

Beyond the Red Doors

Neighbor to Neighbor

Margaret Tjimos Goldberg, Bobbi Eggers and Sue Bodson

Throughout its history, Neighbor to Neighbor, a secular, independent, non-profit organization located on the campus of Christ Episcopal Church, Greenwich, has been keenly focused on an often unnoticed and underserved portion of the community. Neighbor to Neighbor began in 1975 in the basement of Christ Episcopal Church when a group of compassionate people started collecting gently used clothing, linens, towels and household items and distributing them to those in need. Food was also provided on an emergency basis.

In 1984, responding to the increasing cost of living in town, the Greenwich Department of Social Services asked Neighbor to Neighbor to initiate a weekly food distribution program for Greenwich families in need of significant assistance. That led to a new program where volunteers packed bags with food items for three meals for three days for each member of the families served.

Evolving to meet client needs, Neighbor to Neighbor opened a "Client Choice" Food Pantry in September 2005, one of only a few operating in the state of Connecticut, and a model for food pantries in neighboring towns. Clients now have the opportunity to choose their nutritious food with the aid of a shopping list that provides quantity guidelines, based on the number of people in their families.

Hunger is easy to miss

Hunger is a silent epidemic. Every community is home to people who struggle with hunger, in different ways, with various solutions. According to Feeding America, 1 in 9 people or 37 million people face hunger in the United States today, including more than 11 million children and nearly 5.4 million seniors.

Outsiders may think Greenwich is an affluent town, a bedroom community of Wall Street. But in fact, it is a diverse, international blend of people from all economic levels. Hunger and food insecurity impacts people throughout town. Historically, Greenwich residents have been, and continue to be, generous and philanthropic. They are responsive to the needs of others, but with busy schedules and bustling families, helping residents understand those needs can be challenging. In a community like Greenwich, the existence of wealth translates into a higher cost of living, making it that much harder for some people to meet basic needs like shelter and food.

As of October 1, 2019, 19.8% of Greenwich Public School students qualify for Free or Reduced Lunch benefits (or 1,794 students). Under Connecticut State regulations, students qualify for these benefits if family income is below federally specified levels, which vary, according to the number of children in the family. Those classified as ALICE (asset-limited, income-constrained employed people) have jobs, but still face significant challenges, such as paying for necessities like food, shelter, transportation and health care, while still above eligibility guidelines for many state subsidies. Close to 9,000 residents are in need and qualify for Town Services. Some families are forced to choose between food and medical care. Providing proper nutrition is important for emotional and physical health and can have a ripple effect in schools and in our town.

Services expand in response to need

Today, Neighbor to Neighbor offers three distinct food programs as well as a clothing program. The primary program provides eligible Greenwich residents with a free weekly supplement of food for three days for each family member. Also, a one-time emergency food supply is available to residents of neighboring towns. The third food program is the weekly Summer Supplement, available to eligible Greenwich students to help bridge the gap during the summer months when school-supplied free or reduced-price meals are not available. Clothing, linens and small household items are available by appointment in the Clothing Room to eligible residents.

This year, groceries distributed through Neighbor to Neighbor enabled clients to prepare 390,000 meals, including over 500 turkeys with all the trimmings at Thanksgiving. Last summer, the program provided breakfast and lunch to students who normally receive free or reduced lunch benefits at school and distributed more than 500 backpacks filled with school supplies in August. This past holiday season, Neighbor to Neighbor distributed nearly 1,000 new toys to families they serve.

From Christ Church's basement to a center to serve the community

Celebrating new beginnings, Neighbor to Neighbor is building a new, ADA-compliant, energy efficient building, leased on the Christ Church Greenwich property, anticipating completion this year. "We are extremely grateful to Christ Church for the support in their building for so many years," said Pam Kelly, Board Member and Co-Chair of the Building Committee. The new 6,300 square foot building will be a sunny, home-like building with easy access for both donors and clients. Because the building is no longer in the basement of the church, it is fresh, updated, and easier for donors and clients to access. "The friendly, welcoming architecture of the new Neighbor to Neighbor building has been designed to be compatible with the surrounding neighborhood," Pam said. "We want to treat everyone with the utmost respect. That includes our neighbors, the environment, the church and our clients."

*Executive Director of Neighbor to Neighbor since December, 2019, **Margaret Tjimos Goldberg**, is an experienced administrator in the nonprofit sector. **Bobbi Eggers** is a public relations professional who has worked with several non-profits. **Sue Bodson**, president and founder of Emboss LLC, specializes in compatible, strategic partnerships between non-profits and businesses for the greater good of both.*

Resources:

- [Feeding the Community](#) by Renee McKenzie, ECF Vital Practices blog, June 6, 2017
- [Hunger Games](#) by Richelle Thompson, ECF Vital Practices blog, October 23, 2013
- [Feed the Poor or Fix the Roof?](#) by Dan Austin, Vestry Papers, July 2007
- [The Hunger Games](#) by Miguel Escobar, ECF Vital Practices blog, March 20, 2012

Sacred Stories and Listening

Alli Gannett, Karin Hamilton and Jane Hale

Editor's Note: This Coffee Hour at The Commons podcast is a conversation with the Reverend Jane Hale, missional priest-in-charge at Trinity Church in Brooklyn and a tri-town missional curate. Hale shares her experience of going out into her neighboring towns and practicing "sacred listening," which she says has helped her "encounter the people and the stories that God needs me to encounter." Find the complete podcast [here](#) and a transcript [here](#). Below is an introduction to the Coffee Hours at The Commons podcast.

Faith meets daily life over a cup of coffee and casual conversations at [Coffee Hour at The Commons](#), a podcast produced by the Episcopal Church in Connecticut. Much like the experience of coffee hour at a parish hall, most Coffee Hour at the Commons podcasts are conversational, with one or more guests covering a broad range of topics. Their stories show how the Holy Spirit moves through the lives and work of everyday people. Guests have included bishops and beekeepers, philanthropists and pilgrims, surfers and social media specialists, actors, archivists, and architects.

In its 6th season, with over 70 episodes, the podcast is the brainchild of Karin Hamilton, the diocese's former Canon for Communications and Media. Alli Gannett, Karin's partner in crime at the podcast's inception, was the sole host after Karin retired in June 2019. Jasree Peralta joined her as co-host in Season 6.

Resources:

- [Sacred Stories and Listening podcast full transcript](#)
- [The Evangelistic Opportunity of Being a Regular](#) by Alan Bentrup, ECF Vital Practices blog, April 11, 2019
- [Walking Wet](#) by Lisa Kimball, Vestry Papers, March 2019
- [Formation Moves into the Neighborhood](#) by Greg Syler, ECF Vital Practices blog, April 4, 2019

We are SMM

Karen Peña

Sitting atop a small hill in a mostly flat town is a place that welcomes followers of all beliefs through its red doors. St. Mary Magdalene (SMM) in Manor, Texas, is a multicultural, multigenerational community that is being transformed by God's generosity. The majority of those who attend our services and have become part of the SMM community, have either never attended church or stopped attending a long time ago.

A relatively young community, SMM began in 2010. We worshipped in a number of places in Manor until 2014 when we moved into our new "home on the hill." After settling in and figuring out the logistics for managing our worship and parish life, we felt we were in an appropriate place to begin looking for ways we could help address needs and shortages outside our walls.

Opening our doors to serve the community beyond

After conducting surveys in the city of Manor and attending neighborhood group meetings, SMM identified a need for affordable places where local nonprofit organizations could meet. The church has traditionally been a place of gathering, and SMM carried on that practice, opening its facilities to outside organizations that include We Are Blood, Toastmasters, Alcoholics Anonymous, the Foster Community of Central Texas, Organic Food Gardening classes and the Prom Dress Boutique, where teen girls pick out donated formal dresses, shoes and accessories for their school proms. These non-profit groups and others were welcome to use the church free of charge.

The Manor Community Wellness Alliance, a collective effort made up of area residents, church leaders, school district staff, social workers, volunteers and medical professionals who saw the need for a free clinic for the uninsured and underinsured met at the church for two years and held its "Manor Free Clinic" rehearsal there. Now active in the area, Manor Free Clinics are operated on a volunteer basis and offer services free of charge to anyone who does not have health insurance.

