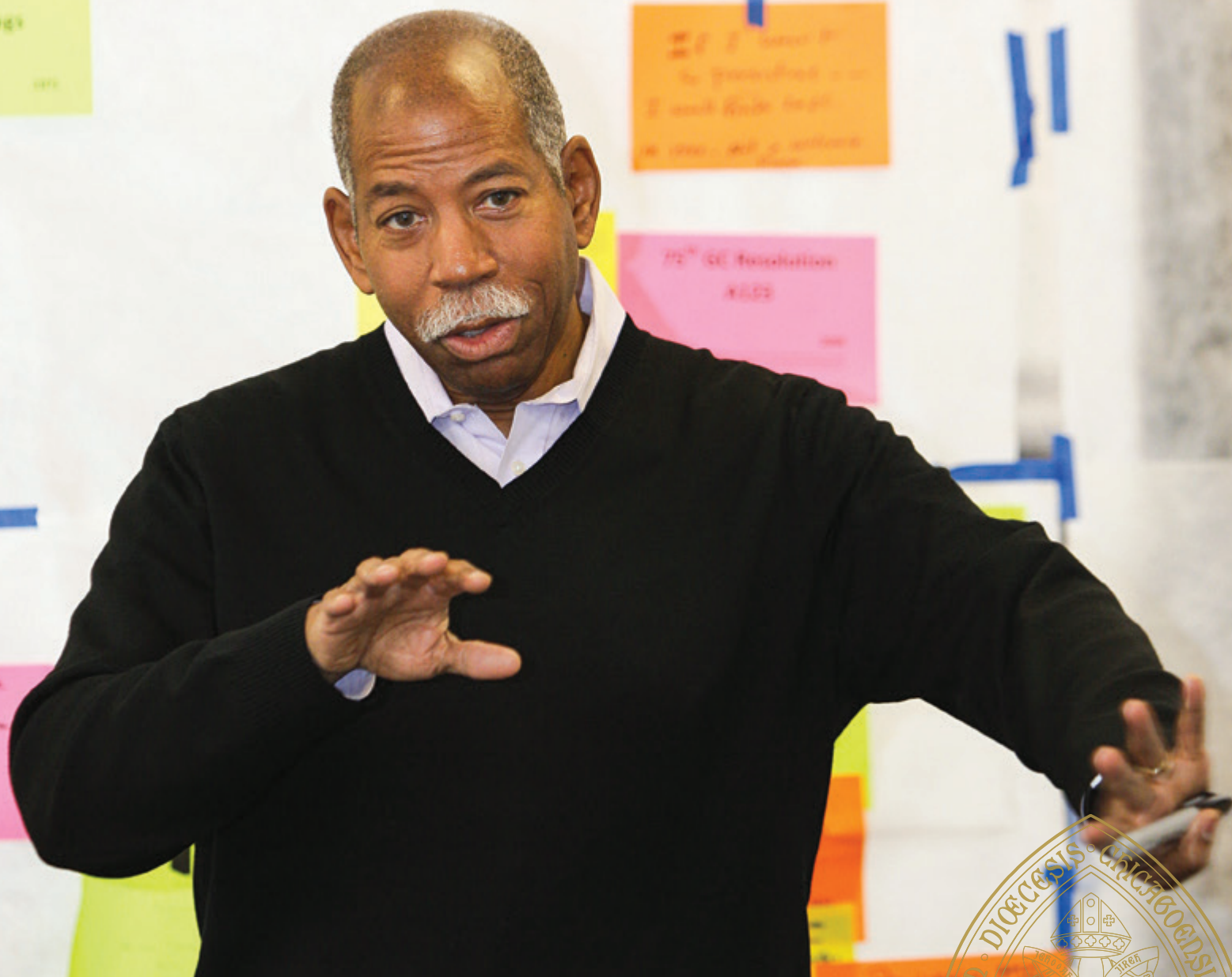


thrive!



SPRING 2019

EPISCOPAL
DIOCESE
OF CHICAGO
MAGAZINE

Confronting racism on a new Pathway
Dementia can't still this choir's voice
Under one umbrella at Grace, Hinsdale



Letter from Bishop Lee



“I am happy to report that the announcement of my departure has not diminished the commitment to ministry among our people and their congregations, and the remainder of this issue of Thrive! makes that abundantly clear.”

As I imagine you’ve heard by now, I am planning to retire next August, and barring unforeseen circumstances, you will have elected a new bishop by then. Being your bishop has been one of the greatest gifts of my life, and because I love this diocese and its people so deeply, I am eager that the process of choosing my successor provoke as little anxiety as possible.

That is why I am grateful for the story on page 19 of this issue of Thrive! about the search and transition process that has already begun smoothly under the leadership of the Rev. Eric Biddy, rector of St. Christopher’s in Oak Park, and the other members of the Standing Committee. The story outlines the search and election process, and it includes some reassuring context, courtesy of my friend, the Rt. Rev. Todd Ousley, bishop for the Episcopal Church’s Office of Pastoral Development. I have great confidence in the people who will lead us through this process and appreciate their commitment to transparency. I know that you can expect a steady stream of information from them at the appropriate times.

I am happy to report that the announcement of my departure has not diminished the commitment to ministry among our people and their congregations, and the remainder of this issue of Thrive! makes that abundantly clear.

On page 2 you’ll meet the leaders and members of the Good Memories Choir started by Sandy Siegel Miller, a postulant for the diaconate, and her husband Jonathan Miller, a professional musician. Every Tuesday, the choir brings 50 older people suffering from dementia, their caregivers, and volunteers together to sing old favorites and learn new music as well. “There’s a holy shimmer in the place,” Jonathan Miller says.

I am especially proud of the anti-racism work the diocese has undertaken in recent years. The 2013 report on the Task Force on the Legacy of Slavery was a turning point in our efforts to examine our own culpability in racist structures, as individuals, congregations and as a diocese. That

work continues through the Pathway to Reconciliation program that you can read about on page 8. In the story you will hear from stalwarts of our anti-racism efforts such as Rory Smith and Diane Shalda as they describe how the program is making an impact at St. Thomas, Chicago; St. John’s, Chicago; Christ Church, Waukegan; and St. James Cathedral.

