

COLORADO episcopalian



SPECIAL EDITION:

LIVING OUR BAPTISMAL COVENANT

IN THIS ISSUE

FROM THE EDITOR:

This edition of the *Colorado Episcopalian* invites us to return to our Baptismal Covenant as we explore how we navigate our lives as Christians, our common ministry, and our work in the world in reflection of those baptismal vows. We hope that you, too, will find time to pray, reflect, and seek how God is calling you to live your baptismal vows.

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DREAMING OUTSIDE THE BOX

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REFLECTION & RENEWAL

For each of us to continue proclaiming the Good News in an authentic and compelling way year after year, that Good News has to be real and fresh for us in a personal way year after year. This inner work takes intention.

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HAVING LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER

Meaningful conversation around our differences is essential for our health and future, both individually and communally. By reflecting on what we love and value (and hearing what others value), grieving what we have lost and expressing the pain we each feel, we may begin to imagine a future with hope and renewed possibilities.

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COVER:

Members of St. Peter's of the Valley
Episcopal Church, Basalt, distribute holiday
baskets at Christmas.

Photo courtesy the Rev. Wendy Huber

OF REPENTANCE & RETURN

BY BISHOP KYM LUCAS

In January of 2020, my husband and I sneaked into Christ Church, Denver for worship. When I steal into church this way, incognito, it takes a while for someone to recognize me—probably because I time my arrival so I can duck in after the processional. But the keen-eyed greeters at Christ Church called me out as I made my way up the sidewalk.

“Bishop, are you just going to sneak in?” they called out. I’d been made. Nodding, I put my finger to my lips. They chuckled, and one said, “You picked a good Sunday! We’re doing baptisms today!”

Their enthusiasm struck me. As I sat in my pew, I could feel that same enthusiasm throughout the congregation; the community’s eagerness to welcome a new person into the household of faith was palpable. The joy of that baptism brought tears to my eyes.

As I contemplated how we, the Episcopal Church in Colorado, have navigated this strange time, and as I wondered how we will face the uncertainty of the coming days, I was reminded of how powerful our baptismal rite is. And I wondered how often we experience that power and how often we take it for granted.

Our Book of Common Prayer says that “the bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble.” Once we become part of Christ’s body, we are forever part of Christ’s body. Our Baptism connects us to God, through Christ, and it connects us to one another. This is a beautiful and holy thing. And we receive the fullest benefits of this bond, when we engage the challenge of living our covenant: when we intentionally practice setting aside the things we have vowed to renounce, and we take on the things we vow we will do.

As your Bishop, I have been thrilled with how well our communities of faith have adapted to our COVID-19-induced reality. I have watched you continue “in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship” through virtual daily prayers and online Bible studies. As we have all adjusted our practice to protect the vulnerable and include those who are

confounded by technology, we demonstrate that our faithfulness is not about doggedly adhering to our historical practices; our faithfulness is about honoring our relationship with God and with others.

I am also moved by how congregations continue to minister to the marginalized in their towns and cities, how they “proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ” by looking beyond their own needs and serving others. The ways in which we are feeding people here in Colorado, and the ways we offer collective support to ministries like El Hogar, Navajoland, and the Colorado Haiti Project testify to our commitment to being Good News.

And yet as committed as we are, as faithful as we try to be, we all fall short of the glory God intends for us. We are all sinful, even as we are redeemed. Each of us is capable of defaulting to selfish idolatry and of seeking to justify ourselves as righteous while ignoring the call to walk in love. Our Baptismal Covenant understands this and the vow that asks, “Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?” is so grace filled. As disciples, we, like Peter, will mess up as often as we get things right. That we acknowledge our imperfection and our need to continually repent and turn to the Lord reminds us that our hope is in trusting not in our own righteousness but in God’s abundant mercy.

This Lent, one of my disciplines will be revisiting the Baptismal Covenant weekly. It seems to me that immersing myself in the reminder of who I am called to be will be helpful in the days ahead. I hope that you, too, will find time to revisit the vows of your baptism; I invite you to sit with those vows, pray over them, seek how God is calling you to live them.

Our Baptismal Covenant connects us and calls us to new life. That life is not only affirming the tenets of our faith, but also living a life of active discipleship. We are called to relationship and to action, to worship and to witness. I pray that every member of the Episcopal Church in Colorado will fully embrace this holy bond, experiencing the power, grace and joy. ■

Celebrant: Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

People: I will, with God's help.



