



## **Formation for the Missionary Church**

### **Formation Through Community**

Emily Mellott

The question of formation is core to the mission of the church. The word summarizes the process of making disciples: sharing the teaching of Jesus with believers, new and old, and providing them the support to continue growing closer in following him.

Many of the ways we've traditionally focused on formation, like Sunday School and seminary, have changed in recent years, as have the formative experiences of worship and relationships. That change was only accelerated in 2020 by the COVID pandemic. All Christians – lay and clergy, recent converts and lifelong faithful – are called to form ourselves and others in the missionary work of the church, empowered by baptism to proclaim the gospel and share in Christ's work of healing and salvation. Many of us engaged in the everyday life of congregations are particularly aware of the need right now to be responsive and creative in how we form ourselves and others.

### **An annual theme to focus conversation**

As part of my work with [Gathering of Leaders](#) (GOL), I serve as the convener for the Theme Committee which discerns and writes the annual theme for our events and conversations. The theme provides a yearly focus for our peer-led conversations and a lens through which to view our core purpose: to be a creative, entrepreneurial, hope-filled response to the missionary call of Christ: to make disciples among all nations, teaching what Jesus taught (Matthew 28:19-20). While GOL is a network of clergy, all people, clergy and lay, are wrestling with the need to find new ways of building disciples right now through innovative formation and community.

For 2021, the Gathering of Leaders Board chose the theme of formation to help focus our missional creativity:

### **Formation for the Missionary Church in a Changing World**

Recent events have reminded us that as we proclaim the gospel, we continually encounter the unexpected and are called into places of vulnerability. At our best, we meet these challenges with fortitude, steadfastness and resilience. What practical strategies can we share to form communities in those virtues? How do we teach and shape Christians to proclaim Christ's good news amid the challenges of the unexpected and the pain of the world's brokenness? As we engage the present and look to the future, how do we form communities of courage and hope?

The change we are experiencing can create new opportunities for forming community that we may not have anticipated. Greg Rickel, bishop for the Diocese of Olympia, comments that at Zoom coffee hour, we're forced to engage with everyone present, not gather in established groups of friends. "One irony of the pandemic is that as we are separated, we are in some ways becoming more connected.... Almost all of my congregations are reporting new members from across the diocese, state and world, with many pledging. This has opened up a whole new world that we probably should have been working on long ago, but the silver lining here is that we were forced into it and it is good for evangelism. Now, we have to capitalize on it."

Christian communities that build one another up in courage and hope develop disciples with the faithful, flexible strength to meet the challenges of change, to share good news with those who need it and to welcome those who seek it. This theme encourages us all to identify and share the practical strategies that build those communities. This year all of us – lay and ordained, known leaders and quiet stalwarts – are learning on the job how to respond to people who appear on our virtual or physical thresholds seeking a community that proclaims the gospel in practical ways for our present time. Networking our experience and resources across contexts that seem very different – between the outreach and music leaders, or a congregation's Sunday school teachers and its finance team, or between clergy working in church plants and established congregations – builds resilient, creative communities.

"Coming together as leaders," says Dr. Scott Bader-Saye from the Seminary of the Southwest, "we can share practices and imagine experiments in ministry that can help us become more courageous and hopeful witnesses in a time of deep uncertainty." He reflects that leading in a time of change requires that we improvise faithfully and turn toward risk, rather than flee from it.

### **Connecting more deeply with our core mission**

In developing the GOL theme, we also thought it important to explore how the vulnerability we experience as so much changes around us may connect us more deeply to the core mission and original call of Christ's church. Bishop Katherine Jefferts Schori suggests that the 2021 Theme reflects "early challenges in the Jesus movement and in our Abrahamic roots – how to be loving, peace- and justice-making disciples who bless, as we are sent out into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit." Recognizing that this may cost us some things we have formerly considered good or relied on, she asks, "Are we willing to let go of prejudices, proprieties, persuasions and principles that no longer serve God's mission? How is virtual worship like the Ark carried in the wilderness? Are we willing to follow the pillar of fire and smoke into the unknown?"

This year, every one of our communities has found ourselves in the wilderness in one way or another. We are in an environment where many of the familiar things that have defined us in the past are missing or different. The wilderness has always been a place of formation, a place in which we discover anew our identity as God's children, God's people, and learn to rely more deeply on God and one another. So, this time of change is the time to find new ways to tell the stories, pray the prayers and build the relationships that form us into the Body of Christ and empower us to join with God in the healing of the world.

*The Gathering of Leaders 2021 Theme Committee included Dr. Scott Bader-Saye, the Rt. Rev. Katherine Jefferts Schori, the Rev. Emily Mellott and the Rt. Rev. Greg Rickel, in consultation with the Rt. Rev. Duncan Gray.*

*The Rev. Emily Mellott is the Rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in Moorestown, New Jersey, and evangelist and web-editor for the [Ashes to Go](#) movement. She has been a member of the Gathering of Leaders since 2010, and currently serves on the GOL Board.*

**Resources:**

- [Formation Moves into the Neighborhood](#) by Greg Syler, an ECF Vital Practices blog, April 4, 2019
- [Just Plain Joy](#) by Linda Buskirk, an ECF Vital Practices blog, December 22, 2017
- [Everyday Christians](#) by Alan Bentrup, an ECF Vital Practices blog, June 12, 2017
- [Hybrid Faith Formation: Two Final Lessons For Any Minister, Any Church](#) by Kyle Matthew Oliver, an ECF Vital Practices blog, January 16, 2015

**The Power of Gathering**

Haley Bankey

Since 2017, I have had the privilege of working with and supporting a network of creative, innovative, hope-filled clergy across the Episcopal Church who are dedicated to the missionary call of Christ and to growing the church in both numbers and spiritual depth. Gathering of Leaders (GOL) has shown me that it is not just the people who make this network transformational, but also the methods by which we come together.

As we head into this year, our clergy will be wrestling with the theme of [Formation for the Missionary Church in a Changing World](#). The way we hold our conversations, come together as a learning community and support one another in ministry is at the very core of our ethos. Our methods are also *not* revolutionary, *not* secret, and *not* specific to our network. They work for any community seeking to support one another, learn from trial and error and find new ways of forming disciples in the world. I think the Rev. Patrick Greene (GOL since 2017) describes these methods best, “they help me not just be a better priest, but a better Christian.”

The core values of GOL are essential to building our supportive network and can be embraced by any learning community. Our founder, the Rt. Rev. Claude Payne, designed GOL because he believes “spiritual development occurs within an individual, but not in the absence of others.” (*The Great Commission*, p. 11) I hope that these methods and values can inspire you as we all seek to bring people into deeper relationship with Christ.

**The Missionary Call of Christ**

At the forefront of every conversation that takes place in and through the GOL network is the Great Commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28).” The purpose of the church, the purpose of our mission and the purpose of our faith is to share Christ’s love and help people find love through him. Long time GOL participant, the Rev. Paige Blair-Hubert (GOL since 2011), reflects, “There are so many forces out there that want to draw us back to the drum beat of maintenance instead of the drum beat of mission.”

*As you look at your learning community or the community you seek to create or enhance, are you keeping Jesus at its core? This isn't about getting people in the pews. This is about reaching people where they are and sharing the love of Christ.*

[\(Watch Rev. Paige Blair-Hubert's comments on the Power of Gathering.\)](#)

### **Peer-Learning**

A unique feature of GOL is that our events and Gathering have no talking heads. We don't invite participants to come learn 'lecture-style,' and then go home to implement tried and true tactics. Instead, we invite our participants to share practical, creative and new ministries that they are working on or creating. Often, they share success along with tangible steps for others to emulate, but we also hear stories of experiments that failed. These stories of failure teach just us much.

"Being peer-led, means I get to hear from people who are on the ground doing things; doing creative and innovative things...these are things that are working for them. Hearing from my peers helps me imagine what they are doing working in my own church," writes the Very Rev. Kristina Maulden (GOL since 2015).

*Do you seek out to raise the voices of those who are doing the deep work in the trenches? Are you learning from successes and failures from your peers? Are you sharing what you learn as you grow in your own ministry?*

[\(Watch Very Rev. Kristina Maulden's comments on the Power of Gathering.\)](#)

### **Hope-Filled**

To me, this is the most important part of any Gathering or conversation within the network. We have a hope-filled vision for the Episcopal church. Period. This doesn't mean we are naïve; this doesn't mean we haven't seen the latest parochial report data; this doesn't mean we have our heads in the sand. We believe in the power of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and that we are living out his calling on Earth. We also know that the Episcopal church we are working to grow will look different from the ways we currently function and measure success.

When conversations happen from this place of hope they become inspiring and rejuvenating. Greene again shares, "There is something about the time at a Gathering that sends me home with a sense of joy and lightness that is fairly unique, that comes from spending time with people who are so deeply committed to following Jesus."

*Do you start your work from a place of hope? Does your work inspire you to seek the future of the church however that might look?*

[\(Watch Rev. Patrick Greene's comments on the Power of Gathering.\)](#)

### **Respect & Vulnerability**

Time and time again I hear participants comment on how GOL has created a space where they can be truly vulnerable and real about the challenges of ministry. They can speak to whatever struggles or

challenges they are facing and know that the others in the room will offer support and respect. Brené Brown defines vulnerability as “uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure,” and through that vulnerability, people can tackle the seriously difficult conversations.

With a national atmosphere of deeply divided politics, racial unrest and ‘purple congregations,’ the ability to bring any idea or thought to the table for discussion gives such power to the conversations. Disagreements will happen, of course, but the response is about learning and inquiring, not judging or condemning.

*Does your community allow space for all voices at the table? Do you seek to learn from those with different perspectives and seek common ground through Christ?*

### **Diverse**

Gathering of Leaders has not always been diverse, and for that, our conversations have suffered. In recent years, our board and our participants have actively sought to identify voices who were not ‘at our table’ and to invite them into intentional and deep community. While this is still a growing edge for our organization, the increased diversity has already made the connectivity and formation so much richer. GOL Board member Rev. Jemonde Taylor (GOL since 2013) has been instrumental in our diversity efforts, and says, “We are all serving, and even though we serve in different contexts, we all battle the same things... if we listen to each other, we are trying not to make the same mistakes.”

*When you look around your room and your community, does everyone look like you? Does everyone think like you? Are you intentionally adding voices with different backgrounds, experiences and ideologies who can challenge your perspectives in the best of ways?*

### **Creative and Innovative**

Participants who attend a Gathering know that the conversations, methods and strategies will be fueled by Jesus-fed creativity. While most of our participants, like most of the laity involved in the Episcopal church, are serving at established, traditional congregations, the ideas for ministry and going outside our doors are free-flowing.

“This is not work that will be done tomorrow or next week or next month. This is work that has to continue,” says the Rev. Canon Dr. Wilmot Merchant (GOL since 2018), and the connections and ideas that participants make and hear at Gatherings allow for creative ministry to thrive.

*When you and your learning community gather, are you inspired to try new things? Do you seek out examples of creative ministry taking place throughout the country and see how your context could improve? Are you seeking to make disciples in ways that are new for you?*

[\(Watch Rev. Wilmot Merchant’s complete testimonial.\)](#)

### **Share the Love of Christ**

At my very first Gathering in 2017, I met Rev. Callie Swanlund (GOL since 2017) who summed up the Gathering experience perfectly for me, as “ the brightest and shiniest example of what church is and

what church can be.” She wasn’t just talking about the people in the room, but also the ethos that permeated every conversation and presentation.

As I stated at the beginning, these methods are not clergy-centric by any means. They can be embraced by all institutions in the church and can make a difference in your own learning community. I offer the methods and testimonials in the hope that you might become inspired to build, join or enhance a learning community that seeks to follow the Great Commission and bring more people to know the love of Christ through the Episcopal Church.

*You can learn more about the Gathering of Leaders [on their website](#), and support the work of their ministry through their [online donation page](#).*

**Haley Bankey** is the Executive Director for Gathering of Leaders and serves as a Program Director for Leadership Resources at the Episcopal Church Foundation. Prior to working with GOL, Haley served as the Director of Operations and Management for her home parish of St. George Church and School in San Antonio, Texas, and ran her own faith-based operations consulting company. She is also a graduate of the College for Congregational Development. Haley grew up in the Episcopal church in the Middle East and brings an international perspective to her work. Her passion is equipping lay and clergy leaders alike through leadership training and community building to grow God's church into the future. She lives in San Antonio, Texas, with her husband and two wonderful daughters.

