, his faith is made real. And surely Thomas strengthened the faith of the other eleven disciples along the way.

I can also offer my own evidence. We’ve all experienced the equivalent of my dark night on the JetBlue plane. I’ve struggled with depression, family crisis, illness, and doubt about whether I made the right choice to come to college. There was a point last year when I almost decided to withdraw from school. The weekend before the withdrawal deadline, I reached out. I began telling people about my struggles: friends, suitemates, deans, and priests.

God answered my airplane prayer a month late. He answered it in midnight pajama parties with my roommates, where my openness about my struggles finally let all of us laugh and cry about our insecurities. He answered it in my friends, in dinner dates and group hugs and poems texted back and forth. These answers are testimony to the truth that yes, we are loved. Yes, we are accepted. Yes, we support one another no matter what.

Here is what I know: We are held by the unconditional, boundless grace of a loving God. When we allow ourselves to be truly vulnerable, this grace is realized through other people. Our faith is strong not in spite of, but because of, our doubts. I know these things because, like Thomas, I have doubted.

Emily Boring is a junior at Yale studying Ecology & Evolutionary Biology. A native of Oregon, she connects to spirituality through nature, choral music, and the community of the Episcopal Church at Yale. Her main passion is creative writing — about science, family, religion, literature, and the outdoors. She hopes to be an environmental writer, using vivid language to bridge the gap between people and ecosystems and instill respect for the world around us. Contact her at emily.boring@yale.edu.
In Haiti, buying food means negotiating prices. Driving means managing a lot of risk and, autumn is a wish that I hope comes true. As a missionary in the Young Adult Service Corps (YASC) living in Cap-Haïtien, Haiti, I learn and relearn a lot every day. I teach English at the Centre d’Agriculture Saint Barnabas (CASB) in Terrier Rouge, Haiti, where students learn to become successful farmers. Haiti can benefit from more small farmers, who increase rural incomes and national food production. So CASB has an opportunity to do a lot of good, but the school needs a lot of work to reach its full potential.

My co-missionary and I are here for a year to assist in the CASB Revitalization Program. The project is large and we have a lot to learn, but our jobs thankfully match our levels of experience. As a faculty member I focus primarily on teaching but also work with the school on administrative projects.

My first priority here is teaching, making this job a surprise for me. In high school I decided I would never be a teacher and looked at other fields. Throughout college, teaching remerged as an option after a few tutoring jobs, which I always enjoyed more than I expected. Even so, when I applied to YASC I did not expect to teach, but here I am. The more I teach the more I love it. Still, like every job, problems arise constantly.

I faced two huge problems after arriving: the complexity of English defied my first attempts to teach it, and teaching students with whom I did not share a language both frustrated and exhausted me.

For weeks it seemed like my class made no progress. At that time I had no interest in recanting the high school decision not to teach. However, I came to Haiti to teach so neither setbacks nor nagging doubts were going to break the resolve that brought me here. I pushed through and did some research online, but more importantly spent time condensing essential parts of English into a curriculum.

The transition from struggling to conveying the material happened after I accidentally tried simplicity.

At first I focused on how English uses helping verbs like do, can, and will, to form questions and negate sentences. Designing an exercise to communicate this proved difficult, resulting in cycles of failure and frustration. The language barrier impeded everything, compounding the stress and pressure that so much adversity left me with.

One night I again mustered the effort to write yet another lesson plan. I zoned out for a while and wished that the class could just assemble a few sentences without my help so we could move on. Then I remembered a question from countless Spanish tests in high school, and decided to try it. It was a great, simple idea. The question gives you “Ryan/to like/to eat/ice cream/after school” and the student writes “Ryan likes to eat ice cream after school.” The class caught on to this and we started racing through material and tackling harder examples.

All of a sudden I could ask myself what else we should cover after this unit. The simplicity of that exercise makes it such a great platform, and all it took was connecting a need with a memory. Teaching experience is great, but seventeen years of school can help too.
So anyway, I don’t stress about teaching anymore and I love this job. All it took was stepping back and letting simplicity happen. Progress on this front provides a lot of peace, and also opens up other avenues for growth.

Teaching and lesson planning is only one aspect of the iceberg of complexity that is moving to a foreign country and starting a new job. The closer I got to a “normal,” which seems impossible after leaving Connecticut for Haiti, the more I felt ready to ask hard questions about this job. One could ask why I chose to leave the USA for Haiti, or about whether the positives could possibly outweigh the colossal negatives. I avoided those questions at first.

I believe in God and this offered a way to follow the plan I believe God has for my life. At 21 years old — and right after college — I desperately wanted a way out of jumping right into an office job. Plus, experiencing and learning how to live in another culture had to be enough to make it worth it. But none of these answers have much to do with Haiti, bringing up the question of why Haiti matters to the equation.

Unfortunately, that question does not have a clean, cut and dry answer. Right now I love improving at speaking Creole and hanging out with the mechanics who work across the street, and the food is great. There are of course challenges and what I like about Haiti will definitely change and grow over time.

Because of that, perks of the job are not specific. A friend of mine articulated an idea perfectly: this job pays in life experiences. So until I come up with a more concrete and exacting reason why this is the coolest thing I’ve ever done, I’ll stick with that.

To everyone who helped make this amazing opportunity possible, thank you so much. I’m here for a year and still don’t know what to expect because everything is new. But as Haitians say all the time, pa gen pwoblèm. That translates literally as “no problem,” but in Haiti a phrase can mean different things.

One way to say what’s up in Creole is sak pasè. A common response is nou la, or we’re here. That attitude of simply acknowledging that we are here changes one’s perspective. Rather than focus on potentials or expectations, nou la brings me back to remembering that it’s pretty cool to be here and that this job is a blessing that just wears a heavy disguise sometimes. Nou la acknowledges that life throws us a lot at you and that even preventing lost ground is better than not trying. Through the realization and gradual adoption of these ideas, I am learning to appreciate a different ideology.

Mitch Honan is from Westbrook, CT and graduated from Southern Connecticut State University in May 2016. He loves the outdoors and the deluge of new experiences that Haiti provides. The support of his family and friends makes all of this possible. Read his blog at mitchhonanhaiti.blogspot.com.

THOUGHTS FROM MITCH HONAN’S BLOG ‘The old that is strong does not wither’ *

JULY 2016. When I first heard about YASC, I didn’t think too much about the reality of living in a different country. I didn’t know where I was going and was so busy anyway that it never seriously crossed my mind. Then I left. After that, I spent two weeks learning the very basics of life in Haiti, working closely with the Anglican Communion where they live, work, and pray with the local community.

Currently YASCers are serving throughout the Anglican Communion, working alongside partners in administration, agriculture, communication, development, and education. They are serving in Brazil, Costa Rica, England, France, Haiti, Hong Kong, Japan, Jerusalem, Panama, Philippines, and South Africa.

Among possible placements for 2017-2018 are Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, England, France, Ghana, Haiti, Honduras, Hong Kong, Japan, Jerusalem, Mexico, Panama, Philippines, South Africa, South Korea, Taiwan, and Tanzania.

For more information, visit episcopalchurch.org/blog/YASC or their Facebook page.

The Young Adult Service Corps offers one-year international mission assignments to young adults age 21-30. These young adult missionaries are placed in dioceses across the Anglican Communion where they live, work, and pray with the local community.

* not full blog posts
Learning generosity

My journey

Sam Chang

Generosity is giving of yourself without expecting any personal gain.

My life has been a roller coaster ride of generosity. I’ve gone from the peak of selfishness, what I would call idolizing money, to the depths of questioning my self-worth, to an enlightened realization that there is immense joy in generosity and giving to others. How did I get from one end of the spectrum to the other? Really, it was a combination of work challenges, family, friends and a God who didn’t give up on me.

I started my career on Wall Street in 1997. In the late 90s, we were in the froth of the technology boom. Money was flowing and life was good. My focus during the week was to make as much money as I could. Then on the weekend, I’d give back a little — volunteer for a couple hours on Saturday and go to church on Sunday.

The markets peaked in March of 2000, but then quickly began to crumble, hitting the bottom in March of 2003. Things got tight on Wall Street and massive layoffs occurred. I was more fortunate than many of my peers, and over the next decade I always seemed to land on my feet. Until 2012, when the last firm I was with on Wall Street closed its doors. I was well-qualified, had experience and was well-connected, but I couldn’t find a job.

I believe God opens and closes doors for a reason, and in this case, God kept the job door closed for six months.

For many years, my job had defined me. Without it, I began experiencing self-doubt and asking myself a lot of questions. What was my purpose in life? Was it just to make more money? Who was I helping?

And those questions began to deepen.

What was my true calling? What did God have in store for me?

I was getting more involved in church activities rather than just being a Sunday worshipper. I knew the pursuit of money was not leading to happiness for me or my growing family. Then my father-in-law mentioned Thrivent Financial to me. My wife’s grandma is a tried and true Thrivent member.

Thrivent who? A personal financial representative?

I began to research the organization. I wanted to have good reasons for shooting the idea down. But what I learned was amazing. Thrivent is a membership organization of Christians whose purpose is to help its members and society “by guiding both to be wise with money and live generously.” Faith, finances and generosity are all connected.

After a few months of prayer, discernment, and wise council, I realized God wanted me to work for Thrivent Financial. It was a great opportunity for me. With Thrivent I’d be able to use the skills I’d accumulated over 16+ years. And I could do something that made me feel good on a daily basis. But I also knew that joining the organization would mean some changes for my family, and I’d truly be living out my faith every day of the week.

After three years at Thrivent, I can safely say this was the best move of my career. I’ve learned more about personal finances, generosity, and me in the last three years than I have in the previous 37 years combined. And I have Thrivent Financial and its mission of helping people be wise with their money and live generously to thank, in part, for that.

Every day, I help our members with their financial strategies. Whether it’s helping someone get on the road to building an emergency reserve or get out of debt, or helping them prepare for life’s changes, including retirement, I help them think through what they need to do.

But it’s the generosity piece of what I do that I’m most thankful for. The people around you do matter — and being around generous people (as opposed to selfish people) has encouraged my own generosity journey.

There’s the family I know of modest means with multiple adult children still living with them. Their house isn’t big and their assets are few, but their hearts are huge. In the past two years, each of the family members has created a Thrivent Action Team or two ranging from a toy drive to a food drive for the local pantry. What they taught me was that generosity doesn’t mean you need to have a certain income or number of dollars in your bank account.

Through Thrivent Action Teams, members can take their passion for their church, local nonprofit, a school or a family in need and make a difference quickly and easily. They round up a team of volunteers and go online to fill out a short application. After the idea is approved, the team leader gets a start-up kit including banners, checklists and T-shirts in the mail. They also receive seed money to help launch the program.

I see our members also give back through our Thrivent Builds with Habitat for Humanity partnership. Some help with projects — both builds and repairs — locally, while others travel to destinations across the U.S. and the world.
Generosity is giving of yourself without expecting any personal gain. I think all people have a desire to be generous; it’s just that most people are afraid of breaking from what’s comfortable. I see generosity as a muscle. We need to use it regularly. Sometimes it hurts, especially when we step out of our comfort zone. But it also strengthens and grows as we stretch ourselves and try something different.

Generously, people think either they’re generous or not, and they can’t change it. I’m living proof that you can change with the help of the Holy Spirit. (There is a reason why generosity is one of the Fruits of the Spirit.) I wasn’t very generous in my 20s. I’d put a small tip in the offering plate whenever I’d make it to church on Sunday. Or I’d clock in for a couple of hours at a food pantry or homeless shelter on a Saturday.

Today, I have my tithe withdrawn automatically from my checking account each month. And I participate in charitable events frequently. It didn’t happen overnight, but it’s a muscle I slowly developed over time.

Generosity isn’t for the rich or the poor. It’s contagious. It can be shared and encouraged. It feels good.

Best of all it can change the world, starting with yourself.

Sam Chang is a Thrivent Financial representative in South Windsor, CT. For more information about Thrivent, contact Sam at 860-474-3601 or sam.chang@thrivent.com. You can also visit Thrivent.com/why and find them on Facebook and Twitter.
lim·i·nal
lime·nal/
adjective:
1. of or relating to a transitional or initial stage of a process.
2. occupying a position at, or on both sides of, a boundary or threshold.
Medical researcher and popular writer and speaker on mind/body health and spirituality, Joan Borysenko, Ph.D. has focused on the need to develop resilience and creativity in times of profound change. For Dr. Borysenko, living between the “no longer” and “not yet” means that we cannot go back even though we do not know what will come next. This liminal, in-between time is an invitation to transformation, an invitation to do and be different. Leadership in the in-between requires openness, trust, and the relentless pursuit of life in the face of death.

