

Young Leaders in Ministry November/December 2022

Call-out Culture's Shadow Side

By Cate Anthony

The culture of irredeemability in the United States, begotten of the desire for progress and justice in American society, pervades relationality at local and national levels and undermines the very progress that it claims to champion. This culture threatens to destroy our society's ability to share one Earth and to create healthy, cooperative, just systems of relationship. The culture of irredeemability is the shadow side of the very methods used to seek systemic justice, and in particular, it is the shadow side of 21st-century America's "call-out culture."

What, exactly, is "call-out culture?" Broadly, it's a colloquialism for the practice of public accountability (usually on social media) that aims to hold individuals and groups responsible for their actions by calling attention to behavior that is perceived to be problematic, like sexism, racism or homophobia. Additionally, the practice of "calling-out" has grown in popularity concurrent with the contemporary era in which marginalized and minority groups acquire ever-increasing access to platforms which amplify their voices over and against those who traditionally hold power.

In this context, calling out "is an act of withdrawing from someone whose expression – whether political, artistic or otherwise – was once welcome or at least tolerated, but no longer is." At its best, this practice has the potential to reclaim and redistribute power in systems previously unbalanced. In this way, call-out culture is a kind of "cultural boycott" which refuses to amplify voices of racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, ableism and more. [\[1\]](#) This practice is central to the revelation of a more just, safe, equitable world – in theory, it assumes first and foremost the redeemability of what was previously distorted. Where, then, has it gone wrong? [\[2\]](#)

Social Media's impact

The precise marriage of call-out culture to modern forms of social media marked a particular turning point in the evolution of the culture of irredeemability. Social media, to be celebrated for the ways it transcends boundaries of all forms to enable connection previously impossible, also risks a kind of dehumanization of those with whom we interact on such platforms. Rather than calling out in order to improve relationship and society, call-out culture transforms into cancel culture. Intention transforms, too: rather than boycott voices of oppression, cancel culture seeks to cut out real people whose ideologies or identities are not popular in public regard. We cancel human beings as though they are magazine subscriptions.

As our technological lives become ever more intertwined with our actual lives, this "cancel culture" has morphed into an acceptable default way of relating to one another. Rather than assume the redeemability of broken systems, we now assume that what is broken, or conservative, or flawed, or

harmful is best dealt with by excising from community and relationship altogether. *This* is the crisis of irredeemability.

Jesus and irredeemability

As a follower of Christ – and, more basically, as a living, breathing, hopeful human being – I am terrified by this crisis. Moreover, I stand in wonder at the discovery of the attitude of irredeemability inside of me. How often have I thought to cut off relationship from someone with whom I do not agree? How insidiously the desire to “other” voices of disagreement has crept its way into my heart!

Cancel culture, the crisis of irredeemability: these are not the Good News of Jesus Christ. As Christians we know that Jesus gave himself on the cross in order to ameliorate our sins and to rescue us from the evil of this present age. Moreover, we know that Jesus’ death and resurrection on the cross marks the salvation and redemption of all humankind from the fallen nature of creaturely sinfulness. Jesus “is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant.”^[3] If I am truly a Christian, the question of Jesus’ redemption-for-all is not a question at all. It is the unshakeable foundation for how I view the whole world, the society in which I live and my neighbors. It is the heart with which I must greet those who hurt me, those who stand opposed to me, those toward whom it would be exponentially easier to harden my heart.

How, then, have I come to discover within myself a heart hardened against those who hurt me or who cannot get onboard with my worldview? Of course, some of this action is based on a desire to stand in solidarity with those who suffer among us. This stand necessitates a boundary *against* the perpetrating Other, a moral imperative if we are to lead one another to a more just way of being community (oppression should be stood against, always, every time). And yet too often we stop in our stance against the Other, holding the boundary and marking the Other as permanently out-of-touch.

The truth of Jesus’ redemption of all through his death on the cross, and what this redemption means for the redeem-ability of humanity, is the lifeblood of what it means to be Christian. As I survey the socio-cultural landscape around me (and frankly, as I try just to be a moderately okay person in the world!), I worry that we’ve forgotten this lifeblood, that we’ve let it drain out of our bodies and dry on the ground. We’ve become accustomed to polarized communities, allowing ourselves to cast out from our lives those with whom we disagree.^[4]

The Church as a counter-cultural beacon of hope

In the face of these questions and realities, what might it look like for the Church to stand as a counter-cultural beacon of hope, reminding the world around us of the miracle of our redemption? How might we think about this miracle theologically, pastorally and ritually? In particular, how might we enact these beliefs on a really concrete, at-home, vulnerable level? When we are hurt by someone in our immediate community, how might we welcome them home instead of casting them out? And – where *do* we hold the line? What harms are too great for redemption to happen through our own work, requiring instead time and the immutable grace of God?