#### **Resources:**

- [Reshaping the Table](#) by Maria Bautista Vargas, an ECF Vital Practices blog, May 29, 2019
- [Change is Possible](#) by Richelle Thompson, an ECF Vital Practices blog, December 2, 2016
- [What Needs To Go Out, So The New Can Come In?](#) by Greg Syler, an ECF Vital Practices blog, November 9, 2016
- [What Gives You Hope?](#) by Miguel Escobar, an ECF Vital Practices blog, June 5, 2012

#### **New Wine in an Old Wineskin**

Anna Sutterisch

*Editor’s Note: This resource is a video. Please [click here](#) to view. The full transcription is available below.*

**TRANSCRIPT:** Hey! I’m Anna, and I think a lot about how the church – ‘big C’ institutional church and ‘little c’ faith community church – can best teach and shape Christians amidst the brokenness of the world. How can we form communities of courage and hope, when it’s easier to just disappear into apathy and Instagram, putting trust in no one because everyone is a disappointment?

As a reminder, just because God doesn’t have limits doesn’t mean we are also limitless. We aren’t in control, we can’t “save the church,” but we *can* follow the Holy Spirit as she moves and changes us and hopefully makes us see some opportunities to make our faith communities a little more relevant, woke and hip. (#MakeChurchHipAgain #NotYourGrandmasChurch)

It’s *all* about context. I’m not advocating throwing the baby out with the bathwater. I am not proposing we burn it all down, although #realtalk some days I do. Instead, I propose the question of how we can

avoid the trap of putting new wine in an old wineskin. (Matthew 9:16, Mark 2:22, Luke 5:36) Instead of letting the grape rot on the vine, maybe we could try to make some new, natural, sulfate-free rosé! The truth is, following the Holy Spirit will lead us to new wineskin. The pandemic, the “big reveal” of a nation based on racism, the inequalities of capitalism and political insurrection means that the wine needs to change. And that old vessel is getting more and more obsolete. So let’s raise a glass.

### **First, some brainstorming**

When thinking about any aspect of your faith community, play the “Why” game. Get to the Why before the What or How – and it’s different for each community. For example:

“We need more young families in church.”

Why?

“So our Sunday school is bigger.”

Why?

“So we can keep the church alive for generations.”

Why?

“So my legacy will continue!”

If we start with the why, before jumping in to the what and how and who, we can make sure the real nugget of God’s grace and hope and love is at the basis of everything we do.

Revamp your media diet: Are you looking in the mirror at church resources? Or are you gleaning new ideas, new ways of thinking about church? Some of the things giving me life right now are Seculocity (Zahl), Learning from London (Fout), Mockingcast (Mockingbird Ministries, Faith and Capital, Earth and Altar, @BlackLiturgies, @PrayersFrom Terrie, #ProgressiveClergy TikTok. People are trying crazy things. Just steal their ideas, y’all!

### **Next, more examples for you to steal and contextualize**

#### **Use technology as a tool for evangelism, not a vehicle for what was**

Check out the Noon Service out of Cincinnati and Imagine Church out of Atlanta. Play around –use YouTube clips, music videos, breakout rooms (being mindful of licenses, requesting and paying for access and permissions, and giving credit to creators of course.) There are some super fun things we can do in virtual church that we will never be able to do in real life pews. I just wonder if, in the face of the unexpected and the pain of the world’s brokenness, people really need a YouTube video of a vested clergyperson in an empty church talking to a camera?

#### **Consider worship**

The essential elements of bread, wine, fire, water can be transformed into... Candle-light yoga? Bonfires? Beach day? People are doing this and it works. Again, don’t throw the baby out with the bathwater. Take your ancient chant and Rite I to the lake at sunset. Have rogation day in the public park, complete with a thurible and all the vestments. Make sure to record and post it. Pass out tambourines and bongo drums and make a chaotic joyful noise along with the organ playing old-school hymns. Make a line dance to them. Do the Church Clap! I’m not advocating for building from scratch. I’m advocating for using what we have and love in new ways. Warning: You may have to butcher some sacred cows.

### **Look around**

What do you have available to you? I've had a successful Stations of the Cross for runners in downtown Cleveland, the tomb represented by a parking garage. A hike through the snowy woods at Advent with stops to read the freedom poetry of Maya Angelou. Liturgies for chicken processing and maple syrup tapping. Cook-a-longs with chefs talking about cooking as a spiritual practice. Soul-tending activities using found objects at home. Theological reflections on images from the news. TikTok evangelism. Start with what you have, not what you're missing (#AssetBasedCommunityDevelopment.)

### **Small groups**

A culture of small groups is perhaps one of the hardest cultures to build, and for sure one of the best ways for folks to deepen relationships with God, self and others. Start with what you have: form small groups for "church people" around EfM or Sacred Ground or Men's Bible Study/Donuts or Knitting/Sewing circles or whatever. For other people, form small groups around tabletop games, beer brewing, Fortnite, yogalates, whatever the interests are. Build into the small groups actual formation, reflection, discussion, vulnerability, real talk. (Michael Moynagh's literature on "Third Space" church is helpful here.) Let's take a cue from the ancients and the evangelicals and make the network of house churches and small groups be the foundation for the larger faith community that gathers corporately.

### **Finally, some reminders**

Yes, you'll have to rethink your budget. Are your church building expenses precluding a line item in your budget for reparations? Is your revenue diversified, including space rental and for-profit fundraisers? (Yes, we're allowed to charge money, hopefully on a sliding scale, for goods and services.)

Have you paid a millennial, or any other trusted non-churchgoer, to show up at your services, virtual or in person, and give feedback? (p.s. you fail this test if no one talks to them *and* if they get asked to become a Sunday School teacher on their first visit.) Have them try to find you on a Google search and hear their reactions.

Is your outreach ministry actually a front for charity? What does outreach – reaching out – look like in your community? What does your community need from you? Is it spiritual care or access to internet? Rent assistance or organ recitals? Can charity be evangelism? Could they (gasp!) be intertwined? Here's where we may think of prayer at food pickups, Bible study at soup kitchens, film discussions at the pantry. May your community ministries be so engaging and relevant that people get curious about Sunday morning (or, you know, Wednesday night with dinner and childcare... or zoom discussions... or outdoor worship).

To be a real beacon of grace in a world that is bleeding out right now means to be *real*. And maybe, just maybe, what was real and true and relevant and helpful back in the day is ready for a reset. For the church to form communities with fortitude, steadfastness and resilience, we need to be nimble. We need to listen – to the spirit, to our neighbors, to people outside the church. And we definitely, *definitely*, need some new wine.

*The Rev. Anna Sutterisch is Canon for Christian Formation in the Episcopal Diocese of Ohio. She loves to cook, grow and eat plants, and run. She lives in Cleveland Ohio with her spouse, the Rev. Noah, and two cats, Phoebe and Thecla. Anna serves on the board of directors at Bexley Seabury Seminary, where she was in the first class of the low-residency model which emphasizes context and practical missiology.*



Anna has been a member of [Gathering of Leaders](#) since 2020. She is also involved in the local Reparations movement in Cleveland.

**Resources:**

- [Bursting The Old Wineskin](#), by C. Eric Funston, an ECF Vital Practices blog, January 18, 2013
- [Small Groups, Big Impact](#), by John Adler, Vestry Papers, July 2014
- [Triple Threat](#), by Adialyn Milien, Vestry Papers, July 2020
- [Ministry in a Global Pandemic](#), an ECF webinar presented by Joshua Rodriguez-Hobbs on June 11, 2020
- [An Idea to Invite Change](#), by Linda Buskirk, an ECF Vital Practices blog, December 10, 2019

**A Two-In-One Ministry Grows In Houston**

Uriel Lopez

In a changing world, the Missionary Church needs leadership and trust. This is what we have found in forming San Romero at St. Christopher's in Houston, Texas. The one requirement that must be present when planting a new Christian congregation is the leadership of the Spirit of Christ. It is his church and his mission.

I can describe the experience of housing San Romero and St. Christopher's together in one word: trust. To work together we must trust each other, but as we all know, trust is earned. I decided to trust Andy Doyle, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas, from the moment he told me, "we are waiting for you here, whenever you are ready." I did not hear conditions to that invitation, and that is why I considered it some years later.

I trusted the diocesan leaders when they said to me, "We trust you." They trusted my experience in ministry, and they wanted me to present a project after I had a chance to get to know West Houston. It made a great difference to hear that there were enough funds dedicated to mission. I mean this sincerely, because other initiatives want to send missionaries without committing funds, knowing well that they are available for other priorities.

Maybe I just trust people too easily, but the same process repeated itself in our decision to choose St. Christopher's as our host church. Father Bob Goolsby and the leaders of the congregation opened their church and hearts to us and remained committed to the project, even after we decided to be a separate congregation that would not be integrated into their parish.

**Sharing space and making space for each other**

When people are forced to be together, togetherness can become an obstacle. Sometimes we think that if we require others to speak our language, come to the same place, at the same time, try to look the same, never disagree in anything, etc., then we are one. But we are all one church, with people who are allowed and encouraged to be different. We speak and worship one language at a time. There is no requirement to integrate all people into one like-minded, same-cultured group. We are, however, asked to be respectful and appreciative of one another.

Housing two congregations together requires sharing space and making space for each other. There are always issues regarding sharing space, but good leadership handles them with authority when trust has been built. St. Christopher's has given full use of the campus to San Romero, even though we do not own it. When we presented the project to the vestry of St. Christopher's, I was ready, good missionary that I am, to be told what specific areas we could use, and which ones we could not. The Holy Spirit has surprised me several times, and one was when the vestry told us that they wanted us to use their entire campus, without exceptions, whenever needed. In that same meeting, after I explained that we would come in every Sunday to set up our musical instruments and take them down after our worship, they decided that it was not acceptable. They would take two pews out of their newly renovated sanctuary to make room for our band. No need to set up every week. Our ministry is one.

Of course, earning trust takes time, and it only happened after I spent more than six months sharing with the people of St. Christopher's at every opportunity. Before we invited other people, we got to know each other. I learned to appreciate who they are and what they have done, and I made sure that they knew that I would love and respect them, no matter what.

Father Bob Goolsby and I trusted each other, and when it was time, we presented the project to the Diocese together, surrounded by our leaders. Because we had first built trust, we were confident that we were called to be two separate congregations. When San Romero began its public ministry in Spanish, some of St. Christopher's lay leaders participated in our leadership. It was critical that they welcomed people, not to their building, but to their church. The planting of San Romero became an integral part of their mission, and when it was time, they were able to step back.

"What language do you speak at home?" This was an important question in our preliminary research on the residents of Spring Branch, Houston. It made sense to start our ministry in Spanish when we learned that 52.85 percent of residents spoke Spanish at home. It is good to feel at home when we go to church. We must depart from the idea that we are different. God has showed us that our differences are not a problem, unless we make them one.

### **New rector, new insights**

Father Rich Houser inherited the project of San Romero in 2019, when he became St. Christopher's rector, and he has gained our trust. Leaders must trust each other to share in the one mission of Christ, and one of the many ways that God has showed us we should trust Father Rich was a new insight into our ministry. At that time, San Romero was gearing up for the possibility of having our own campus. One of the main reasons for that was us feeling the call to add ministry in English, which might have caused our churches to compete for new members and present a problem.

Father Rich's answer was, "I don't see the problem. We just have to work on our schedules." And with the support of his vestry and our Bishop's Committee, San Romero is on its way to starting worship in Spanish and English. Because we trust each other, our two congregations offer newcomers different options for Episcopal worship and membership on the same campus.

We have a ritual now that I call "the moving of the ropes." To be two-in-one, we need to be allowed to be different. St. Christopher's is excellent in dealing with the pandemic and having in-person worship safely. And we have followed their leadership in all but one detail - the ropes for social distancing. Large families that live under the same roof come to worship at San Romero. No social distancing required.

Father Rich told us, “Well, you can do your own thing, move the ropes if you need to.” So, every Sunday before worship, we move the ropes to accommodate to our needs and put them back afterwards to respect theirs.

The Missionary Church needs leadership and trust. I believe you should try to hear everyone, but not consult everyone. Decisions and authority are given by the congregation to those in leadership. I am sure that there are some at San Romero and St. Christopher’s and some outsiders who do not get it. They might say, “Why do they/we have to move the ropes? Can’t they accommodate to our way?” But even if they disagree with the way things are done, they respect it, because they are met by the maturity, commitment, courage and hope of their leaders. This applies to all disagreements. We need to recognize that we are different. When we can be different and embrace each other as we are, then we are one in Christ Jesus, our leader.

The people of St. Christopher’s and San Romero have come together often. We have shared outreach efforts and events such as Trunk or Treat, Pet Blessing, Easter Egg Hunt, and Ashes to Go. We have been in the first row for each other at every special celebration for our two congregations. We have not felt the need to make bilingual gatherings or liturgies because we trust our leaders, who serve as a bridge, and because we feel at home in our separate languages and cultural heritages. We know we are there to support each other. And we know well that even if we don’t gather together and only greet and talk between services, we are two-in-one, still one Christian Church in the Episcopal tradition.