The Christian Church, particularly churches in the northeastern part of the United States, are living the reality that the church as we have known it in the 20th century is no longer. Christendom, the overlap of the church’s structures and institutions with the social, political, and economic realities of society, has historically privileged mainline Protestant churches, such as The Episcopal Church. Blue laws and limited sports schedules that ensured there would be no conflict with Sunday morning services, special tax status benefiting houses of worship and ordained ministers, schools and workplaces closed on Christian holidays, church buildings enjoying the best property on town greens and main streets, and the community accepted norm that “everyone went to church,” are all expressions of Christendom.

But Christendom is waning, particularly in New England, which is now the most irreligious part of the United States according to a 2012 Gallup study. The loss of Christendom leaves churches and church leaders awash in uncertainty, wondering how to respond to such changing times. Living between the no longer of Christendom and the not yet of the 21st century church can result in feelings of loss and sadness, fear and anxiety, anger and frustration. It’s not easy being a Christian leader today.

But we need not be paralyzed by our feelings of loss, fear and anger at the demise of Christendom. We are invited, even compelled, as followers of Jesus who triumphed over death in the Resurrection, to look for new life, new possibility, new hope in these times of change. The question is: how can we move forward, peacefully, powerfully, and joyfully, into the not yet of the church that is coming?

I was blessed in my recently completed sabbatical to participate in an Executive Education Program at Harvard Business School (HBS) focusing on “Strategic Perspectives in Nonprofit Management.” Living and learning alongside 160 other leaders of nonprofit organizations, including schools, foundations, healthcare institutions, and civic and arts organizations from around the world was an incredible gift. I am indebted to the Episcopal Church in Connecticut for my sabbatical and the opportunity to be renewed and recharged through such study and time away from my regular responsibilities.

At Harvard Business School I learned that scholars of business management and organizational development theorists know that the space between the no longer and the not yet is a particularly fertile place for growth and opportunity. It is where the entrepreneur is able to make her mark. Professor Lynda Applegate of HBS emphasizes that entrepreneurship is a way of thinking, reasoning, and acting where leaders look ahead, pursuing new opportunities through exploration and experimentation. Entrepreneurship is an iterative process, where one is continually learning by boldly trying on new ways of being in response to changing times and circumstances. Entrepreneurial leadership is not a haphazard, reckless, throw all cares to the wind kind of leadership. No, entrepreneurs have an astute ability to read the shifting scene, act in clearly thought out ways, pursue new opportunities, and then learn from one’s experience of what works and what needs to be abandoned.
Professor Herman B. “Dutch” Leonard, with appointments at both the Harvard University John F. Kennedy School of Government and the Harvard Business School, is a leading thinker in the intersection between entrepreneurial leadership and the social “nonprofit” sector. He offers a framework for helping nonprofit leaders engage the space between the no longer and the not yet with entrepreneurial acumen.

Professor Leonard’s framework is based on three units of analysis. The first is value: what benefit does society receive from the work of the organization? What is the “good” the organization seeks to accomplish by pursuing a new venture or direction? The second is support: is there “buy in” for the way forward by individuals and groups who are closely involved with and committed to the organization? And finally capacity: is/are there sufficient people, money, skills, authority, knowledge, and institutional infrastructure to accomplish an organization’s purpose and/or new venture?

The alignment among the three units of value, support, and capacity helps to determine how successful a new venture will be. As seen in the Venn diagram above, the more the overlap (alignment) the greater the possibility of success. The role of the entrepreneurial leader in the social sector is to help move the three circles closer together by helping to reframe value in new ways, and/or develop new support, and/or generate new capacity.

So the question is: what does entrepreneurial leadership look like for the Body of Christ living between the no longer of Christendom and the not yet of the new church. Entrepreneurial Christian leaders, be they parish clergy, vestry members, or diocesan officials need to analyze the possibilities of overlap between value, support, and capacity in whatever new programs/ventures/experiments they might try on. The key value question is: how much does a new program or venture help to make real the restoring, reconciling love of Christ in a broken and hurting world?

How does the new effort manifest the love of Jesus in real and particular ways? In other words: how much is the experiment aligned with the mission of God? At the same time entrepreneurial church leaders need to assess how much support Christian sisters and brothers, and others, have for the suggested program or venture? Do they find the new direction to be life giving, hope-filled, and generative? Do they see and understand that the mission of God is lived out in the new ways through the experiment? And finally, does the parish, region, diocese have sufficient capacity to pursue the new direction with respect to money, volunteers, staff, infrastructure, facility use? The more that entrepreneurial leaders can engender alignment between value, support, and capacity in our ventures in God’s mission the greater the likelihood that we will become the church God wants us to be.

Christian leadership between the no longer and the not yet requires faith in the truth that the kingdom of God is real and present, and at the same time has not yet been fully realized. It means trusting that God will use us individually and corporately to effect God’s desire for a restored and reconciled humanity, world and creation. God will have the Church (the Body of Christ) that God needs to fulfill God’s mission. The question before us is: will the Episcopal Church in Connecticut be part of that new Church that God is bringing into being?

I believe the answer is a resounding: Yes! Episcopalians in Connecticut are embracing God’s mission in creative and fresh ways at the personal, parochial, region and diocesan levels by trying on experiments and venturing forth into our neighborhoods in new and unprecedented ways. Our future lies in following Jesus into the world in God’s mission through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a future filled with promise, possibility, and potential; even if we do not know exactly what the church as an institution is going to look like going forward.

For the past year and a half, my sermon preparation for my Sunday visitations has included a demographic and historical study on the contexts where the parish is located. I share with congregation my wonderings as to how this information relates to the last three questions of the Baptismal Covenant, “Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?” “Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?” “Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?” (Book of Common Prayer, p. 293-294)

Why do I focus on these three questions? For me, they are the fruits of our relationship with God. Our Baptismal Covenant is our “yes” to God. The first three questions ground us in our relationship with the triune God, expressing our belief and commitment to a God who is relational by God’s very nature. The triune God seeks to be in relationship with us and our baptismal vows give voice to that “yes.” The next question is our discipleship question, the question about our faithfulness to our prayers, our community, and our recognition that the Eucharist is the table of inclusion, offering comfort and challenge. The Eucharist invites us to draw closer to God and to our neighbor, and reminds us that we are called to be servants in God’s Name to all. At times we are tempted to turn away from this relational God, but with God’s help we can stay focused on our work of restoration and reconciliation for all God’s children.
These ministries of getting to know our immediate neighbors are courageous steps in living into our vow to “seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself.”

| What are the demographics of the community and have they changed over time? |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| What is the poverty rate in the community? |
| What is the population over 65 years of age? |
| What is the form of government of the community? |
| What schools are located in the community? |

These five questions can help vestries and congregations that seek to join God in the neighborhood to explore, “What is God up to in the neighborhood?” and “Who is God calling us to partner with in God’s mission?” There are certainly other questions one could ask which might be more pertinent to your context, but these are a place to start. What follows are some ideas which might help you think about next steps for you and your faith community as you seek to join God in the neighborhood!

**WHAT ARE THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE COMMUNITY AND HAVE THEY CHANGED OVER TIME?**

Some of our congregations match the neighborhood demographic of 50 years ago, but as the neighborhoods have changed, the congregation has not expanded to include this new diversity. We can ask who are the neighbors we know and are connecting with and how might we get to know those we do not know. How might we help our neighbors get to know us better?

St. Andrews in Devon (Milford) has tried on some innovative ways to get to know their neighbors better by inviting them to neighborhood meals at the church. St. Mary's Manchester has gone out in groups of two to knock on neighbor’s doors and asking the residents if there is anything that they might pray for. These ministries of getting to know our immediate neighbors are courageous steps in our living into our vow to “seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself.”

**WHAT IS THE POVERTY RATE IN THE COMMUNITY?**

This question often leads to questions about where local food pantries are located and what local feeding programs exist.

Recently, I asked this question of the leadership of Camp Washington, the Episcopal summer camp and year-round conference center located in Morris. While the poverty rate in 2012 was 5.6%, which is lower than the state average of 10%, it is important for Camp Washington, “Our place in Morris,” to help address the needs in their community. When looking at local feeding programs, I learned that the town’s food pantry is located at the Town Hall and is open Monday to Friday from 9-4.

Seeking to connect with their local context, a recent youth weekend at the Camp (a quarterly event for ECCT in 2016-2017 — watch your eNews!) collected food for food pantries. The food collection will be split between Torrington, a large city near Camp, and Morris.

Do you know where the local food pantry is in your town? When is it open? What are their needs? What parishioners, other local faith communities and social service organizations are already participating in feeding, serving and staffing local feeding ministries and how might you join them? Who might you speak with in your community to learn more about food insecurity and the food needs in your town?

**WHAT IS THE POPULATION OVER 65 YEARS OF AGE?**

This question leads to wonderings about how many seniors in the community live alone, what connections they have within the local community, and what is available to the town’s seniors? While some seniors live in communities where they have lived for years and have numerous local connections, some have moved to be closer to family. Still others are isolated by the realities of living alone in a community where they may not have many ongoing connections or limited access to travel.

This year I preached at the celebration of new ministry for the Rev. Barbara Briggs in Pennington, New Jersey. I was so impressed by what I learned about the community senior center that I visited it when I was there and I preached about it as a resource the parish might connect with as they explore what God is up to in their neighborhood. The senior center website noted that they provide meals, rides, books, and opportunities to gather for fellowship and learning.

Who are the seniors in your parish? What are their needs? How might you connect more fully with seniors in your neighborhood to listen and learn what their needs might be? Who is working with and for seniors in your community and how might God be calling you to connect with them? How can we meet with them and explore possible ways of serving together?

**WHAT IS THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT OF THE COMMUNITY?**

This question is an invitation for members of the congregation to ask if community leaders are members of the congregation and if members of our congregation know the civic leaders.

This list includes members of the town council, the mayor or the first selectman/ selectwoman; it may also include Connecticut House or Senate members. I have asked some of the local leaders in West Hartford where I live what they see as the needs of the local community. And then I ask who they see who are seeking to, or effectively addressing, those needs. These may be partnerships.
that the parish is being called to join or collaborations we might be called to begin. These partnerships include joining with local social service organizations or collaborating with local worshipping communities. Collaboration might include anything from recruiting volunteers, providing space, offering financial resources or making other connections with persons who have similar needs.

I WHAT SCHOOLS ARE LOCATED IN THE COMMUNITY?

This question interests me personally as well as spiritually. I have a passion for ministries with schools and I believe that our children and youth are a significant part of God’s family with whom we are called to partner.

Do members of your congregation know members of the board of education, teachers, school nurses, lunch personnel or janitors? What do those ministers in our schools see as the needs of the school community? How might God be calling us to partner with our schools to meet the needs of our neighborhood children? This might include partnerships with Covenant to Care social workers or doing backpack/school supply collections in our parishes. All our Children (allourchildren.org) is a national network endorsed by General Convention that advocates for school/church partnerships. Lallie Lloyd, the director, notes we might “provide a safe supervised place for children to do homework after school, or offer a Day of Service to the school (planting, gardening, etc.) or host a ‘Thank you’ celebration for teachers.” All of these ideas seek to build relationships between our parishes and those in our local schools.

One town I visited had some thoughtful notices of the local school’s website about bullying and ways to addressing bullying. I wondered with the parish how they might support these conversations. What forums or conversations might we support or even host in our communities to make certain that all students feel like their dignity is being respected while they attend school — including when they walk home or when they go to their locker? Will you respect the dignity of every human being? Will we be communities that affirm this promise? I will with Gods’ help.

Our questions in our neighborhoods are focused on, “What is God up to in the neighborhood?” Asking a variety of people in our communities what they see as the needs of the community and who they see addressing those needs, helps us see what God is up to in the neighborhood. It can assist us in not making assumptions about needs in our community and gives us an opportunity to reflect on the relationships we already have. It also creates space to begin to wonder about new relationships.

As we continue to explore how we are invited by God to join God in our neighborhoods, perhaps these questions will inspire you. I know these questions have helped my journey. I hope they will enrich yours. By truly listening to our communities just outside our doors, we join God and others in the mission we seek to participate in as faithful servants of God. The Jesus Movement is out in our neighborhoods! Let’s go join Jesus there!

The Rt. Rev. Laura J. Ahrens is Bishop Suffragan of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut. Send your email replies to lahrens@episcopalct.org, and/or write a longer reflection and submit it for the “God’s Mission” blog, to be shared more widely.
To hear Sharon Betts talk about her new ministry — running a “traveling church” called Grace2Go for children with special needs and their families — is to hear a woman in love. She lights up and leans forward to share stories, her eyes tear up and glisten as she talks about each child as beloved, and she stops every few minutes and just grins in amazement that it’s actually happening and that it is so very much of God.

“I love these children, I can’t even begin to tell you how sweet they are,” she says. “And these parents are amazing, the strength they have, their ability. They love their kids and they love what they do.”

Sharon Betts, who lives in Prospect and attends St. Michael’s Episcopal Church in Naugatuck, recalls telling God at the beginning of her nursing career that she hoped she’d never have to work in pediatrics. For 25 years she worked in the surgical intensive care unit of a hospital in New Haven.