Currently, the Welcome Center for Immigrants is hosting English language courses at SMM, as well as providing low-cost immigration legal services and citizenship workshops. It aligns with the value SMM places on welcome, and we're enthusiastic about offering a safe space for these activities. We also arranged to host the El Salvador Mobile Consulate for the first time. Previously accessible only in Houston and Dallas, the Consulate provides services that include passports, free legal help, marriage licenses and identification cards.

Member-led projects build relationships and confidence

Our members reflect an abundance of interests, and with our assistance and encouragement they have been able to realize some of them. Member-led projects and the good will they generate were catalysts for expanding SMM's local reach. Last year, we started a Men's and Women's Ministry, a book club and multiple campaigns that included Socks of Love and the Sewing Workshop.

Socks of Love, a well-known campaign, collects white tube socks, fills them with toiletries, water and snacks and distributes them to the homeless. The project was initiated by Yasmin Aguilar, along with the Women's Ministry. With Christmas a few months out, they took advantage of the season's spirit of generosity to bring this campaign together.

While a young congregation brings energy and enthusiasm, it can also bring hesitation and confusion. Socks of Love was our first opportunity to begin a project ourselves, to explore our networking skills, find sponsorship and creative ways to ask for community contributions. Every action in the project was a celebration. It took roughly a month-and-a-half to gather the necessities, coordinate several “sock filling” assembly lines and prepare to distribute to local and neighboring areas. We are grateful and proud of the Women’s Ministry for sharing this vision and for their courage in using their abilities to bring our congregation and neighbors together.

The Sewing Workshop came about through a need for clothing protectors for the residents at our local nursing home. Edna Fournier, an SMM member, had sewn a few of these and offered to make a few more. When we learned that the nursing home had more than 70 residents, another community project was born. Friends, family, neighbors and SMM members donated a large amount of cotton and flannel material with lively prints. It was fascinating to see how many seamstresses we had in our congregation and surprising to learn that people outside of our church were interested in putting their hands and sewing machines into this work as well.

After hosting an enjoyable evening of tracing, cutting, sewing and ironing, we had 83 clothing protectors, and are looking forward to the next sewing workshop. We are grateful for members like Mark Longley, who discovered this need through an associate and friend; Edna Fournier, who has directed several campaigns with her infinite skills and attentive eye for quality-control; and Amy Rodriguez and Elizabeth Diaz, passionate needle workers, who spent late nights sewing the majority of the clothing protectors.

Through these projects, I learned that growth happens within you when you are in a community with people who have experienced more life than you. Sharing the drawing board with this level of diversity and learning about one another’s lives has helped us value one another. SMM’s culture of inclusivity and unflinching support has come from the grace and patience of our pastor, the Rev. Alex Montes-Vela. His introspective nature gives him the ability to model by example, through listening effectively and recognizing when adjustments or a reset are necessary.

In the short time that I’ve been a member of St. Mary Magdalene, I have seen a burst in curiosity and profound devotion in our parish for the needs of the Manor community. With the momentum that built this past year, I’m eager to see what relationships will develop this year and how we can be a link to the next project.

***Karen Peña** is 28, bilingual, a first generation Mexican-American and a first-time Christian. She is senior warden at St. Mary Magdalene in Manor, Texas and manages the church’s weekly e-newsletter and social media communications.*

Resources:

- [Extending Ministry Footprint through Building Use](#), an ECF webinar presented by Paul Stephens on December 11, 2019
- [Rummage Ministry](#), by Lu Stanton León, Vestry Papers, September 2017
- [Transportation Ministry](#) by Annette Buchanan, ECF Vital Practices blog, March 1, 2017
- [Episcopal Asset Mapv](#), an ECF webinar presented by Katie Mears on November 3, 2015

Be A Blessing for Young Families

Timothy Carr

*Tell the sweet story of Christ and His love,
Tell of His power to forgive;
Others will trust Him if only you prove
True, every moment you live.*

*Make me a blessing, O Savior I pray,
Make me a blessing to someone today.*

For diverse reasons, church attendance has declined over the last two generations. This is not surprising news. But there is also good news if we pay attention to the communities that surround us – and particularly, the people raising children in those communities. There is a natural curiosity, an innate yearning for spirituality and community at work in our culture today and little residual institutional bias. Today's young parents have definite ideas about the cultural context they long to create for their children. I propose that the church has an important role to play in that context, a role that, even today, has broad popular appeal in our country.

I offer the suggestions that follow for you to consider in your unique situation. They are based on a few common traits in today's churches – limited funds, underutilized space, older, faithful folks and lots of grace and love to give.

Preparation

When you decide to connect with families beyond the doors of your church, there are some steps to take to ensure that you are visible and set up to welcome them.

- Review and refine your Google rating and comments for your church. This is also a good time to update your web presence, so that it reflects your commitment to supporting families with children.
- Choose a room for young person activities and make sure it is inviting and comfortable.
- Solicit the help of a coordinator to welcome and assist in organizing activities for young people.

Community involvement

Here are just a few ways that you can look beyond your church's doors to share your space and your interest in supporting families and activities in your community.

- **PTA Affiliation** – Introduce yourself to the leadership of your closest elementary school and its PTA. Offer to assist with activities and fundraising.
- **Young Moms Support Group** – Being a mom today is challenging. Offer meeting space for a self-maintaining mothers support group at your church.

- **Young Parents Meet Up** – The challenges parents face today are hard on relationships. Demands are many and varied. Ask long-term relationship partners within your congregation to offer a discussion group.
- **Adopt a Grandparent** – The transient lifestyle of our culture today creates loneliness for both seniors and families. Consider setting up “support” families where love develops and the benefits are many.
- **Team Sponsorship** – Meet with the leaders of the girls’ and boys’ softball teams and see if your church could sponsor a team.
- **Scout Troop Sponsorship** – Call your local Scout headquarters and offer space and other support for their program at your church.
- **Children’s Music Group** – See if there’s a community music group for children that would be grateful for rehearsal or meeting space in your facility.
- **After School Homework Group** – Work closely with your local elementary school to see about setting up a homework session after school one afternoon a week. There may be retirees in your congregation who would enjoy giving their time to helping students.

Church Programs and Liturgy

You may see some of those who bring their children to your building for Scouts or music lessons or attend the mom’s group or parents meet up on Sundays. Here are some way to make parents and young people welcome in the life of your congregation.

- **Acolyte Service and Children’s Choirs** – The desire to serve seems natural and innate. Families become more involved with the church when their children have a role to play in Sunday services.
- **Children’s Bible Study** – Learning is important in this context, as many young parents today have had little or no experience of spirituality and religion growing up.
- **Family Service** – Introduce a 30-minute service for families that includes song, story and communion. In my experience, for that service the children’s ages range from 2 to 6 years. Parents and children learn together and love the informal interaction.
- **Celebration of Communion** – An annual celebration, similar to First Communion, of the sacrament of the eucharist. Children attend classes to prepare. Families are asked to participate with snack and activities.

These efforts – Preparation, Community Involvement, Church Programs and Liturgy – should assist you in connecting and supporting families with children in your community. I advise you to start slowly with something that appeals to your faith community and fits your unique situation.

There is tremendous grace at work when we intentionally address the needs of those in our communities. You and your flock can be a blessing to families who need community, empathy and love. The needs and the response of this new constituency can fire up your congregation and kindle an energy that will make your church a blessing in your community.

*The Reverend **Timothy P. Carr** is rector at All Souls Episcopal Church, Miami Beach, Florida. Prior to becoming All Souls rector in 2019, he served at St. John’s Church in Boonton, NJ. Carr is married to*

Dr. Edwin A. Acevedo who is a Superintendent of Schools. They have an adopted, grown son, Mario. Their dogs, Barney, a cocker spaniel and Teddy, a rescue terrier, both enjoy the role of parochial canines.

Resources:

- [Are You Ready for People to Google Your Church?](#), by Alan Bentrup, ECF Vital Practices blog, July 16, 2018
- [Community Engagement: A Little Church that Could](#) by Erin Weber-Johnson, ECF Vital Practices blog, June 10, 2014
- [Jesus was Right There, in the Bounce House](#) by Bob Leopold, ECF Vital Practices blog, October 3, 2013
- [Cathedral in the Night](#) by Christopher Carlisle, Vestry Papers, November 2013

Somos SMM

Karen Peña

Situado en la cima de una colina en una localidad prácticamente llana hay un lugar en el que sus puertas rojas están abiertas para toda la gente, independientemente de sus creencias. Santa María Magdalena en Manor, Texas, es una comunidad multicultural y multigeneracional que está siendo transformada por la generosidad de Dios. La mayoría de las personas que asisten a nuestros servicios religiosos y han pasado a ser parte de la comunidad SMM, ya sea nunca asistieron a una iglesia o dejaron de asistir hace mucho tiempo.

