

# VESTRY PAPERS



EPISCOPAL  
CHURCH FOUNDATION  
**Learn. Lead. Give.**

*To inform, inspire and affirm Episcopal leaders in their work*

## Feed the Poor...or Fix the Roof?

by Dan Austin

There wasn't a cloud in the sky, but it was raining at St. Tiffany's-in-the-Fields. Inside. From the leaky Sunday school bathroom above to the parish hall floor below, the water, a trickle at first, had become a stream.

The deluge didn't affect the nearby furnace boiler. It had stopped working during the Christmas Eve service, when the outside temperature hovered around 18 degrees.

The sexton had quit too, but not because of the water or the furnace. Tom simply couldn't live on the pittance St. Tiffany's was able to pay.

Aghast, St. Tiff's vestry sprang into action. Bold steps against this literal sea of troubles were required, and the vestry's financial engineers (this was St. *Tiffany's* after all) had a bold solution: cut the outreach budget, including the diocesan pledge ("Does anybody know what they *do* with that money?") and bring the resulting savings home, where charity is said to begin anyhow, and where the plumbing needs repair.

Hyperbole? Perhaps a little. Apocryphal? No doubt.

### Maintenance vs. Mission

Most everyone who sits on a parish vestry has experienced, or will soon, a variation of the dilemma faced by the good folks at our fictional St. Tiff's. Maintenance vs. mission is one way the issue is framed, and it can lead to some lively parish annual meetings. Do we keep God's House in good repair and appearance — honoring holy ground, enhancing worship and attracting newcomers, not to mention the budget balm of their pledges — or do we follow Christ's commandment to feed the poor, care for the sick, clothe the naked and otherwise seek justice and mercy for someone other than ourselves?

It's at bottom a phony debate, but one that reoccurs as often as the liturgical calendar changes. And as one who has witnessed more than one brouhaha over attempts to cure parish budget deficits by cutting back on outreach, I know such arguments can suck the spiritual life out of a congregation, not to mention make enemies out of friends and cause rectors to wish they had gone to business school.

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**This Issue:  
Creative Outreach**

Circulation 24,500

*What is it about outreach that energizes a congregation? Whether it is chopping vegetables for a soup kitchen or building a house for the poor, hands-on work seems to bring people together, helping "the helpers" almost as much as those we seek to serve. Maybe God meant it to be that way. Maybe the real gift of reaching out to others is that we ourselves no longer remain the same.*



Kym Hall, St. Luke's on the Lake, Austin, TX

Hands-on mission and outreach efforts often spark vitality in congregations.



*Vestry Papers won six awards at the recent Episcopal Communicators' conference in Virginia Beach, including three awards for General Excellence in the following categories: Overall Excellence, Writing, and Series of Articles on a Single Topic. Doing Holy Business: The Best of Vestry Papers, available from Church Publishing, also won a General Excellence award. In the last five years, Vestry Papers has won twenty-five national awards for high standards in religious journalism.*

*Next Issue:  
Christian Hospitality*

## *Giving Away the Church*

by Charles Hendrix

"Giving from Our Abundance" sounds like a tired stewardship campaign slogan, but what might happen if a church did this? What might be the result of giving away something of great value, even while being limited in other areas? A congregation that has been blessed with gifts must share.

In Minnetonka, Minnesota, an affluent suburb of Minneapolis, the need was to replace or upgrade the local food shelf, Intercongregation Communities Association (ICA), which worked out of a condemned house. There was no privacy for clients and food storage space was limited. When the Rev. Jim Cook, former rector at the Episcopal Parish of St. David's, toured the ICA building, he was embarrassed; he could not accept that this was the way the community treated people going through hard times. Great things have happened from this tour, both for ICA and for St. David's.

By early 2004 ICA had looked for a practical and affordable building for four years, but was unsuccessful. The mayor of Minnetonka had been helpful to ICA, speaking to member congregations and urging them to find a solution. This was the situation into which the Rev. Jim Cook stepped with St. David's.

St. David's has served the Minnetonka area since 1950 from four acres of donated land. Average attendance is about 200, and there are about 200 pledges; growth in both has been steady since the late 1990's. Outreach has long been a hallmark of the parish. Some projects have been supported for decades, and new ones are continually tried.