Grace Church, Hinsdale, and Grace Academy are also making a deep impact on their community. The campus is open seven days a week since the Rev. C. Christian Pierce brought all of his parish’s education and formation efforts under one umbrella five years ago. Today the once-struggling academy is thriving under the direction of Julie Pierce, and 30 percent of preschool children are involved in the church. Megan Mannor oversees the formation program which includes youth groups and leadership development programs for older youth. You can read their story on page 14.

St. Barnabas Church in Glen Ellyn is stepping boldly into its future, just in the nick of time. In 2017, a structural engineer told them their church could potentially fall down around them. Rather than panic, they not only got to work on a massive rebuilding program but redoubled their efforts to reach out to the community. The result is a beautifully renovated church and an expanded ministry to families with children on the autism spectrum that will debut after Labor Day. You can read about it on page 17.

It’s always gratifying to find that our conversations at diocesan convention continue after we adjourn. On my recent visit to Brent House, the Episcopal campus ministry at the University of Chicago, I was especially glad to hear from Ian Grant-Funck that he had written a response to Ray Suarez’s keynote at last year’s convention. He’s given us permission to print an edited version of it on the back page of this issue, and I hope it will give you, as it did me, hope for the future of our beloved Episcopal Church.

In Christ, + Jeffrey

PHOTO: CHARLIE SIMOKATIS

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Anti-racist Insights 08

The diocese has been grappling for years with how racism affects and infects not only the communities it serves, but also its diocesan institutions and congregations. Now the Antiracism Commission is offering Pathway to Reconciliation, a new resource for congregational study already being piloted in several parishes.

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Contact us

St. James Commons
65 East Huron Street
Chicago, Illinois 60611
(312) 751-4200
episcopalchicago.org

On our cover

Rory Smith of the Antiracism Commission leads a session of Pathway to Reconciliation at St. James Cathedral. Cover photo and above photo by Suzanne Tennant

Contributors

Editorial: Canticle Communications and Ian Grant-Funck
Design: Martha Hoyle

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SAVE THESE DATES

Clergy Conference at Loyola Retreat and Ecology Campus

October 6-8

Woodstock, IL (new location)

Episcopal Charities Ball

October 18

Hispanic Liturgy at St. James Cathedral

October 26

Convention at Westin Lombard Yorktown

Nov 22-23

CCD Year B Weekend Trainings

St. James Commons

- September 20-21, 2019
- December 6-7, 2019
- February 7-8, 2020
- May 1-2, 2020



Still Singing

In the Midst of Dementia: Joy

{ By Lu Stanton León }



“We’re giving people a place where they can be seen and heard in a way that is not negative. That is part of the sacredness of what we’re doing.”

— Jonathan Miller

Tuesdays at 6:15 a.m., Bob Nelson gets in his car and drives 120 miles from his home in Milwaukee to Chicago. There, he picks up his 91-year-old father-in-law, Charles Custer, and accompanies him to the rehearsal of Good Memories, a choir for people with early-stage dementia and their caregivers.

Anna Brothers of South Holland also spends an hour behind the wheel so she and her mother, Mary Blackwell, 88, have a chance to sing.

“My mom is worth it,” Brothers says with a laugh. “She says she still can’t sing, but she enjoys it.”

Every Tuesday, some 50 older people, their caregivers, and volunteers gather at Fourth Presbyterian Church in downtown Chicago to sing old songs and learn new ones in a program founded last year by Jonathan Miller, a professional musician, and his wife, Sandy Siegel Miller of Holy Nativity in Clarendon Hills, a clinical child psychologist who is a postulant

for the diaconate in the Diocese of Chicago.

“It’s just a great group, very professional, great music,” says Nelson, 68, a retired high school teacher and construction worker. His father-in-law’s memory is fading, he says, but the loss is not yet debilitating. “Having me come down and doing this together, it’s great. He has a very good voice, and he understands music. I have never sung in my life. I just stumble through all the parts. It makes a big difference in both of our lives.”

It has made a big difference in the Millers’ lives as well.

“Do you have any idea what a privilege it is to be in the midst of that kind of love and beauty?” Jonathan Miller asks. “We’re giving people a place where they can be seen and heard in a way that is not negative. That is part of the sacredness of what we’re doing. Even when you have memory loss, you can feel joy and connect to people; you can feel in relationship. We have witnessed that. There’s a holy



Clockwise from top left: Jonathan Miller chats with Veronica Cook; Rosalie Fruchter; Joan Miller; Jim Houston and Bruce Hunt

“Even when you have memory loss, you can feel joy and connect to people; you can feel in relationship. We have witnessed that. There’s a holy shimmer in the place.”

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Bruce and Anne Hunt, both 82, were two of the first to join Good Memories Choir. Bruce, a retired college professor, holds an MDiv from McCormick Theological Seminary. His wife, Anne, was a pioneer in the field of food and nutrition and has co-authored numerous books on healthy eating. Three years ago, Anne was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s. Choir rehearsal remains a highlight of their week.

“The music really moves me,” Bruce says. “What we do to get started each Tuesday morning is to sing ‘Oh What a Beautiful Morning,’ and it just raises the roof when we do that. There’s a real spirit in the room, and there’s a real feeling of hope and excitement.”

There’s also a feeling of dignity and acceptance.

“I don’t want to go around with a sign that says *Alzheimer’s* on my forehead, but I don’t want to ignore that it is part of our life,” Anne says. “For me, the stigma is gone. I want anybody who will listen to me to know that I have Alzheimer’s, but I’m having the best time with this group of people who share this with us.

“All I know is that, at least for this period of time, I am still living a full and happy life,” she says. “Unlike a lot of diseases, this is not a disease where I have a lot of pain. I have anxiety about it, and there are some things I can’t do. But I feel much more confident about living life to the fullest. I think the choir has helped with that.”

Before starting the Good Memories Choir, the Millers founded Sounds Good!, a choral organization for adults

55 and older that now numbers more than 400 people in seven choirs across Chicagoland.

In 2018, they founded Good Memories using the model of the Giving Voice Initiative, an organization that has provided encouragement and start-up materials to more than 60 choruses worldwide for people with Alzheimer’s and their caregivers.