And then God did what God does so often: Takes away our carefully-built security, throws us into new experiences we didn’t ask for, sends us messages through people — even strangers — and in a way that only makes sense in hindsight, fashions us to better serve God’s mission.

For Sharon, this confluence of events began about 10 years ago, after she had begun the discernment process for ordination to the priesthood. Her son, a vocalist, went on a trip to Wales to perform with a chamber choir. The troupe had needed adult chaperones and like most groups, appreciated having a nurse travel with them, so Sharon volunteered.

One evening while there, sharing a meal and conversation with a host family, she met a woman from the United Methodist Church who had a ministry to adults with special needs. The woman invited Sharon to a service. The following weekend, Sharon went. The seed was planted.

“To me it felt like the ‘most right’ thing in the world to be doing,” Sharon said. “I literally had to go to the back of the room because I was sobbing. A young man with Down’s syndrome read a poem and another young man was singing. It was beautiful. To see the passion in him — the sound went away — and just to watch how passionate he was and how happy it made him, it was amazing. As a nurse, it hit a bunch of buttons.”

About three years later Sharon needed to cut back her work hours to accommodate seminary so left the surgical unit. Despite her conversation with God years ago about pediatrics, she began working for several families, providing overnight care for their special needs children who had breathing issues. Her presence and nursing care allowed the families to get some sleep. The more she got to know the children, the more she loved them.

Then, as Sharon says, God sent a spark down to the seed that had been planted.

“One of the moms mentioned to me that she didn’t go to church because her son had a trach (tracheostomy tube) and she asked, ‘What am I going to do if in the middle of a sermon I have to suction him? I’ll disturb the entire church,’” Sharon said.

Initially, Sharon looked for services the family could attend, but they were too far away. “By the time you get everyone into the car it’s already a half-hour or 45 minutes,” Sharon said. “Then you have to drive to wherever it is you’re going.”

She talked with the Rev. Audrey Scanlan, co-founder with Linda Snyder in 2003 at Trinity, Torrington, of Rhythms of Grace, a worship service for families with children on the autism spectrum or with other special needs. Rhythms of Grace is offered as a parish-based ministry at a number of churches across ECCT, and has spread to other states, countries, and denominations.

Sharon Betts, center, with children at a Grace2Go session.
At that time, Audrey was Canon for Mission Collaboration & Congregational Life for the Episcopal Church in Connecticut; she is now the Bishop of the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania.

“After meeting with Audrey I had this vision of literally taking this service to the people so they don’t have to add extra time, and it would be more convenient for them, less stressful,” Sharon said.

Fast forward to the fall of 2014, when Audrey, along with Bishops Ian Douglas and Laura Ahrens and a few others, embarked on a “missional experiment” in ECCT. Audrey invited a group of trainers from Boston to come to Meriden and lead a dozen small parish-based teams in discerning, planning, and implementing a community-based project that served God’s mission. It was known as the Leadership Development Initiative, or LDI.

Sharon was in the LDI group from St. Michael’s, Naugatuck, her home parish. The group decided that they would like to launch a Rhythms of Grace-style worship service for special needs children that could travel to different locations.

And thus was born a new ministry, now known as “Grace2Go.” The Naugatuck group took advantage of a grant available to LDI teams and were awarded $5,000, with which Sharon bought a trailer. A former church-school teacher and director, she already had most of the arts and crafts supplies needed.

Today Sharon drives the trailer to five locations a month. The first weekend a month she takes for Sabbath, personal time, and advance lesson preparation. The other weeks she’s at churches where clergy have agreed to participate and celebrate the Eucharist.

As of early November, services were being held at Episcopal, United Methodist, and Covenant churches, monthly, at different times of day, on Saturdays, Sundays, and Mondays.

One of her challenges in offering the ministry where and when it’s needed is locating and arranging for clergy to celebrate the Eucharist, which would no longer be a factor if she’s ordained to the priesthood. But Sharon knows that’s in God’s hands.

She is a postulant now, having completed her seminary studies. She works with the Commission on Ministry, which oversees the process for those discerning ordained ministry, and meets regularly with Bishop Laura Ahrens. Sharon is hoping to be recommended for the next step, candidacy. If that happens, then usually six to twelve months afterwards there’s another review and a final recommendation about ordination.

As an ordained priest, Sharon wouldn’t be dependent on another priest’s schedule in setting the dates and times of the services. She said she would continue to hold them in churches, primarily, because she believes church space is sacred. However there

And then God did what God does so often: Takes away our carefully-built security, throws us into new experiences we didn’t ask for, sends us messages through people — even strangers — and in a way that only makes sense in hindsight, fashions us to better serve God’s mission.
may be occasions when holding a worship service for children with special needs might take place somewhere else, she said.

**WORSHIP**

Grace2Go was originally conceived as Rhythms of Grace2Go, after the existing Rhythms of Grace. Sharon still consults with Linda Snyder and draws from their now-published curriculum, but there are some differences, based on Sharon’s own experience in Christian education and her work with children with special needs. Those differences, and the different model, make it sufficiently distinct to warrant its separate name.

On her website, Sharon describes Grace2Go as a “mobile ministry that assists churches in their ability to serve the spiritual needs of families with children who have autism, ADHD, epilepsy, Down syndrome, sensory process disorder, global developmental delay, cerebral palsy or literally any individual who may simply thrive in a different sensory learning worship style. ... Our purpose is to create an inviting atmosphere that welcomes typically abled and differently abled youth and adults to worship together in a judgment free environment. We strive not to separate but to create a cohesive body of Christ in action.”

A Grace2Go service begins in an open space, such as a parish hall, set up to accommodate a wide variety of children and their needs. While some walk in from the immediate neighborhood, others have had to travel. This can involve elaborate preparation and perhaps special equipment, even for short distances. There are mothers, fathers, grandparents, other adults, and siblings.

Once there, children may choose to sit alone on a cushion in an indoor tent or wander about. A few may need to stay in specialized wheelchairs. Some won’t say a word during the entire time; others won’t be able to stop talking or making other kinds of noise. Some act out obsessive behaviors. Everyone is welcomed and accepted and loved. It’s a safe place.

Sharon tells a bible story, followed by story-related hands-on activities. Teen and adult family members — including Sharon’s own — help at the various activity stations. There is time for prayer and snacks. Afterwards, the group moves into the church sanctuary for a simple celebration of the Eucharist, which includes a recitation of the Lord’s Prayer using hand movements as taught by the Rhythms of Grace curriculum.

When the families are gone and the cleanup of the parish hall and sanctuary is finished, supplies and equipment are re-packed into the red trailer, ready for the next family worship service of Grace2Go.

The bulk of the ministry’s expense is craft supplies and the gas for travel, Sharon said. She holds occasional fundraisers and at this time conducts business by way of St Michael’s and will apply for independent federal 501(c)3 status as a religious non-profit. Parishioners of St. Michael’s offer some financial support, and sometimes attend the services as another way to provide support. In September, the Trinity/Harrub Fund awarded her a grant of $4,200.

It’s a lot of work, between the planning, packing, unpacking, traveling, the actual services, the administration, and the development. And Sharon knows it’s worth it.

“The Holy Spirit is definitely moving in this ministry,” she said. “It’s making a difference in the lives of many children.”

Some of the moms who come to the services in Naugatuck with their children can give an Amen! to that.

“It’s such a blessing to be able to bring my children and not worry about disturbing the rest of the praying people,” said one mom. “It’s an incredible blessing to be able to participate. My daughter loves it [and] is learning so much about God and what it means to follow Jesus, it’s amazing.”

Another mom who lives in the town with her young son, says he has a way of letting her know how much he looks forward to the services. “When we they walk past the church,” she said, “he always goes, “Church today? Church today?”

For more information visit specialneeds grace2go.com or their Facebook page.
My yoke is easy and my burden is light

Bill Barfield

Karin Hamilton

We all go through some ups and downs. You can’t be afraid, because God said he’d never leave us. We’ll work together as one. We’ll pray about it, do what we can do, and leave the rest up to God.

Bill Barfield of St. Mark’s Episcopal Church in Bridgeport, may be St. Mark’s busiest parishioner. Bill is a 30-year veteran of the submarine service, and retired as well from more than two decades of running his own carpet and upholstery cleaning business, following his Navy career. He is the senior warden of St. Mark’s Episcopal Church in Bridgeport, leads Bible studies and community conversations, helps with the parish’s annual Christmas food and clothing collection and distribution, serves on the board of the affiliated and legally separate St. Mark’s Day Care Center, Inc. across the street from the church, and oversees their buildings and grounds. His involvement isn’t limited to the church: he also coordinates the annual gathering of his large family and for years he chaired his lakeside neighborhood organization. Since 1983 he’s been happily married to the Rev. DeOla Barfield, deacon, and has two grown daughters and five grandchildren.

Beyond his exceptional project management skills, Bill is remarkably low-key, kind and gentle, loves God and loves people, and is a terrific storyteller. He wears the mantle of leadership well.

He also knows he wears that mantle with Jesus. Bill is a lifelong believer who has
always been able to see the hand of God in his life and credits Jesus with saving his life twice.

Years ago his life was spared when he was almost in a disastrous car accident. His captain had sent him off to town on an errand. As he was speeding along a mostly-empty highway, a big truck, dragging a chain and going over 80 miles an hour, pulled sharply in front of him. The chain wrapped around the bumper of Bill’s vehicle. Bill steered left to try to break free. Suddenly the chain came loose but Bill’s truck was already veering across the median into lanes of oncoming traffic, and off the other side. He suffered no injuries.

“I think about it about once a month,” he said, “how God loved me enough to get me out of that situation.”

Years later, faced with a diagnosis of early stage prostate cancer, he put it in God’s hands. Through prayer, he chose a treatment option, which was successful. He keeps getting good news when he goes for checkups.

FROM NORTH CAROLINA TO BRIDGEPORT BY SUBMARINE

Bill was born and raised in North Carolina. His mother attended a Baptist Church, yet Bill went more often with his aunt to a Methodist church.

After high school Bill decided he needed a solid, well-paying career, enlisted in the Navy, and went into the submarine service. Most of his time was spent between California and Hawaii. He retired as Master Chief Petty Officer.

Bill served as Chief of the Boat on two of his submarines. “[It’s] almost like being senior warden in a way,” Bill said. “It’s the senior enlisted advisor to the commanding officer on all enlisted matters. Anything that has to do with enlisted personnel, I’m like his right-hand man, to get things done.” Before that, Bill was Atmospheric Control Technician. Bill also stood watch as the Diving Officer — responsible for getting the boat at the right level so it could fire a missile if needed. He had also served as Chief of the Watch.

Three years before he retired he met his future wife, DeOla Jones, at a teacher’s convention in Los Angeles. Bill had come off the submarine for shore duty and was recruiting for the Navy.

Bill’s sister, Shirley Gillis, who lived in New London, came to Los Angeles, for a teachers’ convention with her close friend, DeOla.

DeOla was also from North Carolina but had moved to New York and later to Bridgeport, where she worked as a teacher for the Bridgeport school system.

Shirley invited Bill to the convention, “because she wanted her friend to have someone to dance with,” said Bill. Not that DeOla was looking for anyone. But Shirley was a good matchmaker. “I was so impressed with her,” Bill said, that he changed his future plans.

Bill had already put in a request for Hawaii, in part because he had an ex-wife who lived in California. But Hawaii would have made the courtship to DeOla a challenge. When he learned that he could have the submarine he wanted but not the job he wanted, he told officials in Washington that he didn’t want Hawaii any more. They offered several other options, among them, Groton, Connecticut (known as the “Home of the Submarine Force,” and the “Submarine Capital of the World”).

“I said, ‘I’ll take it,’” Bill said, figuring that if he didn’t like it, he’d go back.

The romance blossomed. His boat went on two tours, then he was asked to choose his final two-year assignment, his “twilight tour.” It took a swap between friends, but he was able to get assigned to Groton.

“I didn’t realize that God was working this out for us,” said Bill. He visited DeOla on weekends until they married in 1983. They still live in same house, today.

LEADERSHIP AT THE LOCAL PARISH

DeOla was already a member of St. Mark’s and although Bill considered trying out a few other churches, he kept going to St. Mark’s. DeOla loved The Episcopal Church, he said. Later, she was ordained as a Deacon in the Church.

“I was a going to St. Mark’s for six years before I became a member,” Bill said. He was even tithing by then, as well.

“God works in mysterious ways,” said Bill as he described how that came about.
One week his wife asked him to put her envelope in the plate for her, and it fell open. The two were each giving separately. When he saw the amount, he was surprised by how much it was, and asked if she was in trouble. No, she explained to him, I give ten percent of my income every month.

“If I could have cut a hole in the floor at that time and dropped in it, I would have, because I was so embarrassed,” he said. “But I’ve been giving five or ten dollars at the most.