Una comunidad relativamente joven, SMM comenzó en 2010. Rendíamos culto en un número de lugares en Manor hasta 2014, cuando nos mudamos a nuestro nuevo “hogar en la colina”. Después de instalarnos y determinar la logística para manejar nuestro culto y nuestra vida parroquial, sentimos que estábamos en un momento apropiado para empezar a buscar maneras de ayudar a dirigirnos a nuestras necesidades y a las escaseces más allá de nuestros muros.

Abrir nuestras puertas para servir a la comunidad más allá

Después de haber realizado encuestas en la ciudad de Manor y de haber asistido a reuniones de grupos de la vecindad, SMM identificó la necesidad de contar con lugares asequibles en las que organizaciones locales sin ánimo de lucro se pudieran reunir. Tradicionalmente la iglesia había sido un punto de reunión y SMM, continuando esa práctica, abrió sus instalaciones a organizaciones externas, entre ellas We Are Blood, Toastmasters, Alcohólicos Anónimos, Foster Community of Central Texas, clases de cultivos orgánicos y Prom Dress Boutique, en la que niñas adolescentes pueden escoger vestidos, zapatos y accesorios de gala para los bailes de fin de curso de sus escuelas. Estos grupos sin ánimo de lucro y otros podían reunirse sin cargo en las instalaciones de la iglesia.

La Manor Community Wellness Alliance (Alianza para el Bienestar de la Comunidad de Manor), un esfuerzo colectivo de residentes de la zona, líderes de la iglesia, personal del distrito escolar, asistentes sociales, voluntarios y profesionales médicos que vieron la necesidad de contar con una clínica gratuita para los no asegurados y los subasegurados, se reunieron en la iglesia por dos años y realizaron allí su ensayo de “Clínica Gratuita de Manor”. Las clínicas gratuitas de Manor, ahora activas en la zona, funcionan con personal voluntario y ofrecen servicios gratuitos a todas las personas que no tienen seguro de salud.

En la actualidad, el Centro de Bienvenida a Inmigrantes está impartiendo cursos de inglés y proporcionando servicios legales de inmigración y talleres de ciudadanía de bajo costo en SMM algo que cuadra con el valor que SMM da a la bienvenida y nos complace muchísimo poder ofrecer un servicio seguro para estas actividades. También hicimos arreglos para brindar un espacio al Consulado Móvil de El Salvador por primera vez. Este consulado itinerante, que presta servicios que incluyen pasaportes, ayuda legal gratuita, licencia de matrimonio y tarjetas de identificación, anteriormente solo era accesible en Houston y Dallas.

Proyectos encabezados por miembros forman relaciones y confianza

Nuestros miembros reflejan una cornucopia de intereses y con nuestra asistencia y estímulo pudieron hacer realidad algunos de ellos. Los proyectos encabezados por miembros y la buena voluntad que generan fueron catalizadores de la expansión de las actividades de extensión local de SMM. El año pasado iniciamos un Ministerio de Hombres y Mujeres, un club de libros y campañas múltiples que incluyeron Socks of Love (Calcetines de Amor) y el Sewing Workshop (Taller de Costura).

Calcetines de Amor, una campaña muy conocida, recolecta calcetines y los llena con artículos de tocador, agua y refrigerios y los distribuye a los sin hogar. El proyecto fue iniciado por Yasmin Aguilar, junto con el Ministerio de Mujeres. Varios meses antes de la Navidad, aprovecharon el espíritu de la temporada para lanzar esta campaña

Si bien una feligresía joven trae energía y entusiasmo, también puede traer vacilación y confusión. Calcetines de Amor fue nuestra primera oportunidad para iniciar un proyecto nosotras mismas, explorar nuestras destrezas de formar vínculos y encontrar patrocinadores y maneras creativas de pedir contribuciones a la comunidad. Todas las acciones en el proyecto fueron una celebración. Llevó aproximadamente un mes y medio reunir los artículos, coordinar equipos de “llenado de calcetines” y prepararnos para distribuir en zonas locales y vecinas. Estamos agradecidos y orgullosos del Ministerio de Mujeres por compartir esta visión y por su valentía en emplear sus habilidades para unir a nuestra feligresía y nuestros vecinos.

El Taller de Costura surgió de la necesidad de contar con protectores de ropa para los residentes de nuestro hogar de ancianos local. Edna Fournier, una miembro de SMM, había cosido algunos de ellos y ofreció hacer unos pocos más. Cuando nos enteramos de que el hogar de ancianos tenía más de 70 residentes, nació otro proyecto comunitario. Amigos, parientes, vecinos y miembros de SMM donaron una gran cantidad de tela de algodón y de franela con estampados vistosos. Fue fascinante ver cuántas costureras teníamos en nuestra feligresía y fue sorprendente enterarnos de que gente

de afuera de nuestra iglesia también estaba interesada en poner a trabajar sus manos y máquinas de coser.

Después de haber sido anfitrionas de una agradable velada de trazar moldes, cortar, coser y planchar, tuvimos 83 protectores de ropa y estamos alegres de iniciar el próximo taller de costura. Estamos agradecidos por contar con miembros como Mark Longley, que descubrió esta necesidad mediante un asociado y amigo; por Edna Fournier, que dirigió varias campañas con sus infinitas destrezas y capacidad de control de calidad; y, por Amy Rodríguez y Elizabeth Díaz, que trasnocharon cosiendo la mayoría de los protectores de ropa.

Mediante estos proyectos aprendí que el crecimiento ocurre cuando estamos en una comunidad con gente que tiene más experiencia de vida que nosotros. Compartir la mesa de proyectos con este nivel de diversidad y conocimientos y aprender sobre nuestras vidas nos ayudó a valorarnos los unos a los otros. La cultura de inclusión y apoyo inquebrantable de SMM emana de la gracia y la paciencia de nuestro pastor, el Rev. Alex Montes-Vela. Su naturaleza introspectiva le permite dar el ejemplo escuchando con efectividad y reconociendo cuándo es necesario hacer ajustes o empezar de nuevo.

En el poco tiempo en el que he sido miembro de St. Mary Magdalene, presencié un gran surgimiento de curiosidad y profunda devoción en nuestra parroquia hacia las necesidades de la comunidad de Manor. Con el impulso que se formó el año pasado, estoy ansiosa por ver qué relaciones se desarrollarán este año y cómo podremos ser un enlace para el próximo proyecto.

***Karen Peña** es una mexicana-americana de primera generación bilingüe y de 28 años de edad y una cristiana por primera vez. Es guardián mayor en Santa María Magdalena en Manor, Texas y administra el boletín electrónico semanal de la iglesia y sus comunicaciones en los medios sociales.*

Recursos:

- [St. Alban's: ¿Por qué Crecer?](#) por Brent Owens, Vestry Papers, septiembre 2011
- [Ministerio de Pañales](#) por Ema Rosero-Nordalm, ECF Vital Practices blog, 5 de abril 2013
- [Grupos Pequeños, Gran Impacto](#) por John Adler, Vestry Papers, julio 2014

What could *being* church look like, post COVID-19?

Chantal McKinney

In the many months before our core team of passionate Episcopalians and Lutherans launched Christ's Beloved Community/Comunidad Amada de Cristo in Southside Winston-Salem, NC, we had a thriving ministry, knocking on the doors of our neighbors' homes and apartments. We did this near the church building that would eventually become our church's home, as well as in the surrounding area, which included Section 8 housing, gas stations, tiendas, laundromats, street corners and more. We literally started our faith community outside, sparking relationships with people on their porches and front lawns and in their neighborhoods and stores.

Holy encounters

One day, a couple of us knocked on the door of a modest home near the church building. A man answered, and we introduced ourselves as people creating a new church. We said that we would be his new neighbors and asked if there was any particular way we could be a blessing to his household or to his neighborhood? He thought for a minute and said, "I don't know what to say."

