

Hospitality and Outreach
November 2018

Welcoming Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Sarah Barton

During the first few months of 2018, I spent many hours visiting churches where adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) were vibrant participants in parish life. I interviewed adults with IDD, as well as their family, friends, clergy and lay leaders to learn their views on belonging, Christian identity and baptism.

Many of the stories I heard were filled with challenge and pain. Adults with IDD spoke of being asked to leave because of disruption, of receiving an initial welcome and then realizing that no one was committed to being in relationship with them, of being excluded from events or programs like Bible studies and redirected to “special needs” ministries.

The stories came as no surprise. Since the deinstitutionalization of people with IDD in the 1960s, the population continues to struggle with significantly heightened loneliness (Gilmore and Cuskelly, 2014), and while more than 80% of adults with IDD report their faith as important or very important, fewer than half attend church regularly (Carter et al., 2015). People with more profound and multiple disabilities and those living in residential settings such as group homes are even less likely to attend church.

Called to help all God’s people flourish

But alongside these stories of hurt, I heard others of great beauty – stories of creative avenues for liturgical participation for people with and without disabilities, stories of belonging, of churches that are becoming families of choice for people with IDD and congregations that have become places of empowerment and leadership for these adults.

For those of us in The Episcopal Church, the service of Holy Baptism and baptismal reaffirmation provides strong encouragement to help all the baptized flourish. In the baptismal covenant, the celebrant asks, “Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?” and, “Will you strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being?”

Before responding, we might well consider what practices we could embrace with regard to adults with IDD so that can faithfully answer, “We will, with God’s help.”

Ways we can welcome and incorporate adults with IDD into our parish life

- Visit group homes and other residential settings in your community. Many adults with IDD living in group homes are disconnected from churches. They may no longer have a local family member who consistently enables their participation in church. Volunteer to spend time with people at group homes, or even better, spend time with them and invite them to church! Group homes typically have transportation options for people with mobility needs and are required to support adults with IDD in meeting their spiritual needs. But this is a two-way road – make it known that your parish is welcoming of people with IDD!
- Seek opportunities for participation, beyond inclusion alone, for adults with IDD. Inclusion recognizes that someone is in the room or attends a church event (a good place for many Episcopal Churches to start!), but that person may not be a participant. Belonging is when someone is missed, when we love and consider them and their gifts as an indispensable part of our community. (Swinton, 2012)
- Focus on opportunities for participation. People with IDD may wish to serve in a number of ways but may never have been asked to do so. Consider pairing someone with IDD with another lay leader to participate in greeting, reading, coffee hour, ushering or acolyting. You don't need to say words to participate in most of these activities! One parent I talked with reflected on the acolyte at her son's baptism: "There was a young adult with Down syndrome who was an acolyte when [my son] was baptized...it was a hopeful thing." Now that child is an adult (who has Down syndrome and does not speak for communication). His mother sees his active participation in his home parish, where he serves as a choir assistant, passing out bulletins and assisting in coffee hour.
- Consider inviting adults with IDD into pre-existing church gatherings – praying together, eating together and studying the Bible together. Special "disability ministries" can often work against encouraging the full belonging and participation in the life of a church for people with IDD. One practice I typically use, following the wonderful example of folks at Reality Ministries, is "circle time." It's a practice for introducing new folks to one another, or to simply do a "check-in." One question is asked to the whole group. For example, "share a single word, facial expression or gesture to share how you're doing today." This kind of practice enables both speakers and non-speakers to engage, and can also offer more concise starts to "get to know you" events and meetings!
- Lean into the liturgy! The beautiful repetition of the liturgy can help people with and without disabilities to connect deeply in worship. It can bring comfort, familiarity and new opportunities for learning. One particular practice that I commend is more frequent occasions for baptismal remembrance/reaffirmation. It is a multi-sensory practice that can get everyone involved – singing a familiar hymn or song at each occasion for baptismal reaffirmation, making sure folks get wet with the baptismal waters, hearing or seeing the water poured out, walking or rolling to the font, repeating the words of the baptismal covenant that remind us of our identity in Christ and the vocation of all the baptized. These are practices that not only include people through a variety of senses (not just cognitive understanding), but also shape church communities, forming a heightened sense of the identity of all the baptized, including people with IDD, as disciples of Jesus. As a lay leader I interviewed said so eloquently, "baptism is a wordless way of preaching." Amen!

- Need more specific ideas for cultivating belonging and encouraging participation among parishioners with IDD? Partner with someone in your local community or even your own parish! Do you know an occupational therapy practitioner or a special educator? Your local independent living association? A self-advocacy group for adults with IDD? Local offices for your state IDD council? A social worker? A community support professional? Working toward the belonging of people with IDD can open up new opportunities for community partnerships, deepening our parish connections with our neighbors.

As we strive to serve all our neighbors in the love of Christ, upholding the dignity of every human being, may our lives be blessed by people with IDD as we together affirm boldly and faithfully: “I will, with God’s help!”

Sarah Barton is a Doctor of Theology candidate in Theology and Ethics at Duke Her research focuses on the intersections of disability and theological anthropology. She specifically investigates how theologies and practices of baptism across the ecumenical spectrum can foster communities of belonging for people living with significant intellectual and developmental disabilities. Sarah currently resides in Michigan where she is a faculty fellow at Western Theological Seminary.

Resources:

- [Improving Inclusion—Part 1: Words Matter](#) by Linda Buskirk, ECF Vital Practices blog, June 1, 2018
- [Improving Inclusion—Part 2: Engagement](#) by Linda Buskirk, ECF Vital Practices blog, June 11, 2018
- [Improving Inclusion—Part 3: Sensory Kits](#) by Linda Buskirk, ECF Vital Practices blog, June 22, 2018
- [Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities A Guide for Service Providers, Families, and Congregations](#) (1st Edition) by Erik W. Carter
- [Accessible Gospel, Inclusive Worship](#) by Barbara J, Newman

Let the Children Come To Me

Jamie Martin Currie

As church leaders, we are called to invite all people in, to help them feel comfortable and loved. Plenty of resources are available on the hospitality of adults, but what about children? Although it will be parents who ultimately decide whether or not to return to your parish, there are ways to specifically welcome young people. The nursery, worship and formation are areas where you can provide intentional hospitality to kids. Parishes that find ways to practice hospitality toward children experience successful results.