Brothers, 67, heard about the Good Memories Choir through a program for people with memory loss at Northwestern Hospital in Chicago. She and her mother, both retired teachers, had traveled the world together before Blackwell went into a memory care facility more than two years ago.

“My mother is very high functioning; she just has memory loss,” says Brothers, who owns a dessert catering business. “When the doctor tested her last year, her memory had stabilized. I attribute it to my taking her out and doing things with her, like the choir.”

Blackwell’s sense of humor is also intact. Asked if she likes the snacks served before choir practice, she replied, “My daughter must love them. She stole one of mine today.”

When seeking singers, the Millers focus on people with early-stage dementia who are living at home.

“We learned from our colleagues at Giving Voice that people who are early stage and living at home are the most socially isolated, because people are ashamed and tend to pull back and cocoon,” Jonathan says. “People say that, the day before the diagnosis, you’re fine. After the diagnosis, you’re a person with dementia and people won’t look you in the eye. This is a place where, for those two hours, it’s all about having fun together.”

According to the Alzheimer’s Association, 5.8 million Americans are living with Alzheimer’s disease, which is the most common form of dementia. That number is expected to skyrocket to almost 14 million by 2050.

While there is no known cure for dementia, research shows that listening to or singing songs can provide emotional and behavioral benefits for people living with the disease. Numerous studies—one of the most recent featured last year in *The Journal of Prevention of Alzheimer’s Disease*—have demonstrated that musical memories often are preserved in people with Alzheimer’s because key brain areas linked to musical memory are relatively undamaged by the disease.

“One of the ways to describe what we do is a cultural intervention for dementia,” Jonathan Miller says. “There is nothing pharmacological that has been successful in treating dementia, but there is a glimmer that perhaps music can help. Here, the music we choose for our people



“When someone starts out in discernment to become ordained in the diaconate, there is a lot of talk about ministry. To tell you the truth, I wasn’t sure what my ministry would be.”

— Sandy Siegel Miller



“My mother is very high functioning; she just has memory loss. When the doctor tested her last year, her memory had stabilized. I attribute it to my taking her out and doing things with her, like the choir.”

— Anna Brothers

is mostly the music that they learned as a teenager or young adult, but during this 15-week session of rehearsals, we are also doing a brand new piece, and they are learning the music. We’re so afraid, as a culture, of memory loss that we don’t see the shades of gray.”

It was a year of grief and loss that led the Millers to found choirs for older adults and those with dementia.

In 2015, Sandy’s mother, Jonathan’s father and step-mother, and the family cat died within seven months. Then, at the end of the year, Jonathan lost his job in music publishing.

“After all the losses, both of us were reeling,” Sandy says. “I said, ‘If there is any lesson in this, it is that life is short and we should be doing what we love. I looked at our finances and said, ‘Why don’t you take some time and decide what you really want to do in this world?’” With Sandy’s encouragement, Jonathan decided in early 2016 to begin leading choirs for older adults, bringing to Chicago the model originally pioneered by a Maryland-based organization called Encore Creativity.

At the same time, Sandy was discerning a call to ordained ministry, and she and Jonathan started the first year of Education for Ministry at Church of the Holy Nativity in Clarendon Hills.

“When someone starts out in discernment to become ordained in the diaconate, there is a lot of talk about ministry,” Sandy says. “To tell you the truth, I wasn’t sure what my ministry would be.”

In November 2016, they attended a Giving Voice rehearsal day in Minneapolis, and the die was cast.

“That day in Minnesota somehow struck a chord with us,” Sandy says. “If there was a call to ministry, that was it. Now it’s like this fast-moving locomotive and we’re running behind it. We were so moved by the rehearsal day in Minneapolis. We were alternatively incredibly overcome with joy, and the next moment we were crying bittersweet tears. On the way home, Jonathan pulled out his laptop and we started running the numbers.”

It took two years to raise the initial resources, but they never looked back.

“Sandy and I have never felt this way before, where we were grabbed by the neck and shaken,” Jonathan says. “It was not optional. It was, ‘You are going to do it.’ It’s one of those decisions where there is no choice. It was, ‘This needs to be done.’ It was not a case of who or when or how.”

During Good Memories’ rehearsals, fears of failing health and fading memories yield to jubilant singing, great music and friendship. There’s no audition to get in; no singing experience required. Anyone is welcome

who is living with dementia and can attend structured weekly rehearsals.

Lynn Clark, a volunteer singer who manages the check-in table, travels 30 miles from Downers Grove. She says, “One thing I love about the choir is that it is purposeful. Some choirs are sing-along groups. Jonathan brings this incredible skill, and he’s demanding. The songs are not easy. We do this challenging music, and the expectation is that we’ll learn to do it. Some of the people, even the people with memory loss, have had a lot of musical experience. And some of their care partners don’t have any. So the choir is a great leveler.”

In addition to the opportunity to spend time with his son-in-law, Custer values both the quality of the music and the opportunity to make a distinctive contribution. A retired lawyer who lives in an independent retirement community, he sings bass.

“I guess one of the things I particularly like is the harmony that I can put into a piece, into a song, from beneath the bottom of most people’s voices,” he says. “I enjoy it partly because I guess there aren’t many competitors. When I’m singing, people know I’m doing it!”

The choir has been a confidence booster for the Hunts, neither of whom has sung with a group since high school.

“I like the social aspect of it; I’m enjoying meeting these people,” Anne says. “It seems that whoever you sit next to, you work together to make sure you’re singing the right notes. I don’t know anything about reading music. I’m learning some new skills and developing a confidence to sing along with the choir. The fact that I’m learning something new, it just kind of revs up my spirit.”

Clark certainly didn’t need another volunteer choral opportunity—she sings in four choirs—but she was drawn to Good Memories.

“In training we received before the choir started, Jonathan shared with us four things that he learned happen when people are diagnosed with Alzheimer’s: others tend to stop calling them by name, looking them in the eye, touching them, or expecting anything of them. This is a turnaround of that. I love the choir because we avoid the ‘them’ and ‘us’ dichotomy,” says Clark, who has a doctorate in clinical psychology. “In truth, for those members who have early stage dementia, it’s difficult to know who has it and who doesn’t.”

