

Episcopal JOURNAL

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Episcopalians remember, reflect, pray for Notre Dame Cathedral



Photo/Ralf Roletschek via Wikimedia Commons
Flames engulf the roof of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris.

By Mary Frances Schjonberg
Episcopal News Service

While the world watched in stunned disbelief as Notre Dame Cathedral went up in flames on April 15 during Holy Week, many people, including Episcopalians, took to social media to post photos of their visits to the iconic church and offer prayers for the people of Paris.

Presiding Bishop Michael Curry joined with the Very Rev. Lucinda Laird, dean of the American Cathedral in Paris, and Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe Bishop in Charge Mark D.W. Edington, to offer “our sincere condolences and our readiness to offer any hospitality that would be of help to the community and congregation of Notre Dame in this most holy season of the faith we share.”

In a message on the American Cathedral’s website, the three said that “the cathedral of Notre Dame is more than an icon of the city of Paris; it is an ancient place of worship at which

Christians have gathered for nearly a thousand years. In this most sacred of weeks in the Christian year, all Christians mourn the damage caused by the ravages of a terrible and destructive fire in that holy place.

“The Episcopal Church throughout Europe, with its seat in the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Paris, expresses its sympathy to the people of Paris and to all who sense the immense loss of this priceless and historic house of worship. We extend to [Roman Catholic] Archbishop [Michel] Aupetit and to all his people our sincere condolences and our readiness to offer any hospitality that would be of help to the community and congregation of Notre Dame in this most holy season of the faith we share.

“We send our prayers in this week that ends in what we know to be the sure and certain promise of resurrection for the future life and restoration of this monument of Christian faith.

The American Cathedral is located about three miles from Notre Dame. Aupetit led a Good Friday procession

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Stations of the Cross commemorates survivors of sex trafficking

By ENS staff
Episcopal News Service

On the morning of April 6, the Port Authority Bus Terminal in New York became more than a transit hub — it became a site of prayer and activism that connected the Stations of the Cross to the plight of sex trafficking victims.

“The cross is a metaphor for sex trafficking,” said the Rev. Adrian Dannhauser, associate rector at Manhattan’s Church of the Incarnation and chair of the Diocese of New York Task Force Against Human Trafficking. Sex trafficking involves coercing, tricking or otherwise forcing people (mostly women and often women of color, and children) into prostitution.

Dannhauser and a group of some 30

faith-based activists — many of whom wore various hues of purple in support of sex trafficking victims and in recognition of Lent — gathered for a traveling model of the Lenten tradition, which connected the Stations of the Cross to elements of sex trafficking throughout the city.

Praying the Stations of the Cross during Lent is a centuries-old tradition that focuses Christians on the path of suffering that Jesus followed to his ultimate sacrifice on the cross, and for many Christians, that story is retold in solemn tones inside the walls of a church or chapel.

Organized by the Episcopal Diocese of New York Task Force Against Human Trafficking, Stations of the Cross for Sex Trafficking Survivors followed seven stations, abbreviated from the usual 14,

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Photo/Lynnaia Main via Facebook

Yvonne O’Neal, a member of the Diocese of New York Task Force Against Human Trafficking, leads a prayer at the third station.

CONVERSATIONS

The church is dead. Long live the church!

By Scott Gunn



SEVERAL OF MY church-going friends shared a recent op-ed from Fox News Opinion on their social media, “Church as we know it is over. Here’s what’s next.” The op-ed says that “the church needs to accept the fate of physical church as we know it, so we can move into the next phase of digital church.”

Yes, the old expectations that people will somehow just show up in churches must die. But the replacement is not digital church.

While I love connecting online, it isn’t the same as being part of a gathered community. Church as we know it may be over, but it’s time to reboot church as we know it — and our expectations.

Christians need to go to church. It’s that simple.

Let’s talk about why digital church isn’t enough, and then I’ll share three ways to change the pattern of declining attendance at church.