The Nursery

Keep in mind that potential parents and grandparents might keep an eye on the nursery for months before they bring children in. They are checking to make sure it is a safe, clean, uncluttered,

nurturing and welcoming space. Do the caregivers engage with the toddlers, reading and singing to them? Try getting down on the ground where the toddlers are; you might be surprised at what you discover from that angle! If you have a single room for your nursery, consider building a half-wall to divide the infants from toddlers. The preferred location for the nursery is near the nave, but if it is in a separate building, the audio from worship can be transmitted into the nursery so the caregivers and children can enjoy the service.

The need for clear, directional signage is obvious, but so is the need for signage on the nursery door. I once saw a nursery door with a Do Not Enter sign, the day school signage, which could easily be covered with a Welcome to the Church Nursery sign during child care for services or church events. What about posting a greeter near the nursery door to welcome families and assist with sign-in and drop-off?

Walk the campus with fresh eyes, as a visiting or new parent might, to see whether you are doing all you can to welcome young children to your nursery. New parents should be asked to complete a nursery registration form and leave it with the caregivers for the files. This is not an inconvenience! It's what parents expect nowadays. The form should ask for contact information, allergies and special needs. In addition, sign-in/out sheets should be posted at the door each week so that parents can provide information about where they will be and how they may be contacted while their child is in your care. Parents will feel their children have been well cared for if the caregivers provide them with a brief form reporting how the morning went.

Make sure there are changing tables in multiple men's and women's restrooms and stepstools for little ones to wash hands. Depending on your church size, consider designating parking spaces for expectant parents or parents with small children.

Worship

There are many ways to welcome children in church services, and it begins at every entrance to the worship space. If your congregation is truly welcoming families into worship, ushers need to be trained to do that. They can encourage families to sit up front, so they can see what's going on. Instead of assuming parents plan to utilize the nursery during worship, ushers should wait to be asked and then escort parents to the nursery instead of merely pointing the way. It is also helpful if older adults encourage families to sit up front near them. Playgrounds that allow young children to sit comfortably at small tables or on the floor somewhere in the sanctuary have become popular. If there isn't space for that up front, child appropriate tables and chairs with activities can be available in the back of the nave.

Many parishes provide worship or activity bags at entrances in the narthex and transepts. These are bags of quiet toys and activities like board books, sewing cards, colored pencils, cardstock, fuzzy sticks and child friendly bulletins. Offering two choices of worship bags, one for preschoolers and another for early elementary ages, with developmentally age appropriate activities for each takes this idea one step further. What if the children of a visiting family also received a welcome bag like the adults? Just take a worship bag, add a letter from the children's minister, using lots of photos, and include crayons with a church information sticker and information about Vacation Bible School

or other family-friendly parish activities. Some parishes include children's illustrated Bibles in the pews, a children's sermon in worship or a family service.

Education Hour

Children may be hesitant to walk into a classroom for the first time – or even once a month. If one of the adult leaders sits on a chair and greets children at eye level, it can ease some of that hesitation.

Registration offers a good way to capture the information you want to meet a child's needs. In addition to food allergies and any special needs, find out what sports they play and what their schedules are like. If you find you have students with special needs, keeping a basket full of sensory products (such as fidget toys) in the classroom can enhance learning and promote independence. And finally, create Faith at Home bags or boxes with take-home resources to give families seasonally so parents can access resources for sharing their faith with children throughout the week.

Communication

The parish website should include specific information about what to expect on Sunday mornings – times, offerings, locations, procedures. A three-, six-, or twelve-month schedule of classes and activities, including when childcare is offered, should be mailed and handed out. A children's ministry page on your congregation's website describing the curriculum, class routine and pick-up and drop-off times and locations, is important. The following welcome language is found in many worship bulletins around the country:

To the Parents of Our Young Children

Relax! God puts the wiggle in children; don't feel you have to suppress it in God's house. All are welcome! Sit toward the front where it is easier for your little ones to see and hear what's going on at the altar: they tire of seeing the backs of other's heads. Quietly explain the parts of the service and actions of the priest, altar servers, choir, etc. Sing the hymns, say the prayers and voice the responses. Children learn liturgical behaviors by copying you. If you must leave the service with your child, feel free to do so, but please come back. As Jesus said, "Let the children come to me." Remember that the way we welcome children in church directly affects the way they respond to the Church, to God and to one another. Let them know that they are at home in this house of worship.

To Our Parishioners

The presence of children is a gift to the Church, and they are a reminder that our parish is growing. Please welcome our children and give their parents a smile of encouragement.

Fellowship

If food and drinks are served during fellowship, a simple hospitable gesture would be to include child friendly snacks, water and perhaps juice boxes. Welcoming children is much more than just welcoming their parents. It is about attending to them, paying attention to them, to their needs and

their lives. Finally, you will need to get to know the children – and more than their names, seek to learn what is on their hearts. Pray for them, follow up and check in when they have been absent.

Paying attention to the needs of children and parents shows that your church is interested in the needs of all its membership – young and old. Welcoming families requires attention to many details, but without young families, parishes won't remain viable.

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Resources:

- [Beloved Children of God](#) by Richelle Thompson, ECF Vital Practices blog, May 10, 2016
- [Can Children Understand Worship?](#) by Heidi Clark, ECF Vital Practices blog, February 21, 2014
- [The Church that Plays Soccer](#) by Ginny Anton by Ginny Anton, ECF Vital Practices blog, December 28, 2012
- [Children ARE Welcome. Really.](#) by Richelle Thompson, ECF Vital Practices blog, August 12, 2013

The Vital Outreach and Evangelism Connection

Frank Logue

When my wife and daughter and I arrived in Kingsland, Georgia, to plant a new church, my driving vision was to create a new congregation so vital to its community that if the church closed its doors in ten years, people who had never attended would miss it and wish it were still open. I had already learned a lot about connecting a church to its community and about how to do personal evangelism and encourage others to do so as well. What I didn't know, is that I was still missing the vital connection between outreach and evangelism.

Lessons in outreach and personal evangelism

As a seminarian at St. Philip's in Baden, Maryland, I learned how even a small congregation can be important to its community. The rural, historically black church had an average Sunday attendance of 44 when I arrived. The congregation ran the clothes closet and food pantry for the community. They also had received a grant supporting the transportation ministry that picked people up at their homes and took them to doctor appointments and other essential trips. Beyond this, they had created an eight-bed assisted living facility so that frail elderly could stay close to home when they could no longer care for themselves. The church might have been small in attendance, but if its doors were closed, the community would have a sizeable hole to fill. St. Philip's would be missed.