### **Blessed with land**

Could this parish which was blessed with land, but which always felt limited by money, be part of a solution for the food shelf? The wardens began discernment. Was sharing property going too far? Would this move inhibit future growth opportunities? Since St. David's was struggling to meet the budget, was it fiscally prudent? The wardens decided that none of these were stoppers.

Before taking the proposal to the vestry, Cook and the wardens evaluated what was necessary for this project. They sounded out church leaders for support and talked with food shelf leaders, who had looked for a building on practical, affordable sites and were unsuccessful.

Cook had been talking for some time with parishioners who might be challenged by a legacy gift. He found a couple, Judie and Mark Jones, lifelong residents of Minnetonka, longtime parishioners, and volunteers for ICA. They agreed to fund the shell of the building; ICA agreed to give an equal amount to finish and landscape the building.

### **Energy and determination**

With these four key elements in place the wardens proposed to the vestry that St. David's build a food shelf building for ICA. The idea was well received, with little dissent. The long range implications of the project did concern the vestry. Over several months the vestry came to a clear decision: the will of the parish was to find a way to house ICA, an important ministry of the

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Kym Hall, St. Luke's on the Lake, Austin, TX

**Equity sweat — including time, talent and treasure — builds both muscles and faith.**

# Feed the Poor...or Fix the Roof?

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Parish outreach, the willful and cheerful giving of a parish's time, talent and treasure to people and organizations outside the parish walls, separates our congregations from social clubs. In parable after parable, Christ either hints, suggests or, in some cases, demands that we reach beyond ourselves and our own needs and wants, and help those less fortunate.

Christ never said, don't fix the parish roof. Christ said, think of others first — do unto them as you would have them do unto you — and the roof (or the leaky Sunday school bathroom) will be taken care of soon enough. In Matthew 6:33, for instance, Jesus says it this way: *"But strive first for the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well."*

Put another way, parish outreach is how parishioners learn to practice the Christian faith by making that proverbial leap of faith, and by trusting in God first.

## Faith as a line item

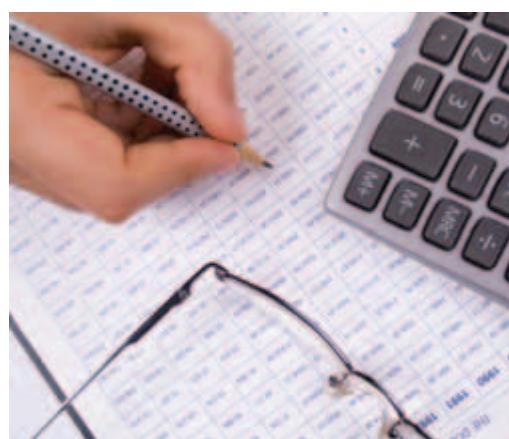
I once served on the vestry of a parish suddenly beset by hard economic times — the local industry had collapsed — and the threatened loss of pledge income had sent us back to the budget, red pencils in hand. The alternatives were all awful: cut outreach, cut maintenance, cut salaries. In the end, we prayed, and then we introduced a new line item to our revenue budget: "Faith." This figure represented the difference between our projected lower pledge income and our current expenses.

Our budget thus "balanced," we prayed some more and launched an outreach program aimed at helping families whose breadwinners were losing their jobs. Our average pledge did decline, but the loss was largely offset by the number of new pledges attracted to our now visible community of faith.

Thus, to the vestry at St. Tiff's, and to any others who might be wrestling with maintenance vs. mission issues, some advice:

- **Connect the dots.** Outreach, whether funding a local women's shelter, organizing a food pantry, or pledging support for diocesan programs, is a teaching opportunity no parish leadership should pass up. That your parish reaches out to others in a significant way also can be a compelling story at Stewardship Campaign time, and a strong answer to the question, "why give?"

- **Set an aggressive goal, and stick to it.** Giving away 50 percent of pledge income through outreach programs is a typical "stretch" goal: it's breathtaking, gets attention, and is an unequivocal statement about what your parish leadership thinks is truly important.
- **Start somewhere, and commit to improvement.** If you've been budgeting 10% of pledge income for outreach, try 11% next year. And so on.