I don’t have answers for all of these questions yet, but I am working on them each day in my life and in my ministry as a priest at St. Stephen’s, Richmond. Through my Episcopal Church Foundation fellowship, I am crafting a program aimed at helping my community practice how to *reckon* with one another – how

to do the work of feeling, repenting, praying, forgiving. Bit by bit, we learn how to hold our boundaries so that we can find health together, and how also to ensure that those boundaries are porous enough to let new life come through.

I believe there is something universal in our common call to community and our common bond of Christ's love. Polarization, Othering, casting-out: these behaviors harm us all and exacerbate every other form of injustice and oppression. And so I pray that together we will call one another home, even (especially!) when we fall short, and that this will beget a mutual kind of imagining and remembering about our redemption – an imagining to re-shape the world.

[1] Jonah Engel Bromwich, "The Age of Celebrity Is Being Canceled," *The New York Times*, July 1, 2018, sec. ST.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Hebrews 9:15

[4] The Pew Foundation reports that citizens are more divided along ideological lines – and partisan antipathy is deeper and more extensive – than at any point in the last two decades.

The Rev. Cate Anthony is delighted to begin her ordained ministry at St. Stephen's. A child of Florida and Delaware, Cate is a graduate of McGill University, Berkeley Divinity School and Yale Divinity School. During her time at YDS, Cate's academic and pastoral work focused on ministry to individuals and communities in the midst of trauma and conflict. She was privileged to pray and wrestle as a member of the Reconciling Practices cohort, a group of ten seminarians (now mostly clergy) from the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church in North America. Together the group imagined lived practices of reconciliation and community even across wide chasms of difference. Cate continues this work in a parish context as a current fellow of the Episcopal Church Foundation. Her ECF project focuses on creating spaces of reconciliation and reckoning in everyday life.

Resources:

- [The Third Place](#) by Jon Davis, Vestry Papers, May 2022
- [In Christ the Bottom Holds](#) by Bob Leopold, an ECF Vital Practices blog, April 16, 2014
- [Crowds, Rocks, and Seeing the Face of God](#) by Alan Bentrup, an ECF Vital Practices blog, February 3, 2020
- [Fear of the "Other"](#) by Richelle Thompson, an ECF Vital Practices blog, November 30, 2016

Love in Humble Service

By Stephen Rumler

Music touches our souls and inspires us in ways that no other mode of communication can. At our lowest points, it lifts us. In our rejoicing and celebration, it animates us. When the world seems silent, it speaks to us. In our anger, anxiety and sadness, it soothes us. The playful rhythm of conversation, ornate melodies of bird songs and diminished triad of a passing train's horn all contribute to our shared human experience. Even for those who cannot hear, music finds a way. Music is, in fact, an unavoidable grace that we receive each day. As an integral part of our worship as Episcopalians, music draws us into prayer, placing the comforting, demanding and sometimes alarming words of scripture onto our lips and into our hearts through a treasury of hymns sung through the generations.

As Episcopalians, we share an extraordinary repertoire of choral music that offers rest, haven, and healing for many musicians in our parishes. The choir room becomes a shelter and community of singers, a second family. Creating music as community unites us in ways that no team or organization ever will. We share a common goal and must realize it together with the utmost accuracy, patience and cooperation. The pilgrimage, from the beginning of a piece to its end, humbles us to learn that nothing in our mortal life happens immediately. Through the successful completion of an artistically sung chorus, we have only just begun our journey of understanding musicality, text, and most importantly, each other.

COVID's impact on choral and congregational singing

In March of 2020, the Coronavirus pandemic forced us into our homes, and our churches, once lively places of worship, song and celebration, grew dormant. Concert dress rehearsals and Easter preparations were well underway when in only a few days, all who craved sung communion found deprivation and the uncertainty that reshaped our world, heightening fear, depression and loneliness. The centering experience that group singing offered was considered high-risk and lethal.

Some questioned whether this was the end of choral singing altogether, and perhaps even humanity as we knew it. Amid the chaos, music found a way. Church, university and community choirs quickly learned to assemble virtual video choirs, Zoom cocktail hours and even safely-distanced, outdoor gatherings and drive-by events. These were no substitute for ensemble singing and in-person gatherings, but they offered some sense of human connection and relief from the troubling uncertainty that engulfed us.