I was afraid that perhaps I had put him on the spot. I said, "Don't worry! Would you be willing to think about it and maybe I will see you again out and about?"

He was silent for a longer amount of time. I could see his eyes watering up. "No, I mean...I don't know what to say. You see, I grew up as a military kid. I moved more times than I can count growing up. I have lived all over this country. And everywhere we lived, we always lived right near a church. And not once did any church knock on our door to say 'hi' or to ask how they could help us, or even to welcome us.... I just don't know what to say."

By this time, this large man's eyes were brimming with tears. He had said more than enough, and, surprisingly, I learned that we had done enough. By simply showing up, we had been enough. And that was more important than anything we would do. This was one of many holy encounters we would have and continue to have on the streets and in the neighborhoods of Southside Winston-Salem. It impressed upon us the importance of simply meeting our neighbors and learning what God was doing in their lives and then joining alongside that.

Being church in a new way

I confess: I have long been an advocate for congregations to discover anew what it could look like to be church outside of a church building. But I would never have wished for it this way. I could never have imagined that a virus would be what showed the world that we are deeply interconnected. This has taken us all by surprise, and from what I see, many in the church have quickly moved to online worship services, Bible studies and pastoral care. Critical ministries, like our Beloved Community Food Pantry, are able to continue. It has been inspiring to see the way collaborations are forming, to notice that good will is just as viral. A spirit of unity is once again beginning to emerge in this country that has been so deeply fragmented.

Another advantage in this time is that we have the opportunity to center down and become more deeply aligned with what God is saying to us. Even amidst the incredible challenges of COVID-19, I have appreciated the time to draw near to God and to be open to the way God speaks in times of transformation. I keep asking: What is cracking open? What is breaking forth? What needs to die so that something new might emerge? What important shifts need to happen in the church to bring us closer to God's reign on this earth? What is right in front of our eyes, if only we have the eyes to see? I have done a lot of asking, a lot of deep listening and a lot of wondering. And I have come to believe that an important shift needs to happen in the life of the church.

One day, this chapter will be over. We don't know whether it will be weeks or months. But one day, we will return to our church buildings. We will share from the same chalice without fear. We will

embrace one another at the peace. We will look deeply into the eyes of those we care about. We'll meet in groups, as we once did, to do the good work of the church!

But an important shift needs to happen, too. Have you not felt the Spirit at work in these times? Have you noticed ways we might be able to be church differently? I am personally reminded of how critical face to face connection is, even as I am grateful for online opportunities to connect. My spouse and children miss the grandparents we cannot see. I miss seeing my parishioners in person. I miss the youth in our church's neighborhood.

But I do not want to go back to normal if that means only seeing my parishioners inside our church building. I do not want to go back to shining our light inside the building, where those outside can't see it. I can see more clearly now how we shut ourselves off from interconnectivity when we stay in our buildings. I want us to be intentional about venturing out to be church in our neighborhoods.

What new thing is God doing in us?

I want the light that our church shines to be seen and felt in our neighborhood. I want to check on the neighbors just as I check on my parents and my parishioners. I wonder what neighbors near the church are feeling particularly isolated? Who among them is now unemployed? Who is food insecure? Are there families worn thin from balancing working from home and overseeing their children's online school classes? Who is struggling to stay sober without AA and NA meetings? Who is emotionally fragile? Who, near the church, is longing to make a difference and doesn't know where to start? Who has emerged from this dark night of their soul with a stronger connection to God and wants to share that faith with others? Who near us has a voice ready to sing or a mind ready to engage and learn with us? I want to go back to knock on their doors, to look into their eyes and to see what new thing God is doing among us all.

Brothers and sisters, we will soon be at the proverbial fork in the road. When we are able to return to our buildings, we can go back to business as usual or we can begin a new, less familiar path, toward balancing being church inside our buildings and also outside of them, deeply rooted in our neighborhoods and communities.

I believe it's time for a shift in the church that starts with shining our light outside our buildings. We are learning that our buildings are not what make us church, after all! It's the people. It's the love of Christ and the love we share. That can be done online, but, for the sake of the world, we need to take our love and our light out into the world, too. Then we will really see what God can do among us.

When I first began our street ministry, after more than 10 years working primarily within the church building, I was overwhelmed with the reminder that God is moving all over the world, co-creating and kingdom-building. God is working through nonprofits, community leaders, everyday people and all sorts of households that aren't necessarily coming to church on Sundays.

When the world becomes our church

I had become accustomed to thinking of God working through churches because that's where my energy was at the time. Moving to ministry outside of the church building was an amazing, expansive wake-up call for me. I hope that when the time comes for us to look up from our Zoom meetings and online worship, we will take advantage of this time to ask ourselves, "What now? How can we continue to be church outside of the building, but more intentionally out in the world? What needs to shift?"

Meeting neighbors at an apartment complex one day, I met a grandmother on the sidewalk. She was a small woman with a big heart and despite the years etched on her face, a light shone from within her. She told me that, thanks to God, she had beaten her addiction to crack. In a sing-song rhythm and with a large smile, she gave all the glory to God. "God did it again! He did it again!" And she began swaying back and forth as she felt her own praise move through her body. She told me it was God's strength that allowed her to stay clean and sober day after day and to be present to her daughter and granddaughter, who were standing right near her, nodding in agreement. With bright, dark, shining eyes and a huge smile, she proclaimed that God "saved her again, and again, and again."

This was years ago, but I recall her song, her heart and her conviction as if I heard it last week. And to think, if she only shared this inside her church or in her home, I would never have heard it. It was only because I was on the street to meet the community and she was out in her community, ready to share what God was doing in her life. And in that moment, we were the two or three gathered and Christ was among us. We were church, together.

God's light and love can go viral in our world, when we leave our buildings to engage our neighbors face to face, eye to eye, and heart to heart.

God's light and love can go viral in our world when we seek and listen for what God is doing with others in the world, trusting that God moves outside the church, too.

God's light and love can go viral in the world when we can share what God is doing in our lives with vulnerability, outside of our church buildings.

God's light and love can go viral in the world when the world becomes our church, and when the Good News springs up from our voices like water from parched earth.

God is inviting us into a shift.

God is inviting us to pay attention to all the possibilities at the fork in the road.

God is inviting us to go viral.

[Click here](#) for a list of Covid-19 resources on ECF Vital Practices.

*The **Rev. Dr. Chantal Morales McKinney** is passionate about creating the scaffolding for people and churches to venture out into their neighborhoods and the world for the sake of mutual mission and to be Christ in community. Her work with others on the streets of Southside Winston-Salem, NC have*

led to the development of Christ's Beloved Community/Comunidad Amada de Cristo, a bilingual and multicultural Episcopal and Lutheran church. She uses Asset Based Community Development to empower people and create partnerships. In addition to being the Mission Developer at CBC, she enjoys speaking about mission at conferences and consulting when time allows. She is married to Bryson and they have two rambunctious boys and a precious baby girl.

Resources:

- [A Blueprint for Change](#), by Birdie Blake-Reid as told to Nancy Davidge, Vestry Papers, March 2014
- [Jesus Was Right There, in the Bounce House](#), by Bob Leopold, ECF Vital Practices blog, October 3, 2013
- [Feeding the Community](#) by Renee McKenzie, ECF Vital Practices blog, June 6, 2017
- [Redefining Outreach](#) by Linda Buskirk, ECF Vital Practices blog, May 12, 2018

The Art of Organizing

Francisco Garcia

“I really do believe we need to see ourselves as a movement – a Jesus movement – rather than as an institution. That’s what Jesus was about. He inaugurated a movement to make God’s dream happen. To see ourselves this way changes everything. It means our institutional configurations must be designed to serve the movement and not the other way around. The movement serves life. There is no life in serving the institution.”

– Bishop Michael Curry, “The Jesus Movement now,” Yale University Reflections, 2015

I can still recall my excitement when I first heard our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry speak of the Jesus Movement. And I’m inspired by this call to be “the ongoing community of people who center their lives on Jesus and follow him into loving, liberating and life-giving relationship with God, each other and creation.” Having come to the Episcopal Church from the work of community activism and organizing, Bishop Curry’s message reminded me that I was in the right place.