Physically-distanced summer on the lawn. Photo courtesy Laurie Gudim

DREAMING OUTSIDE THE BOX

BY RHODA ROBINSON AND LAURIE GUDIM



What is a church? Nowhere in the Episcopal Prayer Book Catechism do we find the church described as a place—a building. Rather, it says: “The Church is the *community* of the New Covenant” (pp. 854–55).

St. Paul’s in Fort Collins has been exploring this concept since 2015. And 2020 was an epiphany year for us, giving St. Paul’s a deeper understanding of that definition of “Church.”

In the Baptismal Covenant, we are asked: “Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?” This covenant is not contingent on having abundance, or having the comfort of a building, or knowing the future. It was our act of faith to trust God and leave our church buildings and move to new ones...it would be a time of trusting God in the desert for provision.

For years, even though we had been stating that the church is the people not the building, we continued to let a building with all its décor and location represent us. In 2015 when a developer came and offered to buy our one-acre plot and our church buildings on it, we faced squarely into that issue. The buildings had been erected in 1959 on the outskirts of Colorado State University. Over the ensuing 55 years, the once-small college campus had become a large and bustling university with an ever-expanding student body. Our parking lots were overcrowded; the buildings were in much need of upgrading and repair, and we had been unable to find the million or so dollars to complete this work. As we prayed and discussed the pros and cons of leaving our beloved buildings behind, we often found ourselves muttering, groaning, or shouting: “The church is not a building—it is the people!”

In the Baptismal Covenant, we are asked: “Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?” This covenant is not contingent on having abundance, or having the comfort of a building, or knowing the future. It was our act of faith to trust God and leave our church buildings and move to new ones...it would be a time of trusting God in the desert for

provision. After constructing a list of what we needed and wanted and, finally, examining more than 200 possibilities, we came to the decision to share space with another faith community until we could find the “right place.” Since we were already sharing space with an Ecumenical Catholic Community (ECC), which also had needed a home, we knew it could be done.

Along with our ECC companions, we rented space from Trinity Lutheran Church and moved into their building in October of 2017. Either by chance or God’s design, our move occurred on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, when Martin Luther posted his Ninety-five theses in Wittenberg, Germany. It was not lost on us that bumping elbows with people of other denominations was a move toward reestablishing a kind of unity. To celebrate this event, we held a joint worship service, an amazing event that has become a fond memory for the Lutherans, Catholics, and Episcopalians who are now sharing a church building.

In that first year, as we dwelt with our fellow Christians, a great energy took hold of us. We began to collaborate in offering opportunities for adult formation and social and ecological justice. We supported one another’s children and youth programs, shared in one

another's fundraising events, and began to take responsibility for maintenance and upkeep of the space in which we found ourselves. New life was being breathed into us.

We began to think about staying. When we approached Bishop O'Neill with this idea a year later, he responded, "It sounds like the Holy Spirit is moving." He suggested that we think about creating a multidenominational, and perhaps even multifaith, center in northern Colorado. Thus we were given permission to dream outside the box.

By 2019 all three faith communities at 301 E. Stuart Street had realized that we were committed to become a faith partnership. Accordingly, we established a Faith Partners

Vision Committee to begin to envision what this entity, called 301 Faith Partners, would look like and how it might function. In October of 2020, in the midst of a historic pandemic, we made a covenant with our faith partners: to love, to share, and to seek God's will together. Each of the three communities will maintain its own identity, but together, as 301 Faith Partners, we will better seek and serve God. We had found a new way to build and plant a church.

In 2020, unable to meet in our new building and amidst the pandemic, a divisive political election, violent tragedies that laid bare our country's past and ongoing racism, and ecological devastation, including the largest forest fires ever seen in Colorado, we have been a vibrant,

life-giving church, engaged with the community and the world. We found ways to nurture one another and to worship safely, both online and in physically distanced venues. As 301 Faith Partners, we acted to expand our ministries to serve our northern Colorado neighbors: food drives, working to shelter those experiencing homelessness, contributing funds both to those without work and those impacted by the fires. And we did this because of all the preparation over the five-year span between our first call to sell our property and our eventual union with our Faith Partners culminating in a deeply rooted understanding that our church will never be a building. It is our people. As we continue to live into the covenant we made, we do so knowing we are not a



church of bricks and mortar—we are a community of faith partners who Walk the Way of Love shown to us by Jesus, the Christ. ■

RHODA ROBINSON is the Senior Warden at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Fort Collins.

LAURIE GUDIM is the Communications Liaison at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Fort Collins.

Left: A Food Bank Drive called Cans Around the Church. Left to right, Jo and Lawrence Baietti; Charlotte Leighton; Beth Stoneburner and Joan Stephenson, all of St. Paul's. The truck was procured by Len Russ of Mary of Magdala.