Digital church would work fine if church were only about transmitting content or selling a product. But a Netflix vs. movie theater metaphor won’t work for digital church vs. gathered church. We don’t go to church only to watch sermons. We go to church to be part of community, to pray with others, to offer our thanks and praise, and to learn from those around us. Digital church only works when our vision for church is quite small.

The thing about actual, gathered communities is that they’re messy in a very beautiful way. Churches are one of the last places in our red state/blue state world where we rub shoulders with people who hold different political views from us.

Churches are one of the only places in our segmented society where people of different races and socioeconomic status spend time together engaging in meaningful connection. Churches are among those few places with intergenerational connection, where kids can learn to form healthy friendships with adults outside their own families. We don’t enjoy any of these benefits if our only tether to church is digital.

When we join a church, part of what we gain is access to teaching and programs. But mostly what we gain is participation in a community. We get to practice reconciliation. We get to share joy with others when we are close to God, and we can draw inspiration from others when we begin to stray as followers of Jesus. It’s not impossible for this to happen with digital church, but it’s much more likely when we are in the same room as other people trying to figure out what it means to follow Jesus in this crazy, amazing world of ours.

Now, I do think that digital ministry is essential. People miss Sundays, and online sermons help people catch up on what they missed. Those who are looking for a church are likely to visit your website and watch your services to get a feel for what your church is like before they come for the first time. And online connection can help church members get through the week from Sunday to Sunday.

If gathered community is better than digital church, why aren’t people flocking to church? Because churches need to make some big changes.

It’s true that church attendance is decreasing. Here’s how to change that.

First, we have to offer better church. Back in the 1800s, famed preacher, Phillips Brooks disagreed with critics of those who were buying books of sermons instead of coming to church to listen to live sermons. Brooks said that

people wouldn’t be buying books if the sermons in their churches were better. In other words, preach better sermons. So it is with us. Instead of complaining that people are making other choices, we need to up our game. Our worship should be excellent and our sermons

‘We don’t go to church only to watch sermons. We go to church to be part of community’

must be both compelling and rooted in the Gospel.

Second, we have to teach Christians that coming to church matters. Several years ago, I was speaking with a group of clergy who began to complain that people weren’t coming to church as much anymore. I asked them if anyone had ever done teaching on why church matters. No hands were raised. We shouldn’t wonder that people don’t know the importance of Christian community if we haven’t taught this.

When people can’t come to church because of sporting events, we need to talk about the choice that they’ve made to prioritize playing sports over following Jesus. When people say they need the morning to rest, we should celebrate rest but also point out that our busy-ness is a choice. We can step off the treadmill of endless work and activity and leave room for really important things. Not every Christian can come to church every week, but every Christian should

have participation in church right at the top of their priority list.

Third, we do need to realize that Sunday morning isn’t sacrosanct anymore. Even small churches can offer a mid-week service. We can find ways to make church available for those who really cannot make it on Sunday mornings.

The article which inspired me to sing the praises of coming to church uses a bunch of statistics to show the value of online engagement. And I agree that online engagement is good, though it’s no substitute for coming to church. Here’s just one statistic about church. A Pew Forum study from 2019 says that people who actively attend church are happier and healthier than those who don’t.

But none of this is the best reason for we Christians to come to church. If for no other reason, we should do it because the Bible tells us to. And it’s not just that we need to do what the text says blindly. We need to follow the scriptural command because the command is right.

The tenth chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews says this, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” We Christians need each other to spur one another toward love and good deeds. I know I do.

Let’s meet together, even as we use online connections to stay in touch. Let’s meet together in church, because it’s good for us, it’s good for the church, it’s good for the world, and it’s good for God in Jesus Christ. ■

The Rev. Scott Gunn is an Episcopal priest and serves as executive director of Forward Movement. This column was first published on Fox News Opinion.