- **Don't backslide.** That sends a message too, and there's nothing Christian about it.
- **Pick outreach programs that are visible, understandable, and give parishioners the opportunity to respond with time and talent as well as treasure.** A homeless shelter or soup kitchen staffed with parish help, clothing drive to which all can contribute, and social justice ministries that need funds and volunteers are some examples. These don't have to be local: witness the many parishes that have sent volunteers into Katrina-ravaged areas in the past year.
- **Get the parish youth involved.** The idealism and energy of the young is not to be wasted, certainly not by a church!
- **Be responsible.** When giving away money, make sure that at least 80 percent of the money is going to those served, not to administration or marketing. Think about impact: Sometimes, one gift of \$2,500 will make more of a difference in your community than ten gifts of \$250.

Dan Austin is a board member of the Episcopal Church Foundation and worships at St. George's Episcopal Church in Maplewood, New Jersey, where mission and maintenance currently live in harmony.



Nice link between faith and action at Grace St. Paul's Church in Tucson, Arizona:

"At Grace St. Paul's, part of our mission is to call people to change the world. We exemplify this mission through action in the community, and we enrich our lives by helping those in our community of church and world who are in need. Our outreach is grounded in our faith, and our faith demands our outreach...We invite you to join us in prayer and action."



*We spotted this rather creative invitation while browsing parish websites in the Diocese of Maryland: "We have many areas on our property that need maintaining. Through our Adopt-a-Spot program you too can have your own spot to take care of throughout the year. Not much time is needed and by working together, we can keep our grounds looking beautiful. Please call the Parish Office..."*

## Giving Away the Church

*continued from page 2*

church since ICA's founding. The food shelf fit within the current mission plan and there was energy, even determination, for the project.

The vestry faced many decisions on the project. Some were easy — would the value of what St. David's was giving to ICA count against the diocesan apportionment? The consensus was that the Bishop would not agree. The terms of the lease, the lifeblood of the relationship, were hammered out delicately. The length of the lease, who was responsible for maintenance, hours of operation, and other obligations were considered. A vestry covering the spectrum of the congregation was valuable. Cautious voices pointed out pitfalls, and gung ho voices urged finding a solution. Both were essential.

Communication with the parish was critical. All discussions and decisions were as transparent as possible. Great decisions were being made; there was no reason not to share information. Vestry members were urged to listen constantly to the congregation.

Another element came into view — the neighbors. St. David's sits on a cul-de-sac. Over the years the church property has become surrounded by residents who like a quiet street, except for Sunday mornings. They became fearful at the thought of traffic, and perhaps worse, the types of people drawn to a food shelf. The city urged that the neighbors be consulted. Meetings were painful, but beneficial. The neighbors forced the planners to consider the details, making the project better by their demands.

### Problems were solved

The project took off. Many church members donated professional skills. From lawyers to architects to developers to public relations, the parish and the project profited from wide participation. People with the right skills were in the right positions to solve problems.

By December 2005 the plans were drawn and the parish had affirmed the vestry's decision for the project. The City Council approved the plans in March 2006. ICA moved into the 10,000 square-foot building in March 2007. Staff and volunteers relish the privacy to

interview clients — who arrive on an average of every fifteen minutes five days a week — the warehouse space to store products efficiently, and the aura of the building which says to clients: "We care about you."

St. David's has changed from this project: The parish broke through the fear of limitations. We continually refer to the ICA Center at St. David's as a signature mission.



St. David's Episcopal Church, Minnetonka, MN

Ground is broken for a food shelf building at St. David's in Minnetonka, Minnesota.

It is a gift to the community which also says something to the community about the parish. In order to keep up with our new neighbor we have begun a capital campaign to spiff up our building.

We have also begun the transition process to find a new rector, as the Rev. Jim Cook has assumed a new post. We lost a rector who urged us to take on a huge project, but we gained a sense of accomplishment in completing it. A church which prides itself on its outreach efforts gets to give what it has in abundance. In this case, it was land. In return, we have a newfound drive for more of God's work.

*Charles Hendrix is senior warden at the Episcopal Parish of St. David's in Minnetonka, Minnesota. Jon Tuttle, project manager, also contributed to this article.*

# Outreach: Getting Started #101

by Bob Runkle

We have been the Church Gathered,  
We are now the Church Dispersed.  
Remember, Wherever you go, Christ goes.  
Whatever you do, Christ does.  
If someone asks what your church is like, tell  
them "I am what my church is like."  
If someone asks what your church does, tell  
them "My church does what I do."  
  