At Grace Episcopal Church in Holland, Michigan, where I serve as Music Director, we too found a way to retain a sense of community by streaming the Sunday Eucharist. Though crude in quality, many congregants found the sounds of the pipe organ, peaceable timbre of the rector's voice and familiar view of the pulpit and altar space comforting. Though we could not gather in person, worshippers participated by commenting on the live feed, responding to the dialogues of the mass, offering universal prayers and even passing the peace. As the organist played the hymns, those with copies of *The Hymnal 1982* at home sang along. We offered drive-thru communion in the parking lot, so that we could continue sharing in the Body of Christ. While the live video worship experience quenched the thirst for liturgy and some sense of church community, our need for sung communion remained unfulfilled.

Struggle and joy for singers and worshippers alike

On Christmas Eve 2020, the faithful of Grace gathered outdoors on a beautiful, snowy evening to celebrate the birth of Christ. The hymns, played by the organist from inside the church were streamed for those gathered, uniting them in congregational song after nearly nine months. The beauty of the evening and blending of voices wove a powerful, comforting sense of normalcy, briefly blanketing our distorted reality. Our pilgrimage through the pandemic was far from over, but our ability to rest, sing and feast at Christ's table offered healing and the strength to carry on.

In June of 2021, when COVID cases reached an all-time low following the winter months, we were once again able to gather as church indoors. Seeing the faces and hearing the voices of those we had not encountered in person for over a year brought newfound joy and childlike giddiness into our church, another moment of rest for weary travelers. Once again, congregational song found its place in our lives.

In-person worship continued through summer and into autumn, bringing back the comfort of the Sunday routine.

Finally, in October of 2021, the Grace Chamber Choir resumed rehearsals after a two-year hiatus. We implemented COVID-mitigation strategies such as masking, distancing and a powerful air purifier to ensure the health and safety of all choristers. After such a significant break, it took some time to relearn the courtesies of choral singing (especially with masks), blending and group interaction, and required patience, understanding hearts and prayer.

As we approached Christmas in 2021, Grace Choir had regained most of what was lost over the course of two years and presented beautiful, stirring music for the service of Lessons and Carols on the fourth Sunday of Advent. Unfortunately, with COVID cases rising sharply, even among choristers, the choir once again had to pause, just days before Christmas Eve. This pause continued until Ash Wednesday, when we were once again able to sing as ensemble.

Later in March, COVID cases had decreased to the point where masks could be removed, bringing an even greater sense of normalcy into our choir space. As we celebrated the Paschal Triduum and Easter Sunday, the peace of the Risen Christ and joy of our resurrected choir filled Grace Church with a sense of excitement that I will remember for the rest of my life. Music indeed found a way.

Stephen Rumler moved to West Michigan after graduating from Aquinas College in the class of 2020. He was delighted to join Grace Episcopal Church as Music Director in the Fall of 2021. In addition to singing, playing piano and organ, Stephen enjoys cooking, staying active and spending time with friends and family.

Resources:

- [Singing Our Song](#) by Anna Olson, an ECF Vital Practices blog, April 8, 2016
- [The Creed: Profession of Faith, Love Song and Prayer](#) by Lisa G. Fischbeck, an ECF Vital Practices blog, August 6, 2019
- [Music for Team Building](#) by Sandra T. Montes, Vestry Papers, January 2019
- [Music and Change: A Conversation with Dent Davidson](#), by Sandra T. Montes, Vestry Papers, July 2021

On Being Available Always

A video by Nia McKinney

Wise beyond her 27 years, Nia McKenney shares her thoughts about the concept of “always being available” in this short, seven-minute video. This idea, that one should always be “on” and “ready” for the next thing coming around the corner fast is an American curse that has spread worldwide. (Maybe it has something to do with baseball, who knows?) Nia clearly and carefully points out that constant availability leads to constant vigilance, which leads to worry and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). She says, “I don’t know if you’re a person who experiences worry a lot, but it’s exhausting and not a space where a person can thrive.” This is true, and too much of that kind of worry can lead to chronic anxiety.

Early on, she implores us to respect one another’s time, since we all exist within the confines of hours, days, months, etc. “If my first goal is to ensure that I’m respecting another person’s boundaries within

that, then I know that I'm doing my best to ensure that they can take care of themselves in the ways that they know best."

I encourage you to listen to this woman. Ever respectful of our boundaries, she says a lot in a short period of time.

Cathy Hornberger

Nia McKenney is a constant and curious learner. A musician and Episcopalian since childhood, she loves her sisters, learning to embroider and being outside – and especially a combination of all three.