FROM THE EDITOR’S DESK



I FIRST LEARNED of the fire at Notre Dame de Paris by means of a text from my daughter: “Paris is burning!” Not sure what she meant, I thought of a terror attack, then saw on news websites that the venerable cathedral was apparently being consumed by fire and masses of billowing smoke.

A week or so later, as I write this, news reports are covering violent protests in Paris by “yellow vest” demonstrators, outraged that funds have rapidly built up for the restoration of a building and angry that their pleas for economic justice for humans seem to be unheard.

How can one fathom the reaction to the fire at the French capital’s most famous structure — one that draws more visitors than the Eiffel Tower — 13 million vs. 7 million?

Although it is a Roman Catholic edifice, people who profess no religious faith at all said they were distressed at the sight. It was hard not to weep, witnessing the red-hot inferno eat through the roof and destroy the ornate spire.

However, in today’s real-time world, we have witnessed many disasters. On Sept. 11, 2001, thousands died as we watched the World Trade Center burn and collapse. We mourned the people, not the buildings. Thankfully, no one died in the Notre Dame fire.

Other churches have burned and been mourned — and should be restored — but the world did not grieve.

We might say that our Western culture is exaggerating the importance of this event, yet the Japanese auto company Nissan has contributed to the rebuilding and the Japan Times called Notre Dame “a monument to the human spirit, a source of inspiration, hope and beauty to the world.”

Over the course of 850 years, that human spirit created a structure of such symmetry and beauty that it became a symbol for a nation. Its builders pioneered techniques in architecture and its artists created works of stirring drama. These factors converged in a place that reaches toward God in a way that stirs the soul.

Restoring Notre Dame doesn’t mean ignoring human needs — quite the opposite. Both can be revived. ■

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NEWS

Lodging for spouses becomes Anglicans' latest battleground over LGBT clergy

By Catherine Pepinster
Religion News Service

A British university that customarily houses those attending the Anglican Communion's worldwide gathering of bishops is welcoming same-sex clergy couples to stay on campus despite the archbishop of Canterbury's attempt to ban gay and lesbian bishops' spouses from the 2020 Lambeth Conference.

For years the issue of homosexuality and how the Church of England treats gay people has haunted the church and the wider Anglican Communion, causing a rift with African bishops who consider the church too liberal and distressing LGBT people who think the church is discriminatory and prejudiced against them.

Then, in February, the secretary-general of the Anglican Communion, Archbishop Josiah Idowu-Fearon, explained in a blog post that, because of the communion's position that marriage is a lifelong

union of a man and a woman, same-sex spouses would not be invited to the decennial church conference in 2020.

Idowu-Fearon's announcement reflected a decision by Justin Welby, archbishop of Canterbury and the communion's traditional leader, that the same-sex partners of those participating in the conference will not be welcome — while heterosexual ones will be accommodated. A predictable furor arose from Western bishops and other Anglicans.

The conference, which costs about \$6,500 (4,950 pounds) per person to attend, attracts delegates from across the globe to discuss issues of the day. It holds no legislative sway but influences moral and spiritual views within the communion. It is always held in Canterbury, despite its name (which refers to Lambeth Palace in London, residence of the archbishop of



Photo/Scott Gunn/ACNS
Bishops prepare for a group photo during the 2008 Lambeth Conference at the University of Kent in Canterbury.

Canterbury.) The nearest place that can hold the gathering and provide enough residential space is the campus of the University of Kent, which has hosted Lambeth since 1978.

The university agreed at first to house the clergy despite Welby's decision, citing a stipulation in the British Equality Act that bans discrimination on sexuality but allows it for religious organizations. But the university changed its stance after Bishop Kevin Robertson of Toronto was told that his husband, Mohan Sharma, could not attend the conference, and accused the archbishop of Canterbury of bowing to homophobia.

Robertson's fellow Toronto bishops also issued a statement calling the ban troubling. (Two other bishops, both Americans, have been affected by the ban as well.)