Remember, you may well be the only  
authentic contact someone has with Jesus Christ  
because they will not come to church but you  
can bring the church to them.

Attributed to former U.S. Senate Chaplain  
Richard Halverson

If you learn this message, you can do  
anything you choose in the community of  
social justice and outreach ministries!

But what if you are on the vestry and there  
is not much interest in outreach? What if  
your congregation used to have an outreach  
ministry but does no longer? What if you've  
never been involved in outreach but have  
discovered a need within your community?

## Get passionate

An effective social justice and outreach  
program can be created by a small group  
who has a passion for these ministries, in  
a very short period of time. A supportive  
environment created by a willing clergy  
person and a behind-the-scenes vestry  
member can make the program even more  
effective. At least one vestry member  
needs to be a passionate believer in outreach  
ministry activities, as this provides a built-in  
communications tool for the team.

## Assess the local needs

Key to success in starting a new outreach  
program will be careful observation, fact  
gathering and presentation of conclusions.  
Realizing an unmet need is a great way to  
start. If things are not so apparent, interview  
members of the community (city council,  
mayor, governing body members or folks  
who've lived in the area a long time). Find  
at least one cohort to challenge your  
thoughts and summarize gathered data.

After you talk to people, you should have  
the names of organizations that are effective,  
some which may already be addressing  
that need you saw. Talk to their leaders  
and keep good notes. Would our volunteers  
be able to jump right in or would they need  
to help raise funds before starting? Would  
staff be available to help manage volunteers  
or would we need to devote time to that?

Will their philosophy merge with our  
faith structure?  
  
Summarize the research and your  
decision-making process so that you can  
present this to the rest of the vestry. If your  
case holds the vestry's attention, collect  
names to invite to a planning meeting. If you  
have only one real recommendation, you  
might consider including a representative at  
your first meeting to talk about the needs.

## Welcome new energy

Many congregations change over time.  
Neighborhoods change, clergy change,  
people move away. For one or more reasons  
a congregation that once had an active,  
meaningful outreach program may become  
very inner-directed. If new members arrive  
with a passion for outreach, for doing  
something for others, or with a drive to help  
those less fortunate arrive, they can become  
the catalyst for change. Having a vestry and  
clergy tuned to inviting and nurturing new  
ideas to surface will help!

## Define measurable goals

Once a new direction is selected for the  
outreach efforts, the team needs to define  
goals for the first year that are really  
achievable and measurable. Figure out how  
to recruit team members, how to educate  
people about this need (newsletters,  
bulletins, tons of photos, bulletin boards,  
videos, web site messages — you name it,  
will work).

Success will happen if people see the needs  
and understand them, if the team is seen  
having fun, if the results are shared with  
the congregation, and if the activities are  
well planned and completed on time.  
Given that people learn and understand in  
different ways, tell the story in multiple  
ways. A really effective method can be a  
"client" who will tell how your congregation  
has made a difference, even to the point of  
changing lives.



*Eternal life is no doubt the key reward for the Christian, but also consider plaques, trophies and scholarships when motivating parishioners. Start an annual award program for your two most involved young people. Or suggest that parents buy a children's Bible with 365 stories in it and present a small trophy to those children who read all the way through (educating the parents as well). And occasionally surprise an adult, or an adult outreach group, with a certificate for work well done.*

*Bob Runkle is a lay outreach leader at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. With service on four different vestries, he has started major outreach projects in every parish he has attended — most recently in parishes in the dioceses of Chicago and Maryland. On May 12, he was awarded the first annual "Agitator's Award" by St. Luke's, complete with a standing ovation from the congregation.*



*Vestry Papers is looking for some good pictures of congregations at work. Submit them (high resolution, 300 dpi, on a CD) to Toni Daniels at the Episcopal Church Foundation (address on back). While we can't print all of them, we'll share as many as possible in our ongoing effort to keep vestries connected with one another.*

*What does your congregation do for others in Jesus' name? There may be a food basket at the front door of your church. Or there may be an occasional rummage sale, with proceeds going to help the poor. But chances are your congregation — through its past efforts and ongoing contributions — is doing more than you think. Knowing your history is helpful in terms of planning your future.*