I learned about personal evangelism from the Rev. Roger Schellenberg, while assisting him as he planted the Episcopal Church of the Spirit in Alexandria, Virginia. Roger had a winsome way of talking about his faith in Jesus that came up naturally in most every interaction with people he met. He effortlessly modeled apologetics as he talked about questions of faith with people dealing with obstacles that blocked their return to church or showing up for the first time.

Connecting the two

When starting the work of planting a new church, I set out to learn the needs of the area, and that's how I began in Kingsland – meeting one-on-one with community leaders and knocking on a hundred doors to ask what a new church could do for the community. From this work, I learned of the pressing need for a full-day preschool for families where both parents held jobs. I also saw that the small core group I was gathering had the skills needed to undertake the project. These conversations led to the creation of a full day preschool. In a few years we added thriving scouting programs as God gave us the people with the right gifts and passion. A twice weekly Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meeting founded by church members followed.

Then came the surprise. I didn't know that I needed to connect outreach and evangelism. Newcomers didn't make that connection for me. I thought our coming in contact with other groups, like the families of preschool students, the Boy Scouts and those who took part in Narcotics Anonymous, was enough. I didn't want to be pushy. What I discovered was that if someone came to a meeting at the church and no one from the congregation actually invited him or her personally to come for church, it was experienced as if we didn't want them.

"I figured you didn't want us to come," was the answer I received when I asked one dad, active in the Scout Troop, why his family hadn't come to worship with us. I only thought to ask when he mentioned that they didn't have a church home. As we talked further, he said that it was almost like being disinvited when the church members he talked with didn't invite him to church. I was knocked off my heels.

We certainly didn't expect everyone who benefitted from the ministries of the church to come and worship with us. That had never been the goal. But we also didn't want to be the church that crossed its arms rather than embracing those who crossed our threshold for preschool, NA or our scouting program.

Creating on-ramps into the church

I worked with the vestry on ways to build bridges, like a "Trunk or Treat" (where adults decorate the back of their cars for Halloween, park in a parking lot and distribute candy to children who come "trick or treating") with the Preschool, and a Low Country Boil and Burning of the Greens with the Scout Troop at Epiphany. At those events, rather than yelling out an invitation to all, we thought it best to talk personally with participants and invite them to join us in church.

Those personal invitations worked surprisingly well. I remember one family that became active in Boy Scouts and then, following an invitation, started attending services and church events. One Sunday, we baptized the whole family of four. Where would they have been without our learning to

make the connection between our outreach with the community and inviting people into our faith and church life?

Canon Stephanie Spellers has a helpful adaptation for a saying attributed to St. Francis, “Preach the Gospel at all times; use words, they’re necessary.” People may not even know that our work in a soup kitchen or at Laundry Love is connected to our faith in Jesus unless we say so. And as I learned the hard way, many of those who come into your church for other activities, won’t feel welcome in worship without a personal connection and an invitation.

The Rev. Canon Frank Logue is the Canon to the Ordinary of the Diocese of Georgia. A member of the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church, Frank blogs on church development [here](#).

Resources:

- [A Ministry of Invitation](#) by Nancy Davidge, Vestry Papers, November 2016
- [What is Episcopal Evangelism?](#) By Alan Bentrup, ECF Vital Practices blog, August 10, 2018
- [The Invitation](#) by Annette Buchanan, ECF Vital Practices blog, June 9, 2018
- [Redefining Outreach](#) by Linda Buskirk, ECF Vital Practices blog, May 12, 2018

Sharing the Bounty of God’s Garden

Bill Eakins

God’s Garden is one way in which St. John’s Episcopal Church, West Hartford, is trying to connect with the people who live in the church’s neighborhood. Since last spring, we have been growing vegetables to give away to our neighbors. Every Tuesday morning, a handful of volunteers have come to the church to pick what is ready in the six raised beds. Then they wash the day’s harvest and display it on a table by the sidewalk fronting the church’s lawn. Kale, chard, spinach, lettuce, broccoli, tomatoes, squash and herbs were among the table’s bounty as the summer advanced.

At first, St. John’s neighbors were shy about coming to the God’s Garden table. Many found it hard to believe that we were actually offering vegetables free of charge. Passers-by often avoided eye contact with our volunteers because they assumed we were selling something. They were surprised when we greeted them and introduced ourselves as belonging to St. John’s – “that big church over there.” It was clear that these neighbors may have walked by the church for years, but had never met any of the congregation. The vegetables from God’s Garden have begun to open their eyes to see St. John’s as people and not just a pile of buildings.

Likewise, our volunteers have learned a lot about St. John’s neighbors during conversations at the vegetable table. We have learned that many of the people living near our church are immigrants who have come from all over the world and speak English as a second language. We discovered that some have learned English in a program offered in our parish house. We have found that a lot of our neighbors do not have cars and find it difficult to get food, particularly fresh food. And we have learned that many have little idea about what happens behind the red doors and stained glass windows of churches like St. John’s, or about what we believe and why we exist.

Like many congregations, St. John's neighborhood has changed considerably since its house of worship was built. When the Norman Gothic church and parish house were erected at the end of a trolley line in a newly developed suburban area, St. John's was very much a part of an affluent neighborhood with substantial family houses springing up around it. Children from the neighborhood filled the large Sunday School, and many members walked to worship. Today the parish neighborhood is much more urban than suburban, its impressive buildings and spacious landscape surrounded by commercial enterprises, professional offices, multifamily dwellings and apartment houses. Most parishioners live some distance from the church and are strangers to the neighborhood around their church.

God's Garden came into being out of a growing conviction that St. John's isolation from its neighbors has to change. If, as Jesus commands, we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, surely we have got to begin to know who those neighbors are. And our neighbors have got to begin to know who we are. The relationships that have begun at the vegetable table this summer are a step in that direction. In early September, we did something else. We threw a block party with church tours, bands, food and a kids' bouncy house to welcome the local community. God knows where all this will lead!

When we planted our seeds last spring, we thought we were planting vegetables. What has grown in God's Garden is much more than that. What has grown is a new way of being the Church.