Right: A puppet show on Zoom for the children, put on by the Youth Group.

Right Bottom: Summer on the lawn. Our socially-distanced way of sharing communion.

Photos courtesy Laurie Gudim



Celebrant: Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

People: I will, with God's help.



Resisting the Desert

BY THE REV. CANON ALEX DYER

As the season of Lent approaches, I must confess that I am not looking forward to another Lent in the midst of a pandemic. When Lent arrived last year, I had no idea—few did—that the pandemic would persist this long, or that we would have another Lent and Easter where large groups cannot safely gather. The image of wandering in a barren desert resonates with me. I suspect that, like me, few of God's people like to spend much time in a barren land. Yet we know from the Bible that God does most of God's work in the desert. So while we yearn for the lushness of the Promised Land, "a land flowing with milk and honey," we also know that, paradoxically, many holy things happen in the barren places.

In this time of COVID-19, we have lost many cherished things long associated with church and society. I myself long to gather with others to sing, pray, and share the Eucharist. Unable to gather as we did means, however, that most of us, at one time or another, are left feeling frustrated, angry, sad, disillusioned, or bitter. We did not see this coming, and we have not been able to carve out the time we need to lament all that the pandemic has taken from us.

We feel lost in this new reality, and it is causing us to re-examine almost everything—if we are paying attention. Meanwhile, we know that church leaders are bearing the brunt of the annoyances, exasperation, and anxiety expressed by our members, even though they know we are doing the best we can. COVID-19 has also exposed the cracks in our society around inequality, systemic racism, and greed. It has been overwhelming even trying to process so much in so short a period of time.

All of this being taken away we may be wondering what we are left with now. We may feel like we are in the middle of a barren desert feeling exhausted and just wanting a sip of water. This may not be true for all of us. We may not feel this way all the time. But nearly everyone I have spoken with is mourning a loss.

Being church involves more than worship. At root it means following Jesus, who in fact never asked us to worship him. *He asked that we follow him.*

Jesus was also clear: following him would be hard. It would require sacrifice, including sacrificing unworkable beliefs and attitudes. My own sacrifice has been relinquishing my need to feel that I am in control. In truth, we rarely control the circumstances in our life. What we can control is how we react to our circumstances. This has always been a hard lesson for me.

We can no longer worship the way we have for most of our lives, so how should we react as followers of Jesus? In an interview with *Relevant* magazine, Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church and author of *The Purpose-Driven Life*, observed that “most churches only have one purpose: worship. And if you take worship away, you’ve got nothing. They’re in a hurry to get back to worship because that’s all they’ve got.”¹

Those words hit a little too close to home. They were hard to hear. Warren explained that his church is built on five purposes and not just one: “You take one circle out, we’ve still got four other circles. We’ve got ministry going on. We’ve got mission going on. We’ve got fellowship going on. We’ve got discipleship going on. Those all stand on their own.” Since last March his church grew its membership by 16,000 people. New membership is not the only metric, and I know there are other factors to consider. Nevertheless, Warren is on to something.

What is the purpose of church? It’s a basic question. And the pandemic is forcing us to wrestle with basic questions in new ways. Perhaps we avoid the desert because it strips away all but the essential. The stripping away the inessential allows God to show us what is really important. This should sharpen our focus and deepen our purpose.

This pandemic has forced all church leaders to do things they could not have imagined a year ago. In

reexamining our vocations and our baptismal vows in light of a global calamity, many of us have come to realize that ‘ministry’ had become synonymous with how you serve . . . the Church. Ministries had become centered around a building, around maintaining an institution, and less about how we follow Jesus in our everyday lives.

Immediately following his baptism, Jesus is sent to the desert and is tempted by Satan. The enemy tempts him to focus on meeting his physical needs, his need for protection, and his need for control and power. These temptations reside in each of us and may even be magnified during these past many months of privation and anxiety. We want things to return to normal. We are sick of wearing masks. We want control over our situation. God rarely calls us to look back, however. He may be calling us to create a new normal. When God’s people emerge from the desert, they come out transformed.

What, I wonder, is God doing in the midst of this tragedy? What can we learn as the Body of Christ? This virus will change our society and our church—that much is obvious—and we are deciding what, and who, we will be when we emerge from these barren places. I was recently reminded that the devastations of the Black Death ushered in the Renaissance. History shows us that after each pandemic, society responded with making profound changes. The Church, as part of society, will be changing as well. For now we can only speculate about the changes COVID-19 will bring to society, and speculate about the cracks and rifts we will choose to mend and those we will continue to ignore.