Resources:

- [What's the appropriate pace of change?](#) by Miguel Escobar, an ECF Vital Practices blog, February 28, 2012
- [Endurance And Rest](#) by Greg Syler, an ECF Vital Practices blog, December 18, 2014
- [Rest for the Journey](#) by Annette Buchanan, an ECF Vital Practices blog, August 24, 2020

To Feel or Not to Feel

By Prema Vas

We live in a culture that is all about trusting your feelings. Follow your heart. Listen to your gut. Feel all the feelings. But the truth is that we can't trust our feelings, not all the time.

If I always followed my feelings, I would never work out. I'd eat whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted, regardless of how it made my body or brain feel. I'd quit projects before finishing them. I'd start all sorts of fires of over jealousy and bitterness. I'd hold grudges. I'd fall out of love to fall into love to fall out of love again. I'd live in my bed and binge watch cooking shows all day.

This is pretty much what does happen when I am swayed by my feelings. But that doesn't mean that some of my feelings aren't trustworthy and good at times. It doesn't mean that I don't observe my feelings and seek to understand them. It doesn't mean I suppress them or shove them away.

I think feelings matter, but I don't want to be defined or ruled by them, because they change every two seconds.

Should we trust our feelings?

Over the past two years, I've begun to realize that my feelings – big as they are – are not the best tour guides for my life. They weren't giving me the most accurate information. They weren't making my life any better or more free. They were making it harder for me to make solid, wise decisions.

They were not allowing me to thrive, because I was investing so much in them. Most days, I felt that I

was a captive to whatever I was feeling in that moment, that hour, that day, and they were hardly good or useful feelings.

I felt like a failure. I felt sad and depressed. I felt the need to perform and to always be impressive. My feelings ping-ponged, sending me in a lot of different directions. I couldn't see that they didn't always have my best interests in mind.

Feelings can be beautiful, though, and it would be hopelessly boring to navigate this life without them. They inspire people to write love stories that can shake the world. They can stir you up, make you clench your fists and act when you see an injustice taking place. They are what move you to tears when you read a good book or listen to an incredible song.

We need these things to make life full of beauty and passion. I believe that we have feelings because God intends for us to have them. Yet we are encouraged to follow our hearts, while often told that the heart is fickle and does not know what it wants. So which is it?

Bringing our feelings to God

I think it is both. I think you can live a beautiful life and lead from your heart while also learning to bring the things in your heart to God. I think there is a way to see and acknowledge your feelings, while also being in control of them. I think there's a power-packed and thriving version of life to live where we can be stronger and better because we trust faith over fleeting feelings.

Jesus felt things. Majorly. And I get so much comfort in that. He wept. He experienced anger. He called out injustice. He felt fear. He loved and he laughed and made the most of his time on this planet.

But throughout the texts, you read that Jesus was alone with God – a lot! More than he preached or taught or performed miracles, he spent time away with God. I imagine that is where he first began to deal with the feelings inside him. And that's what I want to focus on today.

When we spend time alone with God and bring our feelings to him, we can both honor the things inside us and open up to seeing them from a different perspective – God's perspective. We can say freely, "I'm tempted to trust this feeling right now, but I want to trust You more. I want to understand why I feel this way."

There's always a reason. Something beneath the surface. Something to learn. Something God wants to illuminate through our feeling happiness, loneliness, sadness, jealousy or rejection. God wants to be close to us, and I think God uses our feelings to get closer, to show us more of who we could become if we would just let go of that which doesn't serve us.

I have immense and big, big feelings. But I have an even more immense and bigger God.

***Prema Vas** is a third culture kid, born and raised in Kuwait, from Kerala. She studied in Pune, worked in Mumbai and is currently living with her husband in the beautiful city of Bangalore.*

She currently works as the Operations Director in Alpha India, a global organization that sparks conversations about faith, life and meaning through the church.

She and her husband are on a mission to bring light and love into every dark, isolated space through their movement Little More Love, a gospel platform Awe and Wonder and a gathering at home called Wednesdays.

This piece was first published on [Awe and Wonder](#).

Resources:

- [Leadership in Times of Change](#) by Robin Hammeal-Urban, Vestry Papers, May 2015
- [The God Who Sees Me](#) by Nicole Foster, an ECF Vital Practices blog, December 30, 2020
- [A Throne in Your Heart](#) by Linda Buskirk, an ECF Vital Practices blog, December 18, 2018
- [Worry... And Heart](#) by Anna Olson, an ECF Vital Practices blog, August 13, 2014

A Young Leader's Mission

Montserrat Calvo Corella

I came to the Episcopal Church almost twenty years ago, and when I was twenty, I began taking on leadership as the assistant to the Diocesan Youth Commission Coordinator. With the help of God, and several exemplary people, I continued to learn and grow and ultimately became the coordinator of that commission.