She’d never asked him for money, and never seemed short, so he decided to work on it himself. He read the passages in Malachi that invited him to test God. So he tried it, increasing the amount a little at a time. After a while he was tithing, also. “Blessings have come,” he said. “So many. And not just financial.”

Bill said it took him a while to adjust to the structure and the financial setup of The Episcopal Church. He liked that it wasn’t all centered on the priest. Then he started attending meetings.

“One day I went to an annual meeting and the treasurer said that we started from zero in the New Year. If there was money left over from the year before, where was it going? I asked. So, I thought I’d get involved.”

There was more.

He went to a vestry meeting, but it seemed to him like the people had been put in place by the priest and people couldn’t say what they wanted. People were all voting the same way, he said, “and when I asked [one person] if she knew what the vote was about, she said, ‘not really,’ so I said to myself, I think I’ll get on the vestry.”

He became an official member of St. Mark’s and got elected to the vestry. Soon, he was asked to be the junior warden. After 10 years, the new priest in charge asked if Bill would serve as senior warden.

Bill was reluctant to agree to taking on more responsibility, but when parishioners started to ask him as well, he said he’d pray about it. At the next annual meeting, people asked him what he’d heard from God.

“God didn’t say anything,” replied Bill. He knew that if people wanted him, he was capable of providing the leadership. Bill was nominated and elected.

St. Mark’s was in a difficult financial situation and had become $90,000 in debt to the Episcopal Church in Connecticut. The then-rector was leaving and the then-bishop asked the two wardens what they were planning to do about the debt. Bill said they’d pay it off.

“He asked, ‘When will you start?’” said Bill. “About a month, I told him. ‘How much?’ he asked and I told him, $18,000.” The parish had raised about $20,000 over the past year that the departing priest may have expected as a gift. But that wasn’t going to happen under Bill’s watch. And over the course of the next four and a half to five years, though fundraisers and other events, St. Mark’s paid their debt in full.

Bill has also been involved with St. Mark’s Day Care Center across the street from the church. The original one was started in the 1960s by St. Mark’s and Trinity Southport. The current one was created in the early 1980s also by St. Mark’s and Trinity, Southport to serve children in the area, especially minority children. Bill joined the board of directors and he’s also their building and grounds director. He meets with the Day Care Center’s director as often as he can.

IT’S GOD’S MISSION, AND IT’S IN GOD’S HANDS

St. Mark’s serves in the strong tradition of a historically Black church — an anchor in the community, for the community. It has faced social, cultural, financial, membership, and other challenges over the years, and has challenges today as well.

God is up to something, though.

The whole area is in the beginning of potentially large changes that are bringing more people to the area.

St. Mark’s is in the East End of Bridgeport. It’s across the street from Newfield Park, popular for local gatherings and cricket games. There are about 7,000 people who currently live in the East End.

Less than a mile away by Stratford Ave, heading west across an inlet, a 52-acre development known as Steelpointe Harbor has completed its first phase. There’s a Bass Pro shop, Starbucks, and plans for more retail stores, a hotel, and up to 1,500 residential units. People who work in New York are moving into Bridgeport.

More development, and redevelopment, is taking place in the East End itself as well. A grassroots effort by the residents will soon open a market and café there; another development plans to bring in a 40,000 square foot supermarket, and a civic block is being redeveloped to include retail, housing, and an expanded library. There are plans to relocate the Bridgeport-Port Jefferson Ferry from downtown to the area.

Bill has started a bi-monthly conversation at the parish to explore how St. Mark’s can help meet the needs of its current, and changing, community. He’s thought about inviting young people in the neighborhood to visit the Naval Submarine Base in New London, as he did years ago with the youth at St. Mark’s.

For the past 15 years, Bill has led Bible studies at church and sometimes in his home every other Saturday, reading the scriptures chapter by chapter and asking, “What is God trying to tell us?” It’s a question that he and the others may be asking about St. Mark’s changing neighborhood, as well.

“We all go through some ups and downs. You can’t be afraid, because God said he’d never leave us,” said Bill. “We’ll work together as one. We’ll pray about it, do what we can do, and leave the rest up to God.”
Community is not only the central focus of the Rev. Susan Pinkerton’s ministry as an ordained priest, but her life story as well.

“Experiencing community, building deep relationships with each other, ourselves, and God is so important,” Susan said, with a warm smile on her face. “A church community is just a slice of life — you meet and work with people maybe you never would have had you not been a part of the community.”

Susan learned at a very early age the importance of developing community and inviting others to join in. Growing up as an “Army brat,” Susan attended more than 30 schools in four countries before she graduated high school.

“It was a wonderful way to experience community [and] life,” Susan reflected. “I learned quickly, early on, that people make the place.”

A cradle Episcopalian, Susan continually seeks comfort in the deep relationships formed in her church community. In Susan’s words, The Episcopal Church is “a big tent with wide doors,” and centralizes hospitality and community.

Community is essential to our lives as humans, and our roles as Christians, she said.

“It is the central part of being a follower of Jesus. The first thing Jesus did when he came out of the desert was form community.”

After graduating from Mary Washington College (now University) in Fredericksburg, Virginia, Susan married and moved to Colorado.

Susan’s family, which by then included three daughters, became members of a small mission church in Boulder, Colorado. During this time Susan was able to try on various lay leadership roles within the church, and assist in the building of this new community.

It was at this mission church that seeds were planted for her to consider ordination within The Episcopal Church. Susan, interested to explore this call, attended courses in religious studies at the University of Colorado in Boulder.
However, after a divorce, Susan and her three daughters moved to San Antonio, Texas to be closer to her family. It was then that Susan experienced yet another welcoming and supportive community — an independent bookstore specializing in theology, psychology, and classical literature.

The owner of Viva! Bookstore considered the thriving bookstore a ministry. Susan, and the other employees (all of whom were Episcopalian at that time), led book groups with the local seminaries and frequently hosted authors and discussions.

“It was a rich place to learn more about community and theology and working with all sorts of people who also had the same mind,” Susan said. “It was a great training ground; we were like a family there.”

Then, after much deliberation, Susan moved her family once again to attend the University of Oklahoma College of Law. She practiced law in Oklahoma City for eleven years, specializing in oil and gas litigations for her last three years. During her time as a lawyer, all three of Susan’s daughters graduated from the University of Oklahoma.

To no surprise, Susan again found a warm community at St. John’s Episcopal Church in Oklahoma City, where she was an active lay leader. St. John’s later became her sponsoring parish as Susan entered into the discernment process.

“It was the right time to test if I had a call [to ordination], all my kids had started their lives, so it was now or never,” Susan said. “I started the process with the real clear sense that if there was a road block of any kind, that would be my answer that that was not my calling and I would continue with my private practice and my leadership within the church.”

But doors opened for Susan, and kept opening.

Susan attended Yale Divinity School and Berkeley Divinity School beginning in the fall of 2005. During her time in seminary, Susan completed her Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) at Yale-New Haven Hospital, visited Tanzania and worked closely with the Bishop of Kilimanjaro, and was an exchange student at Wescott House in Cambridge, UK for a semester.

Upon graduation in 2008, Susan received her first call as a newly ordained deacon at Trinity Wall Street, New York. Since then, Susan has accepted calls to serve in parishes in Washington D.C., Chicago, and Peoria, Illinois.

Throughout these various communities, and transitioning her role from lay leader to now ordained person within the church, Susan remained centered through asking, “Where is God in this?”

“If I can’t find God in [a situation], then I need to step back,” said Susan. She shared that it is sometimes hard for her to “realize it is God’s agenda and not mine.”

In May 2015, Susan joined the staff at St. John’s West Hartford as rector.

Since her time at St. John’s, Susan’s desire to build community has been the focal part of her ministry. She said that her first 15 months were spent “watching and asking questions, learning the community, building the relationships, and one on one conversations [in her efforts to] “appreciate their history, [learn] what their challenges are, what they are proud of, and what keeps them up at night.”

Susan, 64, often states in her sermons that she believes that her role as a priest, “is not to find the answers, it’s [thinking] ‘are we asking the right questions?’” She invites every community to “live into the questions, and not worry about the answers, because they will come in time.”

Last spring, Susan invited her vestry to divide up and walk — two by two — into the surrounding neighborhood along Farmington Avenue. She gave only one instruction: look at the neighborhood through God’s eyes. Susan’s focus was for the vestry to keep in mind the potential for deep and meaningful relationships with the population just beyond their doors. She wanted the vestry to witness what God is up to in the neighborhood and imagine how St. John’s could be involved.

“We need community and the life experiences that we bring; our gifts and talents,” she said. “It is a wonderful array of resources of how to build up the kingdom here on earth, and it requires everyone. In God’s economy, nothing is wasted.”

St. John’s, with the average Sunday attendance around 200, is predominantly a “destination church;” parishioners often drive quite a distance to attend service and coffee hour, then head back home to another community. However, since Susan has arrived at St. John’s she has pushed the congregation to refocus their role in God’s mission to their immediate neighborhood.

With reimagining hospitality at the heart of St. John’s ministry, the community has hosted various neighborhood events, like a family-friendly fall block party; encouraged parishioners to frequent local businesses and shops; opened up the building to community groups, free-of-charge; and co-sponsored a refugee family from Syria.

“God is at work in this neighborhood in all different ways,” Susan added.

Susan hopes to continue developing strong relationships through collaboration with other faith leaders, worship communities, and secular groups. In the end, however, “it has to be joyful,” as Susan cheerily exclaims, “there’s God in that.”
In a culture dominated by “either/or” thinking, the Rev. Dr. David McIntosh, M.D. navigated and preserved the integrity of his “both/and” life, growing up to become a physician and an Episcopal priest.

“I look at both of these as healing professions and spiritual pursuits,” he said.

David’s passions emerged during his childhood in Miami, Florida when he was about 10 years old.

He said that he used to roll out his mother’s old metal typewriter cart, flip out both of its drop leaves, and set it up as a gurney. Then, using sets of tweezers from his brothers’ dissection microscope kit, he’d pretend to “operate” on his stuffed animals. After the operation, David would reset the table as an altar and pretend to “celebrate the Eucharist” in thanksgiving for a successful surgery and recovery.

His family might be the source of these early career ambitions. One grandparent and a cousin were doctors and both his parents were devout church-goers. He primarily attended the Roman Catholic Church with his mother, and had more in-depth conversations about scripture and faith with his Presbyterian father.

Throughout high school and his years at Duke University, David sustained his interest in the sciences as well as his involvement in the Roman Catholic Church. Occasionally, it felt to him like competing passions.

“One [source of] angst when I was growing up was trying to figure out what is it I wanted to do,” he said, “because I loved religious studies and theology and scripture and I loved science and microbiology and immunology.”

At Duke, he majored in zoology and immunology, and took courses in religion and psychology.

David finally decided to attend medical
school. Yet, true to his both/and vocation, he also accepted an opportunity to live with priests as a “pseudo-postulant” for a year, serving as parish intern to see what priestly life was like. His applications to medical school included a request for a one-year deferment if accepted, to explore the priesthood. A number of schools accepted him yet the only one that thought it was a good idea, and granted the deferment, was in his home town: the University of Miami School of Medicine.

“Their note to me said, ‘What a wonderful thing to pursue and we think it will make you a better doctor.’” he said.

David accepted deferred admission and began his year living in a rectory where he did occasional preaching, work with the youth, and other “ministerial” work.

He quickly realized, he said, that full-time parish ministry and the celibate life wasn’t for him. He entered medical school the following year.

The “either/or” nature of the decisions he was facing was frustrating.

“I noticed that when I was studying scripture and theology [during the year with the priests], that I was yearning to study the sciences,” he said. “I was annoyed because my friends were already advancing and doing their clinical wards in medicine.

“And once I was in medical school at the University of Miami, I missed terribly the prayer life, regularly going to worship and reading and doing theology. I was annoyed because all of my friends were back in seminary and studying theology and here I was talking about anatomy and biochemistry. It was very frustrating.

“I’ve always had that sort of — not dualistic, but that combined yearning for both areas in my life.”
**OPEN A PATH**

David turned his primary focus toward his medical studies, though he remained active in the Roman Catholic church, attending worship services and teaching prayer in parishes.

Unexpectedly, love intervened and changed his life.

Just before he began his dual residencies in pediatrics and internal medicine, he met and fell in love with Dan Bars, a former Baptist-turned-Episcopalian. Within one year, while David taught and directed the combined residency program at the medical school, he and Dan made a commitment to one another and were unofficially married by a friend — legal options weren’t available then. After teaching for five years, he and Dan explored a move up north so that Dan could pursue work in New York City.

After New Milford Hospital recruited David, they decided it was time to move. They found a house and settled in Kent, CT where David soon opened a medical practice affiliated with that hospital and Western Connecticut Medical Group.