As a young student activist I began learning the art of organizing. Fred Ross, Sr., the seasoned organizer who famously recruited Cesar Chávez and Dolores Huerta to the cause, said that organizing was about “providing people with the opportunity to become aware of their own capabilities and potential.” (From Fred Ross, Sr., [Axioms for Organizers](#)) Getting people to this sense of agency happens most often through one-on-one conversations, often in people’s homes.

One of the most impactful house meetings for me took place when visiting an immigrant father who worked as a food service worker on my university campus. He, like his co-workers, was paid minimum wage by an outside agency. He wanted to organize for a living wage, but he was afraid of getting fired. Still, he wanted more for himself and his family. Their living conditions were sparse, as they shared a small studio with his brother’s family to make ends meet. Through a series of

conversations that began in his home, he was able to overcome his fear, find hope in coming together with his co-workers and see a pathway forward. This is the power of organizing.

Entrenched systems can get in the way of the gospel

At the core of organizing is building relationships. Over time, this network of relationships can become a movement when a plan of action is developed around shared values and concerns. For the past 15 years, in different capacities from lay to ordained, I have sought to integrate the principles of organizing into my faith practice. In my experience, getting to the actual work of organizing and movement-building, even in justice-minded parishes, is often a challenge.

What gets in the way? Bishop Curry's clarion call to be a movement also includes his assessment of the problem – our institutional church configurations. I strongly believe that these institutional ways of being and doing church are so entrenched that they will not be easily dissolved or translated into a movement without a significant amount of struggle. Our denomination is deeply invested in a highly-structured polity – constitution and canons that trickle down to parishes, schools, social service agencies and other institutions that make up dioceses. Our dioceses send bishops and elected lay and clergy deputations to General Convention, and so forth. This elaborate and long-standing system of organization can be characterized as an effective administrative or institutional structure for operating and preserving the church for posterity. From a "Jesus movement" perspective, it can also be seen as a hindrance to the life-serving spirit of the gospel.

Organizing is key in building a movement

For our church to truly embody and enact the truth and power of the Jesus movement, this call to make tangible God's loving, liberating and life-giving nature, we, the church, must organize. This means having the kind of organizational culture, theology and common practice that enables us as the church, its people and resources, to see ourselves as a movement. We don't currently have the spiritual and practical DNA that would give us a movement mentality. When people hear the phrase "social movement," they may think of the great movements of the past, like the Civil Rights movement, and feel like that time has passed. This makes it difficult to put teeth into the Jesus Movement. But by dedicating and allocating time and resources to the work of relational organizing, we can create new experiences that generate new ways of being and doing church.

Bishop Curry further says that the change from church institution to Jesus movement must begin with Bible study and prayer. I agree – and again, I would add the practice of organizing as a critical ingredient to the mix. In order to enable and engage a "movement" way of thinking and acting in the church, we desperately need the tools of community organizing and social movement-style leadership at every level of the church, like a powerful wave of the Holy Spirit. This means that even our Bible study, our personal and communal prayer lives, our Sunday worship, our vestry and committee meetings can and must be guided by a different way of relating to God, to each other and to creation. Without an organizing process that effectively disrupts the current way of doing and being church, we will likely remain with a narrow institutional mindset and address mostly institutional concerns. We need to do church in a way that draws us into a different level of awareness and relating to each other and the world, that creates an urgency for change, hope for something different, belief in our capacity to change and a plan of action.

What Jesus movement organizing would look like

If integrating organizing is essential for church transformation, what would this “Jesus movement organizing” look like? How can we move our institution to serve the movement? Think about that house visit with the immigrant father that I spoke of earlier, and imagine if we as the church did this in a systematic way. What it would look like if clergy and vestry leaders were equipped with organizing tools, and held relationally-oriented one-on-one meetings with a majority of members of their parish? And what if our understanding of “parish” was expanded altogether to include the surrounding neighborhood? What kinds of concerns might emerge, and what kinds of dreams and plans for community action might develop, guided by the organizing spirit of Jesus?

Even with the institutional limitations previously described, the projects where we’ve used the tools of organizing in parish/diocesan settings have led to positive change on issues from living wages, to immigrant rights and affordable housing. In the case of the campaign for just housing policies, I was moved to see the way the parish where I served as rector, Holy Faith Church in Inglewood, California, came together with neighboring Methodist and Presbyterian congregations and how we adapted our liturgical seasons (Advent/Christmas, Lent/Holy Week) as a means of unity, worshipping and organizing together with community-based organizations and neighborhood residents. Guided by our faith convictions, clergy and lay members across the three congregations intermingled and related to each other, canvassing neighborhoods, discussing proposals and attending city council meetings together, sharing a common vision for a livable city. Together we organized for a period of three years and secured the passage of a city ordinance that curbed rising rents and prevented displacement. This all began by building relationships through one-on-one conversations and gatherings that took clergy and lay leaders outside of the normal way of doing church. This work was entirely grassroots. Imagine the kind of impact we could have if we fully resourced a Jesus-rooted organizing effort for the whole church!

The work of organizing is the work of the Jesus Movement. Jesus was nothing if not relational, demonstrated in the strong bonds he created among his disciples, and his public engagements with those on the margins of society. For us to be a Jesus movement, our church needs to invest real time and money to learn these community-organizing methodologies and do the hard work of organizing ourselves beyond the confines of our institutional structures. We can do it together, with God’s help!

Addendum

As I put the finishing touches on this article, we were in the very early stages of the novel coronavirus situation. It was not yet a global pandemic as we now know it, with no clear end in immediate sight. Phrases like social distancing and sheltering in place were not yet widely understood. Now a great many of us are doing our best to reorganize our entire lives, for the time being, in an effort to lessen the spread of this incredibly tenacious virus.

This of course must be our priority at the moment. As a global humanity, we have to be more disciplined and even more tenacious than the virus to get through this period of challenge and crisis. We are in a moment where human solidarity, and for us as people of faith, where love for our

neighbor, has perhaps never been more apparent and urgent. These words from Dr. King's Letter from a Birmingham Jail resonate deeply: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

After some reflection, I decided to leave my article intact, because while some of the details about tactics may change due to the need for physical distancing, the strategy and the values guiding the work of organizing remain the same. We might not be doing house visits right now, for instance, but we can and should be engaging in the relational work of having one-on-one and small group conversations in other ways.

If this pandemic has taught us anything, it has brought home the point that the church truly is the body of Christ, the Ekklesia, and that the church is "not the building." The work of organizing draws upon the creative energies and gifts of the people of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit and guided by the way of Jesus. If we can't congregate together, we assemble in alternative ways, we keep the faith and allow it to guide us in continued pastoral and prophetic action, informed by our shifting context and realities. The call to organize, to stand with each other and with our neighbors, and with the so-called stranger, remains and grows ever so powerfully. The call to use our relational capacity and power to create a lasting hope and love-filled justice never ceases.

My hope is that we live prayerfully into this moment, that we use it to examine the old ways of being and doing church and that we not return to old familiar patterns and habits. My hope is that we come out of this situation knowing what it means to live, breath, pray, love and act like the Jesus Movement. Stay safe, stay connected and stay organized, friends!

[Click here](#) for a list of Covid-19 resources on ECF Vital Practices.

Francisco Garcia is a PhD student in the Graduate Department of Religion at Vanderbilt University. He is focusing his PhD work on Theological Studies and Ethics. He brings nearly 20 years of justice-based work at the academic, professional and pastoral levels and intends to develop a theology of organizing around pressing social and economic justice issues rooted in the liberation tradition. Francisco was born and raised in Southern California in a working-class, Roman Catholic, Mexican immigrant household. He found his way to the Episcopal Church as a young adult, joining All Saints Church in Pasadena in 2004, where he was sponsored for ordination to the priesthood. Francisco completed his M.Div. from the joint program at the Claremont School of Theology and the Episcopal Theological School at Claremont (Bloy House). Prior to ordination, he worked in the labor movement for a decade in various capacities with workers in both the public and private sectors. His work over the last ten years has centered around interfaith community organizing and advocacy around issues related to systemic poverty, racism and immigration.