“Maybe it’s a function of aging myself, but I’m struck by the fact that we are all vulnerable to loss, whether from Alzheimer’s or something else,” she says. “As we work together learning the music and refining our performance, it feels like we’re more alike than different ... I treasure that.” ✚

Church-based Pathway program explores racism past and present

By Jim Naughton

The diocese has been grappling for years with how racism affects and infects not only the communities it serves, but also its diocesan institutions and congregations. The most recent effort began with the creation of the Task Force on the Legacy of Slavery in 2009 and gained momentum when the task force published its final report, “A Call to Faithfulness: an Invitation to a Committed Journey” in 2013.

Following publication of the report, the Antiracism Commission began to develop a resource for congregational study, the Pathway to Reconciliation, and to train facilitators to bring the Pathway program into





congregations across the diocese. Over the last year, clergy and lay leaders from at least 17 parishes attended the training offered at St. James Commons, St. Paul & the Redeemer in Chicago, and St. Benedict's in Bolingbrook. Several congregations used the Pathway program during the year.

For parishes concerned about taking on subjects as sensitive as racism and white privilege, Rory Smith, a member of the Standing Committee and the Antiracism Commission of the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago, who has been instrumental in developing the Pathway program, has some reassuring words. "My work with the Antiracism Commission has taught me there is more than one way to approach anti-racism. One thing we talk about is the labyrinth of reconciliation ... You can enter a labyrinth where everyone is at a different point along the path. Our bishop has been quoted as saying, 'Enter where you are. But God loves you too much to leave you there,' and I believe that."

Some congregations prepare people for anti-racism work through film or book discussion groups that help people develop a common understanding of the issue, Smith says. "Facilitators recognize the challenges that people will have with this conversation. What we tell people is, 'have no fear because God is with you.' This is God's work and, as it says in Isaiah 41:10, 'So do not fear, for I am with you; ... I will strengthen you and help you.'"

St. John's Church in the Old Irving Park neighborhood of Chicago has been involved in anti-racism work for more than six years, and its website features a large list of resources including recommended books and novels. "We built a larger number of people willing to deal with how racism affects and infects life in the U.S.," says Mike Underhill, co-facilitator of St. John's anti-racism team. Two years ago, Underhill, the Rev. Kara Wagner Sherer and parishioners Laura Singer and Eddie Dzialo attended "Understanding and Analyzing Systemic Racism." The training was presented by Chicago Regional Organizing for Antiracism and subsidized by the diocese's Antiracism Commission. "That's what lit the fire at St. John's," Underhill said.

St. John's, Christ Church, Waukegan, and Smith's home parish of St. Thomas, Chicago, were among the first to employ the Pathway program. A six-session undertaking, Pathway examines the legacy of slavery in the United States, in the diocese and in its congregations through film and video, written materials and small group conversation with scripture reading and prayer woven through each session.

Topics include America's Legacy of Slavery, What Does Our Faith Require of Us, and A Call to Faithfulness: Reimagining Our Diocese.

"They are pretty well-scripted sessions," says Anne Smith, who facilitated the program at Christ Church, Waukegan, as part of her field work as a postulant for the diaconate. "They last anywhere from



"You can enter a labyrinth where everyone is at a different point along the path. Our bishop has [said], 'Enter where you are. But God loves you too much to leave you there.'"

two to three hours. It really works. When I did it, it was as part of a group of people in our congregations with a pretty good commitment of coming to all six sessions and spreading them over a few months."

The program not only enables congregations to have important conversations, but it brings members of the congregation closer together, says Diane Shalda, co-chair of the Antiracism Commission, who recently facilitated a group at her own parish, St. James Cathedral.

"You really get to know people on an intimate level because people share things that don't usually come up in conversations over coffee," she says. "That's why we say, 'What is said in the room stays in the room.' Because this conversation isn't always comfortable, it takes courage to speak out about our experiences."

Some experiences are so common that it betrays no confidences to share them. "Something you hear frequently from white people who first learn about northern complicity in the slave trade is, 'I had no idea,'" Anne Smith said. This concept is sometimes introduced by viewing the film "Traces of the Trade," which chronicles filmmaker Katarina Browne's efforts to come to terms with the discovery that one branch of her family, the DeWolfs of Rhode Island, was the largest slave-trading family in U.S. history. (Browne also developed Sacred Ground, a film-based dialogue series on race and faith recently released by the Episcopal Church for use in congregations.)

"Every one of us has to own this," Smith said. "Don't fall asleep here just because your family didn't have slaves or didn't arrive during slavery."

As the program progresses, participants begin to discuss the ways in which racism is not simply a matter of holding prejudicial beliefs. "One of things was getting clear on what racism is," Underhill says. "There is racial prejudice, but there are also structural systems, policies, programs that affect who gets house mortgages and how much they have to pay for them; what are sentencing guidelines and how are they implemented; do you live in an area where the Chicago public high schools teach calculus or not?"

"Those are some of the ways we think about racism. ... You may have a good heart and be willing to accept other people, but you have to think at the level of systems, too."

For many participants, the high point of the Pathway sessions is the creation of what is known as the quilt of history, although what is created is not precisely a quilt.

"We used a shower curtain," Anne Smith says. "It's more like a grid. What you have across the top is time periods from the colonial to contemporary, and down the side you have communities, our country, our church, our diocese, our parish. And in the grid, you have the events that were happening in those communities at that time."

"That makes it visual. You can see the themes. One of the glaring



“Every one of us has to own this. Don’t fall asleep here just because your family didn’t have slaves or didn’t arrive during slavery.”

words that is in our history as a member of the Episcopal Church is ‘silence.’ Instead of standing up for what you think is right, you say nothing so you maintain the unity of the church. That was something for us to look at.”

Dealing with a congregation’s history is sometimes a sensitive matter, Shalda says. “St. James had a lot of prominent white founders of Chicago in the parish, like Potter Palmer of the Palmer House. How did they benefit from the legacy of slavery? How did they benefit from silence? And in being silent about what was going on, how were they complicit?”

The study guide also asks probing questions about how the diocese allocated resources during the post-World War II period when white Episcopalians began moving to the suburbs, and diocesan resources followed them.