Dan started attending St. Andrew’s in Kent. David visited a few other churches first, then joined Dan at St. Andrew’s. The experience was transformative for him, he said.

David describes himself as having a “high theology of the Eucharistic presence,” and said that when he saw people doing different things during the Eucharist, he wondered why.

“Some were kneeling and staring in awe of what was happening at the altar,” he said, while others were sitting respectfully. Some were holding or talking to their children, he said, or responding in other ways.

“I remember asking various people what they thought was going on and each had a very different answer on their theology of what the Eucharist was, and they were completely respectful of the other person’s values and ideas and needs,” he said.

He was impressed by the community’s openness to the feelings of others, and says now, “We all have the same belief in God but the specifics (might vary). There were so many different accepting ideas.” Growing up he had been used to either a right or wrong answer.

He and Dan were embraced by the congregation as a couple and a number of parishioners later became patients.

“It just was amazing to me,” he said.

Encouraged by St. Andrew’s rector, the Rev. Roger White, as well as members of the parish and even patients at his practice, David entered the discernment process for the priesthood. He took three years off from practicing medicine, starting in 2007, to attend General Theological Seminary in New York City.

David was ordained in 2010 as a transitional deacon and assigned to serve at Trinity, Torrington, where he remained for two years after his ordination to the priesthood in 2011. In 2013, he accepted a call as priest associate at St. Andrew’s, Kent.

Today, the Rev. Dr. David McIntosh works three days a week at his medical office and is at St. Andrew’s on weekends. His medical colleagues cover for him when he is not in the office — a model he wishes was more prevalent in the church.

“Ordained ministers have to be willing to cover for each other, just like in medicine — on call to help each other,” he said.

“We can’t continue to have ‘walled-off’ churches.”

David serves as chair of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut’s (ECCY’s) Commission on Ministry (COM), which oversees ministry formation. Its primary focus has been on the ordination processes for the diaconate and the priesthood, which is changing. The process is much more individualized than in earlier years.

They’re also challenging two traditional expectations: first, that anyone who is in discernment for ordination will stop everything in their life to attend a traditional Episcopal seminary for three years, and second, that all seminarians want to be, can be, and should be, full time parish priests when they graduate.

David believes he was asked to join the COM to bring his experience and perspective.

“I am one of many people who had a different vision about what priestly ministry was,” he said. “As [Bishop] Ian has talked about many times, in this postcolonial and 21st century world, we need to look at alternative ideas of ministry [including] dual or multi vocational approaches to ministry, whether that means multiple parish-linked jobs or a missional priest job and another one, be it as teacher or physician or something else.

“You can do both and it can make sense, though it’s not for everyone,” he said.

Still, people find the concept, and the reality, confusing.

“A lot of times, people’s first reaction is, Are you a real doctor?” he said. “And I say, Yes. Then they ask me, Are you a real priest? And I say, Yes.”

For David, the two are not only integrated, but complementary.

“Being in the religious community at St. Andrew’s, to feel God’s grace working through me and through that community, and to celebrate the sacraments, empowers me to do my work as a physician,” he said.

“And I think I’m a better priest because I understand and I experience the suffering and the needs of people in the community and in the world outside of the church doors.

“I try to instill a sense of God’s presence in our lives no matter what ministry I’m trying to undertake,” David said. “Nothing I do is myself. It is all God and God working through me.”

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Karin Hamilton serves as Canon for Mission Communication & Media for the Episcopal Church in Connecticut.
I am a Christian
An interview with Piper Gilbert

Karin Hamilton

Piper Gilbert, 13, is in eighth grade at Sacred Heart Greenwich, an independent, Catholic school for girls K-12 in Greenwich. Her outside interests and activities include soccer, alpine skiing and racing; water polo and other aquatics; and musical theater both at school and at community theaters. Last January, Piper wrote and delivered a “Reflection on Mercy” at her school’s weekly chapel service.

Q. Do you consider yourself a Christian? If so, why?
A. Yes, I do. I feel I have a connection with God on a spiritual level. I can talk to him whenever I need to.

Q. Do you recall making a choice about being a Christian?
A. My church and my parents and my grandmother are very open to me questioning my faith. I could lessen my faith, or grow in it, any time, with their support. But I feel that I made the choice recently, because lately, I’ve been feeling like I have this deeper connection with God that’s really awesome.

Q. What does it mean, in practical terms, to be a Christian?
A. I can always lean back on God and trust him to take me in the right direction. Even when I’m not walking with my friends, I always feel like God is a companion with me. Also, when there are family disagreements, God is always there for me.

Q. Do you have friends who are not Christian?
A. One. She’s Jewish but she goes to my school (which is Roman Catholic). It’s very interesting to see her express her faith. She has a deep respect for Christianity. And I have a deep respect for Judaism.

Q. Do you experience any kind of negative social consequences for being a Christian?
A. I haven’t experienced any. I go to a Catholic school, which supports and helps me grow in my faith. My friends and I support each other.

Q. What kind of responsibilities do you have as a Christian?
A. To do my best, to fulfill whatever purpose God has for me. If it’s important to God then it’s important to me. To succeed in the eyes of God. Also [the responsibility] to generally be a good person, a kind person; to be open to people, and always give people a chance, whenever I can.

Q. What church do you attend and how are you involved with it?
A. I attend St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Riverside. I’m in the youth group, I sing there when I can, I acolyte and I’m a youth reader. I have a close relationship with our priest.
Tucked away in an Episcopal Church on Sigourney Avenue in a busy, urban neighborhood, is a small elementary school that offers an extended-day program and a tuition-free education for families who can’t afford a private-school education for their children.

About eight years ago, the Rev. Donald L. Hamer, rector of Trinity Church, had an idea to open a middle school that would serve the community surrounding the church. Some parishioners formed a steering committee and explored several regional Episcopal schools to garner information about their programs.

Initially, the steering committee considered expanding the existing Choir School, an afterschool enrichment program that Trinity Church hosts for children from the Greater Hartford area, into a day/music school.
The Choir School provides training in music education as well as academic assistance. However, committee members didn’t find a model that worked for Hartford. So, they decided to open a day school similar to Epiphany School in Dorchester and Esperanza Academy in Lawrence, MA; they both have a music and an arts component.

“We did the planning and exploring for several years,” explained Hamer. “We looked at the demographics in the Asylum Hill neighborhood, and it had one of the biggest achievement gaps in the country. There were a high number of immigrants and more than 15 different languages spoken at the local elementary school. Asylum Hill had the highest density housing in Hartford. We already had a commitment to education with the Choir School and we had this big sprawling education wing that sat empty during the week.

“On a wing and prayer we started the school with a grant from a donor-advised fund at the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and a lot of smaller contributions. Our donor base keeps growing and we are always looking for financial support from people and organizations who believe in the work we are doing.”

Hamer, who as rector of Trinity Church is ex-officio on the board of Trinity Academy, said the academy is the only Episcopal school in Connecticut that doesn’t charge tuition. The church also provides the space rent free and pays the school’s utility bills.

In its first three years, the academy offered grades six to eight. By the third year, the administration began transitioning it to an elementary school and had third and eighth grade classes. The school now has second, third, and fourth grade classes.

Although the academy is autonomous from the church, they do share a business manager. And, this will be the first year that the two will share additional resources. For example, every other week, Hamer will teach fourth graders a course on spirituality.

“The church is a great resource,” said Karen Connal, Trinity Academy’s head of school. “It’s important to be a part of a
bigger community and share resources. The school isn’t faith based, it’s spiritually based. We deal with core values and community service.”

She said the academy is a member of the NativityMiguel Coalition and follows its model, which was created in 1971 with a small school in Manhattan’s Lower East Side. According to Trinity Academy’s website, the model provides a quality, tuition-free education to low-income children who desire to learn in a challenging, academic environment. The model promotes small class sizes, with an extended day, parent involvement and lessons in life skills, with a focus on academics, physical, social, creative, emotional, physical and spiritual education.

Trinity Academy is also partnered with the nearby Grace Academy (for girls) and Covenant Preparatory School (for boys); Trinity Academy is a feeder school for the two independent day schools and sends its students there for grades five through eight. The three schools also share the admission process and steer students to each other’s schools.

Connal, who was development director at Trinity Academy for three years before becoming head of school, said tuition is free because the academy serves low-income families, with most students receiving free or reduced lunch.

“We offer a fabulous education without parents having the burden of money,” said Connal. “If not, then we’re not serving them as much as we can. They can’t afford private school, so this is another option.”

The school demographics vary, she said, explaining that students come from households that are large, where parents may be single, educated, uneducated, or households where English is spoken as a second language. Some parents are actually grandparents who are custodial guardians.

To become a student at Trinity Academy, families must complete an application and submit papers verifying a recent physical examination. Families tour the facility and prospective students take an entrance test for placement purposes only and not for acceptance. Children from low-income families are given priority. However, the school is not set up to serve children with special needs.

About 85 percent of the 42 students come from Hartford, with the rest from New Britain and Bloomfield. Students are bussed in from Hartford if they live more than one mile from the school. Parents drive students who live in surrounding towns.

This year, average cost per student is about $13,000, and parents are required to pay an activity fee of $50 per semester or $100 a year.

The bulk of the school’s funding comes from sponsors, donations, grants, and annual appeals. Donations range from $25 to $25,000. The school solicits sponsors to pay for the students’ education. Individual student sponsorships begin at $5,000, as well as group donations. Students are encouraged to write thank-you cards to all of the sponsors. The ultimate goal is for every student to have a sponsor. Students who don’t have a sponsor write cards to board members. The school sends out a newsletter three times a year to its donor base. There are two major fundraisers a year, in addition to smaller ones, including an auction, an advertising book, and a spring dinner.

The curriculum includes language arts, reading and writing workshop, math, social studies, science, and physical education. There are greenhouses in the third and fourth grade classrooms. The whole school knows what each other is doing because of the integrated curriculum, said Connal. Students learn the “word of the day,” and all students read one book in a three or four week span. Students also take art twice a week and a psychotherapist teaches martial arts, which involves movement and control. Classes are offered in yoga and golf, which builds character and help students control their bodies.

A volunteer teaches gardening one day a week and students plant flowers and vegetables in the fall and spring. Volunteers play an integral role at the academy. They work with small groups of students and teach one on one to give students individual attention.

“Volunteers make us a better school,” said Connal. “They become a part of our community and form relationships and help our fundraising. They sell our school. Some come in every single day. Some come in weekly.”

Connal said the school thrives on community resources and partnerships. A nurse from Hartford Public Schools comes one day a week. One of the cooks at Travelers insurance company buys all of the school’s food from the House of Bread and Costco and cooks the meals. The children are also taught healthy eating habits, and fruits and vegetables are offered at each meal. The Hispanic Health Council offer parents healthy cooking classes three nights a week, starting in October.

Louise Loomis, a retired Hartford school teacher, who has been a member of Trinity Church since 1970 and was on the steering committee, heaped praises on the school. She said Trinity Academy is a necessity because it fills the void left by public schools.

“[Trinity Academy] was designed as a user-friendly school that is effective school for students,” said Loomis, who has a doctorate in education and lived in Hartford for 38 years.
years until she moved to Bloomfield in 2008. Meanwhile, she is pleased with her new role at the academy where she teaches a class called “Critical and Creative Thinking and the Cognitive Six,” which is based on a book that she recently wrote.

“We want our teachers to think outside of the box,” said Connal. “We want them to be entrepreneurs. We want them to be better teachers and have a passion, to feel they have ownership. It helps students so much more in various aspects.”

Principal Jennifer Scanzano agreed:

“We want teachers who are positive, who put students first,” she reiterated. “We look for creative thinkers who encourage students and teachers to be creative thinkers. I guide them and help with whatever they need. It’s teamwork, not one dimensional. I want people who create a unique, safe and fun environment. This includes staff and volunteers.”

Scanzano said the academy is different from other public schools, because it has a longer school day. Students arrive at 7:30 a.m. for breakfast and the school day begins at 8 a.m. and ends at 5 p.m.

“Students get used to it,” she said. “At first, there was a concern that it was a long day for the younger kids.”

But, she added, the school day offers specials, such as martial arts, yoga and gardening, which many public schools do not offer its students.

“We try to be different,” Scanzano explained. “The atmosphere is different. We have smaller classes. In public schools, classes are large and second graders may not know the other students.”

Scanzano also runs morning meetings that she described as building community in school. The entire staff and students greet each other and introduce themselves.

“It’s comforting,” she said. “It creates a different atmosphere. We enforce a safe school environment and everyone knows each other and feels respected. Our core values are respect, responsibility, community, excellence, leadership, and integrity.”

These morning meetings stem from a curriculum known as “Responsive Classroom,” which builds community in the school as well as the classroom. Scanzano took a one-week workshop on how to make the school better. Now, teachers have morning meetings in their classroom. And, once a week, she hosts a morning meeting for the entire school. They do greeting activities — shake hands, make eye contact. Students are encouraged to say good morning to each other in different languages.