Bill Eakins is a Priest Associate at St. John's, West Hartford. During his fifty years of ordained ministry, he has served in urban, suburban and rural parishes and as a college chaplain.

Resources:

- [How Does Your \(Church\) Garden Grow?](#) by Peter Strimer, ECF Vital Practices blog, June 2, 2011
- [Homegrown Communion: Faith, Land and Neighbor](#), an ECF webinar presented by Sarah Nolan, September 26, 2013
- [Tips for Parishes Considering a Food Pantry Garden](#) an ECF Vital Practices tool submitted by Timothy Goldman
- [Missional Mealtime](#) by Alan Bentrup, ECF Vital Practices blog, March 8, 2018

Four Steps to a Public Health Ministry

Joshua Rodriguez-Hobbs

As a hospital chaplain, I encounter people at some of the lowest points in their lives. My role is to help them see how their own spiritual resources can support their physical healing. However, hospital patients are discharged, often before they are fully healed, and most healing, most health care, takes place in our communities. While we often talk about how church attendance in the United States is declining, the truth is that over one third of Americans attend religious services

weekly. Faith communities still have some of the strongest social capital in our society, and they can use that to promote health and healing.

In John's Gospel, Jesus states, "I came that they might have life, and have it more abundantly." (John 10:10) While I believe that the abundant life Jesus promises is more than physical health, I also believe that it does include physical health. People in our communities have health needs that churches can and should address, but they often seem overwhelming. How do you even know where to begin?

1. Think about health broadly

The odds are that your parish is already engaged in a public health ministry. That's because health doesn't just include the services you receive from your doctor or other health care professionals. According to the CDC, "Conditions in the places where people live, learn, work and play affect a wide range of health risks and outcomes." These conditions are known as "social determinants of health."

Does your parish have a feeding ministry? Lack of access to healthy food is linked to a number of chronic health conditions. Do you already have a ministry that helps people find stable housing and employment? Homelessness and unemployment are also linked to negative health outcomes. Perhaps your parish hosts twelve-step groups. Addiction is a chronic disease that is linked to numerous negative health outcomes.

2. Assess your community's needs

Doing a public health assessment sounds daunting. Luckily, the IRS requires each non-profit hospital to make a public health assessment of its community every three years. You can find one for your community by Googling "community health needs assessment" and the name of a local non-profit hospital. Here's a link to the [Community Health Needs Assessment](#) (CHNA) for the Johns Hopkins Hospital, where I work.

As part of their CHNA, hospitals identify two to five of the biggest public health issues in their community and provide a plan on how they will address them. Some hospitals, like Johns Hopkins, will also identify social determinants of health that they plan to address. By using a local hospital's CHNA, you can identify the greatest health needs your community faces, as well as ideas for how to address them.

3. Discern your gifts and skills

If your parish is already engaged in a health ministry, it might make sense to build on that. For example, the greatest health need that we're focusing on at Johns Hopkins Hospital is access to addiction treatment services. With this in mind, it might make sense for a parish near our hospital to focus on expanding the twelve-step programs it hosts to include Narcotics Anonymous and Al-Anon in addition to more traditional groups like Alcoholics Anonymous.

If you already have a parish nursing ministry, consider expanding that to include help for parishioners as they navigate the health care system, which can feel complex and overwhelming. Or, if you have a number of nurses in your parish but don't have an existing parish nursing ministry, consider starting one to provide basic health care like blood pressure screenings and vaccinations.

Whatever your parish's gifts and skills, there is a health care need that relates to them. If you have an active feeding ministry, consider whether the food you provide is healthy. By including more fresh fruits and vegetables, you can have a huge impact on the health of your community.

4. Form partnerships

Health care organizations are actively looking to partner with faith communities to improve public health. Reach out to local organizations and see how you can support what they are doing, as well as how they can support your efforts in the community. You don't have to do this alone! Remember, when Jesus sent out his disciples, he sent them two by two.

Maybe your parish can offer space to start a weekly mental health clinic. Perhaps you could partner with a dietician to provide healthy cooking classes for your congregation and the people you serve through your feeding ministry. Is there a local doctor or lawyer who would come and lead an adult forum on advance directives for health care? Have you thought about partnering with the department of spiritual care at a local hospital or hospice?

At the Johns Hopkins Hospital, the major social determinant of health that we're focusing on is stable employment. The hospital has a large human resources department, and we have experts who can help individuals prepare resumes and practice interview skills. We found it hard, though, to get the community to come to job training at the hospital. Zion Baptist Church, a local congregation, had strong relationships with their community and space for job training workshops. So now we partner with them to offer Turnaround Tuesday, a weekly program helping individuals in one of Baltimore's poorest neighborhoods find stable employment with health benefits. Neither the hospital nor the church could have done this on its own. However, we could do it together.

The following resources explain how your parish can begin a public health ministry, as well as provide curriculums developed for faith-based and other community organizations to address chronic illnesses.

[Building Healthy Communities through Medical-Religious Partnerships](#) by W. Daniel Hale, PhD, Richard G. Bennet, MD, and Panagis Galiatsatos, MD

[Social Determinants of Health: Know What Affects Health](#)

[The Heart Truth Faith-Based Toolkit](#)

[Your Game Plan to Prevent Type 2 Diabetes](#)

[Power Sunday Toolkit](#)

[MyPlate](#)

[SmokeFree](#)

The Rev. Joshua Rodriguez-Hobbs serves as the Episcopal Chaplain to the Johns Hopkins Hospital. He is a 2018 ECF Fellow. Josh's ministry project focuses on helping parishes in the Diocese of Maryland form medical-religious partnerships to improve the health of their communities.

Resources:

- [Mobile Health Clinic: A Path to Dignity and Wholeness](#) by Abigail Nelson, ECF Vital Practices blog, December 5, 2014
- [Where There is Despair, Hope](#) an ECF Vital Practices tool submitted by Richelle Thompson
- [So You Think You Don't Know One...](#) by Chilton Knudsen, Vestry Papers, May 2011

Taking Church Out into the Community

David Rice and Anna Carmichael

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. – Hebrews 13:2

For generations in the Episcopal Diocese of San Joaquin, we existed in silos. Our worshipping communities did not know each other, and we certainly did not know our neighbors. We neglected to show hospitality not only to strangers, but to each other, and failed to recognize the angels walking among us.