Our choices will have consequences, as all choices do. The Episcopal News Service (ENS) recently ran an article on the church’s membership trends showing that the Episcopal Church will not have enough members to continue after 2050. This harsh

Photo courtesy Vincent Ledvina on Unsplash

What, I wonder, is God doing in the midst of this tragedy? What can we learn as the Body of Christ? This virus will change our society and our church—that much is obvious—and we are deciding what, and who, we will be when we emerge from these barren places.

reality will force us to make difficult decisions and drastic changes—that is, if we want to emerge from the desert with fresh insights and new purpose. I don't think we are called to replicate Rick Warren's church model. Nor do I think we can return to the way things were, before the pandemic. I do think we are called to evaluate what is important to us and the reasons we do the things we do. Are we following God, or merely wandering in the wilderness hoping will arrive in the promised land?

Even as the vaccine is distributed, our journey is far from over. And I have little intention of wandering in the desert waiting to see the promised land. I don't like the desert, and I don't want to be here. And yet here I am, with all of you. I am confident in God's promise to be with us, and I believe God is calling us to stop and listen, asking us to focus not on everything we don't have right now, but calling us to look at what we retain, amid the loss and the grief, and how we might use what remains ours. We may find the things we have are sufficient and that God has not left our side. God could be calling us to resist

the temptation to regain a (false) sense of control and to seek only our own safety and comfort.

Reflecting on our own Baptismal Covenant, I believe it is worth noting that none of the promises we make requires a building. Praying, resisting evil, proclaiming the Good News, loving your neighbor as yourself, and striving for justice and peace. The Way of Love will eventually lead us through deserts. By following the path and listening to God, we will be changed. Our churches, our Diocese, and our lives will never be the same. We shall emerge from the desert more faithful, wiser, and stronger. ■

THE REV. CANON ALEX DYER is the Canon to the Ordinary for the Episcopal Church in Colorado.

¹ Cameron Strang, "Rick Warren on the Year We've Had," *Relevant*, December 2020, <https://www.relevantmagazine.com/faith/church/rick-warren-on-the-year-we-had/>



Celebrant: Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

People: I will, with God's help.



Photo courtesy Kirsten Wilson

REFLECTION & RENEWAL

BY THE REV. KIM SEIDMAN

One of the most poignant moments of the Easter Vigil for me is when the Celebrant addresses the people saying “Through the Paschal mystery, dear friends, we are buried with Christ by Baptism into his death, and raised with him to newness of life. I call upon you, therefore, now that our Lenten observance is ended, to renew the solemn promises and vows of Holy Baptism, by which we once renounced Satan and all his works, and promised to serve God faithfully in his holy Catholic Church” (BCP 292).

At that moment in the liturgy, we cross the finish line of Lent. And in preparing for a Holy Lent, it helps to remember where the journey ends. If Lent ushers us to the baptismal font in time for Easter, then let us enter this season considering how God is inviting us to live into our baptismal covenant this year.

There's something about our baptism that call us to return and reflect at least annually. One reason is change. The biblical story of Jesus' passion and resurrection stays the same year to year, but our own story changes. The world we live in, the



individual circumstances of our lives are constantly evolving. We are not the same person we were last year, or five years ago, or a decade ago. Where will we encounter Jesus during the Lent and Easter seasons this year?

For each of us to continue proclaiming the Good News in an authentic and compelling way year after year, that Good News has to be real and fresh for us in a personal way year after year. This inner work takes intention. How is God at work transforming our lives? Making us into a new creation? Then we can proclaim outwardly by word and example.

Lent offers an annual invitation to enter into prayerful reflection of one's life. Often, this effort is undertaken by stepping away from routine responsibilities for a time. In the setting aside of time and space, we have room to listen deeply and reimagine how to live into our baptismal covenant this year.

For each of us to continue proclaiming the Good News in an authentic and compelling way year after year, that Good News has to be real and fresh for us in a personal way year after year. This inner work takes intention. How is God at work transforming our lives? Making us into a new creation? Then we can proclaim outwardly by word and example.

Cathedral Ridge invites you to a time of personal retreat during Lent, for individuals and couples to rest and reflect as their schedules allow. If personal retreats are a new experience, I would be honored to hold space for conversation and provide materials for reflection.