Among the challenges I encountered during these years, I can highlight adult-centrism, the view that only adults are experts. Older people often doubt younger people due to their "lack of experience." I've also come across adults who want to be participants in youth activities, but fail to recognize that they no longer belong to that age group. That is why many young people feel uncomfortable attending those events.

On the other hand, there is the economic factor. Sometimes you want to plan activities, but cannot because of the lack of budget. This year, however, we managed to be awarded a diocesan youth fund that helped us reach some goals.

Trained and sustained by role models

Part of what inspires me to keep going is seeing the ways God is responding to my prayers and putting excellent people in my way. I have encountered people who have been both stumbling blocks and role models.

I am one of those people who thinks that everything that happens, whether good or bad, is a life-teaching to help me continue to grow and remain in the path that God has traced for me. Of course, there are people who have helped me, inspired me and above all, loved and blessed me. For example, my grandparents. Together, we built a mission in Alajuela, Costa Rica, that is focused on the love of animals. The mission began because my grandfather had adopted and cared for street dogs that were sick. That mission grew to care for twenty-four dogs!

My grandfather had a bus, and when we started the mission, he would pick people up from their homes, take them to mass and bring them back to their homes. Unfortunately, my grandfather died, but I had promised him that I was going to continue the work of the church, hand-in-hand with my grandmother. It has not been easy, but I have continued working hard and have kept my promise.

Other people who have been a blessing and an example to me are the Rev. Mirza Ramírez, Víctor and others from the Panama team. Esdrás and the Rev. Salanic from Guatemala have also helped me. All these people helped my youth leadership training by showing me their work and guiding me.

Another important person in my ministry has been Marcia Quintanilla. A woman completely committed to youth, she has taught me how to structure activities and delegate functions. My mother, the Rev. Kattia Corella, has also helped me. She is a bivocational pastor who has shown me that you can work 24/7 and achieve great things if you put your mind to it.

I have surrounded myself mostly with strong women as I grow as a leader. We are part of a church where women have the right to work and be heard and that is something that fulfills and motivates me a lot. We will always have to struggle for the social development of humanity, but it is not impossible to achieve good results.

Youth leader development

If there is to be more youth leadership, the heads of the church must support young leaders. When there are negative people in leadership, young people quickly become discouraged. They are in a complex stage of life, and even more so in these times. They need more pastoral support. But support doesn't mean doing all the work for them. It means advising and directing, not commanding.

We must change the fact that most youth teams in congregations or at the diocesan level include two or three young people, while the rest are adults, three, four or even more decades older. I'm not saying that's bad. It's always good to have people with more experience to learn from, but it's also not good for a whole commission to be made up of older people and only one or two young people. Representation matters.

What happens when there are very few young representatives in teams? Young people don't feel that they can express themselves freely. Sometimes they feel uncomfortable and unheard when surrounded by older people. They need peers who understand what they may be going through. They also need adults who can direct, teach and guide them. It's important to let them be and trust them, so that they

can listen to God and the path that God has planned for them. When we are trusted, we feel motivated and confident that we can help that neighbor who may be lost.

Sunday School as a path to youth engagement in the Church

I have a project in mind that could strengthen the bonds between young people and children and the church. I don't know if it is applied in other countries, but we are not doing it in mine. The project would be to create a study plan for Sunday school that includes graduations, just as is done in the schools. As children and youth travel this Biblical path, they could discover their gifts and talents and would motivate them for the service of God. We would give them certificates, plan celebrations and graduations.

I think this program would help children and youth look forward to the weekend when they can go to Episcopal School, College or University (Sunday school). And from that experience of Sunday School, I feel that:

- more young people can be motivated to participate in the church
- that children will want to go on to the youth group
- and that young people will want to go on to the adult group, and so on

It would create a powerful, lasting and motivating Christian socialization and education. We would be creating leaders from childhood who want to follow Jesus and help others.

Montserrat Calvo Corella was born in San José, Costa Rica, in 1995. She is a university student studying music education with an emphasis on the tuba. A tuba teacher at the Castella Conservatory, she is the director of the Mulier Brass Collective of Women Brass Players of Costa Rica and a tuba player for the first female brass ensemble of Costa Rica, Liliun Brass. Montserrat is the coordinator of the Diocesan Youth Commission of the Costa Rican Episcopal Church.