When Bishop David Rice joined the diocese in 2014, he began his ministry by asking “who are our neighbors,” and our faces, both clergy and laity, were blank. We did not know the people in our neighborhoods – not the principals in our schools, not our elected officials, let alone anyone who might be considered “invisible.” So he challenged us to go out into the community and meet the people who live there.

What we found as we took up his challenge was a tremendous need for relationship. We met not only the “important folks” in our towns and cities, but also our unhoused brothers and sisters, people who had been sex and labor trafficked up and down the diocese and those without documentation. We discovered homebound parishioners who had been forgotten and children who had never been invited to the altar. We met each other and learned that we could not do this work of ministry alone. The effort was challenging at times, but always Spirit-led.

Shifting the focus to the community

Since then, we have reframed our ministry as a diocese, seeing ourselves as worshipping communities and the beloved people of God. We firmly believe that “Church” happens not only on Sunday, where we come to celebrate, rejuvenate and give thanks, but also in our encounters every

day of the week. For this reason, while we still take attendance counts on Sundays, we are shifting our focus away from ASA (Average Sunday Attendance) to AWE (Average Weekly Engagement).

By focusing on Average Weekly Engagement, our ministry has become less about recruiting people to sit in the church, and more about how we can be the hands, feet and heart of Jesus in our neighborhood. By focusing on AWE, our ecclesiology and our stewardship have shifted from scarcity to abundance. Instead of being overwhelmed by thoughts of electric bills and assessments, we rework our budgets to focus on supporting the ministries we engage in, always with those we serve in mind. Average Weekly Engagement is about meeting the stranger who is the angel in our midst. Average Weekly Engagement is about radical hospitality, welcome and service – not about the Sunday headcount. By embracing AWE, we have become liberated to do the work that God has called us to do, which means seeing the face of Christ in each other.

AWE in action

Over the last few years, we have developed six feeding ministries in our diocese that range from partnering with local farmers to provide fresh produce, to homeless meal kits and food boxes designed for seniors. One parish provides a hot meal daily to approximately 50 people who live on the streets or are alone or just in search of fellowship. And when we prepare our local budgets, we ask:

- How does our physical plant support this ministry?
- How do our clergy/staff and laity support this ministry?
- How can we be generous givers in support of this ministry, our buildings and the clergy/staff and laity to sustain this ministry?

We have started a diocesan-wide ministry that provides daily supplies of socks and hygiene items in yellow backpacks to those who are unhoused. In some worshipping communities, the yellow-bag ministry has been taken up by the youth group, Daughters of the King or by the parish as a whole as a way to meet the needs of those in the neighborhood. Prayers are offered, along with the donations of time, talent and resource, to make these bags meaningful and of service.

Through the generosity of parishioners, local non-profits and civic agencies, we have raised approximately \$11,500 across the diocese to provide legal defense for those facing deportation and separation from their families, as well more than \$70,000 to support our neighborhood agencies that work to free people from the bondage of human trafficking. In every encounter, we strive to see the face of Jesus in the other, and we stand in AWE of the generosity and faithfulness of those in our communities who not only seek justice and to walk humbly and love one another, but who also welcome the strangers among us.

The Rt. Rev. David C. Rice has served in the Episcopal Diocese of San Joaquin since 2014, first as provisional bishop, and as diocesan bishop since 2017. Prior to serving in San Joaquin, Bishop Rice served as the Bishop of Waiapu in the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia from 2008-2014.

The Rev. Cn. Anna Carmichael, Ph.D. has served in the Episcopal Diocese of San Joaquin since 2016 as Canon to the Ordinary. Prior to serving in San Joaquin, she was Rector of St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Hood River, Oregon.

Resources:

- [Be Born in Us: Love of Neighbor in Advent](#), an ECF webinar presented by Ali Lutz, December 13, 2017
- [Being with Our Neighbors](#) by Ginny Dinsmore, Vestry Papers, May 2015
- [Putting Out Signals](#) by Anna Olson, Vestry Papers, November 2014
- [Homegrown Communion: Faith, Land, and Neighbor](#), an ECF webinar presented by Sarah Nolan, September 26, 2013

Ten Signs of a Welcoming Congregation

Sandra Montes

In my travels around the Episcopal Church's nine provinces as a musician, speaker and consultant, I have visited many churches over the past 18 years. This year, I decided to visit a different church each Sunday and blog about my experiences. That effort lasted for three months until, as is often the case, life intervened.

During that time, I learned a great deal about what churches can do to be welcoming, loving, liberating and life-giving.

Welcome begins before the visitor walks through the door

Before visiting a church, I always look at its website and social media presence. Websites for the more welcoming churches include service times, style of service (i.e., Rite I, contemporary, family, no music, etc.), leadership, the street address and a way to contact them on their home page. The pages that follow are user-friendly and attractive. The church's social media is up to date with information and images of people smiling, singing and working together that reflect the congregation's life and mission, as well as its diversity. In addition, welcoming churches answer emails, return phone calls and respond promptly to comments and questions. Once, I contacted a church with a question and the person who responded found me at church the following Sunday, introduced herself and welcomed me.

When I arrive at a church, I look for signage and relaxed, smiling greeters. It's off-putting when greeters are overly excited about having a new person. Visitor parking spots are very welcoming, especially for those of us who run late! One church I visited even had free valet parking. Clear and well-placed signage helps visitors find the service (especially if it is not in the sanctuary), restrooms, coffee hour and the nursery. If the church is large or tricky to navigate, it can be helpful to have a person clearly visible outside the building to direct foot traffic. When I visited a large church in the

Houston area that has multiple services and simultaneous activities, no one was stationed outside to help people find the service or program that they had come for.

User-friendly materials and diversity help visitors feel comfortable

During the service, I can find it tough to balance a leaflet, newsletter, song sheet, prayer book and hymnal – one leaflet/bulletin is plenty. Welcoming churches make the service as easy to follow as possible, providing clear instructions on music, where to find readings, page numbers in BCP. They explain how the Eucharist works and that everyone is welcome at the table. Although it uses a lot of paper, when the entire service – including songs – is in one leaflet, it is easy to follow. If there is projection, it is easily seen and read in a welcoming church, wherever one sits. Songs and recitations are presented simply, without animation, colored fonts or other decorative distractions.