## *Faith in Action: A Parish Audit*

### **The Past**

- History:** What is your outreach history? Name ten things that have been accomplished through the direct involvement of your congregation.
- Member outreach:** Members often engage in outreach quietly, particularly philanthropy, in your community and state, diocese and overseas. What have your members, on their own, accomplished over the years?
- Focus:** Are there broad fields (eg chemical dependency, refugee resettlement, etc.) that have made a real difference in your congregation's identity?
- Impact:** How did specific outreach efforts affect your congregation? Did pledging go up or down? Did energy ebb or flow? What can be learned from those past efforts?
- The personal touch:** Have those who are active in outreach give a five-ten minute talk on what inspires them, why they serve, and what they have learned.

### **The Present**

- Your total effort in labor:** How much hands-on work is being done in the community, or onsite, in terms of volunteer hours?
- Your total effort dollar wise:** How much actually goes OUT for current projects (including your diocesan assessment) by both your congregation and individual members? Include funds donated through budgets, endowments and special collections. If you are providing free, or reduced-rate space onsite for community programs, project a fair market rental value.
- Your outreach focus:** If you have an outreach committee, is it an avenue for bringing life and new energy to the congregation? Or an obstacle that new interests must maneuver through? Those broad fields that made a real difference in your congregation's identity — are they still the vital need, or past glories that need to be honored, but moved on from or refreshed?
- What is the Good News** about what you are currently doing? The range of ages involved in service and outreach projects? Are people having fun? (It's not required, but a light heart certainly can help.) How many people are being assisted because of your Christian commitment?

### **The Future**

With an eye to the demographics of your parish and the needs of your community...

- Share the audit:** Let people know the Good News of what you have done and are currently doing.
- "Blue sky" it:** Take fifteen minutes at a vestry meeting or a retreat and brainstorm — recording all ideas without criticism — of outreach projects that have occurred to people as a result of the audit. Then set the list aside.
- Build a list:** Ask the congregation for their ideas, and add them to the list.
- Pray and wait:** At the next vestry meeting, share the list. Pray, asking for God's guidance. Then move onto other business.
- Take a step forward:** At the next meeting, identify three outreach priorities for the year ahead, (including at least one new effort) and three that will bear watching for the "back burner." Commission someone to shepherd each. Step out in faith that the Holy Spirit will guide you. Stay open.

# Outreach Sparks Optimism, Vitality

by Lindsay Hardin Freeman

It used to be just a myth: Do something for someone else and you'll have less time to think about your own problems.

A myth no longer; evidence from a survey of church leaders in Minnesota points to the following truth: Episcopalians who engage in mission practices are much more hopeful about the state of the church, more likely to know their spiritual gifts and to use them, and more confident in proclaiming the good news of God in Christ.

"It's the finding that trumps almost all the others," says Ron Mattross, a University of Minnesota researcher who helped design and analyze the survey as part of a new mission strategy process in the Diocese.



Episcopalians who are engaged in outreach are more hopeful about the state of the Church.

Is the outreach some faraway project in a war-torn nation? Sometimes. But more common are simple ministries such as visiting the sick and serving the poor, say those surveyed.

## **"We just feel blessed"**

And perhaps it is the simplicity of such efforts that inspires both an optimism and vitality, whether the effort comes from a large parish or a small one, urban or rural or suburban.

Pat Stout, the treasurer of Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Shawnee, Oklahoma, is one of about five parishioners who is deeply involved in outreach. When interviewed, she was preparing for a regular breakfast at the church — to which 92 people came the last time — that supports Project SAVE, a program for abused women and children.

The group also sponsors a Ugandan postgraduate student in his studies overseas.

Why the effort? "We just feel blessed ourselves and we want to give back."

## **Outreach is essential to the faith**

The same kind of determination exists at many Episcopal congregations, including Grace Cathedral in San Francisco.

"Outreach is essential to the living out of our faith," says Will Scott, associate pastor. "We are constantly inviting people to be formed as Christians through outreach, knowing that in the sending out we find our identity and do the work God has given us to do."