In addition, Cathedral Ridge is excited to partner with gifted individuals who offer their ministry-in-residence for a time. This Lent, we welcome Kirsten Wilson, a creative and engaging teacher who lives at the intersection of faith, story, and relationship. Kirsten is available to meet with individuals and couples who choose to make their Lenten retreat during her time in residence, March 17-21. She is offering a virtual Lenten retreat "Step into the Story: Jesus' Passion and Resurrection" on her website www.rivermarkacademy.com that can be accessed at any time during Lent. Guests may wish to participate in her offering to enhance their conversations.

However you are drawn to Lent this year, know that your journey will culminate at the baptismal font. At Easter, when you are invited to renew your baptismal vows, may you feel refreshed and renewed to respond once again, "I will, with God's help." ■

THE REV. KIM SEIDMAN is the Vicar and Executive Director for Cathedral Ridge in Woodland Park.

Celebrant: Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

People: I will, with God's help.



Photo courtesy Xuan Nguyen on Unsplash

Seek & Serve

BY TRACY METHE

I will seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving my neighbor as myself. This is what I promised when I was baptized at age 35. And for me, this is where loving God gets real. This is not a call to love a distant God, but a call to love God in our daily lives by recognizing that God lives in each of us and that by treating others with compassion, kindness, and dignity, we are in essence loving God.

I once worked in a church where my first office was an oversized closet. Along with my desk were boxes of things that tend to pile up in churches: leftover craft supplies, Mardi Gras beads from past pancake suppers, and old curriculum books. There was also a lovely image of Jesus, and if you looked closely, you could see that he was actually made up of hundreds of smaller pictures of people of all cultures and colors. It was a great reminder that we are in Christ and Christ in us, and that being a beloved child of God means we are called to recognize Christ in each and every person.

I will seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving my neighbor as myself. This is what I promised when I was baptized at age 35. And for me, this is where loving God gets real. This is not a call to love a distant God, but a call to love God in our daily lives by recognizing that God lives in each of us and that by treating others with compassion, kindness, and dignity, we are in essence loving God.

Most of us can acknowledge that seeking Christ in all people is hard work. It means we first need to slow down enough to

see the people around us, and we then have to remove our blinkers to recognize the holy in them—setting aside judgement and looking beyond the bits that annoy, discomfit, or even repulse us, in order to see the face of Christ. In seeking Christ, we remember that God commands us to love as God does.

Seek and serve is a call to action, not an invitation to simply think good thoughts about others. It's a call to look beyond ourselves and our affinities, to get outside of our heads and to delve deep into our hearts, and to take notice of our communities—the ones we live in. Seeking and serving calls on us to recognize where healing is needed and to ask ourselves how we might serve and how we might be Christ's hands and feet. Which of our neighbors is the Samaritan woman? Which the tax collector? Who is the leper? Are we caring for the battered man by the side of the road to Jericho—robbed, beaten, and left for dead?

Even in our daily lives, in the pandemic-imposed confines of our homes, we can serve one another. We can remember that we are striving to be whole, and we can encourage each other. We can build up rather than tear

down, in our families as well as on social media. We can avoid putting stumbling blocks in front of others with our words, subtle aggressions, assumptions, and divisive actions. And we can live our lives recognizing that *what we do matters*, that we share a home that sustains us, and that our daily habits affect everyone else.

As followers of Jesus, we have promised to seek and serve Christ in all others. Jesus hasn't called us to be quiet and stand passively by. Jesus has taught us to get into the mess of things. And sometimes it takes just that—being in the midst of the mess—to recognize the many faces of Jesus, kind of like encountering the unexpected Jesus mosaic in the messy closet that was my office. Seeking and serving Christ “in all persons” means recognizing that we are so fundamentally bound to one another that we can't truly function as the body of Christ without each member being whole and unhurt. It is only in our mutual wholeness that we thrive and become the holy people God longs for us to be. ■

TRACY METHE is the Missioner for Baptismal Living for the Episcopal Church in Colorado.

Celebrant: Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

People: I will, with God's help.