Regardless of the racial or ethnic make-up of the congregation, it is the practice of the Antiracism Commission to have a facilitator of color and a white facilitator work together with each group. In Waukegan, Anne Smith, who is white, worked frequently with Rory Smith (no relation) who is black.

Anne Smith says conversations about systems sometimes come more naturally in racially mixed groups. At Christ Church, Waukegan, she facilitated a group made up of African Americans, African immigrants, Caribbean Americans with African ancestors,

and whites. “I have found that more fruitful than when I have done studies of books or videos where everyone is white,” she says.

But the diocese includes large numbers of parishes that are almost entirely white. Underhill says such parishes have essential work to do.

“If you are living in the Chicago or Chicago metro area, you are automatically affected by racism, and it affects our whole life together as a community and as a metropolitan area,” he says. “So ... there is a significant role for white congregations to play in building awareness and support for positive change. It isn’t a matter of saying white people have the answers, but we can build a coalition to respond to things that are so counter to everything that Jesus teaches.”

Rory Smith says facilitators are sometimes able to observe subtle ways in which the Pathway program is helping to change attitudes. “Often what you see is that it is a process of transformation, that the aha! moment is internalized, but it happens,” he says. “Part of the issue is that we all have an image of ourselves. Everyone wants to be seen as good and righteous. So you don’t want to blame yourself and shame yourself, and none of this work is designed for blaming and shaming, it’s about sharing and learning in a place where we can talk bravely and courageously in a space full of respect for each other.”

Several congregations have completed the Pathway sessions and then found new uses for the format. St. Thomas, Chicago, is

one. After using the Pathway program during Lent last year, St. Thomas met on Wednesday nights during Lent this year to consider issues of intersectionality, especially regarding authentic welcoming of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, asexual and questioning individuals.

“We are not just black Americans or black Episcopalians, we are also black Episcopalians who have different sexualities, and we know LGBT folk have even additional problems, and those of us who are not LGBT are oftentimes oblivious to them,” says Marcus Richardson of St. Thomas.

“Intersectionality,” he says. “You could be black, you could be black and gay, you could be black, gay and female. You could be black, gay, female and poor. All of these things are reasons that people are oppressed, and they impact how you interact in the body of Christ, and they should not,” he says. “All are invited and should be welcomed.”

Shalda says issues of intersectionality and overlapping kinds of oppression arose naturally in the conversations at St. James. “People talked about being LGBTQ plus, about those intersections,” she says. “I think it is just another layer and that we always come back to race. It’s a way of listening to learn, to learn more about each other as individuals.”

The sixth session of the Pathway program offers “an invitation to

a committed journey,” and features questions designed to prompt thinking about what participants might do next. Underhill says the events of everyday life prompt such thinking as well.

“One of our members was at a neighborhood park and he found some materials left by people who claimed to be affiliated with the KKK,” he says. “What does he do? What do we as a church do to counter that? Another person was standing in a line at Jewel and seeing another person mistreat someone on the basis of race. What do you do? We are working on developing training about how to respond to that.”

The program has implications not only for participants’ conduct, but for the diocese as well,” Shalda says. “Here is a program that is faith-based. That not only is it faith-based, but it is diocesan-based. So we can really use this program to do truth-telling about our diocese. And not just stay there, but plan. Okay, now what do we do?”

“What’s important, in my opinion, is that we create a new way of being together and a new way of relating to one another that we take with us and that informs our lives going forward,” Rory Smith says. “We believe the work is transformational. It is like going to the eye doctor and the eye doctor says, ‘Could you try these on please? I know you haven’t worn glasses before, but try them on.’

“And suddenly you can see better.” ✚



The One Umbrella Approach

| by Kathleen Moore

At Grace Episcopal Church in Hinsdale, Sunday is just the beginning of a week in which learning, Christian formation and community-building take place every day. “Many churches are closed Monday through Saturday. That’s not the case here,” says the Rev. C. Christian Pierce, Grace’s rector. “We have to work to figure out how we don’t step on each other with all of our programming.”

The daily hustle and bustle at Grace is a result of an education model put into place five years ago when Grace Church Preschool became Grace Academy. The academy comprises a preschool program, kindergarten and academic enrichment programs, and Christian formation, youth groups and leadership development programs for older youth.

Together, Grace Academy’s director, Julie Pierce, who is married to the rector, and formation director Megan Mannor oversee all formation programs for young people, preschool through college age, bringing the work of the school and parish together under a single umbrella.

“It’s one comprehensive approach that includes children’s formation on Sunday, or what people would typically know as Sunday School,” Christian Pierce explains. “So when we talk about the academy, that covers preschool, enrichment programs, junior high ministry, senior high ministry, college outreach programs, as well as our summer programming. That ministry team and that faculty work together to create the comprehensive model for education in the life of the parish.”

Founded in 1953, Grace Church Preschool had all but dropped its identification with its sponsoring church community by the time Julie and Christian Pierce arrived in Hinsdale in 2012. “There was no identity with the Episcopal Church whatsoever,” Christian Pierce says. “There was little religious identity at all.

“And it wasn’t growing. It was costing the church money. In fact, it cost the church money for 50-something years; they never balanced a budget. In the past five years, we have balanced the budget and we now have a waiting list to get into our academy. It’s a dynamic growth engine model.”

One benefit of the comprehensive approach to formation is that professional educators shape all learning at both the school and the parish. “I’m a trained teacher first,” Mannor says. “I think it’s important to come from a place of how children learn best, and then what they’re going to learn as far as curriculum and anything else is secondary to how they can learn.”

“I am really proud of what we’re doing,” adds Julie Pierce. “It makes sense, it’s age-appropriate and developmentally-appropriate for the children we have in our academy, and it reaches everyone.”

When the team found they had a large group of active, 9 and 10-year-old boys coming to their Sunday programs, they responded by introducing the Building Faith Brick by Brick program, which invites children to use Lego bricks to illustrate Bible stories. “They really have to listen to the Bible stories in order to create something, as opposed to twiddle their thumbs and pretend to listen,” Mannor says. “I think that builds something more concretely in their hearts and minds.