Resources:

- [A Missional Family](#) by Maria Teresa Bautista-Berrios, an ECF Vital Practices blog, October 18, 2021
- [Back-To-Church: Youth Outreach](#) by Annette Buchanan, an ECF Vital Practices blog, September 12, 2017
- [An Open Letter to Vestry Members From a Youth Minister](#) by Meredith Rogers, Vestry Papers, January 2020
- [Lift Every Voice](#) by Renee McKenzie, an ECF Vital Practices blog, June 27, 2017

Respectful Practices for Approaching Multicultural Resources

Ellis Reyes Montes

In The Episcopal Church, we are slowly acknowledging the cultural diversity that makes up our community. Resolutions from 2018 General Convention called for more consideration of ethnic liturgies and prayers for inclusion in future publications. No doubt, this conversation will continue through future Conventions. As more people are recognizing the issues of racism, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination ingrained in our culture, we are compelled to learn about communities that are different from ours and how to authentically incorporate their contributions into our worship.

The challenge of cultural appropriation

With this push to incorporate more multiculturalism into our worship, a major hurdle that will arise is the question of cultural appropriation. Cultural appropriation is the misuse of cultural materials belonging to a culture that is not one's own. Cultural appropriation serves to relegate an unfamiliar culture to a lower class or to distance it from what is considered normal.

Sometimes, cultural appropriation manifests itself loudly, such as when people shout nonsense sounds during a song in Spanish, or when people think that all Spanish speakers celebrate Cinco de Mayo (my Mexican relatives do not even celebrate this day). Other times, cultural appropriation is more subtle, such as mumbling through a prayer in Spanish on the feast day of La Virgen de Guadalupe or adding a guitar to an English hymn to make it sound more "Latin."

What the above examples have in common is the lack of a respectful relationship with people from the culture represented. Without respectful relationships, we rely upon our own knowledge about unfamiliar cultures, oftentimes using stereotypes or prejudices to inform how we approach them. However, when we cultivate respectful relationships with people from unfamiliar cultures, those relationships help inform how we lift up other cultures in our worship. Here are three practices to help initiate the respectful incorporation of materials from unfamiliar cultures into our worship.

Three Respectful Practices

Evaluate the need: When planning multicultural liturgies and events, it is important to understand the need and purpose. Do you wish to commemorate the feast of La Virgen de Guadalupe because there are Mexican congregants in your community? Do you want to add a Directions Prayer to your liturgy on Indigenous Peoples' Day to acknowledge some of the North American Indigenous cultures that may no longer be well represented in your community? Clearly understanding the need will help guide you when planning a service that will use materials from unfamiliar cultures.

Meet people from the community: Meet people from the communities you wish to celebrate. If they are within your worship community, communicate with them, and learn from them.

Even though I had purchased a Taiwanese hymnal and I can read and understand Chinese, I did not know which hymns were appropriate to sing in our worship services until I talked to the Taiwanese members of my worship community.

Another time, I met an active member in my worship community who was Filipino. After talking to him, I learned about some of the music that was important to him as a Filipino Christian, and we started to talk

about how to incorporate this music into a future liturgy. After much conversation and learning, he taught our choir one of these songs, and we sang it during a Sunday service.

If the unfamiliar culture is not yet represented in your worship community, seek them out. If your church is a monolingual English-speaking community situated in a Salvadoran neighborhood, reach out to the people in the surrounding neighborhood. Find a community center, shop at the local businesses and interact with the community. Reach out to the multicultural representatives in your city or your denomination. Many dioceses/synods/conferences have multiethnic representatives on staff who can lead you in the right direction to interacting with different communities. Many editors and compilers of multicultural resources are also available through social media or websites associated with these resources.

Learn from respectful relationships: Learn not just about the specific prayers or songs to be used in your liturgies and services. Learn about their significance and context.

One year, when I was preparing the liturgy for the Sunday before Martin Luther King Day, I planned to sing “Lift Every Voice and Sing” for the processional hymn. I had learned from different people that this hymn is also known as the “Black national anthem,” so I thought it was appropriate to use for that Sunday. However, when we were beginning to sing the hymn on Sunday, I noticed that the procession did not happen at all as we were singing. It was not until after the service that the verger, who was Black, told me that it was disrespectful to do anything else during the hymn because of what it means to the Black congregants in our worship community. If I had had the conversation with her *before* that Sunday, I would have been able to avoid such a mishap.

Although this experience has informed me of how one community approaches “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” this is not the only way to interpret it. In fact, another time, when I was at a conference that was beginning with this hymn, the Black choir director asked people not to stand during the singing of the hymn.