Kent University's student union has objected as well, saying in a statement

that exclusion of same-sex spouses "is not a value that we expect to see on campus and we are committed to championing inclusivity in all events." Protests from students and staff followed.

Last week the university met with communion officials to raise its "significant ethical concerns" after university Vice Chancellor Karen Cox and council chair David Warren said they had "serious issues," calling the no-same-sex-spouses policy "contrary to the values" of the university.

Both sides are refusing to divulge what the outcome of the meeting was, but the university has now pledged to make accommodation available to spouses who want to be based in Canterbury with their partners for the duration of the Lambeth Conference — a move that will focus attention even more intensely on the Anglican Communion's policy of exclusion.

Anglican Communion spokesman Gavin Drake said the Lambeth Conference would go ahead at Kent University in 2020, and he added: "We are not speaking about this issue at all. What Kent does is up to them."

The row comes 11 years after Gene Robinson, an openly gay U.S. bishop, was banned from the Lambeth Conference but traveled to Canterbury to appear there anyway while traditionalists stayed away from the event in protest at what they saw as the Anglican Communion's liberal stance on homosexuality. ■

More than 500 bishops registered for Lambeth 2020

Anglican Communion News Service

Organizers of next year's Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops have announced that 502 bishops and 382 spouses from 39 of the Anglican Communion's 45 member provinces and extra-provincial churches have so far registered for the decennial event.

The Lambeth Conference is one of four "Instruments of Communion" of the global Anglican Communion. Invitations are extended by the Archbishop of Canterbury to the bishops of the communion to gather for prayer and discussion.

Setting out his vision for next year's Lambeth Conference, Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby expressed his hope that it would be an opportunity to meet the world's need for the good news of Jesus Christ, saying that the world "needs to see it in our actions, envy it in our love together, and hear it in our confident proclamation of the good news of Jesus."

Amongst the first to sign up is Bishop Te Kitohi Pikaahu of Te Tai Tokerau in the Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia. He told ACNS that it was important for the bishops at the conference to discuss issues of peace and justice; the church's response to the effects of climate change and its impact

on humanity and the environment; poverty and injustice; and theology and Anglican ecclesiology.

The Bishop of Montego Bay, Leon Golding, of the Church of the Prov-



Photo/ACNS/Tumilty
Bishops attend worship in Canterbury Cathedral during the 2008 Lambeth Conference.

ince of the West Indies' Diocese of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, will be attending his first conference. "The most important issues the bishops need to address is those that divide. A divided church, which is different from a diverse church, cannot give creditable witness to a divided world," he said.

Another first-time attendee is Bishop Vitalis Yusuph of the Diocese of Biharamulo in the Anglican Church of Tanzania. "The most important thing that bishops should address at Lambeth Conference is how can we walk and serve together as Anglican family apart from our differences."

The last Lambeth Conference, in 2008, attracted 623 bishops and a smaller number of spouses. ■

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AROUND THE CHURCH

Kim to join Breck School

Heidi J. Kim, the Episcopal Church's staff officer for racial reconciliation, has resigned and said she will join the Breck School near Minneapolis as director of the Melrose Center for Servant Leadership. She joined the Presiding Bishop's staff in 2014.

"Episcopalians across the church know the difference Heidi Kim has made as our staff officer for racial reconciliation," said the Rev. Stephanie Spellers, canon to the Presiding Bishop for evangelism, reconciliation, and creation care. "Whether she's keynoting a conference or strategizing for Becoming Beloved Community, her wisdom and humor and fierce love for all God's people shine through. We wish her every blessing at Breck and look forward to a fruitful



Kim

search for the next staff officer in this crucial ministry."

As staff officer for racial reconciliation, Kim played a key role in the Episcopal Church's response to racial injustice. "Heidi has significantly enhanced the will and capacity of the Episcopal Church and its people, congregations and institutions to deeply grapple with the 'why' of the work of racial justice and reconciliation," wrote the Rev. Charles A. Wynder, Jr., staff officer for social justice and engagement.