#### **A few words from St. Christopher’s and San Romero’s leaders**

##### **The Rev. Rich Houser, Rector of St. Christopher’s Episcopal Church**

There is not much more to be said, so I won't say much. I will say that trust is so important in these multiple ministry environments. We have San Romero Episcopal Church, Saint Christopher's Episcopal Church, Saint Christopher's Episcopal Day School, Saint Christopher's Resale Shop, and Total Football Soccer Club in our community, not including our anonymous groups and neighborhood groups. It's a lot of folks who share the unified belief that St. Christopher's in Spring Branch is important to all of us. You might ask, how did trust grow? Trust takes time, lots of communication in the various ways we take in communication, embracing cultural differences - and a central Google calendar! One calendar that everyone can see definitely helps us see possible bumps before they become hills.

It is truly an honor to be entrusted with hosting San Romero Episcopal Church and the Rev. Uriel Lopez.

##### **From Becky Hubert, Lay leader of St. Christopher’s**

I was serving as senior warden and had just come back from a mission to Honduras, when Fr. Bob Goolsby spoke to us about the possibility of having Hispanic ministry at St. Christopher’s. I had been praying about something like this, and when Uriel chose us, it was an answer to our prayer. I wanted our church to open its doors to a greater diversity of people, more representative of our local Spring Branch Community.

We have been part of Uriel’s leadership from the beginning, and we pray for each other all the time. We were present at the beginning of their public worship, and we were there for the ringing of the bell when San Romero was received as a Fellowship. We really feel that their ministry is part of ours, and we are so happy to be able to share our buildings with them.

### **From Patricia Perez, Lay leader of San Romero**

I met Father Uriel at a family gathering of a friend. At that point, my marriage was almost over, and my husband and I started going to him for marriage counseling. When we started counseling, our friends also invited us to come to San Romero with them one Sunday. We loved it. Even though most people were from El Salvador and other countries, we felt very welcomed and pampered.

During one of the Eucharists in my first year, I had a powerful invitation of the Holy Spirit to receive holy communion which I had not done for many, many years, and it changed my life. This church has helped my husband and I remain together and value each other as a couple. To the glory of God, we now celebrate being together for 27 years. We have found a family who loves us unconditionally.

Father Uriel, his wife Luisa and other leaders are always close and attentive to us, and during this past year, when I lost both my parents, we received phone calls and visits daily. They cooked and brought us hot soups and medicine when we caught COVID-19, and they offered a complete virtual novena for my family when my mom died. The love that we feel in this family of San Romero we have never found in any other place. Every Sunday, I feel that I go to a family gathering to be fed and renewed. There is always a message in the sermon that touches you personally; there is always a teaching that I can use. There was an empty space in my life and in my faith before, but now I love sharing my experience of God and my church. I love serving and sharing, and now it makes me proud to be a member of the Bishop's Committee of San Romero Episcopal Church.

*Padre **Uriel Lopez** did parish ministry with the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rockford, Illinois, in the suburbs of Chicago for nine years before transitioning to the Episcopal Church in 2011. He has great experience in bilingual parish settings, and in leading English and Spanish speaking groups in one community. He was received as a priest of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Chicago and served as the rector of Church of the Redeemer in Elgin, Illinois, for four years. Uriel was called to lead in the creation of a new mission in West Houston, and he is now the vicar for his church plant, San Romero Episcopal Church, Houston. Uriel has been a member of [Gathering of Leaders](#) since 2019. He is married to Maria Luisa Mateus Cuesta, and they have two children, Meiby Yeritza and Carlos Uriel.*

*The Reverend **Rich Houser** is rector at St. Christopher's Episcopal Church, Houston, Texas. Prior to becoming St. Christopher's rector in 2019, he served at Trinity, Houston. Houser is married to Trish Houser, a private college counselor. Rich has been a member of [Gathering of Leaders](#) since 2016. They have two young daughters, Ella Rae and Emmaline, Annie, a rescue "lap kitty" and Nora, a Norwegian dwarf rabbit.*

### **Resources:**

- [Breaking Down Walls](#) by David Romanik, Vestry Papers, July 2020
- [Mission of Union and Integration](#) by Daniel Vélez-Rivera, Vestry Papers, May 2011
- [Friendship Beyond Language](#) by Anna Olson, an ECF Vital Practices blog, July 31, 2014
- [Multisites Growing...Just Not in the Episcopal Church](#) by Greg Syler, an ECF Vital Practices blog, October 21, 2019

### **Bible & Brew**

Landon Moore

*Editor's Note: This resource includes a video. Please [click here](#) to view. The full transcription is available below.*

*Bible & Brew* was birthed over beers. One day, soon after cracking open a cold one, Episcopal priests Landon Moore and Ben DeHart asked each other, "How do we make the Christian message relevant to the unchurched at this bar?" The brainstorming session that followed led to the creation of a podcast that focuses on "God talk" over a craft brew.

The podcast is pretty eclectic. Landon and Ben talk about events in their lives, the lectionary texts, current events or whatever the Holy Spirit has placed on their hearts that week. The free-wheeling nature of the podcast is purposeful. If you are anything like its hosts, you're distracted right now. (In fact, they'd bet that while reading this article, there are at least three other things happening in your life, on- or off-screen). There's laundry and racial injustice, cooking and 24-hour news, exercise, and it's still Corona-tide. In a word, it's really hard to focus, to mind any one thing for more than fifteen seconds. But that's why *Bible & Brew* is so perfect as an evangelistic tool for right now. You can do all of these things (and more!) while listening to a quirky, charming podcast that just might catch you off-guard and raise a spiritual question that you can't quit. (That's our hope, anyway.)

But don't take our word on it, here are a few stats from *Podcasts Insights*:

- 75% of the U.S. population is familiar with the term "podcasting"
- 37% (104 million) listened to a podcast in the last month
- 24% (68 million) listen to podcasts weekly
- 22% listen while driving (in a vehicle)

What's more, according to Podcast Insights, 48 percent of young people between the ages of 12-34 listen to a podcast every month. Being millennials themselves, Landon and Ben are passionate about reaching the least churched generations with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

So, as we Episcopalians attempt to counter the church attendance decline narrative, Landon and Ben believe that *Bible & Brew* is a relevant way to creatively proclaim the Gospel of God in Jesus Christ to those outside the church. We invite you to listen to our podcast, but also to come up with your own idea for reaching and engaging those who do not yet know the joys of belonging to an Episcopal church. You can find *Bible & Brew* on Spotify or Apple Podcasts.

*The Rev. **Landon Moore** serves as an associate priest at Saint Mark in Brooklyn, New York. He is active in the Diocese of Long Island and currently assists young adult ministries. He serves as the secretary for the Black Caucus in that area. Landon grew up attending Bethesda Episcopal Church in Saratoga Springs, New York, and earned a Bachelor's of Arts degree in Philosophy and Religion from Marist College, where he enjoyed competing at the NCAA Division 1 level on the college's football team. Following his undergraduate years, Landon went on to receive his Master's in Divinity from Yale Divinity School. As a seminarian, Landon also devoted significant time to mission work at an Episcopal orphanage in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, and in Bondeau, Haiti, where he worked with local children.*

*Landon's Bible & Brew co-host, the Rev. **Ben DeHart**, is the Associate Minister for Pastoral Care and New Members Ministries at the Parish of Calvary-St. George's in Manhattan.*

### Resources:

- [How Do We Tell Our Story?](#) by Demi Prentiss, Vestry Papers, May 2020
- [How Do You Share Jesus?](#) by Linda Buskirk, an ECF Vital Practices blog, August 29, 2016
- [Evangelism – It’s Now or Never](#) by Kenn Katona, Vestry Papers, May 2020
- [Be Weird, Be True](#) by David Peters, Vestry Papers, May 2020

### Video transcription:

Landon Moore speaking: Each of us has had to think outside the box and do ministry in unique ways: using new technology, social media and even some doing TikTok. Ministry is changing, and how do we do ministry in a changing world? The question I wrestle with, like many of us, is how does a church continue to engage God’s people in the midst of a global pandemic? How do we continue to engage God’s people when we can’t have worship on Sunday or can’t leave our home? How do we continue the Great Commission of Matthew Chapter 28 — “therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”? How do we continue to spread the love of God in Christ Jesus?

Not everyone finds life in the church building. Not everyone gets rejuvenated from going to church. So with that in mind, a colleague and I, the Rev. Ben Dehart, started a podcast called *Bible & Brew* – yes, *Bible & Brew!* It’s on Spotify and Apple podcasts, and we have about 3 million people who tune in – no, it’s like about 27 currently, but it’s a start.

So, we started this last year and we would put out an episode each week. We would pick a beer for the week and talk about the lectionary text for the week, have an informal conversation in regards to our thoughts – *this is how God is speaking to me, and then, what do you think about this?* – just an honest, real conversation that everyone can relate to. This also helped Ben and me, because we both preach on Sunday. At the time, it was via Zoom.

As time transpired and history unfolded, we thought yes, we can continue with the lectionary text, but let’s talk about things that are happening in history and tie it back to God-talk; how is God working in history right now? Asking questions that everyday people would want to listen to and tune in for. Questions such as “Can one be a white racist and a Christian? Where is God when human beings get trafficked?” Suffering or love, singing, praise, joy – whatever it may be. This podcast had the intention to reach beyond the church goer and, with the help social media, get into the general public, into the hearts and minds of the non-Christian, the liberal and the conservative and the evangelicals.

We have an average viewership of about 27 right now, like I said earlier – but why a podcast? Here are some stats:

- 75% of Americans are now familiar with podcasts, up from 70% in 2019, an increase of more than 10 million in one year
- 55% of Americans have listened to a podcast, up from 51% in 2019, indicating that roughly 75% of the people who are familiar with podcasts have actually listened to one
- Podcast listeners have grown to 37% in three years
- More than 100 million Americans listen to at least one podcast each month
- As of 2020, 48% of all Americans, 12 to 34, listened to at least one podcast per month, compared to 42% in 2019

So, with these stats, and as they go up, the church can be influential in having honest, real conversations in which the general public – people – are actually engaged in listening. And people can listen to it on a train ride, a subway ride or in their cars – wherever they feel comfortable, instead of going to a physical church space. This could be the beginning of their relationship with God, the beginning of a relationship with Christ.

This was one of the ways that Ben and I engaged this pandemic to do ministry in a creative new way that was outside the box. We ended up dialing down, canceled out the beer and now are doing coffee for the winter months, but these are some of the ways that God continues to use God's people and to speak through us. May God bless you and use you and your ministry.

### **The Church Goes to Virtual Burning Man**

Brian Baker

The COVID Pandemic has pushed us to the limits of our creativity. The Holy Spirit has been active in the church and the world, driving the people of God to creatively use technology to create experiences that can in some way resemble what it is like to be together in person. While this has been difficult for our congregations, usually ranging from 60 – 300 people, imagine what it is like for Burning Man, a city of 80,000 people, to try to move online. (Hear Brian's original sermon on his Burning Man experience [here.](#))

### **Burning Man goes virtual and the Church shows up**

Once a year, tens of thousands of people gather in the desert north of Reno, Nevada, to create a city complete with an airport, a public safety and health system and an abundance of public art. There are museums, night clubs, bars, coffee spots, theaters and places of learning. All of this activity comes from the participants, who work year-round to create experiences they can share with others. This bustling metropolis emerges from the desert for a week. This city is guided by ten principles, things like radical self-expression, civic responsibility, leave no trace and radical inclusion...to name just a few. Burning Man is not a festival. It is an expression of the human spirit's yearning to create community that is inspired by beauty, embodies belonging, and seeks to care for one's neighbors. Sounds a lot like the ideals of an Episcopal congregation.

When the Pandemic struck this year, Burning Man, like all large and small gatherings, was driven to try to go online. This forced our camp of Episcopalians and other Christian evangelists, Religious AF, to ask ourselves: *are we going to show up?*

For the last five years, we have been offering communion, blessings and conversation at Burning Man along with other Episcopalians, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, American Baptists and others. This effort has evolved into a thriving, growing theme camp, and in 2020 we were planning for our largest year ever, adding classes and a dance party to our established array of eucharists, daily morning prayer, Bible studies – and open time, where people could come and speak to Christians who would simply listen to them in love and engage in conversation when invited.

Ultimately, our camp decided to participate in this bizarre experiment of a virtual Burning Man. That was our first key learning: to stay focused on the mission. With all we had to deal with in our "normal"

lives, it would have been easy to say, “we just don’t have the bandwidth for that this year.” And in fact, during one of the many surges, we almost decided to skip this year’s Burn. But after prayerful discernment it became clear that Christ had given us a mission: to proclaim God’s Reign of love, justice and mercy to the far reaches of the Earth. And what is farther than an online Burning Man?