As a woman of color, I look for people who look and sound like me. Welcoming churches are intentional about having diverse, multicultural and multigenerational groups serving on the altar, singing in the choir, reading the prayers or lessons and ushering. Welcoming churches may have a “youth Sunday” or something similar, but they also involve all ages in the service every Sunday.

Follow up can be a balancing act

Most churches have visitor/contact cards that one can complete and place in the offering plate, a good practice for determining if and how a visitor wishes to be contacted. I prefer email or text, and do not complete the cards because I have often experienced unwanted results. Churches have added me to their group pages on social media, to their mailing lists and have called me, asking for money. On the other hand, one church called and the brief (30 second) conversation was most welcoming. The priest thanked me for coming and was genuine. He did not try to sell me on the church or my involvement. He simply appreciated that I was there, and I felt welcome.

In welcoming churches, I have been personally invited to fill out a card or asked if I am new by someone in the leadership team. I have also been welcomed and introduced to another churchgoer or invited to the coffee hour by a representative from the congregation. In welcoming churches, people understand that walking into a coffee hour where everyone is sitting with people they know can be intimidating, and they will ask you to sit with them.

Some churches like to give visitors a “swag bag.” Welcoming churches know that the best gifts are those that are useful and not overly branded, things like pens, mugs, coasters (my favorite was a cookie!) and, of course, some information about their church and Jesus. I have seen welcoming churches that offer free Bibles, devotionals, pamphlets and booklets from which a visitor can choose.

No outsiders in welcoming churches

Finally, welcoming churches do not speak in code, using words like narthex, nave, chancel. They do not make anyone feel like an outsider. They expect visitors and have systems in place to make people feel at home. They are clean and uncluttered and provide nice touches like special soaps, tissue boxes and hand sanitizer. In an attempt to be welcoming, some churches ask visitors to stand

and say their names and where they are from. I have visited several Spanish-speaking churches that invite anyone with a birthday, anniversary or who is traveling to come up for a special blessing. Depending on how they are presented, these practices can make a visitor feel either welcome or uncomfortable. Welcoming congregations leave plenty of room for visitors to make their own decisions about introducing themselves or coming forward during the service.

In short, welcoming churches...

- have updated websites and social media pages
- have visitor parking
- have clear signage and directions
- have smiling greeters that are not over eager
- make worship appear simple and easy to navigate
- are intentionally diverse
- follow-up quickly and with respect
- are easy to understand
- are clean
- are loving

It is important to note that this list reflects my personal taste. Every visitor is different and brings their particular needs, expectations, experiences and faith traditions when they enter a church. Overall, I have found that the congregations that are most welcoming have a way of making visitors feel they are at home and loved. In other words, welcoming churches are Jesus.

***Sandra T. Montes** is the Spanish Language Resource Consultant at ECF. She has spent many years developing original bilingual resources for her church, school and others and has volunteered and worked in the Episcopal Church since she was welcomed in 1986. Sandra serves as a musician, translator, speaker, consultant and writer. She earned her doctorate in education in 2016 and is a full-time freelance consultant and musician.*

Resources:

- [Welcoming Visitors](#) by Richelle Thompson, ECF Vital Practices blog, February 19, 2018
- [They Will Know Us by Our Love](#) by Jeremiah Sierra, ECF Vital Practices blog post, January 20, 2014
- [Are You Ready for People to Google Your Church?](#) by Alan Bentrup, ECF Vital Practices blog, July 16, 2018
- [Your Church Needs a Welcome Video](#) by Christian Anderson and Trevor Black, Vestry Papers, November 2016

Mission-Based Budgeting: A Loving, Liberating, Life-Giving Process

Phyllis Jones

Hidden within your budgeting process is a golden opportunity to reach the members of your faith community in ways not possible by any other means. You have an opportunity to connect them, no matter how God has gifted them and set free all the collaborative, creative power they embody. Most importantly, you have the power to lift up the ultimate “Why” behind your hospitality, your outreach and everything you do and to help even your most pragmatic, business-minded folks connect more deeply with it.

Few documents get more consistent attention than a budget. And in every instance where that document is reviewed, we have an opportunity to articulate our understanding of God’s call to us, to tell stories about our response and to reflect on how we “put our money where our mouth is.” Or not.

Changing the Conversation

Conventional budgets focus on expenses. Expenses are costs to acquire materials or services that get used up. They are perceived as a drain on resources. Over and over, our analysis of expenses limits us. Do we have enough resources? How fast are we draining them? Where are we over or under budget? These conversations focus on scarcity and are generally accompanied by anxiety. They apply to fiduciary responsibility in our culture, but there is no life in them.

Mission-based budgeting, on the other hand, starts from the understanding that costs are investments in God’s mission of reconciliation in the world, however we recognize, express and join in with that. It reminds us that we already have a powerful working partner who invested Jesus’s life in that mission. One who stands ready to multiply the return on our investment in that mission far beyond any capacity we ourselves have.

Consider the parable of the talents and ask: Are we burying what God entrusted to us in expenses that merely perpetuate an institution? Or are we looking first to see where God is at work around us, then investing God’s gifts in ways that expand and strengthen the Kingdom in our communities? Have we multiplied the talents we’ve been given? What fruit did our investments bear? How do we measure that? How do we re-invest?

These are loving, liberating, life-giving questions that can change the conversation completely. The mission-based budgeting process is designed to help us address these kinds of questions. And the type of budget document that results will be a direct reflection of how deeply we choose to engage that conversation.

Types of Mission-Based Budgets

I often hear “Narrative budget” used almost interchangeably with mission-based budget. Either term conjures up a document that falls somewhere on a continuum from a conventional budget with a simple narrative explanation to a comprehensive presentation that rigorously allocates ministries and related costs into a specific missional framework.