Kim remains in her present position through June 30.

— Episcopal News Service

United Thank Offering set to award \$1.5 million

The United Thank Offering (UTO) is set to award \$1,535,740 in 2019, thanks to increased giving by people from across the church in 2018. UTO funds are granted on an annual basis to support mission across the Episcopal Church and throughout the Anglican Communion.

Donations made to the UTO 2018 Ingathering increased by \$15,495 over the 2017 thank offerings. Fifty-three Episcopal dioceses increased their giving. For a complete breakdown in giving by province and diocese since 2000, visit www.unitedthankoffering.com.

"We are so very grateful for everyone who participates in UTO each year," said UTO staff officer Heather Melton. "Not only because ... thank offerings go on to fund innovative mission and ministry in the Episcopal Church through UTO grants, but also because we believe that gratitude is an important and needed expression of faith in the world today.

If you think about the Ingathering as an expression of the good things God is doing in the midst of us, then at a dime a piece, that means Episcopalians experienced almost 11 million blessings in 2018."

Since 1889, UTO has collected and granted \$138,629,911 in thank offerings to support innovative mission and ministry in the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion through 5,257 grants. A full list of grants awarded by UTO is at www.unitedthankoffering.com. The 2019 grants will be announced in June.

UTO was founded to encourage Episcopalians to notice good things happening in their daily lives and make small thank offerings in small, individual UTO "Blue Boxes" or through the UTO Blue Box app. The following year, 100% of the thank offerings are awarded as grants.

— Episcopal Church Public Affairs Office

Virginia seminary expands financial aid

Episcopal Journal

Virginia Theological Seminary (VTS) has expanded and simplified its financial aid application and award process, and will allow anyone with assets less than \$200,000 (excluding a primary home and pensions) to have the costs of education covered, the school announced.

"Expanding and simplifying our financial aid packages is an investment in the future of the Episcopal Church," said Dean Ian S. Markham, president of VTS. "Many institutions are going tuition free, but we are going tuition free, housing free, meal plan free, and making a substantial contribution to healthcare."

In a move that will help ensure the Seminary's goal of making theological education accessible to all, effective

immediately, all students applying for financial aid for Fall 2019 with a combined adjusted gross income (single/family) less than \$150,000 annually and/or combined assets less than eight times a respective Cost of Residency category will receive a package that includes tuition, housing, a meal plan and a maximum contribution of \$4,000 towards healthcare cost for those selecting the VTS sponsored health insurance plan.

"We are thrilled to be able to offer such comprehensive scholarship packages to our students and to make theological education accessible for all," said Jacqueline Ballou, vice president for finance and operations.

"Student debt has become a multi-generational burden," added Markham. "VTS is in a fortunate position to make a difference." ■

OBITUARIES

Archbishop Barahona

Former Archbishop of the Iglesia Anglicana de la Region Central de America — the Anglican Church in the Central America Region (IARCA), Bishop Martín Barahona, died of cancer on April 13 in San Salvador at the age of 76. Barahona had been Anglican Bishop of El Salvador.

As the country was preparing to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the assassination of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of El Salvador, Óscar Romero, in March 2010, an unidentified man shot at his car.

Barahona was not injured.

He had served as a Roman Catholic priest for 11 years before joining the Anglican Church. He became Bishop of El Salvador in 1992 — the first Salvadorian to serve as bishop; and was installed as archbishop of IARCA in 2003 and served until 2011. He retired as bishop of El Salvador in January 2015.



Photo/ACNS

Barahona

In a statement, IARCA said that Barahona would be remembered as a campaigner for justice, the poor, human rights and ecumenism. He was a member of the National Council for Citizen Security and Coexistence in El Salvador and had played a significant part in the peace process that ended the civil war in 1992.