HAVING LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER

From Many, One: Conversations Across Difference

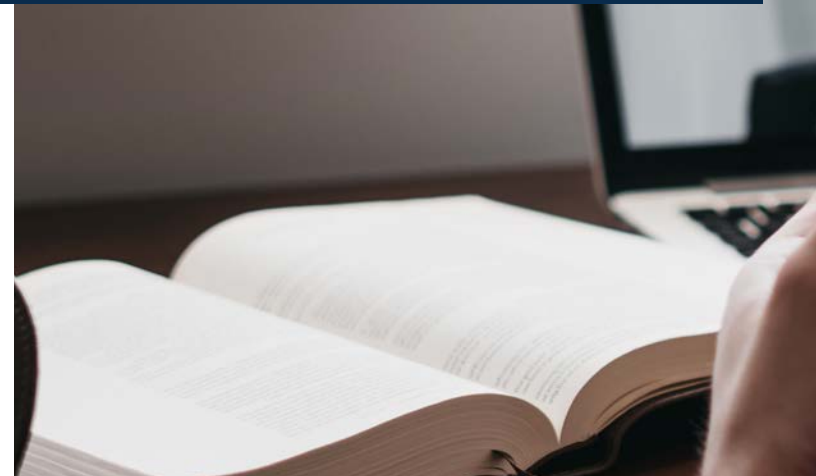
BY THE REV. CANON GREG FORAKER

Will you ... respect the dignity of every human being?

At baptism we celebrate the essence of our Christian faith, affirming the foundational beliefs that bring us into deeper relationship with God and bind us to God's beloved community, the Church. We engage our faith anew and reaffirm the transforming and life-giving power of the sacrament every time we reaffirm the Baptismal Covenant and renew our commitment to Christ. This series of faith-affirming vows culminates with our promise to respect the dignity of every human person. No simple promise in the best of times, and even more challenging and important now.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed almost every aspect of our lives. Many of our communities, neighborhoods, and, in some cases, our own families are divided as the pandemic is also affecting some people more than others. In the midst of our own suffering, amid suffering communities, we find ourselves stymied by physical distance and not knowing how we can move forward. Simple conversations, even with those for whom we care the most, are now difficult because what was once common ground has shifted.

Finding a way forward is nevertheless essential. Presiding Bishop Michael Curry expresses this plainly, "Conversation with others *across difference* is not just a nice thing to do. It is a spiritual practice of love in action." Conversation becomes a practice of repenting, forgiving, and reconnecting with each person from whom we feel estranged.



An important resource for Episcopalians, and by extension our family members and neighbors, "From Many, One: Conversations Across Difference" leads us to engage in one-to-one listening so we might share, across the differences, what defines and sometimes separates us.

Conversations are sparked by four questions:

1. What do you love?
2. What have you lost?
3. Where does it hurt?
4. What do you dream?

What do you love? *What do you value? What will you struggle to protect?*

So much of human action and thinking is driven not by hate or anger but by the urge to protect what we love. By asking and sharing our answers to "what do you love," each of us has a chance to name and to hear what matters most to us and why. It's harder to argue when we start from what we love.

What have you lost? *What keeps you up at night? What has been lost in your community? What do you miss?*

People across the spectrum understand loss: the loss of money, employment, status, national identity, cultural identity, a sense of security, a sense that they matter, etc. By asking and sharing our answers to "what have you lost," we become curious about what each of us has lost, what we're grieving, and perhaps what we're trying hard to get back.

Where does it hurt? *Where have you been*



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wounded by life? What makes you angry? How or where do you feel that pain and anger?

Regardless of our race, gender, age, ballot choice, earnings, or location, we all know what it is to hurt. By asking and sharing our answers to “where does it hurt,” we become curious about how each of us has been wounded by life, by others, and by social forces, instead of assuming “others” are fine and only I or my group is hurting. We offer up our experiences and learn to offer one another compassion.

What do you dream? *What do you hope for the future—for yourself, your family, your community, and your nation?*

We all dream of a better world, as we imagine it from our own personal perspective, but we don’t often get to hear or share that vision. People may assume their own ideal picture of life, community, and society is shared by everyone or that certain others can’t possibly want the same kind of future they do. By asking “what do you dream,” we become open to hear and share each other’s dreams for our families, communities, society, and ourselves.

Meaningful conversation around our differences is essential for our health and future, both individually and communally. By reflecting on what we love and value (and hearing what others value), grieving what we have lost and expressing the pain we each feel, we may begin to imagine a future with hope and renewed possibilities. When we do this, we renew our commitment to the core of our faith and live the Great Commandment that Jesus taught, “I give you a new commandment, that you

love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34–35). In our open, vulnerable and reconciling conversations, we renew our commitment to respect the dignity of every human person. ■

THE REV. CANON GREG FORAKER is the Canon for Formation for the Episcopal Church in Colorado.

EXPLORE MORE INFORMATION on how to engage with *From Many, One: Conversations Across Difference*. You can find explanations for each of the questions, suggestions on going deeper, and additional resources to keep your conversations going at episcopalchurch.org/from-many-one.

PRAYER FOR THE HUMAN FAMILY

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Book of Common Prayer, pg. 815

People: I will, with God's help.



The Rev. Mary Kate Rejouis works from her table at home.