Within the wide range of documents that result, four general groupings emerge:

1. **Conventional Budget with Narrative Support:** This approach takes a conventional budget and adds a separate descriptive listing of ministries arranged to tell a historical, current and perhaps aspirational story. It may or may not include some quantitative information, but that quantitative information is not comprehensively connected to the budget document. An example of that process is described [here](#).
2. **Narrative Budget with Conventional Support:** This approach focuses on a structured narrative presentation developed using a missional framework, with ministries allocated to each framework area and described therein. No attempt is made to allocate costs to ministries or framework areas. The conventional budget is still the primary managerial document, with the narrative budget used as a tool for communication outward. An example of that can be found [here](#).
3. **Narrative Budget with Summary Cost Allocation:** This approach takes approach #2 above one step further, allocating costs very broadly to each framework area. The conventional budget remains the primary management tool, with the narrative budget now able to be used in outward communications, but with greater connection to the numbers. Simple examples of that can be found [here](#) and [here](#).
4. **Mission-Based Budget:** This fully comprehensive approach requires an analytical process that is sufficiently in-depth to:
 - a. break down the conventional presentation based on your missional framework, and then
 - b. create a matrix to re-allocate and re-assemble the quantitative pieces in a way that clearly links costs to the missional priorities narrative in which they're invested.

Only then can a [mission-based budget like this](#) begin to gain the credibility it needs with the "numbers people" to become your primary management tool and relegate the conventional budget to a supporting role.

Whichever approach you choose, Part 2 of this series (coming in March 2019) will take you fully through the steps to get there. To prepare, you'll need six basic things:

1. A clearly articulated sense of mission. Here in the Diocese of NJ, ours is rooted in our commitment to discipleship and God's mission of reconciliation in the world.
2. A framework by which you can evaluate how you live into your sense of mission. We chose the [Five Marks of Mission](#) to evaluate our impact in forming disciples and joining with God's mission in our communities.
3. A listing of the all the ministries in which you engage (worship, hospitality, outreach, formation, etc.), community programs with which you partner and groups and ministries you support.
4. A list of broad categories, consistent across your framework, into which it's helpful to group costs.
5. Your conventional budget.
6. A committed group of people in leadership positions – including, but not limited to, your main governance team (i.e. diocesan council or vestry) and staff – willing to engage in the process of transforming that dry, conventional budget into one that reaches people's hearts through the stories it tells. Ideally, at least one of that group will be fluent with spreadsheets.

Costs of hospitality and outreach are not expenses. Rather, they are investments – investments of ourselves and our resources. To make the best decisions, we need to continually discern how we are being called to join in God’s mission of reconciliation in the world. Only then can God take our talents and multiply them beyond anything we could ask or imagine.

Join us for Part 2 of this series (coming in March 2019) to explore a process that takes what we’ve learned here to work for God’s mission in the world.

Canon Phyllis Jones was appointed COO of the Diocese of New Jersey in early 2017 after serving as the diocese’s CFO since 2010. In addition to having oversight of the finances of the diocese, she works closely with Bishop Chip Stokes to support and resource the vestries and people of their congregations in their ministries as they seek to join God in His mission throughout the diocese, Church and world. She and Bishop Stokes were among the early adopters of the Project Resource holistic financial stewardship curriculum developed by ECF, The College for Bishops and the Development Office of The Episcopal Church. She serves on the Board of Trustees for the Association of Episcopal Deacons and was recently appointed as Treasurer for Province II. Her passion for resourcing mission and developing young Christian leaders in under-resourced communities finds expression in deep, long-standing Board and development relationships with UrbanPromise Ministries and its affiliate, UrbanPromise International. In 2011, she co-founded UrbanPromise Trenton. She has called St. Matthew’s Church in Pennington, NJ her parish home for 45 years, and lives in Titusville, NJ with her husband of 35 years, Mick Jones.

The Episcopal Church Foundation (ECF) has received a three-year grant as part of Lilly Endowment’s National Initiative to Address the Economic Challenges Facing Pastoral Leaders. ECF’s grant entitled “From Economic Challenges to Transformational Opportunities” will provide lay and clergy leaders of the Episcopal Church with resources, tools and other support to help address the financial and leadership challenges of congregational ministry in the 21st century. This article was made possible by the Lilly Endowment grant. For more information on ECF’s Lilly Endowment Initiative, click [here](#).

Resources:

- [The Budget, aka The Other Half of Good Stewardship](#) by Anna Olson, ECF Vital Practices blog, November 21, 2017
- [Make Your Money Talk. Or at Least, Your Budget](#) by Richelle Thompson, ECF Vital Practices blog, November 10, 2015
- [Tools to Transform Money into Ministry](#), an ECF Vital Practices tool submitted by Sandra Swan
- [Narrative Budget Template](#), an ECF Vital Practices tool submitted by Lisa Meeder Turnbull

Diez señales de una congregación acogedora

Sandra Montes

En mis viajes por las nueve provincias de la Iglesia Episcopal como música, oradora y asesora, he visitado muchas iglesias a lo largo de los últimos 18 años. Este año decidí visitar una iglesia diferente cada domingo y bloguear sobre mis experiencias. Ese esfuerzo duró unos tres meses hasta que, como ocurre a menudo, la vida intervino. Durante ese tiempo aprendí mucho sobre lo que pueden hacer las iglesias para ser acogedoras, amorosas, liberadoras y vivificantes.

La bienvenida empieza antes de que el/la visitante pase por la puerta

Antes de visitar una iglesia, me fijo en su sitio web y su presencia en los medios sociales. Los sitios web de las iglesias acogedoras incluyen la hora de los servicios religiosos, el tipo de servicio (tal como Rito I, contemporáneo, familiar, sin música, etc.), el liderazgo, la dirección de la iglesia y una manera de ponerse en contacto con ellos/as en su página de inicio. Las páginas siguientes son fáciles de navegar y atractivas. La información de la iglesia en los medios sociales está actualizada y hay imágenes de gente sonriendo, cantando y trabajando unida reflejando la vida y la misión de la congregación y su diversidad. Además, contestan los mensajes por correo electrónico, devuelven las llamadas telefónicas y contestan sin demoras los comentarios y preguntas. Una vez me puse en contacto con una iglesia con una pregunta y la persona que respondió me encontró en la iglesia el domingo siguiente, se presentó y me dio la bienvenida.

Cuando llego a una iglesia busco letreros y personas que reciben sonrientes y relajados/as a los/as concurrentes. Es desagradable cuando esas personas están excesivamente entusiasmadas de tener una visita nueva. Los espacios de estacionamiento para las visitas dan una gran sensación de bienvenida, especialmente a aquellos/as de nosotros/as que llegamos tarde. Una iglesia que visité hasta tenía servicio de estacionamiento gratuito. Los letreros claros y bien colocados ayudan a las visitas a encontrar el servicio religioso, especialmente si no es en el santuario, así como los baños, la hora del café/refrigerio y la guardería de niños/as. Si la iglesia es grande y cuesta orientarse en ella, puede ser útil tener a alguien claramente visible afuera del edificio para orientar a las visitas. Cuando visité una iglesia grande en la zona de Houston que contaba con servicios religiosos múltiples y actividades simultáneas, nadie estaba parado(a) afuera para ayudar a la gente a encontrar el servicio o el programa al que deseaba asistir.