“We ask ourselves how our kids will be best engaged, and then we adapt the Bible stories or whatever else us grown-ups think they need to learn to that,” Mannor explains. “For example, during Lent, we talk with our preschoolers about being your best self instead of ‘What are you going to give up?’ or ‘What is your discipline?’ We talk about ‘How can you be the best version of you, a kind little preschooler?’”

Currently, more than 15 of the 56 preschool students at the academy are involved in the parish on Sunday mornings. While Julie Pierce stresses the importance of including students from all faith backgrounds, the preschool serves as an entry point to the parish for families.

“It’s not that we’re trying to make them all Episcopalians,” she says. “That would be great, but that’s not our intent. I think an important part of the Episcopal identity is inclusiveness. Everyone is different, and they might have different beliefs and we respect that also.

“And I do have families that will say, ‘Oh my husband grew up Catholic and I grew up Lutheran and tell us more about this Episcopal Church.’ We have families that don’t have a faith background at all and will say, ‘Tell us more.’ Some of those families stay for chapel on

“They really have to listen to the Bible stories in order to create something, as opposed to twiddle their thumbs and pretend to listen.”

Wednesday morning and get a taste of what we teach. It’s an exciting opportunity to give them a glimpse of what we do.”

“We treat all of our parents that enroll their child in the school like they’re a part of the parish,” Christian Pierce says. “They get all of the parish communication. So, for example, Shrove Tuesday pancake supper—if you’ve grown up in the Episcopal Church, you know that’s a typical parish membership program. At Grace, we have more academy parents and children come to Shrove Tuesday pancake supper than we have people who would call themselves ‘members’ of Grace Episcopal Church. So, that’s all a part of how we think and behave and our ethos of our life together. This comprehensive model has caused Grace to rethink the definition of church membership. “Some of our largest gathering points aren’t on Sunday,” Christian Pierce says. “Some of our largest worship services are in the summer outside with the academy when we have movie night with Eucharist. So, we’ve gone away from a traditional understanding of membership.”

Expanding the definition of membership has created a new sense of vitality at Grace. “We don’t talk about decline here,” Christian Pierce says. “That’s not our reality. We take a particular posture of radical hospitality when welcoming people. It’s not about making clones of ourselves. It’s about being present to people in a way that may change us.”

What happens on Sunday mornings at Grace informs the rest of the week, especially a preschool chapel service. “On Wednesday mornings all the kids meet in the sanctuary, and we do an inclusive lesson about God’s love,” Mannor says. “We do have kids from different faith backgrounds that attend, so we make sure it all intersects with the general message that God loves them.

“I gave a lesson about faith the other day, where I had some kids stand in the choir loft and hide. And I said, ‘Oh no, Rose and George are gone, and their parents are going to be so angry at me. What am I going to do?’ And the kids answered, ‘They’re still there!’ And I said, ‘Well you can’t see them, how do you know they’re still there?’ We talked about believing in something you can’t see, and about faith. In addition to the lesson, we sing and we pray, and it’s just a beautiful moment of togetherness, and kids—more than just the ones who come



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on Sunday—get to hear that God loves them.”

Love and acceptance are the themes that permeate Grace Academy. “We want every child who comes through our doors to know they are loved,” Julie Pierce says. “That is why we are here. Regardless of who they are and what they do, even when they’re not their best selves, they are still loved. I hope that their parents feel the same way, and our teachers and everyone who comes here. That is my mission.”

Hinsdale is home to numerous preschools, Christian Pierce says. “But when you come to our place, what makes it remarkable is a sense that it’s smaller and has intimacy. Some parents come to us with this tremendous anxiety, and they say things like, ‘I want my three-year-old to be reading.’ And we say, ‘That’s ridiculous. That is not developmentally appropriate.’ We want to stand up for the life of your child and we believe in play-active learning. We want your child to walk out with an experience of love and affirmation.”

Sara Clary, a Grace Academy parent and member of Grace Church, says all four of her children—boys ages 4 and 10 and girls ages 6 and 8—have felt that affirmation. “We have gone through the preschool and kindergarten enrichment programs,” Clary says. “Our kids have gotten a great education, and they are cared for by professionals who truly enjoy what they do. The Episcopal identity is important to me. The kids pray before meals and attend weekly chapel. I appreciate they are getting that exposure in their school days.”

“To my kids, church and school are one thing,” she says. “You can tell they feel like Grace is a really comfortable place to be. They take pride in their classrooms, look for opportunities to help out, and are always excited when we go. They also have family friends that we see at school, church, social events, sporting events, and more. Grace is the common denominator.” ✚

left: Purposeful play. Photos courtesy of Grace Academy



Shaky Roof BUT A STEADFAST FAITH

| BY REBECCA WILSON |

above: Bob Spitzer and Natalie Van Kirk inspecting roof work. Photo courtesy of Natalie Van Kirk

To use the words of Ernest Hemingway, the building crisis at St. Barnabas, Glen Ellyn, happened gradually, then suddenly.

Almost as soon as the Rev. Natalie Van Kirk arrived to be the parish’s rector in the summer of 2015, a member of the buildings and grounds committee told her that the support timbers in the 1960s-era sanctuary “seemed to be expanding.”

About a year later, the same leader got up on a ladder to take photos that spurred a Friday-night visit from structural engineers. Soon, scaffolding was in place.

The first structural engineers called in a second firm, which embarked on an extensive survey. The verdict, Van Kirk says, was alarming. “They couldn’t make the mathematical models work,” she says, referring to the formulas used by architects and engineers to calculate building load. “They all led to a building that wouldn’t stand.”

“It’s a really good thing you were praying the whole time you were standing under that dome,” she remembers the engineers telling her. “The building is actually failing.” On the day before Ash Wednesday in 2017, the sanctuary was declared off-limits. The congregation boxed up the organ, covered the altar and font, and moved into the church’s library and classrooms located in a different building on the St. Barnabas campus. That spring, contractors began a nearly eighteen-month engineering and construction project that came in at \$2.25 million before it was finished in November 2018.

**"THE BUILDING ISSUES
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Some congregations, Van Kirk says, might have been overwhelmed by the challenges of a collapsing building and the need to undertake a capital campaign with no preparation. But from the outset, she and the leaders of St. Barnabas were determined not to allow the rebuilding project to overshadow the congregation's mission.