Ray Lee, a fourth grader who lives in the Asylum Hill neighborhood, said he has great teachers who stimulate his love for math, his favorite subject. He said his teachers at
Trinity are much nicer than the ones he had at his former school.

His mother, Kathleen Ruffin, said she found out about the school while walking home from mass one day at a nearby Catholic Church. She was not happy about where Ray was going to school and was looking for a change. She called Trinity Academy and was told to bring Ray in for testing.

“I’m so happy that he’s here and out of public school,” Ruffin said. “The classrooms were so massive there. The poor teachers were glorified babysitters, trying to get everyone to behave, so many children. I feel he has excelled academically [at Trinity]. His behavior has improved a lot and I hope it rolls over into home. He doesn’t mind the long day. Teachers are considerate and don’t give a ton of homework. Some days he comes home and says that he has already done his homework and all that’s left is reading. It’s nice as parents, not having to be up all night helping [with homework]. He needs free time away from academics to be a child as well.”

Ruffin said that since her son has been at Trinity Academy, there was one issue and it was addressed immediately. At his old school, she said, there were several issues that had her sitting in the office for hours and no one came out to talk to her.

Hamer said they saw a desperate need in their local community and created partnerships with local businesses and other community groups to serve a need that was not being met. Their extended, nine-and-half hour day provides Trinity Academy an opportunity to impact the lives of children living in poverty in a way that a typical six-hour school day cannot.

“We are living out the values of our Baptismal Covenant, and building up our students by helping them to see themselves as beloved and valued children of God,” he said. I hope that people see God’s hands in it and want to join us in supporting it. Talk about God’s mission. We are going out in the community. God was already at work in these wonderful children. We are there to nurture them in God’s image and help them do what God wants them to do. We provide the nurturing and sustained input that children need in our extended day school.”

Frankye V. Regis is a freelance writer and editor.
The church is already in the business of imagining a different world. The work of reinventing the economy is a core part of what it means to be a Christian.

Joy Anderson

The ministry of Joy Anderson:
Joining God in changing the world by changing the economy by changing who sees themselves in that work

Karin Hamilton

Joy Anderson believes that God is already at work changing the world through the economy. Part of her life's work is to help you, and your church, see yourselves as capable of joining God in that work as well.

Daughter of two Lutheran (ELCA) ministers and a member of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in East Haddam, Joy is the founder and principal of a venture capital fund for social enterprises and the founder and president of the globally-renowned and Haddam, Connecticut-based Criterion Institute. The Institute's work is to expand the number of people who see themselves in the work of reinventing the economy.

She and the other thought leaders of Criterion are best known for the work that they do with women’s rights organizations around the world including “gender lens investing.” The second focus of their work, which they approach with equal passion, is the church and the people who are the church. In fact, Criterion has pledged to help 1,000 churches to “build economic relationships that reflect what we believe God’s economy to be.”

“The church is already in the business of imagining a different world,” said Joy. “The work of reinventing the economy is a core part of what it means to be a Christian.”

Joy is writing a book, along with her colleague Dr. Matthew Myer.
Boulton, president of Christian Theological Seminary, on discovering God’s economy. At a conference on that topic held last June they identified the three themes of the book, which help explain the work:

- Remaking the economy for the better is at the heart of what it means to be Christian
- The economy can be remade (and God is actively remaking it every day)
- Christian life and practices have a lot to bring to the work of remaking the economy

REMAKING THE ECONOMY

Although Joy talks about remaking the economy, reinventing the economy, discovering God’s economy, and stewarding God’s economy, all the terms are used somewhat interchangeably, like roads that take you to the same place. It’s all about creating social change by changing the economy.

As she’s written elsewhere: “Addressing the key issues of our time — poverty, environmental threats, inequality, conflict, disease — requires that we not only work within existing markets to create change, but also that we approach social change by intentionally changing markets.”

The reflexive approaches that most people take when addressing social change don’t include the financial systems, she said.

Joy’s ministry — how she participates in God’s mission — is helping the church to see itself as capable of remaking the economy, bringing us closer to God’s economy.

“There’s this general sense that we know how to change the government, [or at least] we believe we should know how to change the government…and we believe that we should be able to change media [or at least] we believe that somebody should be able to change it, or it should be able to be changed,” she said.

“[But] finance? It’s like this black hole, that people say, ‘can’t change it, don’t understand it.’”

Yet she knows that it can indeed be changed. She’s studied it — she has a Ph.D. in 19th century American history — and she’s been doing it in her own work for the past 15 years.

“We made up the rules of finance, markets, and systems,” she said. “We can change them.”

It’s essential for her to note this work is not about changing people’s personal relationship with money, nor “fixing” the business model of churches, nor tweaking the annual stewardship campaign. It’s about making changes in the whole economic system.

And, the approach to change is broader than simply expanding access to the current economy.

“This is a core thing for us — and even doubly important in our church work,” said
Joy. “There’s a difference between saying, here’s the economic system and I want access to the benefits of it” and actually changing the economy, she said.

“The economic system as it stands right now is not working for very many people, therefore, having it simply expand to work for more isn’t really logical.”

For example, she said, a lot of churches care about payday loans. These short-term, high-interest-rate loans are often used by people who are poor and vulnerable, leading churches to see payday lending as a predatory practice.

“The overarching approach to payday lending within churches is lobbying,” Joy said. She agrees that regulating debt is a good idea, and argues that a better approach involves remaking the economy.

“In my world there are innovators every day coming up with new approaches to payday lending that are alternative financial systems that allow you do actually do the service, because people need payday lending. … Finance can be a tool for social change, and churches can be part of that.”

CLAIMING LAY MINISTRY

Joy’s ministry — how she participates in God’s mission — is helping the church to see itself as capable of remaking the economy, bringing us closer to God’s economy.

“I believe God is already doing this work,” said Joy. “I work every day with a community of people who are reinventing the economy, and I want the church to find them.”

Joy believes there are people in congregations who, in their own businesses or in corporations, are also trying to shape the rules of the economy, though they may not have claimed it or had it recognized as their ministry.

Talking to people in churches about the work, especially as a non-ordained person, has its challenges.

“I think the church has this weird idea that somehow if the leaders of the church and the structure of the church didn’t think it up and implement it, it’s not [valid],” she said.

“I live my day to day life as a lay person trying to tell the church that there is something happening in the world that might be about God’s work. I once offered a diocese 20 million dollars to experiment with a different approach to finance that would let them and communities within the church shift their thinking, and they told me they didn’t have time to think about it.

“I live in these two camps. I’m a lay person not paid for by any churches, not employed by any churches, and they don’t give me any money to do the work that we do to try to change the church, because the church won’t — often — pay for itself to be changed.

“And,” she continues, “I do this every day with an absolute love of the church. It’s hard. We’re in it for the long haul and we’re making huge progress. The good news is we actually do have things that people can go do, and we do have a bunch of churches that are doing bible studies and making loans in their community.

Joy’s congregation, St. Stephen’s in East Haddam, is one of those.

First, they read one of Criterion’s earlier books, Our day to end poverty: 24 ways to make a difference, during one Lent. Later, they worked through the “1K Churches Bible Study” that Criterion developed to help churches think of themselves as “economic beings.” The Study also teaches the churches about five leverage points — ways to intervene in the economy. As a result, the congregation decided to make a two-year loan to a business in their community. The loan is now in its second year.

The Rev. Adam Yates, St. Stephen’s rector, had an “ah-ha” moment while his congregation was working through the material. “I realized finally that our economies, whether personal or corporate, are not at their core about money, they are about relationships,” he said. “Every transaction we make is fundamentally a relational one, and our faith has a lot to say about how we relate to one another. When you think about it this way, then suddenly the way we as individuals and we as the church use our money becomes an opportunity for relationship. It becomes an opportunity to be in right relationship with one another, with the world, and with God.”

THE LONG PATH

Joy says that what Christianity has to offer the most about this work of reinventing, or remaking, the economy is an understanding that there are no quick fixes to healing the brokenness in the world. They know that God can take a long time.

“If there was a quick fix, then God would have done it,” she said.

“We know how complex God’s creation is and how hard it is, even in the pathway to come to understand God,” she said. “Christianity teaches us that … this is a long path, and there is urgency, but we really do have to attend to the whole of creation and not look for the quick outcomes.”

Joy said that despite knowing this, some still ask for “three easy steps to transform the economy and end poverty.” And while...
“Step one, go find God. Step two. Do that again. Step three, try something — and maybe fail. Work with other people, think about your relationships. It’s the stuff that we know how to do as Christians. Just go do it.”

From the Criterion Institute website:

“Criterion provides training and research to equip people of the church and the churches themselves to discover God’s economy and bring their distinctive faith perspectives to tables where the economy is being reinvented to work for all. Change begins at kitchen tables, at congregational tables, at institutional and denominational tables, at the tables of finance and business where Christian men and women have a voice.”

In addition to the Bible study, Criterion Institute now offers a TOOLKIT for Discovering God’s Economy workshop, now scheduled at sites across the country. It is a board-game-like approach to learning about the economy — economic activity; value and analysis; relationships and structures; processes and trusts; and portfolio management — and five leverage points for creating change.

The five leverage points include:

- Shift or expand what enterprises get investments
- Introduce new data or eliminate bias in analysis
- Change the power dynamic through structures and terms
- Change what processes are trusted or who is seen as expert
- Change the benchmarks by which investments are measured

Last summer, Joy Anderson led the trustees of ECCT Donations & Bequests (parish and Missionary Society investment holdings) in a comparable workshop.

Karin Hamilton serves as Canon for Mission Communication & Media for the Episcopal Church in Connecticut.

Through engaging in the process of investing in microbusinesses in the local community, churches will explore their individual and institutional roles as economic actors.

By 2017, the aim is to have churches across the United States investing in their local communities through microloans. Through prayer and discernment, churches will discover their roles as economic beings and participants in the local economy.

1K Churches is an ecumenical Christian initiative to build a base of congregations and individuals committed to discovering God’s Economy and transforming our own.

A congregation or small group becomes engaged by starting a process of Bible study and discernment that helps participants see new ways to connect faith with the economy, finance, and justice in their local communities.

The Bible study ends in action, with the group choosing to make a small loan to a small business in their community in support of a mission concern of the congregation. For some, this will be a transformative experience, giving them courage and confidence to become more active, informed, and faithful actors in shaping the economy over time to more closely resemble God’s economy.

Congregations cannot be handed a single program. We want them to engage in the discernment necessary to figure out how they would want to do this work. … [and] not every congregation will have the same access to capital, the same financial savvy, or the same investment goals.

**Ten areas of social concern; five investment pathways.**

Criterion and 1K Churches has identified ten areas of social concern that are relevant cultural and social issues, and influenced by economic structures. These include Economic Development, Immigration, Veterans, Creation Care, Race, Children, Food/Hunger, Prison Justice, Gender, and Elderly/Aging.

Through 1K, churches will help to build on this framework as they practice discernment and micro-lending in their own contexts.

 Churches can choose from among these five pathways based on the economic relationships that best reflect their own capacity, context, theological commitments and expressions of faith: Peer Lending Host; Mission Partner; Public Witness; “Angel” Investor, and Justice Partner.

For more info contact Dr. Phyllis Anderson at panderson@criterioninstitute.org. Visit them at criterioninstitute.org and on Facebook and Twitter.
Seeing God’s mission in new ways

Bishops’ Fund for Children looking to teach resiliency at Camp Washington

Frances Grandy Taylor

On a still-warm September afternoon, Camp Washington was a hive of activity. Teens wearing helmets whizzed by on a zip line over the lake while some swam and paddled boats in the cool water. Others sat laughing and talking in small groups along the shore.

It was the first annual Youth Festival, an event in a series of steps to redefine the way that the Bishops’ Fund for Children, now with Camp Washington, participates in God’s mission.

“It’s a big party — it’s like a chance for kids across the diocese to just get together and hang out,” said Matt Cornish, the camp’s director, as he stood watching the playful teens. The festival, he said, is just one in a series of events for youth intended to provide camaraderie and foster resiliency.

“It’s a safe and healing place where they know others will accept them for who they are,” said Cornish, who has directed the camp for the past six years. “It’s about learning to be comfortable in their own skin.”

The word resiliency comes up often when speaking to those who have been involved in the effort to refocus the ministry of the Bishops’ Fund for Children, founded over 20 years ago to raise awareness of “children at risk,” and fund programs across the state supporting them, and Camp Washington, a century old summer camp and rustic retreat center in Morris that is part of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut (ECCT).

Rebecca Hays, a member of the Camp Washington board of directors, has been one of those who have been involved seeking a new vision and direction for both organizations.
...we are looking to find a new life for the Bishops’ Fund here at Camp Washington.