Resources:

- Being with Our Neighbors, by Ginny Dinsmore, Vestry Papers, May 2015
- Taking Church Out into the Community, by David Rice and Anna Carmichael, Vestry Papers, November 2018
- Leaders of the Jesus Movement, by Bill Campbell, ECF Vital Practices blog, September 18, 2018

- The Art of the House Call or... by Anna Olson, ECF Vital Practices blog, July 23, 2014

Credit Unions for Economic Justice

Jennifer Miramontes

“Banking” might not be among first things that come to mind when you think of how best to serve your community, but perhaps it should. After all, nearly everyone with whom you share a pew, (the rest of the world, too) requires the services of a financial institution. We all need bank accounts, debit cards, auto loans, online bill pay and financial literacy guidance, don’t we?

Founded in the wake of the 1992 Rodney King Riots, the Episcopal Community Federal Credit Union received its federal charter in 1994 with the support of many volunteers from parishes around the diocese. This effort was spearheaded by the bishops and clergy of the Episcopal Diocese in Los Angeles and Dr. Gloria Brown, an employee of the Episcopal Church (TEC) at that time.

Dr. Brown’s vision for the church always included economic justice. She believed that providing a path to a strong financial base offered meaningful assistance to individuals and families who were marginalized in their communities. She understood how a financial institution that provided checking and savings accounts and much needed loans in a respectful environment that considered people’s overall well-being and other financial needs could impact the quality of life – and not just for credit union members, but for the community at large.

A faith-based credit union for LA’s low and moderate income communities

Following in the footsteps of other small faith-based credit unions throughout the country, the Episcopal Community Federal Credit Union (ECFCU) opened in 1994 with a \$300,000 grant received by the Diocese of Los Angeles to assist in rebuilding after the riots. It was hoped that the credit union would replace the unscrupulous check-cashing vendors, pawnshops, liquor stores and payday lenders that had set up shop after the big banks left town following the riots.

As a faith-based credit union, located at the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles, we serve a low- and moderate-income community that believes in the principle of service to others and investing responsibly in its communities. This philosophy follows the credit union principle where members pool their savings to make loans to one another and are shareholders of the institution where they save, borrow and obtain financial services. John H. Taylor, Bishop of Los Angeles, notes, “We can all tell from the media and politics that our society isn’t yet an equal-opportunity distributor of economic opportunity. Our credit union began and persists as a ministry of economic justice, enabling individuals and institutions to lay hands on some vital capital to leverage a better future when other lenders pass them by.”

Credit Unions are nonprofit organizations and depend on interest from loans and investments to survive. Federal regulations require that they maintain seven percent capital reserve for every dollar on deposit, meaning that every credit union must have at least that amount of money

available. Even in a large metropolitan area like Los Angeles, our credit union is currently 5.6 million in assets and is barely at 7.84%. This of course, poses its own set of challenges. A financial institution that is not flush with money, must carefully consider how it invests its own resources as it continues to grow and support its members.

Access to quality banking products and services

“A hallmark of our Credit Union” says Suffragan Bishop Diane M. Jardine Bruce, “is the access it provides to its members to quality banking products, as well as loans at an extremely reasonable price. I know of many who have received loans from our Credit Union when they would have not been able to at a larger institution. This great blessing has made a strong impact in our community, especially among our most economically challenged members.”

Currently, our credit union provides an abundance of services, including:

- For members opening their first account or who need financial counseling, low-cost financial services in a supportive, compassionate, bilingual environment with fee-free, direct-deposit checking accounts and co-op debit cards
- Support for local entrepreneurs in the form of small business loans and loans to churches to assist with much-needed repairs
- An extension of our Social Justice Ministries, the credit union enables members with well-established banking records to help support others in the community as they build a more financially sustainable future
- Support for clergy and particularly those new to the country in establishing credit and providing savings, checking and debit cards

Serving the community today and tomorrow

One of the biggest challenges faced by credit unions our size is the rapid advancement of technology in the banking industry. Many of those who would be best served by our services, as well as those who are most well-equipped to provide stable accounts, have grown up with a device in their hand. If it can't be done on a phone, it can't be done. For a small credit union, investing in technology overhauls is daunting. The investment isn't just an expense that isn't in the budget (because it isn't), it's a new way of thinking, a new way of serving, a new way of believing in your mission.

But if your mission, like ours, has always been focused on serving your community, then finding a way forward isn't really choice. It's a calling. The services provided by the credit union are fundamental to people's everyday lives. Because we are designated as a low-income credit union, we can provide services to people when other financial institutions cannot. In providing financial tools and knowledge to individuals and families, we give them power – the power to turn down high interest loans, the power to file their taxes safely, the power to buy a car, the power to share that knowledge with another.

Inspired daily by our members, we are currently evaluating their needs for tomorrow, and how we can be best suited to meet them. Technology won't solve all our problems. There is no substitution

for a warm smile, some kind conversation and a candy to go. But mobile solutions do make a whole lot of sense for generations whose primary communication tool is a tiny computer they hold in their hand.

Getting there isn't easy. We are eager to keep our identity as a local community financial center while expanding our reach, providing our neighbors, clergy and churches with opportunities to grow in financial strength and to pass that knowledge along in their own community. We want our larger Episcopal community – which includes anyone who participates in any program of the Episcopal Church – to have the opportunity to participate in low interest lending, social justice banking and feel-good funding.

By putting our resources in the right places, namely functional in-demand technology, smart marketing and, as always, devoted staff, we intend to continue to serve the southern California counties of Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, Ventura, San Bernardino, Riverside, Orange and beyond with love and faithfulness.

A follow-up note on the novel coronavirus

With heavy hearts, the staff and Board of the Episcopal Community Federal Credit Union have considered the impact of COVID-19 on our members, our churches, our community and our own staff members. We have assured our members that we remain open and available for regular banking services, both in-person (appropriately socially-distanced) and remote, and that we will also consider long-term relief for them as the crisis continues.

The Credit Union has also set up an emergency cash fund to assist churches and other institutions of the diocese whose cash flow has been adversely impacted by circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic and will offer, for a limited time, a 50 percent reduction to the published rate for church loans. These loans will be used to assist in meeting payroll, utility bills or any other expense needed to keep our churches operational.

[Click here](#) for a list of Covid-19 resources on ECF Vital Practices.

Jennifer Miramontes is member of the Board of the Episcopal Community Federal Credit Union. She is the Director of E-Learning for Total CSR, a practical e-learning insurance training company. Jennifer resides with her husband and children in Ladera Ranch, California, and attends St. John Chrysostom Episcopal Church in Rancho Santa Margarita, where she serves as head lector and sits on the gratitude committee.

Resources:

- [Testing Mammon: Learning Financial Discipleship](#) by Steven Tomlinson, Vestry Papers, May 2017
- [Finance Resource Guide Tools and Resources](#) an ECF Vital Practices tool
- [Facing Financial Adversity](#) by Mary Sulerud, Vestry Papers, November 2003

Surfing and Spirituality

Scott Claassen

It's 7:15 am on a Wednesday morning, and I am kneeling in the sand with a dozen students from the University of California, Santa Barbara. Despite the bright sun in the cloudless sky, the air temperature is 46°F and many of us are shivering. Ten yards in front of us, a great blue heron fishes in the tide pools. In a minute, we will disperse into the water and surf the waist high wind swell in the February sun. For now, we mirror the stillness of the heron as we kneel in the sand.

Riding waves and quality down time

This is Surfing & Spirituality – a weekly program of the Episcopal campus ministry at UCSB. We meet at 7 am every Wednesday, rain or shine, waves or no waves. It is open to university students of all skill levels. The only requirement is confident swimming ability. In addition to surfing, we take on a spiritual practice or theme each week. These practices vary from paying attention to our breath to reflecting on grace. Often, the theme reflects the season or the surf conditions. On Ash Wednesday, the practice was “Remember that you are water and to water you shall return.” After I introduce the practice, we sit in silence for a few minutes. Then we hit the water.

Most mornings, I stay behind with newcomers. First, I give them basic instructions on paddling, board positioning and survival tactics. When they are ready, I walk them out to where the waves are breaking and push them into a wave. Invariably, the new surfers are overcome with elation at their first wave. When they finish their rides, some holler; some laugh; some just fall into the water. But the one constant is the grin. There is nothing quite like riding a wave.

One of the best parts of Surfing & Spirituality is the down time. Very little time in surfing is spent riding waves. The average ride for a beginner lasts only a few seconds. The majority of our time together is spent walking to the surf, preparing gear or waiting for a set to appear on the horizon. Those transitional moments make for deep conversation. It is then that students share their struggles with addiction, relate the pain of losing a parent, discuss hardships related to sexual identity and check in on a deeper level. The rare combination of a life-giving activity and quality down time is what makes Surfing & Spirituality a vital ministry.