"Early on, I worked with the vestry to make sure that, whatever we did, we didn't freeze in place. That's a huge temptation for a congregation faced with this kind of challenge," she says. During construction, the vestry began to meet twice each month so that it could address both building issues and larger mission concerns.

Senior warden Roger Cantu, who was junior warden during the construction, says that "the building issues were actually a big blessing because it drove home that God has plans for this church."

"One of the things Natalie was beginning to focus on was that we had become too comfortable and complacent in our church life," he says. "We had stopped paying attention to calling new people, to making new disciples. She was really good about refocusing us, and just then, the building started to collapse."

"Suddenly we were faced with coming up with who knew how many millions of dollars to keep the building safe, or we could knock the building down and give it to the diocese and say, 'Here's another property for you to be saddled with,'" Cantu says. "We expected people to leave in droves, but they did not. We put out a call for stewardship and people responded. It was an affirmation that the congregation was here and committed to remaining a part of the community."

Cantu and Van Kirk agree that staying focused on mission wouldn't have been possible without Bob Spitzer, a retired Boeing engineer and executive who took on the construction project as a full-time job.

"Bob volunteered to put his entire life on hold for this," Cantu says. "He had the patience, knowledge and skill to meet with

engineers and go over every minor detail, so that when the plan was put together for the contractors, nothing was missed."

"My goal was to help our priest, Natalie Van Kirk, in any way, shape or form where I could help that would take the burden off of her so she could concentrate on what you're supposed to do in the Christian Gospel—going out and bringing in members," Spitzer says.

The job was daunting, he acknowledges. "The challenge is when you're in the middle of construction, with scaffolding all over the building, the place looked a little bit war-torn for a while. It was a challenge for getting new people to come to our church," he says. "Fortunately, our congregation stayed faithful in attendance and support. Our future looks very positive."

But although new members were scarce while the building was under construction, the renewed sense of commitment led the vestry to focus on creating programs for families and children, especially those with special needs.

The first step, a parents' day out program that uses classrooms that sit vacant during the week, began in August 2017. The program is growing steadily, Van Kirk says, and although it was expected to lose money in its first year, so far it hasn't. What's more, it has been the catalyst for a ministry currently being planned for families with children on the autism spectrum, with Down syndrome and other needs.

"It was a ministry that had long been on my heart because I had seen the church hurt people in these situations," says Van Kirk, recalling stories told by families who had been asked not to bring their children with behavioral difficulties to church. "It is crushing for parents who are already struggling and already lonely," she says.

Her thinking was influenced by the Archbishop of Canterbury, father to two daughters with learning and developmental disabilities, who has urged churches to welcome families of children with disabilities more fully. In response, the vestry agreed to launch a monthly Sunday evening Eucharist tailored to children on the autism spectrum. The new service will begin soon after Labor Day.

"It plays to our strengths," Van Kirk says. "We have lots of contacts with special ed programs and the March of Dimes, and have some people in the congregation with real expertise."

Spitzer, who says he and his wife are involved in outreach to people in need both through St. Barnabas and other organizations, was mindful that the building project support ministry to people with disabilities. The result is a more accessible sanctuary that can be entered directly from the parking lot via a ramp with railings.

"Just passing code isn't enough," he says. "If you actually have a real experience with some of these people in difficult situations, you realize that it's not an academic matter. We owe them some way of making the church accessible.

"I feel good about the attitude of our church," Spitzer says. "St. Barnabas is really open to trying to do things right." ✚



Succession Plan

[By Jim Naughton]

When Bishop Jeffrey Lee announced in February that he would be retiring next August, he set in motion a long and complex process during which there is abundant opportunity for uncertainty. But diocesan leaders and Bishop Todd Ousley of the Episcopal Church's Office of Pastoral Development are committed to keeping anxiety at a minimum during what could be an opportunity for spiritual growth.

"It can be an exciting time where we get this rare opportunity to consider what it means to be a diocese, the way we are implicated in each other, the way that our life in congregations—from the North Shore to Peoria—is shared," said the Rev. Eric Biddy, rector of St. Christopher's Church in Oak Park, who is chair of the Standing Committee. "That's not always obvious, and this is a real chance to reflect on that spiritually."

In early April, the Standing Committee, which oversees the upcoming search, election and transition, chose the Rev. Kim Jackson of the Diocese of Atlanta as its search consultant, but the work of caring pastorally for everyone involved began even before Lee's announcement.

"One of first things we do is look at the bishop and spouse, if there is one, and remind both staff and elected leadership that the bishop and spouse have already begun a significant transition that will only accelerate, and that is a tender time in their lives because there has been a devotion to a particular ministry and a particular place that for the bishop requires an identification with the place that is really deep," Ousley said. "They are anticipating a very significant loss, and a grieving process is going on.

"The same is also true with the staff," he added. "They also experience the unsettledness that comes knowing the head of the organization is going to be changing."

“Our desire for more diversity in the House of Bishops seems to be gaining some traction in the church. Chicago needs to be mindful of that and live into its own embrace of diversity.”



“What you want to do is identify people who are known for their capacity to discern, to be without agenda and to be collaborative team players. Then you start looking at issues of diversity across the whole spectrum.”

— Bishop Todd Ousley

The Rev. Anne B. Jolly, rector of St. Gregory’s Church in Deerfield and a member of the Standing Committee, said the group is committed to “being there pastorally for the staff.”

“The boss they have loved is on his way out, but not leaving yet,” she said. “They have no idea who the new person will be. I hope the diocese will be aware of the position they are in.”

Ousley said the church cautions bishops-elect against “practices of the past” such as “cleaning house and bringing in your own staff, at least as a first step.” Instead, he recommends the period immediately following a bishop’s ordination be “a time of listening and observation and prayerful reflection” on the part of the bishop in regard to the staff.

Life for members of the Standing Committee also changes as they assume additional responsibilities.

“Of course we want to go about things the right way with the maximum transparency that we can manage,” Biddy said. “I think we’re blessed that we face challenges more than crises, and we have a pretty solid base of trust between the bishop and bishop’s staff and congregations for the most part. Hopefully that will address any agenda-driven motives in the bishop’s search because I don’t think many people will be looking to right terrible wrongs.”