Materiales fáciles de emplear y la diversidad ayudan a que las visitas se sientan bien

Durante el servicio religioso, me puede resultar difícil manejar un volante, un boletín, el libro de oración común y el himnario— un boletín es suficiente. Las iglesias acogedoras hacen que el servicio sea lo más fácil posible de seguir, proporcionando instrucciones claras sobre la música, dónde encontrar las lecturas y los números de páginas en el Libro de Oración Común. Explican cómo funciona la Eucaristía y que todas las personas están bienvenidas al altar. Si bien emplea mucho papel, cuando todo el servicio – incluyendo los cantos – está en una hoja o en un boletín, es fácil de seguir. Si hay una proyección, se puede ver y leer claramente, independientemente de donde esté uno(a) sentado(a). Los cantos y las recitaciones se presentan con sencillez, sin animación, letras de colores y otras distracciones decorativas.

Como mujer latina, busco gente que se parezca a mí. Las iglesias acogedoras forman intencionalmente grupos diversos, multiculturales y de diferentes generaciones para servir en el altar, cantar en el coro, leer las plegarias o las lecturas y ser ujieres. Estas iglesias pueden tener un

“domingo de jóvenes” o algo similar, pero también hacen que personas de todas las edades participen en el servicio religioso todos los domingos.

El seguimiento puede dar una sensación de bienvenida o ser molesto

Muchas iglesias cuentan con tarjetas de visitante o de contacto que se pueden completar y poner en el plato de ofrendas, una buena práctica para determinar si un(a) visitante desea ser contactado(a). Yo prefiero el correo electrónico o los textos y no completo las tarjetas porque he tenido resultados indeseados. Ciertas iglesias me añadieron a sus páginas de grupo en medios sociales y a sus listas de correo, y me han llamado pidiéndome dinero. Por el otro lado, una iglesia me llamó y tuve una conversación breve (de 30 segundos) que me hizo sentir bienvenida. El sacerdote me agradeció por haber ido y fue genuino. No trató de venderme la iglesia ni de hacerme participar. Simplemente apreció que estuve allí y me sentí bienvenida.

En las iglesias acogedoras me han invitado personalmente a llenar una tarjeta o alguien del equipo de liderazgo me preguntó si era nueva. También se me ha dado la bienvenida y presentado a otro(a) feligrés o un(a) representante de la congregación me ha invitado a asistir a la hora del café/refrigerio. En las iglesias acogedoras las personas saben que entrar a una hora del café en la que todos/as están sentados/as con gente que conocen puede ser intimidante, así que te invitan a que te sientes con ellos/as.

Algunas iglesias dan regalos a las visitas. Las iglesias acogedoras saben que los mejores regalos son aquellos que son útiles y no muestran excesivamente el nombre de la iglesia, cosas como bolígrafos, tazas, posavasos (¡mi favorito fue una galletita!) y, por supuesto, alguna información sobre su iglesia y Jesús. También he visto que ofrecen Biblias gratuitas, devocionales, hojas informativas y folletos que las visitas pueden escoger.

En las iglesias acogedoras no hay extraños/as

Finalmente, las iglesias acogedoras no hablan en código, empleando palabras como nártex, nave, presbiterio. Hacen que nadie se sienta como alguien de afuera. Esperan tener visitas y cuentan con medios para hacer que la gente se sienta como en su casa. Son limpias y despejadas y proporcionan toques agradables, como jabones especiales, cajas de pañuelitos de papel y desinfectantes de manos. Con la intención de dar una sensación de bienvenida, algunas iglesias les piden a los visitantes que se pongan de pie y digan sus nombres y de dónde provienen. Visité varias iglesias hispanohablantes que invitan a los que cumplen años, tienen un aniversario o están de viaje a que se aproximen para recibir una bendición especial. Las congregaciones acogedoras dejan que las visitas tomen sus propias decisiones sobre presentarse o acercarse durante el servicio religioso.

En resumen, las iglesias acogedoras...

- tienen sitios web y páginas en medios sociales actualizados
- tienen estacionamiento para las visitas
- tienen indicaciones y letreros claros
- cuentan con personas que reciben sonrientes a las visitas sin estar demasiado ansiosas

- hacen que el servicio religioso sea simple y fácil de navegar
- son intencionalmente diversas
- dan seguimiento sin demoras y respetuosamente
- son fáciles de entender
- están limpias
- están llenas de amor

Es importante señalar que esta lista refleja mi gusto personal. Cada visitante es diferente y trae sus necesidades, expectativas, experiencias y tradiciones de fe específicas cuando entra a una iglesia. En general, hallé que las congregaciones que más dan la bienvenida tienen una manera de hacer que la gente se sienta en su casa y amada. En otras palabras, las iglesias acogedoras son Jesús.

***Sandra T. Montes** es la consultora de los recursos en español de la ECF. Ha pasado muchos años desarrollando recursos originales bilingües para su iglesia, escuela y otras organizaciones y ha sido voluntaria y ha trabajado en la Iglesia Episcopal desde que le dieron la bienvenida en 1986. Se desempeña como música, traductora, oradora, asesora y redactora. Obtuvo su doctorado en educación en 2016 y es consultora y música de tiempo completo.*

Recursos:

- [Aprendiendo a Ser el Pueblo de Dios – En Dos Idiomas](#), de Sandra Montes, Vestry Papers, enero 2018
- [Recorrer la senda de las relaciones](#), de Sarabeth Goodwin, Vestry Papers, noviembre 2015
- [¡El Espíritu de Dios se mueve, se mueve, se mueve! ¡Oh hermano deja que se mueva dentro de tu corazón!](#), de Ema Rosero-Nordalm, ECF Vital Practices blog, abril 25, 2014
- [Entre Muchos, uno: Ministerio Regional New River](#), de Rosa Lindahl Mallow, Vestry Papers, septiembre 2011