Rebecca Hays
The Bishops’ Fund for Children, best known for its annual 5k race fundraiser, provided funds for many organizations with projects aimed at children and youth. Over the years, however, changes in personnel and the needs of the organization and of ECCT led to a decision to change course.

Particularly over the past year, “I believe this is progress...we are looking to find a new life for the Bishops’ Fund here at Camp Washington,” Hays said. That change has led to new programming and a ministry of direct outreach to youth, such as the festival, which brought about 200 campers to Morris for a weekend.

While the structure of both organizations have been refocused, both still aim to help kids at risk.

However, the concept of “at risk” is changing, Hays said. “That term has often been applied to youth living in certain neighborhoods, but the fact is that no matter where you come from, [youth] have the potential to be at risk.”

Hays is also a teacher at an environmental sciences magnet school in Hartford, working with children from diverse backgrounds. “We’re taking that label and turning it in a more positive direction. It’s hugely important in life today to foster resiliency in all kids.”

A series of white boards tacked to outside pillars at the main building ask, “What does Camp Washington mean to you?” The hand-written answers include “An oasis,” “a second home,” “a place of joy and fun,” and, “a safe space.”

Juliana Bojnowski, 18, is a former camper who served as a cabin counselor and received staff training. “It’s like a mini get-away,” she said of the festival. “As staff we learn about what problems we might encounter; the main thing is that every person feels included, that’s a really big thing.”

Bria Lemon Johnson, 17, has been a camper since she was six years old, traveling from the Bronx to attend every year. “Camp Washington became my second home,” said Johnson, who is now a counselor. She was weaving a friendship bracelet while others nearby splashed paint during a messy art project. “It’s a place where you can be yourself; when I was younger I was really shy and it helped bring me out of my shell.”

Bart Geissinger, executive director of Camp Washington, said the festival is just the first in a series of events for youth. An autumn retreat for teens was scheduled for October. Since taking on his position last year, Geissinger worked on creating an environment at the camp that allows the spiritual work to take place. “It needs to be a place of vibrancy, where people feel the Holy Spirit while they are here,” he said. “Everyone that has come here has said there is a palpable change here, something in the air.”

“And we are involving the young people by asking them what they want and need,” he added. “We need them to help us understand what this needs to be in their eyes.”

For more information visit campwashington.org or their Facebook page.

Frances Grandy Taylor is a freelance writer and a former religion writer for the Hartford Courant. She currently works as a peer recovery support specialist in New Britain, CT.
"Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wilderness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life."

John Muir, Our National Parks

On August 25, the National Park Service (NPS) celebrated its centennial with reenactments, parties, Junior Ranger programs, historical tours, and random free admission days. One hundred years ago, the Organic Act of 1916 was proposed and passed, offering a new mission, “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”

Today, destinations such as Yosemite, the Grand Canyon, and Yellowstone National Park average around four million visitors each year. National parks across the country attract an array of visitors, from families on vacation, to retirees in RVs, and millennials on post-graduation road trips.

The current National Park Service campaign and social media movement #FindYourPark has allowed visitors to share their experiences at the parks with their friends and family elsewhere. It has also served as a source of “travel jealousy” for those unable to visit beautiful mountains or islands, and are forced to sit behind artificial wooden desks and stare into the computerized abyss.

Whether you grew up visiting Glacier National Park every year in your family’s minivan, or you constantly stalk Instagram for a digital escape to the Virgin Islands, I am certain that you are cognizant of the beauty that transpires in the national parks. However, you may not know about the many people behind that beauty that make it easier for you to enjoy God’s splendor inside park boundaries.

SEASONAL WORKERS

Rangers are the first park employees that come to mind, as those are the people who greet you at the park entrance and in visitor centers, and you may see rangers walking and working on the trails.

Yet there is another population of employees there: seasonal employees, who live and work inside the parks. I have joined their ranks twice, although with a unique sponsor and distinctive role.

When you visit a park, these men and women, old and young, walk the trails with you during the morning, work in the gift shop or serve you in restaurant in the evening, and sleep inside the park boundaries at night after you leave.

Whether it is due to the desire to leave a common 9-5 desk job for nontraditional work, or a way to escape a difficult relationship or addiction situation, each person has an interesting story behind their national park name badge. Few employees stay for the entire five to eight month season, some only last a few days, many stick around for the bulk of the busy summer months.

It takes a specific mindset to be a seasonal worker. While living conditions vary from park to park, the majority are bunk style dorms with several people to a room and a hall bathroom. Meals are in a small dining area, usually behind the restaurant kitchen. The food rivals that of a public elementary school, and dining ambiance is composed of late employees running to clock in and loud conversations in multiple languages.
Those different languages are due to governmental visa programs such as the J1 Visa. A good number of employees in national parks are students from other parts of the world, most of whom have never visited the states before.

In the park, your sense of time changes: a day feels like a week, and a week feels like a month. This mind-boggling time-warp comes from the intense amount of employee and visitor drama, longer than normal work hours, and the non-stop human contact that happens on a daily basis in the national parks.

On any given work day, a seasonal worker may interact with hundreds of visitors, work eight to 10 hours, hike six miles, and average around four hours of sleep. Community amongst seasonal workers happens at night, when visitors have retreated to their rooms for a full night’s rest, and the Inn’s lobby or parking lot is empty.

With a lack of cell service and internet, seasonal workers must become creative with the excess of free time — if creativity lacks, which it sometimes does, free time is filled up with drinking and partying. For seasonal workers who arrived in a national park to escape alcoholism or other addictions, that can be a risky and dangerous situation.

It is not uncommon for an employee to work a night shift with someone, and arrive to work the next morning only to hear that that person got drunk and made a scene the night before, and was fired.

Seasonal workers come and go from national parks, therefore community is formed fast.

**FADED SPIRITS AND BROKEN HEARTS**

In national parks, employees live and work and play with the same people in a small congested area — it is not for the faint of heart or spirit. And yet, while serving in two national parks (Bryce Canyon and Mt. Rainier) with the organization A Christian Ministry in the National Parks (ACMNP), I found that faded spirits and broken hearts are common amongst seasonal workers.

Since I was in the parks because of a Christian organization, I was immediately labeled “that Christian girl,” or “that religious one.” In the beginning of my summers, people watched what they said around me, walking on eggshells near me, afraid I would judge or condemn them. I was often left out of night time parties or late night hikes, as these events would include drinking and sometimes drugs.

This exclusion would go on until I actually got the chance to sit down with a fellow employee. The conversation usually began with: “So what brought you to the park?” Then I would sit, and I would listen. Most of the time, answers were simple statements, “I want to get paid to be where people pay to go,” “Look at this place, how could I not want to work here,” and “I’m retired, and I want to see the country.”

After more time and deeper conversations, hearts began to open. Regrets, dreams, fears, pride, and anger would begin to pour out. The conversations would sometimes shift — to stories of abuse or abusing, hurt or hurting, abandonment or abandoning.

Each story was more complicated or deeper than the last. I realized that some people who work in national parks are running away from something (a traditional job, age, addiction, or relationships) and attempting to find something else (themselves, a partner, adventure, or something even greater). The majority of the conversations I had with my co-workers involved God, probably because I was the “token Christian” in the park.

“… and that is why my family doesn’t talk to me,” “… and that is why I left the church,” “… and that is why I don’t believe in God.
anymore.” Those were common phrases and topics associated with these late-night conversations, perhaps because there was a need to justify a lack of belief.

But, I wasn’t seeking a justification or reason. I wasn’t there to condemn or judge. I was there to listen and to love, as a peer. I would share in their frustrations with the church, and their questions and doubts about God. I would tell them that the church is human and flawed, that it is ok to question God, and that doubt is a part of a growing relationship with the Divine. Everyone has a unique and different relationship with God/ the Divine/Abba/whatever you want to call this force of omnipotent love above and within us.

It was not my responsibility to influence or thrust my view of God onto my co-workers, even as the labeled Christian in the park. It was my responsibility to love and to listen. These conversations would sometimes end with the comment, “you’re not the normal kind of Christian.”

Normal kind of Christian. This phrase left me puzzled and frustrated — what Christians are being portrayed as normal if listening and loving weren’t the commonly associated qualities?

AN INVITATION

There are many reasons why someone would want to be a seasonal worker in a national park: the natural beauty is mesmerizing, the ability for spontaneous adventure is captivating, and the unique community can be comforting and lasting. However, deeply personal reasons also influence why people choose to live in the excluded and remote areas of the world: as much as it can be a pursuit of something great, it can also be an escape.

The national parks become a nurturing ground and a neutral ground. Ministry in national parks is only possible when there is an intention to love and listen. My invitation and challenge to you, readers, is to engage with and listen to the seasonal workers who serve you the next time you visit a national park.

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REGIONS & REGION MISSIONARIES
CHANGING GEOGRAPHIC ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTION AND ADDING MISSIONARIES

ECCT parishes and worshiping communities had been organized into 14 Deaneries that had a strong administrative function. Overtime, however, most had become non-functional. Parishes and worshiping communities are now organized into six geographic Regions with a missional focus, emphasizing collaboration. In addition the budget of ECCT is supporting a part-time Region Missionary that each Region will hire to support them in their collaborative work including but not limited to Ministry Networks. Deaneries, and all ongoing deanery-run ministries, were invited to reorganize and continue as Ministry Networks* (see section on Ministry Networks).

STATUS
Organizing convocations were held within each Region in the first half of 2016 at which time the Region selected its Mission Council members and identified leaders for the Region and for its Region Missionary Recruitment Team. Deaneries were dissolved as of June 30, 2016 with deaneries responsible for making decisions about existing funds. Missionary Recruitment Teams are completing job descriptions and will be recruiting candidates with the hope to hire in January 2017.

MINISTRY NETWORKS
CHANGING TO RECOGNIZE AND SUPPORT MINISTRY NETWORKS AND INCLUDE THEM IN GOVERNANCE

During its data-gathering phase, TREC-CT members listed all the different groups and committees across ECCT, from canonically required to historical to administrative to newly-emerging grass roots efforts. It was clear this last category was new and there was significant energy around it. Believing that God was behind this new type of organization, TREC-CT named these as Ministry Networks, later defined more precisely as “two or more Episcopalians from two or more parishes who are collaborating together on God’s mission.” There is no outside permission needed to start a Ministry Network. As structured way to support Ministry Networks and the perspective that its members bring, nine seats at the Mission Council were reserved for members of different Ministry Networks. The bishops are to nominate a slate of twice the number to be elected, and Convention will vote.

UPDATE
A Ministry Network Convocation was held in June to listen to people, answer questions, and take names of those who wanted to serve on the Mission Council. Existing ECCT committees were invited to reorganize as Ministry Networks and most have chosen to do so. Historical groups meeting the definition have also claimed Ministry Network status. The office of Mission Collaboration, and the ECCT website, are keeping/posting lists of Ministry Networks and add new ones as known. In June the Executive Council elected a slate of nine from Ministry Networks to serve on the Mission Council in 2016. The Annual Convention will receive a list of 18 nominees and will elect nine members, three for each three-year "class," to start in 2017.

On the ECCT website, episcopalct.org, you’ll find information on the Mission Council, Regions (and Missionaries), and Ministry Networks.
ECCT missional experiments are shifting our focus

2014-2015

**LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE (LDI)**

In 2014, the Episcopal Church in Connecticut (ECCT) decided to undertake an experiment. The bishops and select senior staff invited a few people from several different churches to a training program offered by a group from the Diocese of Massachusetts, built on the community organizing model. Each parish group was asked to identify and complete a small, yet significant, project in less than six months. One group chose to beautify a city park and simultaneously honor the resident veterans; another decided to take a worship service for special-needs children and their families on the road; another hoped to support a neighborhood health clinic’s move into an empty church building; yet another sought to expand a food pantry. Not all succeeded: some never got off the ground and others floundered after launch.

2015 & 2016

**LIVING IN THE GREEN**

The next year, ECCT funded training for a different group of Episcopalians and sent them to a “Living in the Green” program at the Beecken Center of the School of Theology at the University of the South. They, too, were asked to design and implement projects. Building an app for Spanish-language Episcopalians and establishing an interfaith Bible study as a way to address violence in the community were two of those proposed. Again, results were mixed.

The next year, even more Episcopalians from even more parishes took the Living in the Green training and launched projects. This time, people had been more specific and detailed about what they wanted to do and successes include the “Pray First” Ministry Network, with its web presence designed for engagement, prayfirstct.org.

**MISSIONAL CURACIES**

In 2015, ECCT began to explore non-traditional alternatives for its newly ordained clergy. The idea was to match curates looking for non-traditional roles with parishes that provided them the opportunity, with priority given to “new, collaborative projects that advance strategic ventures in God’s mission across ECCT.” As the curacies were missional, the Missionary Society of ECCT provided or assisted with funding. The Rev. Carlos de la Torre has been serving as a missional curate, for example, at first working with unchurched young adults in Stamford and assisting at St. Andrew’s, Stamford; more recently reassigned to New Haven for a similar missional curacy. And, the Rev. Jane Hale, a transitional deacon, is currently embarking on a collaborative initiative between three parishes in the Northeast Region.