The Vice President of El Salvador, Félix Ulloa, paid tribute to Barahona, describing him as "a tireless fighter for human rights and the social causes of our people." ■

Marge Christie

By Mary Frances Schjonberg
Episcopal News Service

Margorie "Marge" Christie, a lay General Convention deputy from the Diocese of Newark (N.J.) who worked for the full inclusion of women and other excluded people at all levels of The Episcopal Church, died April 13 at the age of 90.

The Rev. Gay Clark Jennings said Christie "witnessed the first women being seated as deputies in 1970 and went on to serve at 13 General Conventions as a deputy or alternate deputy. My ministry and that of so many other women, lay and ordained, was formed and fostered by Marge's powerful witness and fierce insistence on women's leadership," Jennings said.

Christie's family plans a public memorial service in May or early June.

Christie began her ministry before women could be General Convention deputies. In 2006, she introduced the resolution for the House of Deputies to confirm the election of Katharine Jefferts Schori as the church's first female presiding bishop and thus the first female leader of an Anglican Communion province.

Bishop John Spong, who was Newark's bishop from 1979 to 2000, also said at that time that Christie "was a force to be recognized. She had more energy than 10 normal people."

Diocese of Fort Worth Deputy Katie Sherrod said Christie was "fierce and funny and one of the smartest people I ever met. I'd say rest in peace,

but good luck with that. Say a prayer for God."

Christie's involvement at the church-wide level began in the 1960s, when she was elected to the Department of Missions, formerly an all-male group. The Department of Missions was part of the church's National Council, the precursor to the Executive Council.

She was one of the first women to sit on Executive Council. An early member of the Episcopal Women's Caucus, formed to promote the ordination of women, Christie attended the groundbreaking 1974 ordination service of 11 women in Philadelphia.

In 1976, her first year in the House of Deputies, she cast her vote in favor of women's ordination. She was also present at the ordination and consecration of the Rt. Rev. Barbara C. Harris as the first female bishop of the Episcopal Church.

As a founding member of Anglican Women's Empowerment, Christie worked with Anglicans around the world for greater inclusion and opportunities for women everywhere.

Christie's ministry of advocacy for inclusion reached beyond her attention to women's voices. She was a founding member of The Oasis (the Diocese of Newark's LGBTQ ministry) as well as the diocese's Dismantling Racism Commission.

She was also concerned about how the church invested its money and in 1977 was appointed to the Committee on Social Responsibility in Investments. ■



Photo/Nina Nicholson

Christie

AROUND THE CHURCH

Anglican, Episcopal advocacy for women and girls extends beyond UNCSW

By Lynette Wilson
Episcopal News Service

The 63rd session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) focused on social protection systems, access to public services, and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Some 9,000 women and men — including Anglicans and Episcopalians — representing all regions of the globe attended the annual event, held March 11-22 at U.N. headquarters in New York.

“This 63rd session of UNCSW might seem like only a two-week event, but it actually builds on the hard work and action of previous generations of Anglicans and Episcopalians striving for gender equality and empowerment for women and girls,” said Lynnaia Main, who represents the Episcopal Church at the United Nations and coordinates and leads the Episcopal delegation.

“The networking and knowledge sharing from year to year helps us build relationships of support to sustain us for the long haul. We really need that, since the U.N. Secretary General estimates that it will be a 217-year marathon to achieve gender equality.”

Off-site, or side events addressed everything from building safe and empowering digital spaces for women and girls to a global perspective on sexual harassment in the workplace to closing the gender pay gap to economic empowerment to effective responses to modern-day slavery and human trafficking, including sex trafficking.

For instance, said Sam Hynes, a UNCSW delegate from South Dakota, when sex workers were given the microphone during an off-site panel about sex work, a discussion about decriminalization led to insights concerning decreases in violence, lower rates of sexually trans-

mitted diseases and fewer incidences of sex trafficking.