These examples around the same hymn show that we cannot apply the same technique or context for every situation, especially when we are handling materials from unfamiliar cultures.

Keep learning

Integrating multicultural resources into worship in a respectful way requires a commitment to ongoing learning and relationship building.

- Yes, attend multicultural services and observe practices from unfamiliar cultures, but also reach out to the leaders and cultivate relationships with them before taking these newfound traditions and making them your own.
- Yes, collect and acquire multicultural resources from different communities around the world, but also research their contexts and significance.

- Yes, observe, commemorate, and celebrate the achievements of great people from different, unfamiliar cultures, but also invite members of these communities for conversation, hire artists and speakers from these communities, and have them teach you and your community about their culture.

As leaders, we must keep asking questions and learning. Just as our own communities change throughout our lives, the communities we do not yet know are also constantly changing. As we continue to witness and celebrate the vast diversity of God's creation, let us seek God's love in every person, every song, every poem, every prayer we encounter.

This article was originally published on [Building Faith – A Ministry of Virginia Theological Seminary](#).

Ellis Reyes Montes is a multifaceted and dynamic musician and writer. A life-long Episcopalian from Houston, Texas, he pursues his passions in music and writing with the loving support of his family. He is the music director of Grace Episcopal Church, and also a Story Weaver with the Beloved Community StorySharing Campaign. In addition to maintaining a church music program and facilitating story sharing, he performs with various ensembles around the country, and maintains a blog: openlyepiscopalian.blogspot.com, where he seeks to investigate the love of God for all of God's creation. Whenever he is not writing or practicing/performing, he can be found studying languages, playing bridge or reading.

Resources:

- [Trust the Process](#) by Jade Mohorko Ortiz, Vestry Papers, January 2017
- [Multilingual Leadership and Multicultural Churches](#) by Sandra Montes, Vestry Papers, July 2015
- [Struggling to Become a Multicultural Church](#) by Miguel Escobar, an ECF Vital Practices blog, June 7, 2011
- [Ingredients for Joyful, Inclusive Bilingual Liturgy](#) by Anna Olson, an ECF Vital Practices blog, March 13, 2015

Who We Are and What We Do for Jesus

Sandra Montes

In this compelling interview, Dr. Sandra Montes talks with two young women, Adialyn and Sandy Milien, who are Latina powerhouses in the Episcopal Church. Both are strong, successful young women in the

Episcopal Church. Sandy is the Canon for Racial Reconciliation and Community Engagement with the Diocese of Bethlehem, and Adialyn is the Director of Communications for the House of Deputies.

The sisters come from a long line of priests and church leaders and speak candidly with Sandra of their love of the church and their experiences as followers of Jesus, church people and young women of color. Adialyn sums it up, “We were born in the Episcopal church; we love it.” Sandy tells us that both of their parents are Episcopal priests and that her first memory is of being in church with her parents. “The Episcopal Church is who we are. It’s what we do for Jesus.”

This is not to say that they agree with the way everything is done in the church. Both agree that there should be more people there that look like them, especially in positions of power. As Adialyn puts it, “I think we need to be more authentic with who we are and who we claim to be.” For example, we say that we want more young people in the church, but the music they want is too noisy. We say we want to see this kind of change, but we feel very comfortable the way we are. “We have the best church! But we need to practice what we preach.”

These passionate, young leaders are some of the best and brightest, working to make a difference for Jesus, and they deserve the prayers and encouragement of the church. With their passion and leadership, we will achieve our Beloved Community.

Resources:

- [An Evening with The Rev. Canon Stephanie Spellers](#), an ECF Vital Practices webinar, May 6, 2021
- [I Want to be Like Bean Blossom](#) by Anna Olson, an ECF Vital Practices blog, November 16, 2016
- [Triple Threat](#) by Adialyn Milien, Vestry Papers, July 2020
- [Mission of Union and Integration](#) by Daniel Vélez-Rivera, Vestry Papers, May 2011

Worship as an Invitation to Belong

Dustin Seo

Like many young folk in my generation, my spiritual growth has an all-too-familiar arc. I was a de facto Christian in my youth because my parents were Christian, and when I moved away for college, my church attendance on Sundays slowly began dwindling into the intermittent Easter and Christmas appearances.

Church as a shopping experience, church as a job

When I moved from Los Angeles to New York to attend college, my church shopping experience was exactly that – shopping. I found that many of the local churches designed to attract young people offered what felt like a consumer experience. Come to church for the most convenient, easily accessible form of worship – worship that can effectively compete to grab a slice of our overly-stimulated mental and emotional bandwidth. What initially felt like a perfect, bite-sized Christian experience to fit into my upbeat college lifestyle, quickly became a dull, disengaging activity that I simply phased out of my life.