2016 & BEYOND

**LIVING LOCAL: JOINING GOD**

Starting in late 2016 and going into 2017 and beyond, another ECCT-wide experiment will launch with three other dioceses in The Episcopal Church: Southwestern Virginia, East Tennessee, and Maine – in an initiative designed and overseen by the Missional Church Network, whose leaders include Dwight Zscheile, Craig Van Gelder, and Alan Roxburgh. The clergy and congregations of a small number of parishes in each diocese (one in each Region in ECCT) will try out a new way of engaging God in the neighborhood in an initiative known as Living Local: Joining God. (Canon for Mission Collaboration the Rev. Tim Hodapp invited people to learn more about it at an event in West Hartford in September.) In each diocese, a small group of lay leaders in the selected parishes will study Scripture together and learn how to design, conduct, and evaluate local “experiments,” while the clergy of those parishes will form their own learning group, in part to learn how to support the work of the lay leaders. Each diocese will have a diocesan team who, with the team of bishops, also form a learning group to discuss how a judiciary may be re-ordered to support the ministries of the parishes where this new way of “being church” is being explored and, hopefully, sustained.

WHAT’S GOING ON

In two words: missional experiments. Whether large or small, they are in our present and future. Those referenced above have been and are being led by the Canon for Mission Collaboration with the bishops and others. These ECCT leaders also know, from parish visits, that many clergy and congregations are also trying out new ideas and conducting missional experiments. The trip by a Cathedral congregation to join Trinity, Lime Rock for a bilingual worship service and conversation about Latino neighbors is just one example.

A NEED OF THE TIMES

God is calling the church into new ways of engaging the world and living the Gospel. In his easy-to-read and practical book published in 2015, Joining God, Remaking Church, Changing the World, missiologist and author Alan Roxburgh writes that, “…I am convinced that God’s Spirit is using the disruptive unraveling facing so many congregations and denominations in order to call these churches to fundamentally change their focus and attention.” He asks people to move from “church questions” to “God questions.”

“We need to lay down and turn away from questions about how to fix the church or make it effective again and embrace a different kind of question,” he writes. “How do we discern what God is doing ahead of us in our neighborhoods and communities and join with God there?”

Missional experiments are a way to shift focus to the mission of God. Learning, studying, and prayer, combined with designing and carrying out experiments, helps people to think and act in different ways. It allows people to “try on” approaches without the burden of extra structure and without the requirement for success. Creating a journey forward together is both exciting and risky.

For more information about any of the past, current, and future ECCT missional experiments, and to share your parish missional experiments, contact the office of the Rev. Tim Hodapp, Canon for Mission Collaboration, by emailing Gigi Leackfeldt, gleackfeldt@episcopalct.org.
Following Jesus
On the road to Emmaus
Jesse Zink

Followers of Jesus are people who, having encountered God in Christ, turn around and find in these places of pain God’s redeeming love.
One of my favorite Bible stories about following Jesus takes place on the first Easter Sunday. Jesus has risen from the dead — but not everyone believes it yet. Two followers of Jesus — one named Cleopas, and the other not named — set out from Jerusalem for a place called Emmaus. You can understand why they might want to leave the city. For the past several years, they’ve been following an incredible teacher. They’ve found his teachings compelling. They’ve been in awe of the miracles he has performed. They’ve found hope in the way he has challenged religious leaders of the day. Just a week before, this teacher — Jesus of Nazareth — rode triumphantly into Jerusalem and was hailed by the people as the son of the great king, David. So moved were they by him, these followers of his thought he might be the long-promised savior who would restore Israel as a kingdom.

And then, suddenly, it was over. Rather than being a place of great triumph, Jerusalem had become a place of incredible pain. Rather than redeeming Israel, Jesus had been put to death in the most shameful and degrading way possible, on a cross. And so these two followers of Jesus run away, fleeing Jerusalem and heading for some place new.

I understand this response. Like many other people, there are moments and places in my life that I associate with pain, sadness, shame, and trauma. Some people experience such pain in relationship with another that they find they need to avoid that person. Others find it difficult to visit certain places because of the memories associated with it. When faced with such memories of sorrow, it is a very human response to do as these two followers of Jesus did — run away, run very, very far away. Although it is a human response, it is not, in my experience, a very successful or sustainable one. No matter how far I try to run, that pain will not go away.

As Cleopas and his friend are running away from Jerusalem, they meet a stranger on the road. They talk with him about their great sadness, about how they had hoped Jesus would be the one who would redeem Israel. They tell him that a couple of women are claiming to have seen an empty tomb and are reporting the incredible claim that Jesus might be alive. But they haven’t been able to verify that and don’t really believe it for themselves.

The stranger starts talking to them, encouraging them to look again at the stories of the Messiah in the Old Testament. He points out that what had happened to Jesus had actually been foretold in Scripture. Not surprisingly, this does little to cheer up the travelers. I understand. When I’ve experienced great pain, I don’t want to be told, “There, there, it will be alright. You’re just looking at things the wrong way.” I want someone to say, “Oh, that’s awful!”

As the day comes to an end, Cleopas and his friend invite the stranger to stay with them. When it comes time to eat, the stranger takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them. Suddenly they see who this stranger is: Jesus, the one on whom they had pinned their hopes. Knowing it is Jesus with them, Cleopas and his friend see their encounter in an entirely new light: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” The presence of the resurrected Jesus has made them come alive in a new way. The power of this encounter is demonstrated by what they do next: they get up from the table and, though it is by now the middle of the night and not a safe time to be traveling on the road, they set out back to Jerusalem. What had in the morning been a place of pain and despair from which they wanted to flee has now been redeemed. Pain and suffering have been transformed into new hope.

The phrase “following Jesus” implies movement. This encounter on the road to Emmaus helps me understand what kind of movement that is. Our natural instinct is to move — quickly! — away from places of pain. Following Jesus, however, means that we turn around. Our encounter with the risen Christ makes us into people who seek out those places of shame and humiliation in our lives and the lives of others and move towards them, able to see them in a new light.

For Cleopas and his friend, the most significant moment of encounter with Jesus occurred when he sat down and ate with them. We mark this moment at every celebration of the Eucharist, the time when we give thanks that Jesus is a God who meets us in our pain and turns us around. Before we celebrate the Eucharist, we confess our sins and make peace with our neighbor. The first is a chance to acknowledge to God those places where we feel distant from God’s love. The second is a moment to ask ourselves who in our community we feel distant from and with whom we have impaired relationship. It is these moments that help us begin to see in our lives where God is calling us to turn around.

No matter how hard we try to ignore it, forget about it, or run away, there will always be pain and suffering in our lives and in the lives of all God’s children. Followers of Jesus are people who, having encountered God in Christ, turn around and find in these places of pain God’s redeeming love.

THE CHURCH’S TEACHINGS FOR A CHANGING WORLD

The Church’s Teachings for a Changing World is a new series of books from Episcopal thinkers and leaders designed to introduce the Christian faith and Episcopal Church.

Five books have been published so far, with a few more in the works:

- Stephanie Spellers and Eric Law | The Episcopal Way (2014): an introductory volume to the Episcopal Church
- Winnie Varghese | Church Meets World (2016): social engagement with a hurting world
- Scott Bader-Saye | Formed by Love (2016): an Episcopal approach to Christian ethics

All are published by the Morehouse imprint of Church Publishing and are available from a wide range of booksellers.

Jesse Zink is a priest of the Diocese of Western Massachusetts and the director of the Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide in Cambridge, UK and author, most recently, of A Faith for the Future (Morehouse, 2016), from which this is adapted.
From many hands
An altar for convention

Adam Yates

Coming down the long driveway, the woodshop is the first thing that comes into view. Though it looks like an ordinary small barn, the sign emblazoned “Tom’s Woodshop” assures me that this is the right place. Its front doors thrown open wide, I see propped up against one wall the object that instigated this whole trip.

Standing next to it is Tom Cottrell, the woodshop’s namesake. With a smile and a hug, he welcomes me into his brightly lit shop. Tom hand built many of the pieces of furniture that adorn their adjacent home, from towering bed frames to TV cabinets that look like colonial jam cupboards. Indeed, even the woodshop itself is outfitted with his handiwork — rows of neat handmade cabinetry helping corral the countless bits of hardware and tools into functional order. Tom takes his work on the road, too. Next to the main door of the shop stands a shelf filled with the mobile workshop he takes with him when he does cabinetry work for contractors on occasion.

What makes Tom’s eyes light up, though, is the work he has done for churches. Tom has designed and built many different pieces of liturgical furniture — ambos, tables, and more — each a work of art, for a handful of churches through the years. It is in these projects that Tom finds his hobby and art form coming together with his own spirituality. Woodworking is a talent given by God, Tom shares, and he feels a deep need to use that gift, and to use it to give back to God. “Working for church projects, it is rewarding because you know it will be a part of the worship,” Tom explained, “you know others will use it in their encounter with God.”

Since early June, Tom has been putting his skill and his faith to work on a new project, one that he had never undertaken before. For the past five months, Tom has been designing, refining, and building an altar for use in the worship service at the Celebration of the Spirit at this year’s convention.

Though one is informed by the other, tables and altars are not the same animal. Even for an altar, however, the requirements for this particular piece are unusual. The altar must be portable and easily broken into component pieces. At the same time, it must be solid and sturdy, giving the appearance of a substantial presence. These two competing needs have to be kept in balance. If it is too light and portable, it will look like a flimsy card table. If it is too substantial, it will be unmovable.
Over several months, Tom worked on design ideas, going back and forth with the Rev. Ron Kolanowski, a member of the Convention Planning Team and the Worship Planning Team. From this iterative work, along with many nighttime “Aha!” moments — some of the best design inspirations Tom attributes to these epiphanies from the Holy Spirit — a final design emerged. Tom spreads out across a nearby work table sheets of paper and sketches that show the evolution of the altar. Some of the drawings are little more than small sketches on wisps of paper. Others are drawn with bold and immaculately straight lines with a level of detail that betrays the complexity of the deceptively simple design.

Standing next the scattered papers is a piece of the final project: one half of the altar top that, when fully assembled, will be a square that is five feet on a side, giving 25 square feet of space for the bread and wine necessary to commune 2,000 Episcopalians in worship.

The altar is made from red oak, a species that is commonly used in church furniture and which Tom feels is especially suited to this duty. But it is not just any red oak. The wood in the altar comes from a tree that once stood on the very ground where the altar is now being built. Tom had to cut down the tree to make room for the woodshop, but it was not discarded. He took the trunk to a local wood mill and had it rough cut into massive timbers. For the better part of the next decade, they sat slowly drying in the upper room of the wood shop. Tom shows off the few remaining pieces of that tree that are still waiting for a project — large pieces of wood with roughly grained surfaces. Most of their siblings have been given to the altar.

The altar draws upon the Shaker style, with clean lines and an airy appearance. Through some tricks of carpentry, it gives the impression of being substantial while actually being light enough to be easily assembled and disassembled. The whole altar comes apart in four pieces — two for the top surface and two leg units. At convention, the altar will be assembled in its full size. However, for flexibility in the future, it can also be assembled into two smaller, rectangular altars. While they will live at The Commons in Meriden, the altar(s) will be available for ECCT gatherings or region convocations. This will be an altar that serves our whole church for years to come.

What makes this a truly wonderful piece are the many small details evident in its craftsmanship. Paneling on the leg units are adorned with a cutout of the ECCT logo while serving the purpose of hiding the altar’s locking mechanisms. If you closely examine the wood of the altar, you will notice tiny worm holes from the insects that once made their home in the tree from which this altar is built. If you get close enough to see the surface of the altar, then you will see thing inlays of mahogany that create an impression of a cross when the altar is fully assembled. The wood for this inlay itself comes from an old pew from St. Mark’s Chapel in Storrs, CT — Tom’s home parish. All of it comes together to give the sense that this altar is something real. It has as much story and character as the people who will gather around it for the very first time.

It is why this altar is so fitting for our annual convention. For our convention is made possible by the work of many hands from all over ECCT. And our gathering is the coming together of many stories, told in many different voices. Our altar, our table linens, our choir, our art installation, even the resolutions over which we will deliberate on Saturday, all of them have a story. All of them represent the ideas, the imaginations, the voices, and the work of many hands belonging to countless people.

Working for church projects is rewarding because you know it will be a part of the worship, you know others will use it in their encounter with God.

Tom Cottrell

Adam Yates is the rector of St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church, East Haddam and also serves as the Episcopal Church of Connecticut Secretary of Convention. This article was originally written for the God’s Mission blog on episcopalct.org and is reprinted here with permission. For a video of Tom in his shop talking about building the altar, visit youtube.com/ctepiscopal.
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