### **Let go, learn from others and see what Virtual Reality can do**

A first step in transitioning to an online camp was to let go of offerings that just wouldn’t translate well virtually, like Holy Eucharist. We focused on what we did well that would translate: conversation, prayer and play. We knew the value of mutual invitation and open-ended, provocative conversation prompts. We knew how to craft liturgies for specific contexts. We created a liturgy with three distinct components: affirmation, lament, and blessing, which helped people connect with individual and shared joy and suffering. And we offered opportunities for people to come together and play as we explored the Virtual Burning Man.

A second step was to turn to other camps and the wider Burner world to see what we could learn. We found communities had been very successful creating intimacy and play via Zoom with simple things like inviting people to change their names on the Zoom window to something more descriptive/creative, having a host, distinct from the officiant, who would make sure everyone felt welcomed and invited to speak and when appropriate – which is always – to dance.

We also learned about Virtual Reality (VR). Much of the online Burn was going to take place in virtual worlds where people create avatars and engage with art and other experiences. In order to fully show up as a camp, we learned how to create a VR chapel space where people could gather (via their avatars) and pray or play together. In doing so, we learned the value of immersive digital experiences that engage people’s minds, hearts and souls, that spark curiosity, that transport people to some kind of liminal space. That is what our Episcopal liturgy does at its best, and VR gives us a new venue to do what we do well.

And it worked! We discovered that deep vulnerability and authenticity is possible online. When people came to our online worship, we created space for spontaneous sharing that, being held together by the safe container of prayer and scripture, allowed people to share deeply about their lives. We had to trust that guests would step forward, would share openly, and our trust was rewarded. People shared about their past wounds from the church; people shared about their deep longing to experience the “peace that surpasses all understanding,” and we were able to share vulnerably and honestly about how the love of Christ has transformed our lives.

### **A new way of being church**

About half-way through the Burn we realized something more was happening. We were creating a way of connecting that was not going to end when our week at Virtual Burning Man ended. Normally we tear everything down and disband until it is time to plan and build next year’s camp. But a community was forming that did not want to wait until next year. There was no reason we could not continue our global, virtual church even after the Man burns at the end of the event.

We have learned a new way of being church. The pandemic created a hunger for connection. Virtual Burning man offered an invitation to learn new skills, try new things and engage a non-church



community. By adapting what we already did well to a new mission field, we have not only engaged this new mission field, but we have learned how to be a better camp/church.

*The Rev. **Brian Baker** is a West Point graduate, Army veteran and has been ordained for almost 30 years. He has served as a Cathedral Dean and in almost every aspect of Episcopal Church governance. In 2015, after attending his first Burning Man at the invitation of his young, adult daughter, he had a significant vocational shift and now focuses much of his time and energy on fostering a religious community of Burners through [Camp Religious AF](#). He is also serving as Priest in Charge at Christ Episcopal Church/Christ Lutheran Chapel just south of Ft. Knox, Kentucky, where his wife Andrea, an Episcopal priest and Army chaplain, is stationed. You can learn more about Brian's ministry on his blog: [www.deanbaker.org](http://www.deanbaker.org).*

*The Rev. **Alex Leach** is a fairly new Episcopal priest, having been ordained in 2019. He is currently a curate for Children and Youth Formation at St. Martin's Episcopal congregation in Davis, California. But he has been a long-time Burner, going back to 2010. He has a background in teaching and coaching individuals, families and teams in using Compassionate Communication to address conflicts and deepen intimacy and connection. His wife works as a hospice chaplain, and he has a delightful two-year-old daughter.*

#### **Resources:**

- [Surfing and Spirituality](#) by Scott Claassen, Vestry Papers, March 2020
- [Virtual Community](#) by Linda Buskirk, an ECF Vital Practices blog, March 9, 2017
- [Annual Meetings Go Virtual](#) by Greg Syler, Vestry Papers, January 2021
- [Called To a New Land by Susan Elliott](#), Vestry Papers, January 2021

#### **Un ministerio dos en uno crece en Houston**

Uriel Lopez

En un mundo cambiante, la Iglesia Misionera necesita liderazgo y confianza. Esto es lo que hemos descubierto al formar San Romero en St. Christopher's, en Houston, Texas. El elemento que se tiene que estar presente cuando se planta una nueva congregación cristiana es el liderazgo del Espíritu de Cristo; es su iglesia y su misión.

Yo puedo describir la experiencia de alojar a San Romero y St. Christopher's en una misma iglesia en una palabra: confiar. Para trabajar juntos tenemos que confiar el uno en el otro, pero, como todos sabemos, la confianza se tiene que adquirir. Yo decidí confiar en Andy Doyle, el Obispo de la Diócesis Episcopal de Texas, desde el momento que me dijo: "te estamos esperando aquí, cuando estés listo". Yo no escuché ninguna condición en su invitación, y por eso la consideré algunos años más tarde.

Yo confié en los líderes de la diócesis cuando me dijeron: "confiamos en ti." Ellos confiaron en mi experiencia de ministerio y quisieron que yo presentara el proyecto después de que tuviera la oportunidad de conocer el occidente de Houston. Hizo una gran diferencia también el hecho de que había suficientes fondos dedicados a la misión, esto lo digo sinceramente porque algunas veces se quieren enviar misioneros sin comprometer recursos, a sabiendas que hay recursos disponibles usados para otras prioridades.

Tal vez confío en las personas muy fácilmente, pero el mismo proceso se repitió al escoger a St. Christopher's como nuestra iglesia anfitriona. El Padre Bob Goolsby y los líderes de la congregación nos abrieron su corazón y su iglesia y siguieron comprometidos con el proyecto incluso después que decidimos que seríamos una congregación separada, que no estaría integrada a su parroquia.

### **Compartir el espacio y hacer espacio para otros**

Cuando las personas son forzadas a estar juntas, la unión puede convertirse en obstáculo. A veces pensamos que, si les pedimos a los demás que hablen nuestro idioma, si vamos a un mismo lugar, al mismo tiempo, tratamos de vernos igual y nunca estamos en desacuerdo con nada, etc., solo entonces podemos ser uno. Pero nosotros somos una iglesia, con personas a quienes se les permite y se les anima a ser diferentes. Hablamos y adoramos en un idioma a la vez. No se requiere integrar a todos en un grupo que piensa igual o que sean de la misma cultura. Lo que sí se nos pide es ser respetuosos y apreciativos de los demás.

Alojar a dos congregaciones diferentes en una iglesia requiere compartir espacio y hacer espacio para otros. Siempre hay complicaciones al compartir espacios, pero un buen liderazgo las maneja con autoridad cuando se ha cimentado la confianza. St. Christopher's le ha dado uso completo de su campus a San Romero, incluso si no es nuestro. Cuando presentamos el proyecto a la Junta de St. Christopher's yo estaba listo, como buen misionero, a que me dijeran qué áreas específicas podíamos usar y cuáles no.

El Espíritu Santo me ha sorprendido varias veces y una de ellas fue cuando la Junta nos dijo que querían que usáramos todos los edificios e instalaciones, sin excepciones, cuando los necesitáramos y estuvieran disponibles. En esa misma reunión, después de explicarles que iríamos todos los domingos para colocar nuestros instrumentos musicales antes y llevárnoslos después del culto, ellos decidieron que esto no era aceptable y que quitarían dos bancas de su recién remodelado santuario para hacerle espacio a nuestra banda, sin necesidad de quitar y poner todo cada semana. Nuestro ministerio es uno solo.

Por supuesto que ganarse la confianza lleva tiempo y esto solo pasó después de que yo había pasado más de seis meses compartiendo con la gente de St. Christopher's en todas las oportunidades. Antes de invitar a otras personas tomamos tiempo para conocernos y aprendí a apreciar lo que ellos eran y todo lo que ya habían hecho, y me aseguré de que supieran que yo los respetaría y amaría sin importar lo que pasara.

El Padre Bob Goolsby y yo confiamos uno en el otro, y cuando fue tiempo, presentamos el proyecto a la Diócesis juntos rodeados de nuestros líderes. Debido a que primero formamos confianza, estábamos seguros del llamado a ser dos congregaciones separadas. Cuando San Romero empezó su ministerio público en español, los líderes laicos de Christopher's participaron en nuestro liderazgo. En ese momento era crucial que ellos les dieran la bienvenida a las personas no a su edificio sino a su iglesia. Plantar a San Romero se convirtió en parte integral de su misión y, con el tiempo, ellos pudieron tomar un paso atrás.

“¿Qué idioma hablas en casa?” era una importante pregunta en nuestra investigación preliminar de los residentes de Spring Branch, Houston. Tenía sentido empezar nuestro ministerio en español cuando nos enteramos de que el 52.8 por ciento de los residentes del área hablan español en casa. Y es bueno sentirse en casa cuando se va a la iglesia. Tenemos que partir de la idea de que somos diferentes. Dios

nos ha mostrado que nuestras diferencias no son un problema, a no ser que las convirtamos en problemas.

### **Nuevo rector, nueva etapa en nuestro ministerio**

El Padre Rich Houser heredó el Proyecto de San Romero en 2019, cuando pasó a ser rector de St. Christopher's y se ganó nuestra confianza. Los líderes tienen que confiar entre sí para compartir en la misión única de Cristo y una de las muchas maneras en las que Dios nos muestra que debemos confiar en Padre Rich es una nueva etapa en nuestro ministerio. En este momento, San Romero se está alistando para la posibilidad de tener sus propias instalaciones. Una de las implicaciones de esto es el llamado a añadir ministerio en inglés, que podría haber causado que nuestras iglesias compitieran por nuevos miembros y presentado un problema.

La respuesta de Padre Rich fue: "Yo no veo el problema, solo tenemos que adaptar nuestros horarios". Así que, con el apoyo de su Junta Parroquial y nuestro Comité de Obispo, San Romero se encamina ahora a tener culto en español y en inglés. Porque confiamos el uno en el otro, nuestras dos congregaciones ofrecen diferentes opciones de culto y membresía a nuevas personas, en las mismas instalaciones.

Tenemos un ritual que ahora llamo "la movida del lazo." Para ser dos en uno se nos tiene que permitir ser diferentes. St. Christopher's es excelente en manejar lo de la pandemia y organizar el culto en persona de manera segura. Nosotros hemos seguido su liderazgo en todo con excepción de un detalle: los lazos para el distanciamiento social. En Romero hay familias numerosas que viven juntas bajo un mismo techo y que vienen a rendir culto a San Romero. No requieren distanciamiento social. El padre Rich nos dijo, "Bueno, pues háganlo a su manera, muevan el lazo si necesitan". Así que todos los domingos antes de nuestro culto movemos los lazos para responder a nuestras necesidades y después los ponemos como estaban para respetar las de ellos.

La Iglesia Misionera necesita liderazgo y confianza. Yo creo en tratar de escuchar a todos, pero no consultar a todos. Las decisiones y la autoridad son dadas por la congregación a quienes están en liderazgo. Estoy seguro de que hay personas en San Romero y en St. Christopher's, y algunos de afuera, que no lo entienden. Pueda ser que digan: "¿Por qué tenemos/tienen que mover el lazo? ¿No se pueden acomodar a la manera como lo hacemos nosotros?". Pero incluso cuando algunos no están de acuerdo con la manera como hacemos las cosas, la respetan porque son tratados con la madurez, responsabilidad, respeto, y la esperanza de sus líderes. Esto aplica a todas las diferencias de opinión. Necesitamos reconocer que somos diferentes, y cuando podemos ser diferentes y aceptar como somos, entonces somos uno en Cristo Jesús, nuestro líder.

Los miembros de St. Christopher's y San Romero han estado juntos muchas veces. Hemos compartido esfuerzos de servicio social y eventos como el Trunk or Treat, la Bendición de Mascotas, los Huevos de Pascua y Cenizas para el Camino. Hemos estado en primera fila el uno para el otro en cada celebración de nuestras dos congregaciones. No hemos sentido la necesidad de hacer más reuniones o liturgias bilingües porque confiamos en nuestros líderes que nos sirven de puente, y porque nos sentimos en casa en idiomas y herencias culturales diferentes. Todos sabemos que ahí estamos para apoyarnos el uno al otro, y tenemos claro que, aunque no nos reunamos al mismo tiempo y solo nos saludemos y hablemos al vernos entre los servicios, somos dos en uno, todavía una sola iglesia cristiana en la tradición Episcopal.

## **Unas pocas palabras de los líderes de la Iglesia Episcopal St. Christopher's**

### **El Rvdo. Rich Houser, rector de la Iglesia Episcopal St. Christopher's**

No hay mucho más que decir, así que no diré mucho. Yo diría que confiar es sumamente importante en estos múltiples ambientes ministeriales. Tenemos a la Iglesia Episcopal San Romero, la Iglesia Episcopal St. Christopher's, Escuela de Cuidado Infantil St. Christopher's, Tienda de Segunda St. Christopher's y el Club de Fútbol Total en nuestra comunidad, sin incluir otros grupos anónimos y locales. Somos muchas personas que compartimos una creencia unificada: St. Christopher's en Spring Branch es importante para todos nosotros.