After my studies, I returned to Los Angeles, where I started my career as a freelance cellist. A regular form of work for me was playing for various congregations. What I thought would be an organic opportunity to plug myself back into church attendance, proved to be an even more alienating experience. My role as a contract musician was simply to deliver my services as a vendor, receive payment and leave without any invitation to communion or fellowship. Church became a job that I was very good at.

In the fall of 2020, Church of Our Saviour Episcopal (COS), a local church in San Gabriel, reached out to ask if I would be available to play during their Sunday services. The church had just begun offering in-person, outdoor services. Due to the limitations of outdoor services and to adhere to COVID protocol,

the church could not offer its usual organ/piano/choir musical offerings. A cellist sharing hymns arranged for the solo cello, alongside classical selections like JS Bach's celebrated *Suites for Solo Cello*, seemed to be a perfect fit.

Surprised by welcome

Initially, I didn't see COS as somewhere I belonged. This was my first time attending an Episcopal Church, and COS seemed to be exactly what I expected from an old, suburban Episcopal Church: a community of mostly older white folks practicing somewhat archaic liturgical traditions. Naturally, as a Korean-American young adult in my mid-twenties, I stuck out like a sore thumb. And yet, I immediately sensed a feeling of hospitality and welcome from every member of the congregation and an invitation to share in the life of the community at COS. Even more surprising, I found myself gravitating to the indescribable reverence of the liturgical services.

A year later, in preparation for the Christmas Eve candlelight services, I had an opportunity to rehearse and spend time with Alice Rucker, the longtime organist at COS. Along with our musical preparation, Alice shared anecdotes about the hymns we were preparing and her beautiful insights on liturgical music. We dived deeper into the etymology of the word liturgy, which comes from the Greek root words, *laós* and *ergos*, which roughly translate to "public" and "work," respectively. Liturgy is the "work of the people." I realized that this was exactly what drew me to COS and to the liturgical services. Worship is an act we *actively create* and not a product we passively consume.

From being welcomed to welcoming others

As Episcopalians, we believe that the Holy Eucharist is celebrated together as a community, and worship is not whole without the active contribution of every member of the congregation. In the same way, I realized that my sense of belonging at COS was due to the congregation's invitation to take ownership of that feeling and make COS a more welcoming and loving home for everyone.

With the support of my ECF Fellowship, I have been able to launch “Laós Chamber Music,” a new classical music concert series hosted at Church of Our Saviour. It is my authentic offering to create a more welcoming home at COS. Inspired by the tradition of liturgy as an active invitation to community and belonging through participatory worship, Laós’ musical programs offer a way to invite and gather our community at COS, my community of young Los Angeles musicians and our broader Los Angeles community to share in music and fellowship. We offered our first two Laós concerts in October and November.

As young adults trying to navigate our faith in the 21st century, I believe we must continue advocating and co-creating these spaces of belonging. Because of how connected we have been through technology and social media, I believe it is much easier to default community and belonging as a supplemental commodity, rather than a lifeline to our relationship to one another in communion. I feel blessed to have found my place as a participant in the community at Church of Our Saviour and in the Episcopal Church. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunities to create a space where my community of young musicians are welcomed and belong in Los Angeles through Laós Chamber Music.

Click [here](#) to view and listen to a short clip from our Laós concert on Oct 1, 2022. It is a clip from JS Bach's Goldberg Variations.

***Dustin Seo**, a graduate of the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, is a cellist and arts administrator committed to building community spaces in Los Angeles through music and fellowship. During his tenure as the Associate Artistic Director at Street Symphony, Dustin committed his artistic practice to organizing and empowering communities in Los Angeles, specifically through partnerships with Skid Row based arts organizations and service providers. He now turns his artistic focus towards “Laós Chamber Music,” a new concert series hosted at Church of Our Saviour, in San Gabriel, CA, and in collaboration with its partner ministries. Dustin also performs as an active freelancer in Los Angeles, performing with several LA ensembles, and recording on a number of media projects.*

Resources:

- [Ten Signs of a Welcoming Congregation](#) by Sandra Montes, Vestry Papers, November 2018
- [Vocation in an Unsafe World](#) by Diana Wheeler, Vestry Papers, May 2022
- [Who's New and Who's Missing](#) by Peter Strimer, an ECF Vital Practices blog, January 6, 2011
- [Let the Children Come To Me](#) by Jamie Martin Currie, Vestry Papers, November 2018