*"Hey, move over an little, would ya?" Try this for a simple gesture of hospitality on Sunday morning: slide over in the pew, leaving some open seats near the aisle. Those running a little late and newcomers who have searched for parking won't have to climb over the old-timers to get a seat.*

Widely known for its extensive mission practices, Grace opens its doors with other area churches for the homeless; staffs local organizations with volunteers, sponsors a "stitching ministry" and a "night ministry" in which clergy and laity go out to serve the homeless, and prepares meals for those who have little.

"The greatest part of that is cooking and chopping vegetables," says Smith, "and sitting down and having a meal together."

That sense of community seems to be integral to outreach efforts across the church — whether it be a youth mission trip, wrapping gifts for the poor at Christmas or collecting money to dig a new well in sub-Saharan Africa. And yes, whatever the project, there often seems to be a common denominator: fun.

"We have a lot of fun," says Pat Stout from Oklahoma. "And if we didn't, we probably wouldn't do it."



#### **ECF's Mission**

To strengthen the leadership and financial capabilities of Episcopal congregations, dioceses and related organizations to pursue their mission and ministry.



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## *Reading Corner*

"Give me a little more of that Jello salad, would ya?"

"Wow. Never knew you could do so much with Tater Tots."

"Hey, dinner here wouldn't be the same without Darlene's hot dish."

How does one of the most meaningful, and repeated events in churches — that of sitting down for a meal together — affect mission and outreach? Significantly, says author John Koenig and General Theological Seminary professor in *Soul Banquets: How Meals Become Mission in the Local Congregation*, new this summer from Morehouse Publishing.

"What I want to get across with *Soul Banquets* is my conviction that nearly all the meals connected with our congregational life already are, or can become deeper experiences of God's transforming presence than we now imagine," he says. "For me, the term "soul" points to our inmost self, our psychosomatic center. That's where the power of the Spirit wells up in us to strengthen us for discipleship, and our gatherings at the table in Jesus' name provide perfect occasions for this. Frequently through our mealtime exchanges, the Spirit leads us most directly into new gifts and ministries.

"Far more than we realize, meals become mission. By this I mean that they issue in



## *Soul Banquets*

*How Meals Become  
Mission in the  
Local Congregation*

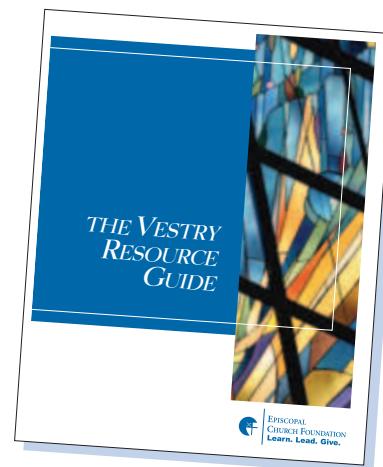
JOHN KOENIG

acts of love which both draw from and advance the very missio dei, God's plan for the world's redemption. Even when we're just sharing donuts and coffee after a Sunday service, Christ's presidency in our midst can turn our gatherings into times of abundance, gratitude, and a grander sense of purpose."

In *Soul Banquet*, Koenig draws on fifty interviews with church leaders, many of them Episcopalians. "All kinds of table settings find their way into this book. My hope is that this small volume will offer special help for the maturing of our Christian identities, and above all our missionary identities. Available from Morehouse Publishing (800-877-0012) or [www.morehousepublishing.org](http://www.morehousepublishing.org).

*We are pleased to announce  
that the new edition of  
The Vestry Resource Guide  
will be available in July:*

- Newly expanded, updated, and redesigned to be user-friendly, *The Vestry Resource Guide* is for both first time vestry members as well as seasoned members who need to review canon law of the Episcopal Church and the responsibilities of a vestry.
- It is a collaboration of contributors and advisors from all around the Episcopal Church.
- The new edition combines the three previous volumes and examines topics such as the ministry of the vestry, leading in a community of faith, origins of conflict, stewardship and navigating transitions in clergy leadership.



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If you are interested in learning more about *The Vestry Resource Guide*, please visit our website at [www.EpiscopalFoundation.org](http://www.EpiscopalFoundation.org). To order a copy (or copies) please call Forward Movement Publications at 800-543-1813. If you are visiting the Episcopal Church Center, it is available at the Catalyst Café and Bookstore, 815 Second Avenue, New York City.