Se preguntarán ¿cómo se hace crecer la confianza? Confiar toma tiempo, mucha comunicación, de las diversas maneras de las que se pueden recibir comunicados, acogiendo las diferencias culturales, y un calendario Google centralizado! Un calendario que todos podemos ver definitivamente nos ayuda a notar los hoyos en el camino antes que se vuelvan cerros.

Realmente es un honor que se nos haya encomendado ser anfitriones de la Iglesia Episcopal San Romero y el Rvdo. Uriel López.

### **De Becky Houser, líder laica de St. St. Christopher's**

Yo era la Guardiana Mayor y acababa de llegar de una misión a Honduras cuando el padre Bob Goolsby nos habló sobre la posibilidad de tener un ministerio hispano en St. Christopher's. Había estado orando por algo como esto para nuestro ministerio y, cuando Uriel nos escogió fue una respuesta a nuestras oraciones. Yo quería que nuestra iglesia le abriera las puertas a una diversidad mayor de personas, que reflejara de mejor manera a nuestra comunidad local de Spring Branch.

Hemos sido parte del grupo de liderazgo de Uriel desde un principio y oramos el uno por el otro todo el tiempo. Estuvimos presentes al principio de su ministerio público y estuvimos con él cuando tocaron la campana para que San Romero fuera recibido como Asociación Episcopal. Realmente sentimos que su ministerio es parte del nuestro y estamos muy contentos de poder compartir nuestra iglesia con ellos.

### **De Patricia Pérez, líder laica de San Romero**

Yo conocí a Padre Uriel en la casa de una amiga, en una fiesta de familia. En ese momento mi matrimonio se había venido abajo y fuimos con él para consejería matrimonial. Junto con la consejería, mis amigas nos invitaron a que viniéramos un domingo y nos encantó. Aunque la mayoría eran salvadoreños y de otros países, nos sentimos súper acogidos y apapachados.

Durante una de las eucaristías en el primer año yo sentí una poderosa invitación del Espíritu Santo para recibir la Santa Comunión, lo que no había hecho hacía muchos, muchos años, y esto cambió mi vida. Esta iglesia nos ha ayudado a levantarnos y a valorarnos como pareja. Para gloria de Dios hemos celebrado 27 años juntos. Hemos encontrado a una familia que nos ama incondicionalmente. El Padre Uriel, su esposa Luisa y otros líderes están siempre cerca y pendiente de nosotros.

Especialmente este año pasado que perdí a mis padres recibimos llamadas y visitas a diario. Ellos mismos cocinaron y nos trajeron sopitas y medicinas cuando nos dio la Covid 19 y ofrecieron una novena virtual completa para mi familia cuando murió mi mamá. El amor que se siente en esta familia de San Romero nunca lo he encontrado en ningún otro lugar. Cada domingo siento que vengo a un encuentro familiar, a alimentarme y a renovarme. Siempre hay un mensaje en el sermón que te toca personalmente, siempre hay una enseñanza que puedes usar. Antes había un vacío en mi vida y en mi

fe. Ahora me encanta compartir mi experiencia de Dios y de mi iglesia. Me encanta servir y compartir y por eso me enorgullece poder ahora ser miembro del Comité de Obispo de la Iglesia Episcopal San Romero.

*El Padre **Uriel López** hizo ministerio parroquial con la iglesia Católica Romana en la Diócesis de Rockford, Illinois, en los suburbios de Chicago, por 9 años antes de hacer su transición a la Iglesia Episcopal en el 2011. Él tiene gran experiencia en escenarios de iglesias bilingües y en dirigir grupos que hablan inglés y español en una sola comunidad. Fue recibido como sacerdote de la Iglesia Episcopal en la Diócesis de Chicago y sirvió como Rector de la Iglesia del Redentor en Elgin, Illinois por cuatro años. Uriel fue llamado a dirigir la creación de una nueva misión en el occidente de Houston, y ahora es el Vicario de la iglesia que empezó: San Romero Episcopal Church, Houston. Él está casado con María Luisa Mateus Cuesta y ellos tienen dos hijos: Meiby Yeritza y Carlos Uriel.*

*El Reverendo **Rich Houser** es el Rector de la Iglesia Episcopal St. Christopher's en Houston, Texas. Antes de convertirse en el Rector de St. Christopher's en el 2019 él sirvió en la iglesia Trinity, Houston. El Padre Houser está casado con Trish Houser, Asesora universitaria privada. Ellos tienen dos hijas, Ella Rae y Emmaline; Annie, una gatita de regazo rescatada, y un conejo enano noruego.*

#### **Recursos:**

- [Misión de Unión e Integración](#) por Daniel Vélez-Rivera, Vestry Papers, mayo 2011
- [Perfiles de recién llegados](#) por Ken Garner, Vestry Papers, noviembre 2014
- [Para Crecer Espiritualmente Necesitamos Ser Amados](#) por Andrés Herrera, un blog de ECF Vital Practices, 23 agosto 2019
- [Liderazgo multilingüe y feligresías multiculturales](#) por Sandra Montes, julio 2015

#### **Digital Ministry Is Here to Stay**

Callie Swanlund and Jeremy Tackett

*Callie Swanlund and Jeremy Tackett have been forming digital communities for many years. As priestpreneur and digital evangelist, respectively, they help people listen to God's call, share their faith stories, and spread the good news. In this conversation, Callie and Jeremy talk about innovative ways of bringing church to all people, from How2charist: Digital Instructed Eucharist to embodied digital retreats. During the pandemic, many individuals and communities had a steep technological learning curve, while others were ready to serve as guides. Rather than viewing digital community as a stopgap that will be thrown out once in-person gatherings resume, Callie and Jeremy believe that there is beautiful and accessible ministry that takes place in the digital realm. Most importantly, communities must share the gospel in ways that are unique and authentic to them, not trying to replicate another community with a different set of resources and tools.*

*This article is a video. To watch the video, please visit our website [here](#). Read the transcript below.*

#### **Transcript:**

Hello, I'm **Callie Swanlund** and I am an Episcopal priest in Philadelphia. I serve a parish part-time, and I have a ministry called the Epiphany Space where I help people discover their gifts and be courageous

and vulnerable in their relationships and in their vocations. And I get to work with this person who helps me shape people's stories in a digital way.

Hey, everybody, I'm **Jeremy Tackett**, I'm Callie's partner in technology and in life. Professionally, I am the digital evangelist and senior manager for creative services for the Episcopal Church, which is a big, long title that means I get to do all of the fun digital stuff with presiding Bishop Curry and a lot of the stuff that you see come out of the Episcopal Church. So I spend a lot of my time thinking about – even before the pandemic, and certainly now – how do we capture digital things as part of ministry and how do we bring that into what we're trying to do in the church? The reason that we're standing here in our house, basically looking like we're on a set, is because we got to do that a little bit even this morning.

**Callie:** As anyone who has had to adapt plans in the pandemic knows, which is literally everyone, there is a snowstorm in Philadelphia this morning. So we had to create a little studio here at the house and stream morning prayer from home this morning.

What does it mean to do digital ministry?

**Jeremy:** Yeah, and being a bit adept at how we set all this stuff up and how we do all of these different pieces is very helpful. So we really brought this into the world, but it's a really good chance for us to talk about, what does it mean to do digital worship and digital church and really make that part of our life and the work of discipleship and evangelism and formation and all of those things in what is definitely not a cathedral?

**Callie:** Both of us have been oriented towards doing digital ministry for years already. It made the transition a little bit easier for us when everything shut down and went online. We had already come together a few years ago to create the How2charist, the digital instructed Eucharist, which is available for free, if you don't know about it. It's a formation and evangelism tool, but How2charist was a way of sort of pulling back the curtain and helping people understand that the whys, why we do what we do in worship. And the way to get that out to a broad audience was to be able to capture it on film and disperse it everywhere.

We've been already finding ways of doing that, of telling our story in the digital realm. I think that the idea behind How2charist, of pulling back the curtain and seeing what's behind the scenes, I think all of that applies on a more global level to digital ministry. I think a lot of people think that there are secret pieces of knowledge that they should know about how to do this and that some people already had that downloaded into their brains and some people had to learn it mid-March.

**Jeremy:** I think even going back a little bit from that, things like the How2charist and the way that we approach digital ministry in each of our own work and when we're being collaborative, is as much a mindset as it is a technology or having the right camera or the right piece of thing. One of the things that made How2charist work is it was something that could only be done in a digital space. It wasn't trying to just recreate something that you could do in the room, but it was adding elements and adding a whole other dimension that you couldn't get, unless we merged these two worlds of analog and digital.

I think in some of the more successful stories that I've heard of people that are doing this work now, it's the folks that are taking exactly that kind of approach, where you're not saying, "Wow, we have to try to recreate church just as it was," or, "We have to try to make our small group exactly the same," or, "Confirmation is going to look exactly like it looked, but now it's on Zoom." It's being able to say, "This is an opportunity to do even more and do it differently," and, like with the How-to-Charist, literally get

different angles on what you get. I've heard so many people say, "No one's in the back of the room when you're on camera and nobody has a bad view or a column in front of them and they can all hear it pretty well." So just even making that shift to thinking about digital not as a barrier, but as an expansion of what we're already doing, completely changes how creative you can get.

### **Pros and cons and possibilities**

**Callie:** Yeah. So, for example, I have a retreat ministry. I love traveling around the country leading retreats. In 2019, I did that in abundance and had great plans for doing that again in 2020, and had to rethink what retreats might look like if everyone was grounded at home and not able to travel. So in the fall, I developed something called the BYO cabin retreat, where if it was safe, people went near where they were to an Airbnb or cabin and they joined in on a meeting. I wanted something that was more embodied than just sitting at the same spot that you take all of your business meetings from, but also available, something that works in the time that we're in right now.

So I had to start in my head, building a list of – you know, you have your pro and con list of Zoom and digital gatherings – I have shifted my mindset to see what is possible with digital that's not possible. So for this BYO cabin retreat, I had people from both coasts of the United States coming together and they didn't have to pay travel costs to be there. They were able to interact with one another in a way that some quieter folks sit back and don't always speak up when we're gathered in person. But when you have comments, maybe some of the introverts, maybe some of the quieter people feel emboldened to speak up. So I've been growing my list of ways that digital ministry actually reigns supreme.

**Jeremy:** I've heard much the same from folks who I'm working with across the church, from all over the world, who are experiencing digital ministry, and what they're finding is they're no longer limited by the physical boundaries of who can get to their church services. That really means two different things. For one, maybe it's the folks that are homebound in their own parish, folks that for a number of different reasons, can't get to church on Sunday morning, but it's also reconnecting those folks who...maybe it's a child that's moved away or a family that's moved away to another town.

In our own parish, we had some folks who went and lived in a different part of the country for part of the pandemic, but they're able to join in to worship. So I hear again and again, that folks are seeing this as an expansion of what is possible for them. But at the same time, I also hear lots of folks going through that pro and con list like you were talking about of it's not all just easy – and it's not just push a button and then you get a really crisp picture, and you've got mics and you've got all the stuff that we have here and lights and cameras and action, but it really can be frustrating to make it happen.

### **Forget comparisons, stay true to your unique call**

**Callie:** Absolutely. So not everyone has the same setup, not everyone has the same tech know-how surrounding them. I think there was a back order on ring lights in March and April because everyone was like, "I need a ring light," all of a sudden. But besides the technology piece, I think there's also...it goes deeper. It goes into the place of our vulnerabilities and our tendency to be comparing ourselves to one another. I've seen throughout the pandemic, we are a people that compares ourselves to one another and says, "Oh, they're doing something better over there," but it's become even more prominent that people are comparing themselves to one another because they're only seeing the digital realm. They're only seeing what's curated. Unless you're putting your blooper reel out online, you're not seeing the

behind the scenes. You're seeing the very cut, polished, final product. I know you've had a few words to people in the field doing this work who are prone toward comparison.

**Jeremy:** Yeah, we all are. I have had to remind folks a lot of times, and I've made a number of posts on a Facebook group for Episcopal communicators, where after I see a number of frustrations, I want to just remind folks that whatever you're doing is okay, and it's enough. If you looked right outside the frame of this picture and you got all the way just past the edges, you would see a chaotic mess and you would see stuff in the floor and you would see half empty coffee cups and we all have that. So part of it is remembering that what is on screen is a curated version. And yes, there are some places that have really nice cameras and really big budgets and they've got somebody in the congregation that does this. The tendency is, and maybe you've even heard feedback from people in your own congregation that says, "Why can't we look like the National Cathedral?" Or even going outside the Episcopal church, "Well, there's a megachurch down the street that's doing million-dollar streams."