Photo courtesy John Rejouis

Leading In a Pandemic

BY THE REV. MARY KATE RÉJOUIS

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On one of the first Sundays of Coronatide worship by Zoom, I choked up as I sang a short blessing over our people. My voice got squeaky and my face got red. A breath and a pause, and I was able to move onward and finish, but what our dear good people remembered was seeing, up close, the depth of grief we were just beginning to feel as a congregation and a country. There's no pastoral distance with Zoom.

I serve God as the rector of a small congregation and campus ministry a block from the football stadium at the University of Colorado, Boulder. I'm also a single mother of school-aged children, and this pandemic season unfolds from a corner of the big dining room table that longs for 18 or more around it again, our large backyard, and, of course, the square video of my face interfacing with church and world. As a church, we are sharing the losses with so many others: not gathering, not meeting, not singing in person. We have had more than the usual number of *things* in one year – vandalism, mailbox theft, storm damage. And we also experienced the loss of about 40 percent of our annual operating income when

college football was wisely and necessarily cancelled.


In good days, our proximity to campus is a boon for selling parking spaces. In hard times, it's just an empty parking lot to manage along with everything else. Whether it's expectations or math assignments or pastoral care or staff meetings or vastly amended budgets, to manage is to care for. That is what parents and leaders do: we manage.

FREEDOM, TRANSPARENCY, AND HUMILITY

Almost nine months in, our congregation is doing all right, even thriving in our Zoom Sunday groove and taking care of each other. This is what works for us – and it has to do with *freedom*, *transparency*, and *humility*. These leadership gifts matter in hard times and in easier times.

Early in the pandemic, I found a group that prays by Zoom daily for about 15 minutes, at just the right time. It's a group I don't lead, but I do my part when asked. What has been essential to everything is that I have a space to pray. Obvious, right? But easy to forget when home is work is school is playground is recess is leisure...is managing. I also know that I am reaping the benefits of a long-tenure and years of hard work. Here we have the trust and knowledge of each other that has let me lead clearly, knowing that if I make a mistake, I'll learn and re-direct. This season is harder for those who have just started in congregations, and we need to support those colleagues even more.

The boundaryless-ness of pandemic life is real, as are parenting and priesting. But it goes deeper – I find that I am never not working, but just



The boundaryless-ness of pandemic life is real, as are parenting and priesting. But it goes deeper – I find that I am never not working, but just changing realms: folding laundry while listening to a meeting, teaching new math while planning a funeral. (Is this the managerial apex of multitasking or just frenetic coping skills?)



The word “liturgy” means “work of the people” and every Sunday we share words of hope and comfort, together managing the resources of the household of God with freedom, transparency and humility. I hope we never stop.

changing realms: folding laundry while listening to a meeting, teaching new math while planning a funeral. (Is this the managerial apex of multitasking or just frenetic coping skills?)

Another word for boundaryless is *freedom*. Had we not all been home, I wouldn't have stopped during the day to jump on the trampoline during “recess.” I won't ever regret other benefits, like daily lunch together during elementary school. One of the freedoms of priestly work relates to the ontological change at ordination – I am a priest always. A wise friend once reminded me that “parson” is etymologically related to “person.” In a season where over-functioning and isolating might seem the best choice, we have the freedom to be human.

There is still a lot to manage, and losing staff and changing the way we do every single thing only increases that. But *transparency* about our humanity matters. I reached a point where I felt I couldn't do much more. So I said so: to the vestry, to the congregation and to colleagues. I asked for help. What unfolded was an abundance of lay ministry. It was the congregation calling each other to check in regularly; it was a vestry

agreeing when I said, “I'm not going to learn to be a video editor.” It was people having enough courage to lead small groups by Zoom on their own, the first small groups in decades in our little congregation. It was groups and committees staying connected because that was what they could do. They could see each other on screen, and they accepted that faithfully.

TRANSPARENCY AND TRUST FOSTER HUMILITY

We also decided to be transparent about our financial losses – not wringing our hands, not begging, just saying, “This is what we're dealing with and the Finance Committee is starting to work on it and we trust we'll get through it.” And God provides. We received a completely unexpected large gift from a stranger who heard our story; some bequests came just at the right time; some gave more, widows mites and also deeper abundance. We are enduring in lean times, seeing the challenges together. We are transparent without being self-pitying.