Ousley said choosing the search committee, a step that the Standing Committee completed in late May, is a pivotal part of the process.

“The first thing I warn about is that there are going to

be people who are immediately jockeying to be on the search committee,” he said. “Sometimes these are people who come with a very personal and focused agenda, and those go on the list of people not to appoint.

“What you want to do is identify people who are known for their capacity to discern, to be without agenda and to be collaborative team players. Then you start looking at issues of diversity across the whole spectrum.”

Ousley said he hopes that search committee members will follow Lee’s lead in recognizing that the diocese extends well beyond the Chicago metropolitan area.

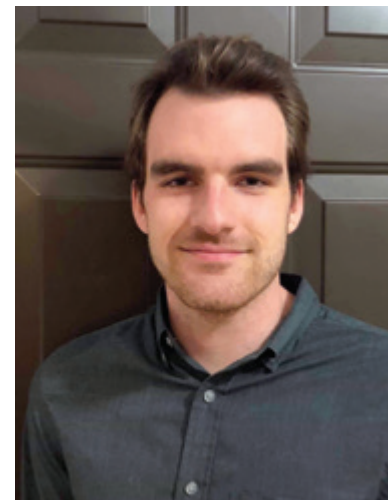
“The other thing I hope they will consider is that we are in a particular moment when the church appears to be embracing, in a fairly wholehearted way, new visions of what a bishop looks like,” he said. “Our desire for more diversity in the House of Bishops seems to be gaining some traction in the church. Chicago needs to be mindful of that and live into its own embrace of diversity.”

Rory Smith, a member of the Standing Committee and a parishioner at St. Thomas’s Church in Chicago, was co-chair of the search committee that nominated Lee and seven other candidates for the election in 2007. “One thing that stood out for us was we received a commission from the Standing Committee to conduct an anti-racist search and to carry forth those principles,” he said. “Part of that included everyone on the search committee taking some anti-racism training together, which we realized was an opportunity to bond and to coalesce around issues of equity, fairness, how we wanted to interact with each other, and the cultural biases we wanted to avoid.

“We found that those kinds of guiding principles helped us in ascertaining whether or not the potential candidates held the same view about what our diocese could continue to strive toward.”

The Standing Committee is determined to “let the Holy Spirit do her work,” Jolly said. “We understand that our role requires us to hold our preferences at bay. We are praying that people will be willing to let go any of the assumptions they have about who the bishop needs to be, or what the bishop needs to do—that we resist the temptation to push our agenda or need to the front of the pile.

“Our God is a God of surprises and creativity. For us to expect that God is going to do exactly what any one of us or any group wants to do is kind of crazy.” ✝



IAN GRANT-FUNCK

“I am left wondering how exactly we can be proud of what we specifically have to share with a suffering world while still letting one thousand flowers bloom.”

A Holy Awkwardness

At the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago’s 2018 convention, where I was a lay delegate, famed broadcast journalist, professor and lifelong Episcopalian Ray Suarez spoke on the dire picture that statistics show for the future of the church. He wondered exactly how the Episcopal Church should reach young people, and pointed to St. Lydia’s Dinner Church, a Lutheran Ministry in Brooklyn, as one example of a way forward.

According to Suarez, the ordained Lutherans at St. Lydia’s step back from being “too programmatic, too creedal, too churchy.” He concluded: “Let a thousand flowers bloom, let’s try these things, let’s try out things that are maybe even a little uncomfortable for us to figure out what works. We’ve got a lot to say to a suffering world. We’ve got to be proud of it, we’ve got to be proud of what we’ve got instead of apologizing for it.”

While I appreciated Suarez’s frank look at the numbers, and agree that Episcopalians need to think critically about how to grow as a church, especially among my peers who have left the churches of their grandparents, I am left wondering how exactly we can be proud of what we specifically have to share with a suffering world while still letting one thousand flowers bloom. How can we be proud of what we have to offer while radically shifting what we’re offering?

One conclusion of his address—that we Episcopalians need to let go of some liturgical elements to keep young people interested—is misguided. It is a conclusion that assumes that the “nones” and “youngs” are leaving because they wished it looked exactly like their day-to-day lives—less creedal and less churchy. This conclusion falls into an all-too-common stereotype of young people; that we want everything simpler, smaller, and more integrated into mainstream culture; that we want church to be a Twitter pizza party, where the Eucharist is a sip of Coca-Cola and a breadstick.

Sociologist Rodney Stark writes that a combination of effective proselytizing and the

maintenance of cultural tension between the mainstream community and the religious community are essential to the survival of religious movements. In his model, it is exactly because a religious community possesses cultural resources that are not widely available that potential converts are excited to engage with it. That’s not to say, of course, that the Episcopal Church should be less welcoming. Our commitment to fighting discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, race and class is essential both to our specific appeal to young people and our Christ-driven mission.

Yet, so are our rich musical tradition, the immense accumulated wisdom of Anglican writers, and perhaps most importantly, the Book of Common Prayer—which Suarez rightfully called “one of the glories of the English language.” That is not to say that what St. Lydia’s is doing is bad—the hyperbolic possibility of a Coca-Cola Eucharist is not representative of their ministry. But I believe that the specific draw of the Episcopal Church for people—young and old—is the precise way that we hold both the past and the present together. We honor our history, and we remain in uncompromising commitment to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves.

One of my peers at Brent House, reflecting on Suarez’s address, said that one reason many young people don’t come to church is not because they think it’s hateful or a waste of time, but because the act of going is awkward. It pushes us out of our comfort zone and into a mindset that we do not regularly experience. Yet it is in that awkwardness, she said, that we experience the holiness we are desperate for—and are quickened by the Holy Spirit and called to return. From her perspective, the path forward for the Episcopal Church in a changing world is to pursue that awkward holiness, not to let it fall away. ✝

Ian Grant-Funck is a third-year undergraduate in religious studies at the University of Chicago. He was baptized in the diocese, confirmed through St. Mark’s, Glen Ellyn, and is a peer minister at Brent House.

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