What I want to encourage everyone to is the goal of digital, just like the goal of church, isn't to be the best on the block. It's not to do the most innovative thing or be on the cutting edge all the time. The goal is to share the gospel message the way that God has called us do it. That might mean a cell phone and Zoom. That might mean a phone call. That might mean a video that you cut together roughly, and it may mean a full production. But whatever you're doing, however you're doing this work, I want you to hear that it's enough and it is good and it is holy and it is blessed. There is no need to compare and to feel like they're doing it better. Open yourself up to be able to do this creative thing the way that you're called to do it and see it the way that no one but you can see it because of your experience.

**Callie:** Right. God didn't call and create us all to be just identical prototypes of one another. We are all created uniquely, and we're created uniquely so that we can go and spread diverse gifts into the world. So we have to. We have to be ourselves and claim that and claim our own unique voice and tech knowledge and resources that we have available to us and to our community.

Now my biggest worry is that we're all going to get vaccinated (that's not my worry, I hope that happens very quickly) and once we're all vaccinated, that people throw all of their devices into the river, which I can completely resonate with some days, especially at the end of a long day of schooling and Zoom meetings and everything happening over Zoom. But I don't want this time to just be seen as a stopgap and be seen as, "Oh, we can't wait until everything is in-person again and we don't ever have to do any of this digital community anymore."

### **A new, hybrid world of digital and in-person**

**Jeremy:** Yeah. I have tried to continue encouraging groups that I meet with and individuals that I talk to, not to find a silver lining in a bad thing and make it all okay, but make a genuine, honest assessment of, how did this experience, how did this time, how did bringing in new tools expand what it is that you're able to do? What are the things that you will never ever do again? Maybe it's trying to do a choir on Zoom, but what are the things that you never ever want to lose? Maybe that is having even two or three people that could never make it into your church be part of it.

Maybe it's a comment or an email or someone that downloaded a resource, someone took a class, that became part of your conversation that wouldn't have been otherwise. Maybe it's a way like the How2charist where you show folks something that they couldn't see any other way. I encourage you to take that as we move into the new hybrid world of digital and in-person. And remember, I have a great



friend named Jim Keat who says, “The opposite of virtual isn’t real. The opposite of virtual is analog, and both are real.” As we have experienced, not just a shift or a different direction but a broadening of our understanding, what are the parts that we can take away and continue to be part of what we do going forward?

**Callie:** Absolutely. Early in the pandemic, we had a wedding unlike anything we had envisioned and we found ourselves a little bit sad that our family and friends couldn’t gather with us. It was just the two of us and our two kids and our officiant that day. We got home and got a phone call from your grandmother. Your grandmother wasn’t going to be able to travel to be there in person, but because we streamed it out, she was there in person. She showed up with her whole personhood and was there. So that’s my guide. Whose grandmother is experiencing this thing now? What access have we given someone who didn’t have that access before? How are we creating community in new and holy ways?

**Jeremy:** What I think we hope that you take away from this reflection is maybe beginning, maybe continuing, that conversation of how you’re doing that in your context, because there is more that we can both learn from you than you could ever learn from us. Collectively, we can do this thing. We have done it and we’re going to come out the other side of it with a church that is stronger with more opportunities to worship, to form those who are following in this journey that we call the Christian life. I’m excited to see what the next How2charist is, what the next new virtual cabin retreat is, what the next new thing that we haven’t thought of is, because you took these tools and turned it into a part of your ministry.

**Callie:** Blessings on you and your ministry. We hope that you’ll reach out to either of us. We love being in conversation with people who are dreaming and doing this work in the world.

**Jeremy:** Grace and peace.

***Callie Swanlund** is a priest and Episcopal Church Foundation Fellow serving in Philadelphia, helping others find their spark, and building a creative ministry. She leads individuals and groups in the work of Dr. Brené Brown as a certified Daring Way Facilitator. Callie is a mama, creator, lover and dreamer who has created a virtual and traveling space – The Epiphany Space – where others can discover and use their creative gifts and learn the digital tools to tell their story. Callie has been a member of [Gathering of Leaders](#) since 2017. Find out more at [CallieSwanlund.com](#), listen to her podcast, Journey to Epiphany, on all platforms and follow her #WholeheartedWednesday movement through [@callieswanlund](#) on social media.*

***Jeremy Tackett** serves as the Episcopal Church’s Senior Manager for Creative Services and Digital Evangelist. For more than ten years, Jeremy’s professional work and personal, creative ambitions have centered around finding “what’s next” for sharing the message and mission of the Church. Collaborating alongside pastors, priests and lay church leaders, he has worked to lead the way in creating strategies, tools and content to serve the Church’s mission and further the reach of its message. A native Kentuckian, Jeremy currently resides in and works from Philadelphia, Penn.*

**Resources:**

- [How2charist: Digital Instructed Eucharist](#), The Rev. Callie Swanlund in partnership with The Episcopal Church, 2021
- [Be Weird, Be True](#), by The Rev. David W. Peters, Vestry Papers, May 2020
- [Q&A with the Rev. Kyle Oliver on Digital Ministry](#), an ECF webinar presented by the Rev. Kyle Oliver, October 12, 2017

- [Burned Out on Being “Connected”](#), by Ken Mosesian, an ECF Vital Practices blog, July 6, 2020

## **Gird Up My Loins**

Westina Matthews

It was 2019 – long before the pandemic, racial unrest and presidential election – when I first thought about gathering the five current Black women bishops in the Episcopal Church together for a series of conversations to edit into a book. Little did we know that life circumstances would change the importance of this opportunity. Dedicated to the Rt. Rev. Barbara C. Harris, the first woman to be ordained and consecrated a bishop in the worldwide Anglican Communion, I can only imagine the hurdles and barriers that she had to navigate.

Within the past five years, five Black women have been consecrated as bishops, making up only four percent of all active diocesan, suffragan, assistant or assisting bishops today: the Rt. Rev. Jennifer Baskerville-Burrow (2017), the Rt. Rev. Carlye J. Hughes (2018), the Rt. Rev. Phoebe A. Roaf (2019), the Rt. Rev. Kimberly Lucas (2019) and the Rt. Rev. Shannon MacVean-Brown (2019). Spending time with these five women, I began to more fully appreciate their own journeys and hurdles. In one of our first conversations, Bishop Kym shared her prophetic voice in a plaintive, spontaneous prayer, “Oh yes, Lord, help me to gird up my loins for what’s coming.” (Job 38.3 [KJV])

### **A jumping off point for deeper discussion**

The questions that I had prepared for our conversation were the obvious ones, such as:

- What was your experience growing up Black, and how has it informed your own faith journey and call to leadership?
- How has your life been affected, personally and as a bishop, during this time of the pandemic, racial protest and economic crisis?
- What have you found to be some of the barriers that Black clergywomen face in the search for employment in the Church?
- What do you believe is needed to make meaningful and lasting changes in the Church?

During the nine months that we engaged in six conversations over Zoom, it became abundantly clear that these questions were to serve only as the jumping off point for these amazing women as they gleaned support from one another.

It was an unprecedented nine months of current events – the death rates from COVID-19 rising from 103,000 deaths to 1.1 COVID-19 deaths per minute; dioceses issuing and revising guidelines for worship; the brutal deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd; the deaths of Bishop Barbara Harris, the Hon. John Lewis and Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg; and a presidential election unlike any other. It was as though all that the bishops had endured over those months – balancing their roles as bishops while at the same time feeling the depths of their personal anguish – had broken open their vulnerability and authenticity, revealing the true essence of these women.

**Formation is a key**

This question, posed by Bishop Shannon, helped guide us during our time together: “How is the Church going to be this fuller picture of what we keep saying that we want to be?”

One important and universal recommendation that the bishops offered for creating lasting change within the Church was formation. Bishop Phoebe noted, “this crisis has further demonstrated the lack of discipleship and the need for transformed hearts.” In response, Bishop Jennifer asked, “what’s our opportunity as the Church to actually take advantage of this moment to help give people what they need?”

Perhaps that is why I was so excited to learn about *My Way of Love* at the recent online Forma conference. Offered by the Episcopal Church in partnership with [RenewalWorks](#), a ministry of Forward Movement, *My Way of Love* is a free, eight-week email series that provides personalized suggestions for spiritual growth based on the seven practices of the *Way of Love*. Each email in the series includes ideas on how to pray, engage with scripture and practice the Way of Love regularly. For more information, contact [Way of Love](#) directly, or [Jerusalem Greer](#), Episcopal Church staff officer for evangelism.

### **A Band of Sisterhood**

The book that resulted from our conversations, *This Band of Sisterhood: Black Women Bishops on Race, Faith, and the Church*, will be published this coming July. The title was inspired by Bishop Carlye, who referred to “this band of sisterhood” in her closing prayer at one of our sessions. In the Foreword, Catherine Meeks (Executive Director for the Absalom Jones Center for Racial Healing) added “a band of angels” to describe further these five warrior women bishops.

Nine days after my last session with the five bishops, the Diocese of Chicago elected the Rev. Canon Paula E. Clark to serve as their diocesan bishop, the first Black person and first woman to hold that position. In her Afterword for the book, Bishop Paula expresses her deep gratitude for joining “this brave band of sisters who, beginning with Bishop Barbara Harris, see, bear and embody the light of Christ.”

Yes, these women have banded together – both warriors and angels – living into their call to leadership. Let the band of sisterhood continue to grow and expand.

*This Band of Sisterhood: Black Women Bishops on Race, Faith, and the Church* can be preordered [here](#). **Westina Matthews, Ph.D.** is an adjunct professor at the General Theological Seminary in the Center for Christian Spirituality. An author, retreat leader and theologian, Westina has found a way to connect with others through her books, essays, lectures, preaching and teaching. Her forthcoming book is *This Band of Sisterhood: Black Women Bishops on Race, Faith, and the Church* (Church Publishing Inc., July 2021). For many years, Westina was a lay leader at Trinity Church Wall Street in New York City, serving on the vestry and co-leading the parish’s annual offering of Commitment to Discipleship. She is now a member of St. Peter’s Episcopal Church in Savannah, Georgia, and serves on the boards of the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation and the Gathering of Leaders.

### **Resources:**

- [An Evening with Dr Catherine Meeks](#), an ECF webinar presented by Dr. Catherine Meeks, November 5, 2020
- [Change: It’s All Connected](#), by the Right Reverend Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows, Vestry Papers, November 2019

- [Triple Threat](#), by Adialyn Milien, Vestry Papers, July 2020
- [Antiracism as a Developmental Effort](#), by Alissa Newton and Arienne Davison, Vestry Papers, July 2020

## **Faith Formation at Home**

Allison Sandlin Liles

If I could pick one message that's been preached and embodied more than any other over the past year, it would easily be, "The church is not the building." I've heard this statement from others countless times. I've written it in newsletters, spoken it over Zoom pastoral care conversations and preached it from makeshift worship spaces in my home.

We are the church, not the building. We offer members resources they need to be the church at home and out in the world – from Lent at Home kits to online Bible studies to virtual weekend retreats. Over the past year, I've watched members of my church gain confidence in their relationship with Jesus. The questions they ask and the prayers they offer feel more honest and mature than a year ago. The pandemic has empowered them in a way no church leader ever could do on their own. And yet, despite their growth, I've noticed one group disconnecting from the church more and more as the pandemic continues.

Parents and their young children experience this time away from our church buildings unlike any other group. Whether parents spend weekdays overseeing online school or offering encouragement as their children attend impersonal in-person school, parents' weekdays are full of hard conversations, grief and anger. They are followed up with Saturdays deprived of birthday parties, playdates and game night dinners with family friends. By the time we get to Sunday, my two children have worn me down. I don't have the energy to persuade, encourage or force them to attend virtual worship or formation classes – no matter how much creativity and work has been poured into producing them.

### **Building up family worship at home**

When this pattern emerged several months ago, I finally realized that if my children received any sort of Christian formation during the pandemic, it wouldn't be from their phenomenal children's minister, it would be from their emotionally exhausted parents. By default, we're finally doing what Moses instructed the Israelites to do in Deuteronomy – build up family worship at home.

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words...in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. – Deuteronomy 6:5-9.*

We learn from Hebrew scripture that God gives parents the authority and responsibility for religious education. In my lifetime, parents have typically deferred to formation teachers and family ministers to teach their children about God. But right now, at least for our household, that's not happening. If we want our children's relationship with God, their knowledge of scripture and tradition to continue growing during the pandemic, then we, as their parents, must take on the responsibility.

Thankfully, parents are not doing this on their own.

### **A community of hope for exhausted parents**

Five years ago, the Rev. Nurya Love Parish and Forward Movement dreamed up [GrowChristians.org](http://GrowChristians.org), an online space for Episcopal adults eager to be more intentional about faith formation at home. Craft ideas and recipes were paired with feast days, offering parents tangible ways to share stories about our faith with young children. Authors featured not just voices of parents in the thick of childrearing, but also Episcopal grandparents, godparents and lay ministers.