A diverse and changing group

Year after year, we draw a diverse group of students. We get prototypical surfers like Charlie, who is both our group intern and also drummer in the church band on Sundays. There are exchange students from China, England, Spain and France. There are DACA students who come to us through the church's work on food insecurity. There are two students who lead the university's Dungeons & Dragons gathering. One graduate student studies piano performance and her boyfriend studies physics. We have students from film studies, education, sociology and accounting.

The group has a penchant for nicknames, like “OG,” “Kahuna,” and “Small Fry.” The boards also get nicknames – “Big Red,” “The Green Machine” and “Curious George.” Most weeks, people from our

group bring a friend or two to join the fun. Several graduate students have brought their partners, and I will officiate at the weddings of two of these pairs this summer.

The struggle for us is keeping the group small enough to manage. A typical week includes 12-25 students. At the end of every year, as we say goodbye to old friends and prepare for new ones, the group continues to flourish through these transitions.

A community that enriches the spirit

At a school known for its party culture, Surfing & Spirituality offers a distinct shift from the norm. The early start requires that students leave their dorms before sunrise. Somehow they manage to make it out even when it is cold and rainy. Most mornings, they're rewarded with a brilliant sunrise overlooking the Pacific Ocean and the Channel Islands. Then we spend the morning surfing and celebrating each other's little victories. There are a lot of high fives and hoots. By the time we pack up, we are all energized for the day ahead.

Surfing enriches spiritual practice in many ways. Simply stepping into the ocean makes notions of interdependence and mystical unity tangible. Cold water encourages parasympathetic states and helps us develop compassion. Careful attention to breaking waves calls for focus akin to traditional mindfulness practices. Surfing can also lead to sublime experiences in which we recognize a power much greater than ourselves.

Spiritual practice enriches surfing, too. Surfing can easily turn territorial, and surfers' hunger for waves can be akin to addiction. When the waves are small or conditions are poor, longtime surfers can find deeper satisfaction by considering gratitude and the church's thinking on scarcity and abundance. The restorative qualities of water that many surfers observe overlap with baptismal theology. In these ways, our tradition can bring language to experience that fringes on the ineffable.

Surfing & Spirituality is not a gimmick to trick people into coming to church. Yes, there are students that attend both Sunday worship and Wednesday surfing, but Surfing & Spirituality is its own community, one that is spiritually satisfying for those who attend. Many young adults are hungry for Christ but have no interest in church. Surfing gives them an opportunity to explore that spiritual longing in a way that complements and informs traditional church offerings.

It is noteworthy that no one who coming to Surfing & Spirituality has ever asked, "Where is God in this?" or "How is this spiritual?" They don't have to. When we paddle out in the ocean with a group of loving people, the answers are there.

[Click here](#) for a list of Covid-19 resources on ECF Vital Practices.

The Rev. Scott Claassen is the Episcopal chaplain to UCSB and vicar of St. Michael's University Church. He is the husband of Maribeth – a Certified Nurse Midwife and Women's Health Nurse Practitioner – and father of Henry (6), Jimmy (4), and baby Amos. A fifth generation Californian, Scott grew up in Monterey County. After studying Spanish Literature and Philosophy at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Scott worked as a musician until a renewed call to ministry brought him to

Yale Divinity School, where he investigated the relationship between religion and ecology. Ordained to the priesthood in 2014, Scott served at Thad's in Santa Monica before coming to St. Mike's in the fall of 2015. When not working or with his family, Scott can be found surfing, exploring wilderness, playing music or dreaming of new ways to make a love-spreading difference in the world.

Resources:

- [The Spirituality of Authentic Leaders](#) by Bill George, Vestry Papers, January 2004
- [Getting to Know the Daily Office](#) by Linda Buskirk, ECF Vital Practices blog, July 6, 2015
- [Communication is mission: Connection](#) by Richelle Thompson, ECF Vital Practices blog, February 29, 2012
- [Suddenly Single: Cooking for One](#) by Linda Privitera, ECF Vital Practices blog, February 7, 2012

¿Cómo lucirá ser iglesia después del COVID-19?

Chantal McKinney

En los muchos meses antes de que nuestro equipo central de apasionados episcopales y luteranos lanzaran Christ's Beloved Community/Comunidad Amada de Cristo en Southside Winston-Salem, NC, teníamos un ministerio floreciente, en el que salíamos a tocar las puertas de las casas y los apartamentos de nuestros vecinos. Lo hacíamos cerca del edificio de una iglesia -- que finalmente se convirtió en el hogar de nuestra iglesia -- así como en los alrededores, que incluían viviendas de Sección 8, gasolineras, tiendas, lavaderos automáticos, esquinas de calles y más. Empezamos nuestra comunidad de fe afuera, generando relaciones con gente en sus porches, en los jardines enfrente de sus casas y en sus barrios y tiendas.

Encuentros sagrados

Un día, un par de nosotros tocó la puerta de una vivienda modesta cerca del edificio de la iglesia. Un hombre respondió y nos presentamos como gente que estaba creando una nueva iglesia. Le dijimos que seríamos sus nuevos vecinos y le preguntamos si había alguna manera especial en que podríamos ser una bendición para su hogar o vecindario. Lo pensó por un minuto y dijo, "No sé qué decir".

Temí que tal vez lo había puesto en un aprieto. Le dije, "¡No se preocupe! ¿Le gustaría pensarlo y tal vez nos vemos en otro momento?"

Pasó un rato más largo en silencio. Puede ver que se le humedecían los ojos. "No, quiero decir... no sé qué decir. Me crie en una familia militar, cuando era niño nos mudamos más veces que lo que pueda contar. Viví por todo este país. Y en todos los lugares en que viví siempre vivíamos cerca de una iglesia. Y ni siquiera una vez una iglesia nos tocó la puerta para decirnos 'hola' o preguntarnos cómo nos podrían ayudar o incluso darnos la bienvenida... simplemente no sé qué decir."

Para ese entonces, ese hombre fornido tenía los ojos llenos de lágrimas. Había dicho más que lo suficiente y, sorprendentemente, supe que habíamos hecho lo suficiente. Con simplemente presentarnos habíamos sido suficientes. Y eso era más importante que ninguna otra cosa que podríamos haber hecho. Este fue uno de los muchos encuentros sagrados que tuvimos y que seguimos teniendo en las calles y barrios de Southside Winston-Salem. Nos demostró la importancia de simplemente conocer a nuestros vecinos y enterarnos de lo que Dios estaba haciendo en sus vidas y después unirnos a ello en ese sentido.

Ser iglesia de una manera nueva

Confieso: Desde hace mucho tiempo he estado fomentando que las feligresías descubran nuevamente cómo ser iglesia afuera del edificio de la iglesia. Pero jamás hubiera deseado que fuera de esta manera. Jamás podría haber imaginado que un virus pudiera ser lo que le demostraría al mundo que estamos profundamente interconectados. Esto nos tomó a todos por sorpresa y, por lo que veo, muchos en la iglesia adoptaron servicios religiosos, estudios bíblicos y cuidados pastorales en línea. Ministerios críticos, como nuestra Despensa de Alimentos Comunidad Amada, pueden continuar. Ha sido inspirador ver la manera en que se están formando colaboraciones, demostrando que la buena voluntad es igualmente viral. Nuevamente está empezando a emerger un espíritu de unidad en este país que ha estado tan profundamente fragmentado.

Otra ventaja de estos tiempos es que tenemos la oportunidad de centrarnos y pasar a estar más profundamente alineados con lo que Dios nos está diciendo. Incluso en medio de los increíbles desafíos del COVID-19, aprecié el tiempo que tenía para acercarme a Dios y estar abierta a la manera en que Dios habla en momentos de transformación. Pregunto constantemente: ¿Qué se está agrietando? ¿Qué está irrumpiendo? ¿Qué necesita morir para permitir que emerja algo nuevo? ¿Qué cambios importantes deben ocurrir en la iglesia para acercarnos más al reino de Dios en esta tierra? ¿Qué tenemos ante nuestros ojos, si solo tenemos los ojos para ver? He estado preguntando muchas cosas, escuchando profundamente y reflexionando. Llegué a la conclusión de que es necesario que ocurra un cambio importante en la vida de la iglesia.