A third thing follows: good transparency is a kind of *humility*. It's been clear to me that, though there are many things we can't do, we are free

to do what the church does. In tiny gatherings, masked and distanced, we've married, baptized and buried, with the church maybe more present than ever before in prayer and love, though not in person. We have led with what little we have, providing more than \$15,000 in matching funds since May to our local food pantry – not because the church doesn't need it, but because we have the humility to know we are all in this together. We have shared these events and others with photos and words at our Zoom services. We leave no doubt that our church loves and lives.

Pre-pandemic, I was used to perfunctory silence at the prayers of the people. Now, there are more prayers, spoken out loud or in the chatbox, than maybe ever in our broad-church Episcopal congregation. Thanks. Be. To. God. The word “liturgy” means “work of the people” and every Sunday we share words of hope and comfort, together managing the resources of the household of God with freedom, transparency and humility. I hope we never stop. ■

THE REV. MARY KATE RÉJOUIS is the Rector of St. Aidan's Episcopal Church in Boulder.



I WILL, WITH GOD'S HELP

BY ELIZABETH CERVASIO

I will never forget December 23, 2018. Holding our daughter, I stood next to my husband—my brother and sister-in-law beside us, supporting us, as the four of us proudly proclaimed, “I will, with God’s help.” Everyone applauded and cheered as my daughter, Eva Rose the newest baptized member, was welcomed into God’s family. It was a special day indeed. And as I think about that wonderful memory, I’m struck by those five little words. “I will, with God’s help.”

This is no small thing we are committing to do. We are making a covenant, a promise, to follow in the footsteps of those before us, to resist evil, to turn back when we have done wrong, to proclaim the word of God and be an example of that word, to

seek God in others and then to serve them, to love them as ourselves, to strive for justice, peace, and respect the dignity of EVERY human being. That’s a tall order! And yet our response is a resounding “I will.” We often forget, I think, how we say not simply “I will,” but rather “I will, with help.” *With help.* This is not a promise we can possibly keep by ourselves. We need help. We enlist the help of godparents and the entire congregation. And right there in those five little words, we enlist the help of God.

We live in a society that doesn’t approve of people asking for help. We think we should pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. We invoke false claims like “God only helps those who help themselves.” Needing help has become synonymous with being

weak. And yet we love books like *Harry Potter* where the wise Dumbledore utters the words “Help will always be given at Hogwarts to those who ask for it.” And we teach our children to ask for help at the tender age of two. But somewhere along the way, we forget that it is OK to ask for help. And if we are baptized, we forget that we have freely and openly admitted that we need it.

Needing help is not something we grow out of. It remains true no matter what age you are, no matter how developed your faith is. It is not something we can escape. And it is not something that we should overlook. Right now, we need that help more than ever. We are living in the midst of a pandemic. Add the social unrest and hurt brought by systemic racism and the highly charged politics of an election year, and it's clear: We. Need. Help. That help comes when we make space for God to soften our hearts and to give us more patience and greater understanding—for strength and courage. *Strength* to speak truth. *Courage* to choose love. And we need to ask for our eyes to be opened so that we may always see God's reflection in those we encounter. We need God's help.

There is a beautiful song, one of my favorites, in “The Lord of the Rings,” where with her hauntingly beautiful voice, Enya sings, “A promise lives within you now.” How true that is for those of us who have entered into the baptismal covenant. Those of us who have been baptized live with that “promise within us” every day. Those who are considering or awaiting baptism live with that promise on their lips, ready to give. Those who have stood, speaking for those too young to speak for themselves, live with that promise on their sleeve, ready to support in any way they can. But whatever way you look at it, that promise is there. “I will, with God's help.”

God of creation. Of sorrow and of joy.
We promise to ask for help so that we may fulfill every other promise.
So we may live in a way that reflects you to a hurting world.
God of healing. God of steadfast love.
We need your help. May we never forget that.
Amen. ■

ELIZABETH CERVASIO is the Missioner for Children, Youth, & Campus Ministry for the Episcopal Church in Colorado.



Above: Children at St. Joseph's Episcopal Church, Lakewood. Photos courtesy the Rev. Michele Quinn

Below: A brother and sister with their masked bear before service at Christ's Episcopal Church, Castle Rock. Photo courtesy the Rev. Brian Winter





Above Left: A child watches the church service at St. Aidan's Episcopal Church, Boulder. Photo courtesy Sarah Sokhey

Below: In observation of the Feast of the Epiphany, Rev. Lisa Musser, Rector of Trinity Episcopal Church, Greeley, offered to provide house blessings throughout the town. Photo courtesy Karoline Woodruff



Above Right: A boy plays on the tire swing at St. Joseph's Episcopal Church, Lakewood. Photo courtesy the Rev. Michele Quinn





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