When Nurya handed off the role of managing editor to me in 2018, I had no idea how valuable this online community would be in the coming years. As our contributors began submitting posts during the first few months of the pandemic, I realized I wasn't alone. Reading about struggles and minor victories from other parents buoyed me when I most needed it. Throughout the past year, Grow Christians has truly grown into Nurya's initial dream of an Episcopal community, deeply connected to one another through our shared experiences.

One of the questions posed in this issue of *Vestry Papers* is how we form communities of courage and hope while engaging the present and looking to the future. For me, Grow Christians has evolved into an invaluable community of hope during a time when parenting has felt more like an isolated endeavor. Yes, the posts assure me that I'm not the only one flailing about at home. But more importantly, the reflections remind me that faith isn't something to be learned in church, but rather something we live out at home.

### **It takes a village...**

Home is where children already know they can ask big questions, where they can make mistakes and make decisions. Home is ideally where they are surrounded by love and nurtured in everyday life...so it just makes sense that it's also the place where we explore a growing faith. The posts have reframed how I think of this interminable time at home with our two elementary-aged children. Rather than something to simply endure, members of our community offer encouragement to take advantage of our shared time together. For me, this means intentionally looking for opportunities to develop their faith and to make my own faith visible.

My hope is that this new way of approaching faith formation will continue, even when children are back in their formation classrooms in the church building. Rather than being the dominant tool, formation ministries and programs at church will supplement the work we do at home throughout the week. In this uncharted way of being the Church, Grow Christians provides a model of shared resources, experiences and support. It's grown into the village so many of parents were accustomed to leaning on pre-pandemic.

*The Reverend Allison Sandlin Liles is wife, mother, peacemaker and priest living in the suburban wilds of Dallas. After working as Episcopal Peace Fellowship's Executive Director for six years, Allison re-entered parish ministry in the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth. She currently serves as the priest-in-charge of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Hurst, Texas, and the editor of [GrowChristians.org](http://GrowChristians.org), a ministry of [Forward Movement](http://ForwardMovement.org).*

### **Resources:**

- [Beloved Children of God](#), by Richelle Thompson, an ECF Vital Practices blog, May 10, 2016

- [Can Children Understand Worship?](#), by Heidi Clark, an ECF Vital Practices blog, February 21, 2014
- [Grow Christians: Practicing Faith at Home](#), by Richelle Thompson, an ECF Vital Practices blog, February 9, 2016
- [Five Ways to Teach Kids Financial Stewardship in the Digital Age](#), by Nancy Hopkins-Green for Grow Christians, October 7, 2016

## **Breathe On Me, Breath of Life**

Mary Vano

Ten years ago, when I came to St. Margaret's, I stepped into a fairly young parish (just 20 years old) in a growing suburban area in west Little Rock, Arkansas, that had just been through a period of grief over the death of the previous rector. The wind had gone out of the sails of this community, and they hoped that I would help breathe some new life into it. I certainly prayed that I could.

So, I stepped up to the helm, and started asking some questions. *Hey, everybody! What should we do? How can we serve our community? What will bring new people, new growth, and renewed joy?* Many eager answers came, and pretty soon "Vacation Bible School" became a steady refrain.

Indeed, Vacation Bible School seemed like an obvious recipe for success. Here in the Bible belt, parents book their kids for a different VBS for every week of the summer. Practically every church has some version of this – a day camp for children to come and play while they receive some Christian formation. Surely VBS would energize our congregation and get us moving again!

Then I asked the next question. *Who wants to volunteer?* The responses were decidedly less enthusiastic. If you've ever done a Vacation Bible School, then you know that the most essential ingredient is a whole host of enthusiastic volunteers. We simply didn't have it.

The idea was tabled, but the refrain returned occasionally. *We should really have a Vacation Bible School.* And each time it came up, those who were asked to volunteer would respond, *That's just not my calling. Or, I'm sorry; I don't have time for such a big commitment.* There didn't seem to be enough wind for this particular ship to sail.

### **A fresh breeze stirs St. Margaret's**

Then came a new and refreshing breeze. At a vestry retreat, one mother of young children explained that she just couldn't get excited about VBS – either for herself or her children. The idea felt stale to her. "But," she admitted, "I could get excited about an interfaith camp for my kids." Here was an idea that seemed so obvious and yet was totally unexplored. Our parish is home to the Interfaith Center of the Institute for Theological Studies at St. Margaret's. Through the Interfaith Center, we already had a Multi-Faith Youth Group for teenagers, and we were doing all kinds of interesting dialogue for adults from different faith traditions. St. Margaret's is also home to the Arkansas House of Prayer, where people of all faiths come for silent prayer in a place of shared beauty. This is a parish with a special gift and spirit for interfaith prayer and dialogue. So, why not share it with our children?

The mission of the Interfaith Center is to reduce fear and hatred among the world's religions. With this mission in mind, we launched Friendship Camp, an interfaith summer daycamp, where children in 3rd-5th grades learn about different traditions, play games and, most importantly, become friends. Creating such a camp held some new challenges. We had to gather and get support from faith educators from around our city. We needed volunteers from different traditions who were willing to work and create something new together. It took special care to convince parents that their children would be safe and loved in an environment where they could learn about other faiths while their own faith was honored and respected.

We held our first camp in 2016, and the camp continues to grow. As an interfaith camp, it doesn't really "belong" to St. Margaret's, but we have been blessed by meaningful partnerships and true friendships.

Watch a video from that first year [here](#).

### **Waiting to set sail again**

Friendship Camp was just one of many things that were either put on hold or adapted in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic took the wind out of our sails once again. But the disease could not rob us of the Holy Spirit that has continued to move among us over the past year.

As we now anticipate our return to in-person gatherings and communal activity, I do find myself wondering which way the wind will blow. *How can we serve our community now? What will bring new people, new growth and renewed joy?* There will certainly be no shortage of ideas and suggestions, but discerning among them will be the challenge. Without clarity about the future, I can only look to the past, where I find that the lessons learned from Friendship Camp provide some applicable wisdom. Some of the ministries that were life-giving before the pandemic may be stale or irrelevant as we enter into the post-pandemic Church. We need to have the courage to let go of the things that don't work anymore and the things that don't interest or give life to our communities.

As we let those things go, I trust that God will provide the direction for what will be next. We only need to keep watch for the refreshing breeze that will point us where we need to go. Friendship Camp worked for St. Margaret's because we already had a love for interfaith work. Some of the strongest winds will take shape through our unique gifts and interests.

As the old adage reminds us: *I may not know what the future holds, but I know who holds the future.* Let's say our prayers, and get ready to set sail again.

*The Rev. **Mary Vano** is the rector of St. Margaret's Episcopal Church in Little Rock, Arkansas, and the host of the "J.O.Y." podcast. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Religion and Sociology from Texas Christian University and earned her Master of Divinity at the Seminary of the Southwest in Austin, Texas. Her pandemic pastimes have included needlework, reading the entire 20-book series of The Chronicles of Brother Cadfael and anxiously watching as her oldest son prepares to leave home for college next year.*

### **Resources:**

- [Calling Kids to Communications](#), by Linda Buskirk, an ECF Vital Practices blog, January 30, 2019
- [Hybrid Church - A Way Forward for Church Leaders](#), by Tim Schenk, an ECF Vital Practices tool
- [Future-Focusing Your Church Finances](#), an ECF webinar presented by Carsten Sierck and Demi Prentiss, June 10, 2020

- [Notre Dame and COVID-19](#), by Ken Mosesian, an ECF Vital Practices blog, May 7, 2020

## **A New Gathering for Asian Pacific American Spirituality**

Yein Kim

[The Gathering](#) – a space for Asian Pacific American spirituality – is a ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles that seeks to provide opportunities for Asian Pacific Americans (APAs) to gather, pray and learn together, as well as to engage in and mobilize for initiatives for peace and social justice, explore spirituality in an APA context and foster community among APAs in the Diocese. At the same time, non-APA allies are welcome to come and learn about APA spirituality through the Gathering.

Ministry of the Gathering started in 2017 as a ministry to the fast-growing Asian Pacific Americans in Los Angeles and was successful in drawing non-immigrant, multi-generational populations who are not attracted to the existing immigrant-focused, language-specific Asian churches. Many were looking to talk with other APAs who face similar realities and challenges, and what we found was that many young APAs are looking to belong to communities that are both spiritual and actively engaging social issues like race, culture, sexuality, immigration and other inequality issues. There are very few progressive/inclusive APA Christian worshiping communities in the United States that celebrate being APA, provide a safe space for APA stories to be told and encourage engagement in theology and activism, all rooted in APA spirituality and prayer. Also, many have expressed how the Gathering has helped them to reconnect with their “Asian-ness,” so that they no longer have to check their identity at the door upon entering the Episcopal Church.

### **Low overhead and theology- and practice-based formation builds adaptability**

One of our biggest assets has been our agile financial structure. Our overhead is low, and we don't own a building. Ours is a moveable feast, and we have begun expanding out of Los Angeles into Orange County – another major growth area for Asian Americans in the Diocese. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, our gatherings have all been online since March 2020. Despite the challenges, this change has actually helped expand our reach. As a community, we were very nimble and quick to adapt to the digital format and we changed our gathering themes to address issues that are immediately relevant to the APA spiritual community.

When we start a new ministry, we are quick to jump to the five W's – who, what, when, where and why. We want to know exactly what the new ministry will look like and how it is going to unfold. Our everchanging realities make us vulnerable and having to change (or completely discard) well-thought-out initial plans can be a daunting task. However, as long as the “why we are doing this” is based on our theology and Christian practices in our constant formation – my personal formation, formation of the leadership team and of the community – the ministry will be able to adapt to our shifting realities. The Gathering was able to pivot quickly at the time the pandemic hit. As a community, we adapted to the digital format right away and focused our gathering themes to address issues that are immediately relevant to the community.

Our community now includes APAs and allies who do not reside in Los Angeles area. We have returning attendees at our events because the immediate geographical areas of these attendees do not offer such a space.



Our key resources have expanded as well, because our speakers and panelists are no longer limited by geography. We have also planned joint digital events with groups outside the diocese, something we could not have done before.

This is not to say that we figured it all out. Similar to our parochial siblings, the Gathering community continues to look for new ways to engage and expand our APA community reach in our new digital reality.

### **Rooted in theology and constant in assessing what works and what the needs are**

Looking back on our journey, two things are important to note. First, it is important to find ourselves rooted in our theological identity. That identity is not a one-time meeting agenda, but a continued effort of formation and discussion that asks why we are doing this and checks that what we do and what we say are in alignment with what we believe. Second, it is important to constantly monitor what works and what does not. Our online events since the beginning of the pandemic have reflected an increase in attendance and reach because we were quick to reevaluate the need of the community and to increase our online presence through our website, YouTube channel and regular Zoom gatherings. We adapted a prayer/litany format which provided a space for people to join in a communal sense of the loss and pain resulting from the pandemic. From our experience, we have learned of the need to maintain both in-person and online community, even when we are able to meet again in person.

With no in-person events, we experienced challenges and opportunities. Yet in a way, it freed us to think more creatively and to expand our work. Like many Episcopal communities, we are working out what community-building looks like in a virtual setting and what it will look like in the future.

In short, adaptability, flexibility and a willingness to consider the tender hearts around us, have provided an opportunity to respond and not react to the consequences of our situation. Our strength is in our willingness to respond to the conditions of our environment. That has allowed us to better serve our immediate community and to provide a reasonable outcome to what was needed, rather than what we thought was needed. Moving forward, we will continue to keep our ears to the ground, listening to the voices that tell us how we can meet the calls of largely underrepresented, but very deserving, communities.