Algún día este capítulo habrá finalizado. No sabemos si será dentro de semanas o meses. Pero algún día regresaremos a los edificios de nuestras iglesias. Compartiremos el mismo cáliz sin temor. Nos abrazaremos en la paz. Miraremos profundamente a los ojos de nuestros seres queridos. ¡Nos reuniremos en grupos, como lo hicimos anteriormente, para hacer el buen trabajo de la iglesia! Pero también es importante que ocurra un cambio de fondo. ¿No han sentido acaso al Espíritu trabajando en estos tiempos? ¿Han notado maneras en que se podría ser iglesia de otra manera? Personalmente, recuerdo a menudo lo fundamental que es la conexión en persona, si bien estoy agradecida por las oportunidades para conectarnos virtualmente. Mi esposo e hijos echamos de menos a los abuelos que no podemos ver. Yo echo de menos a los jóvenes del barrio de nuestra iglesia.

Pero no quiero volver a la normalidad si ello significa solo ver a nuestros feligreses en el edificio de nuestra iglesia. No quiero volver a encender nuestra luz adentro del edificio, donde los que están afuera no la pueden ver. Ahora puedo ver más claramente cómo nos cerramos a la interconectividad cuando permanecemos en nuestros edificios. Quiero que seamos intencionales sobre aventurarnos afuera para ser iglesia en nuestros barrios.

¿Qué cosas nuevas está haciendo Dios en nosotros?

Quiero que la luz que esparza nuestra iglesia se vea y se sienta en nuestro barrio. Quiero verificar si nuestros vecinos están bien, como lo hago con mis padres y mis feligreses. Me pregunto qué vecinos cerca de la iglesia se están sintiendo especialmente aislados. ¿Quiénes entre ellos están desempleados? ¿Quiénes no tienen seguridad alimentaria? ¿Están estas familias agotadas por tener que equilibrar trabajar desde sus hogares y supervisar las tareas escolares de sus hijos en línea? ¿Quiénes están luchando por permanecer sobrios sin reuniones de la AA y de la NA? ¿Quiénes son frágiles emocionalmente? ¿Quiénes cerca de la iglesia anhelan tener un impacto positivo pero no saben por dónde empezar? ¿Quiénes surgieron de esta oscura noche de su alma con una conexión más fuerte con Dios y desean compartir esa fe con otros? ¿Quiénes cerca de nosotros tienen una voz para cantar o una mente lista para participar y aprender con nosotros? Quiero volver a tocar puertas, a mirar a los ojos y ver qué cosas nuevas está haciendo Dios entre todos nosotros.

Hermanos y hermanas, pronto estaremos ante la encrucijada en el camino. Cuando podamos regresar a nuestros edificios, ¿volveremos a hacer las cosas como las hacíamos antes o abriremos un sendero nuevo, con el que estaremos menos familiarizados, hacia equilibrar ser iglesia adentro de nuestros edificios y afuera de ellos, profundamente enraizados en nuestros barrios y comunidades?

Creo que es hora de hacer un cambio en la iglesia que empieza por esparcir nuestra luz afuera de nuestros edificios. ¡Estamos aprendiendo que nuestros edificios no son lo que nos hacen iglesia, después de todo! Es la gente. Es el amor de Cristo y el amor que compartimos. Eso se puede hacer en línea pero, por el bien del mundo, también necesitamos llevar al mundo nuestro amor y nuestra luz. Entonces realmente veremos lo que Dios puede hacer entre nosotros.

Cuando recién empecé nuestro ministerio en las calles, después de 10 años de haber trabajado principalmente en el edificio de la iglesia, estuve impresionada con el recordatorio de que Dios se mueve por todo el mundo, co-creando y construyendo el reino. Dios está trabajando mediante las entidades sin ánimo de lucro, los líderes comunitarios, la gente del pueblo y todo tipo de familias y personas que no van a la iglesia los domingos.

Cuando el mundo se convierte en nuestra iglesia

Me acostumbré a pensar que Dios trabajaba mediante iglesias porque es ahí donde estaba mi energía en ese entonces. Mover el ministerio afuera del edificio de nuestra iglesia fue un llamado increíble y expansivo para mí. Espero que cuando llegue el momento en que finalicemos nuestras reuniones en Zoom y nuestro culto en línea, aprovechemos ese tiempo para preguntarnos, “¿Y ahora qué? ¿Cómo podemos seguir siendo iglesia afuera del edificio, pero más intencionalmente afuera en el mundo? ¿Qué necesita cambiar?”

Un día en que estuve conociendo vecinos en un complejo de apartamentos, me encontré con una abuela en la acera. Era una mujer pequeña pero de corazón grande, que a pesar de los años grabados en su rostro emanaba luz. Me dijo que, gracias a Dios, había logrado vencer su adicción al crack. Con un ritmo como de canción y una gran sonrisa, ella dio toda la gloria a Dios. “¡Dios lo hizo

otra vez! ¡Él lo hizo otra vez!”. Empezó a mecerse al sentir su propia alabanza moverse por su cuerpo. Me dijo que fue la fuerza de Dios lo que le permitió permanecer limpia y sobria día tras día y estar presente para su hija y su nieta, que estaban paradas junto a ella, asintiendo su acuerdo con la cabeza. Con sus brillantes ojos oscuros y una enorme sonrisa proclamó que Dios “la volvió a salvar una y otra, y otra, y otra vez”.

Eso fue hace años, pero recuerdo su canción, su corazón y su convicción como si los hubiera oído la semana pasada. Y pensar que si ella solo hubiera compartido esto *adentro* de su iglesia o su hogar, yo nunca lo habría oído. Fue solo porque yo estuve en la calle para conocer a la comunidad y porque ella estaba en su comunidad, lista para compartir lo que Dios estaba haciendo en su vida. Y en ese momento, éramos dos y tres reunidas, y Cristo estaba entre nosotras. Éramos iglesia, juntas.

La luz y el amor de Dios pueden hacerse virales en nuestro mundo cuando salimos de nuestros edificios para hablar con nuestros vecinos, cara a cara, ojo a ojo y corazón a corazón.

La luz y el amor de Dios pueden hacerse virales en nuestro mundo cuando buscamos y escuchamos lo que Dios está haciendo con otros en el mundo, confiando en que Dios también se mueve afuera de nuestra iglesia.

La luz y el amor de Dios pueden hacerse virales en nuestro mundo cuando podemos compartir lo que Dios está haciendo en nuestras vidas con vulnerabilidad, afuera del edificio de nuestra iglesia.

La luz y el amor de Dios pueden hacerse virales en nuestro mundo cuando el mundo se convierte en nuestra iglesia y cuando las Buenas Nuevas emanan de nuestras voces como agua para tierras resacas.

Dios nos está invitando a que realicemos un cambio.

Dios nos está invitando a que prestemos atención a todas las posibilidades en la encrucijada del camino.

Dios nos está invitando a que seamos virales.

[Oprima aquí](#) para ver una lista de recursos de Covid-19 en prácticas vitales de ECF.

La Rev. Dr. Chantal Morales McKinney siente una verdadera pasión por crear andamiajes para que gente e iglesias se aventuren hacia sus barrios y el mundo por el bien de la misión mutua y de ser Cristo en comunidad. Su trabajo con otros en las calles de Southside Winston-Salem, Carolina del Norte, condujo a la creación de Christ's Beloved Community/Comunidad Amada de Cristo, una iglesia episcopal y luterana bilingüe. Ella emplea el Desarrollo Comunitario Basado en Activos para empoderar a la gente y crear asociaciones. Además de ser Desarrolladora de Misiones en CBC, disfruta hablar sobre misión en conferencias y asesoramiento cuando su tiempo lo permite. Está casada con Bryson y tienen dos varoncitos bulliciosos y una hermosa bebida.

Recursos:

- [Un Plano Para el Cambio](#), por Birdie Blake-Reid según se lo contó a Nancy Davidge, Vestry Papers, marzo 2014
- [Una Instantánea de Nuestro Barrio Urbano](#) por Anna Olson, Vestry Papers, enero 2012
- [Dios, es tu iglesia](#) por Alfredo Feregrino, Vestry Papers, November 2016
- [El amor incondicional de Dios](#) por Alex Montes-Vela, Vestry Papers, julio 2015