*The Reverend **Yein Kim** is the rector of St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Westwood. She is one of the co-founders of the Gathering, a space for Asian American Spirituality, and serves on the Commission on Ministry in the Diocese of Los Angeles. She also serves as the vice-chair of the Worship Committee for the 80th General Convention and is on the Board of Directors at Episcopal Women's History Project (EWHP) and Episcopal Community Federal Credit Union. She lives in Redondo Beach, California, with her husband, the Rev. Nickolas Griffith, who serves as the rector of the Mutual Ministry of St. Andrews, Torrance and Christ Church in Redondo Beach.*

### **Resources:**

- [Investing in a Multiracial Vision of Church](#), by Kenji Kuramitsu, Vestry Papers, November 2017
- [The Power of Gathering](#), by Haley Bankey, Vestry Papers, March 2021
- [In This Moment](#) by Heidi J. Kim, Vestry Papers, July 2020
- [The Church Goes to Virtual Burning Man](#), by Brian Baker, Vestry Papers, March 2021

## **Thrive in the Hive**

Hillary Raining

*We are in a time of deep evolution in the church, one that will take immense creativity and adaptability. The Hive – an online spirituality and wellness community – was formed to bring ancient Christian practices of the faith to those who are looking to grow. This community supports progressive followers of the Holy Spirit who want to grow in their faith and change the world, and it blends the best of parish life with the flexibility of the Internet.*

*Since the Hive was founded by a bee-keeping priest, the life-cycle of the honey bee was chosen as the working metaphor for this community. The church has actually used the beehive as a model of the church for centuries, since every bee in the hive works together with its fellow bees in service to the Queen (as the Christ figure). The natural ability of bees for cross-pollination is a wonderful example of how to give progressive Jesus-followers a model for community. Just as a bee does not spend her whole life in the confines of her hive, the model is intentional about helping people build community beyond the Internet. With a membership area that has monthly workshops, worship, classes, videos, blog posts, podcasts, articles and online and in-person community groups (like spiritual studies and a coffee hour round table), the Hive can help build faith lives all over the world.*

*This article is a video. To watch the video, please visit our website [here](#). Read the transcript below.*

### **Transcript:**

Hello, I'm Hillary Raining. I'm the Rector of St. Christopher's Church in Gladwyne, Pennsylvania, and I also have the great joy of being the creator of The Hive, an online spirituality and wellness community. I'm excited to talk about the topic of formation for the missionary church in a changing world, especially the vulnerability that can come with that and the courage to help be there, to help the world's brokenness, to help engage in hope, to bring the message of good news to places where we might be doing that differently or in a brand-new way. I'm going to use some of the things that we do at the Hive as examples of some of our best practices, but it's certainly an evolving time right now. What works for one community may not work for another – which is true with any tool or practice that we're trying, but it's especially true in this timeframe where we're trying new things at a fast-paced rate.

That's some of the joy of it because you can just dive right in with new technologies and try things you've never been able to before and reach people who you've perhaps never been able to reach before. It's also part of the vulnerability of it. When you put yourself out there in such a wide way, you have no control over who's going to see it and make a comment about it, right? It is very much a time of putting ourselves out there as the church. And frankly, I believe it's something we're certainly called to do in the great commission – to go and make disciples of all people – and something that as a denomination we perhaps don't do very well. We don't like to necessarily bother people, which is a nice emphasis. And yet, at the same time, that perhaps has kept us from actually spreading the faith within us and telling people about the gospel.

So it's putting us, perhaps, out of our comfort zone, and that's a good thing. It's right where we should be. So some of the ways that we engage in this are in the Hive. As I said, it's an online community for spirituality and wellness. The fancy word for all of that might be esthetical theology, taking the ancient, spiritual practices of the church that have always been life-giving and always been perhaps mystical,

maybe a little mysterious, and bringing them to people in a new way. So for many of us, let's say it might be a mindfulness practice, a meditation practice. It might be engaging in art in a new way. We have done all kinds of workshops and community gatherings that do exactly this. I'll give you an example of one that involves a small group.

### **Building community to grow in hope**

Earlier this year, when COVID started, we started a discernment group to help people see what they should do with this energy at the moment, how should they show up and live bravely to bring this message of God to the world. And we met over Zoom. At first, we weren't sure how that was going to go. As many of you have found out, life behind a screen has some disadvantages in community-building. And on the other hand, we also found that for introverts, some people preferred it. There was also an added benefit of bringing holy and sacred conversations to people's actual homes or places of work, which really integrates the faith well beyond the four walls of the church. And for those moments where we were actually doing more than just discernment work, we were actually in somewhat of a retreat. People were actually able to find some comfort in their own surroundings that allowed a deep dive very quickly. So we were able to harness the joys of that.

Now that class, that discernment class, used tools like Ignation spirituality to look at our vocational call as honing our spiritual GPS, right? For those who know Ignation spirituality, you know that a lot of it is discerning the will of God by desolations and consolations. We did it by talking about it as a spiritual GPS, as we're looking for more and more joy in our life, not just happiness, that's fleeting, but joy that's deep and abiding. That was a great class, and it led to even deeper dives.

Now we have workshops on how yoga and prayer practices using the body can help further a prayer life. We have lots of art workshops, including some in iconography. We have classes that are designed to help people start and continue a meditation process, and we'll be making more and more of those as we go. All of this in an attempt to try and meet people exactly where they are, either physically through the Internet or emotionally. So that if people are feeling hopeless, if people are feeling tired, if people are feeling as though they're not able to connect with God in this time, we hope to give them these ancient, spiritual tools that come from the Christian tradition to help them grow even further and say, actually, this is a time to grow in hope. And we're all here together as a community to do just that.

So I hope that is inspiring, but I also hope that you'll share your tips and best practices and some things that have worked for you all, so that I can also learn from your strategies. Our main strategy is, how can we invite people to actually show up and be brave and be who they really are, the beloved children of God, and let that shine even further. Looking forward to learning from you all as well, and thank you for this chance to be a part of the conversation.

*The Rev. Dr. **Hillary Raining** is currently living out a call as the rector of St. Christopher's Episcopal Church in Gladwyne, Pennsylvania. This role is a great source of joy for her as she serves as priest, pastor and teacher to the congregation. In addition to parish ministry, she is the founder of The Hive, an online spirituality and wellness community. She also serves as the director of the Doctorate of Ministry program at The General Theological Seminary, and is a published writer in both church and academic fields. Her doctorate in ministry from Drew University included a concentration on worship, preaching and reconciliation. Find out more at: [hillaryraining.com](http://hillaryraining.com).*

**Resources:**

- [Braving the Wilderness: Lanterns to Light Our Way](#), an ECF webinar presented by the Rev. Callie Swanlund, June 22, 2020
- [Called To a New Land](#) by Susan Elliott, Vestry Papers, January 2021
- [Bible & Brew](#), by Landon Moore, Vestry Papers, March 2021
- [How Do You Share Jesus?](#) by Linda Buskirk, an ECF Vital Practices blog, August 29, 2016

## **Ceñirme mis lomos**

Westina Matthews

Corría el año 2019 – mucho antes de la pandemia, el malestar racial y las elecciones presidenciales – cuando pensé en reunir a las cinco mujeres negras que en ese entonces eran obispas de la Iglesia Episcopal para una serie de conversaciones que finalmente se publicarían en un libro. No sabíamos que las circunstancias de la vida cambiarían la importancia de esa oportunidad. El libro está dedicado a la Reverendísima Barbara C. Harris, la primera mujer en ser ordenada y consagrada obispa en la Comunión Anglicana mundial. Solo puedo imaginar los obstáculos y las barreras que ella tuvo que navegar.

En los últimos cinco años, cinco mujeres negras han sido consagradas obispas, lo que representa solo el cuatro por ciento de todos los obispos diocesanos, sufragáneos o asistentes de hoy en día: la Reverendísima Jennifer Baskerville-Burrow (2017), la Reverendísima Carlye J. Hughes (2018), la Reverendísima Phoebe A. Roaf (2019), la Reverendísima Kimberly Lucas (2019) y la Reverendísima Shannon MacVean-Brown (2019). A medida que fui pasando tiempo con estas cinco mujeres, empecé a apreciar más plenamente sus trayectorias y obstáculos. En una de nuestras primeras conversaciones, la obispa Kym compartió su voz profética en una oración espontánea: “Oh Señor, ayúdame a ceñirme mis lomos para lo que está por venir”. (Job 38.3)

## **Un punto de partida para una conversación más profunda**

Las preguntas que había preparado para nuestra conversación eran las obvias, tales como:

- ¿Cuál fue tu experiencia al crecer como mujer negra y cómo esa experiencia informó tu trayectoria de fe y tu llamado al liderazgo?
- ¿De qué manera tu vida ha sido afectada, personalmente y como obispa, durante este tiempo de pandemia, protestas raciales y crisis económica?
- ¿Cuáles fueron algunas de las barreras que las sacerdotas negras enfrentan al buscar empleo en la Iglesia?
- ¿Qué te parece que se necesita para hacer cambios significativos y duraderos en la Iglesia?

Durante las seis conversaciones por Zoom que tuvimos a lo largo de nueve meses, quedó muy claro que esas preguntas solo iban a servir como un punto de partida para estas notables mujeres que se apoyaban entre sí.

En esos nueve meses ocurrieron cosas sin precedentes: los índices de mortalidad de la COVID-19 ascendieron de 103,000 muertes a 1.1 por minuto; las diócesis emitieron y repasaron directrices de culto; las brutales muertes de Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor y George Floyd; las muertes de la obispa Barbara Harris, el Honorable John Lewis y la jueza de la Corte Suprema Ruth Bader Ginsburg; elecciones presidenciales como ninguna anterior. Era como si lo que sufrieron a lo largo de esos meses, tener que

equilibrar sus roles como obispas y simultáneamente sentir la profundidad de sus angustias personales, había expuesto su vulnerabilidad y autenticidad, revelando la verdadera esencia de estas mujeres.

### La formación es clave

Esta pregunta, presentada por la obispa Shannon, ayudó a guiarnos durante el tiempo que pasamos juntas. “¿Cómo va a ser la Iglesia esta imagen más plena de lo que seguimos diciendo que queremos ser?”

Una recomendación importante y universal que ofrecieron las obispas para generar cambios duraderos en la Iglesia fue la formación. La obispa Phoebe señaló: “Esta crisis demostró todavía más la falta de discipulado y la necesidad de contar con corazones transformados”. En respuesta, la Obispa Jennifer preguntó: “¿Qué oportunidad tenemos en la Iglesia para realmente aprovechar este momento para ayudar a dar a la gente lo que necesita?”

Tal vez fue por eso que me entusiasmó tanto enterarme sobre *My Way of Love* (*Mi camino de amor*) en una conferencia virtual de Forma. Ofrecida por la Iglesia Episcopal en asociación con [RenewalWorks](#), un ministerio de Forward Movement, *My Way of Love* es una serie gratuita de ocho semanas que brinda sugerencias personalizadas para el crecimiento espiritual basadas en las siete prácticas de *Way of Love*. Todos los mensajes por correo electrónico de la serie contienen ideas sobre cómo orar, participar en la escritura y practicar regularmente *Way of Love*. Para más información ponerse en contacto directamente con [Way of Love](#) o con [Jerusalem Greer](#), el funcionario de evangelismo de la Iglesia Episcopal.

### Una hermandad

El libro que resultó de nuestras conversaciones, *This Band of Sisterhood: Black Women Bishops on Race, Faith, and the Church* (*Esta hermandad: Obispas negras sobre raza, fe y la Iglesia*), se publicará en inglés en julio de este año. El título fue inspirado por la obispa Carlye, que se refirió a “esta causa común de hermandad” en su oración de clausura de una de nuestras sesiones. En el prólogo, Catherine Meeks (directora ejecutiva del Centro Absalom Jones para la Sanidad Racial) añadió “un ejército de ángeles” para describir a estas cinco obispas guerreras.

A los nueve días de mi última sesión con las cinco obispas, la Diócesis de Chicago eligió a la Reverenda Canónica Paula E. Clark para que sirviera como obispa diocesana, la primera persona negra y la primera mujer en ocupar ese cargo. En el epílogo del libro, la Obispa Paula expresa su profunda gratitud por haberse unido a “este ejército valiente de hermanas que, empezando por la Obispa Barbara Harris, ven, llevan y encarnan la luz de Cristo.”

Sí, estas mujeres se han unido – tanto como guerreras y como ángeles – viviendo su llamado al liderazgo. Anhelamos que esa hermandad siga creciendo y aumentando.

El libro en inglés *This Band of Sisterhood: Black Women Bishops on Race, Faith, and the Church* se puede pedir por adelantado [aquí](#).

*La Dra. Westina Matthews es profesora del Seminario Teológico General en el Centro de la Espiritualidad Cristiana. Como autora, líder de retiros y teóloga, Westina encontró una manera de conectarse con la gente mediante sus libros, ensayos, cátedras, prédicas y enseñanzas. Su próximo libro es This Band of Sisterhood: Black Women Bishops on Race, Faith, and the Church (Church Publishing Inc.,*

*julio de 2021). Por muchos años, Westina fue líder laica en la Iglesia Trinity Wall Street en la Ciudad de Nueva York, donde integró la junta parroquial y lideró conjuntamente la ofrenda anual de la parroquia de Compromiso al Discipulado. En la actualidad es miembro de la Iglesia Episcopal de St. Peter en Savannah, Georgia, e integra las juntas del Instituto Shalem de Formación Espiritual y Gathering of Leaders (Reunión de Líderes).*

**Recursos:**

- [Cambio: todo está conectado](#), por the Right Reverend Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows, Vestry Papers, November 2019
- [Amenaza Triple](#), por Adialyn Milien, Vestry Papers, July 2020
- [Liderazgo multilingüe y feligresías multiculturales](#), por Sandra Montes, Vestry Papers, July 2015
- [Elevad todas las voces](#) por Anna Olson, Vestry Papers, January 2015