“Decriminalization of sex work and getting them [sex workers] involved can have a positive influence on [eliminating] sex trafficking,” said Hynes, who volunteered while in graduate school with a nongovernmental organization advocating for sex workers in Vietnam.

Decriminalization, she added, keeps sex work on the surface and “can decrease rates of STDs and HIV and eliminate violence,” whereas criminalization can lead to increases in violence against women.

Established in 1946, the UNCSW is the primary intergovernmental agency dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. Although the Episcopal Church has had a presence at the UNCSW since 2000, it has sent a delegation to official UNCSW proceedings only since 2014, when it gained consultative status with the U.N. Economic and Social Council.

On March 17, Anglican and Episcopal delegates gathered at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine for evensong. A



Episcopal UNCSW delegates Chiseche Mibenge, Diocese of El Camino Real, left, and Michele Roberts, Diocese of Delaware, stand together during a tour of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York.

closing Eucharist was held March 22 in the Episcopal Church Center’s Chapel of Christ the Lord.

The 63rd UNCSW precedes the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which laid out an agenda for women’s empowerment;



Photo/Evan Schneider/UN

Participants at the opening meeting of the 63rd United Nations Commission on the Status of Women met in the General Assembly Hall.

it was adopted in September 1995 during the Fourth World Conference on Women.

The worldwide tilt toward conservative, nationalistic governments and the backlash to the #MeToo movement loomed large during this year’s conference, with delegates, including Episcopalians, expressing fear that a fifth world conference and a potential revision of the Beijing Declaration could chip away at some of the gains women have made over the past 25 years.

Still, there’s a long way to go, as Cynthia Wilson D’Alimonte, who represented the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe, learned. D’Alimonte was drawn to panels and discussions about the challenges widowed women face in the developing world where their choices and rights are still limited, marriage is sometimes forced, and property ownership laws, in some cases, still don’t apply to women.

“Their destiny is not in their hands all by decree of country and culture,” she said.

During the meeting, there was some debate over the definition of “family” as it was presented in the draft of the agreed

conclusions, which is the final document produced by the conference.

Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the family has been described as the fundamental unit of society; however, that doesn’t always have a positive connotation.

“When very male-dominated, patriarchal societies think about the family, they think about it as a private space as opposed to a public space,” said Chiseche Mibenge, who represented the Diocese of California and who teaches human rights at Stanford University.

“And the private spaces, they swear a social worker, a police officer, a court of law will not enter into. When, in general, we talk about the right to privacy, it’s a very male-centric ... do not enter my house, government, and we know that women and children can be extremely vulnerable in their homes,” she said.

Michele Roberts, a first-time Episcopal delegate from Delaware and Washington, D.C., and a long-time fighter of environmental racism, said she hoped to use the language around the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals in her advocacy at the local, state and federal levels. ■

General Convention 2021 dates, location announced

Following a decision by the Joint Standing Committee on Planning and Arrangements, the General Convention Office has announced the ten legislative dates for the 80th General Convention will be June 30 to July 9, 2021.

The convention will be held at the Baltimore Convention Center in the Diocese of Maryland.

“The Joint Standing Committee on Planning and Arrangements and the General Convention Office are already hard at work to plan and enhance our meeting in Baltimore for the 80th General Convention,” noted the Rev. Canon

Michael Barlowe, executive officer and chair of the committee.

General Convention, the church’s bicameral governing body, is held every three years. It is comprised of the House of Bishops, with upwards of 200 active and retired bishops participating, and the House of Deputies, with clergy and lay deputies elected from the 109 dioceses and three regional areas of the Church, numbering more than 800 members.

For more information contact the General Convention office at GCOoffice@episcopalchurch.org.

— Episcopal Church Public Affairs Office

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NEWS

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near Notre Dame during which he said, “France is crying, and all of her friends around the world with her.”

On Easter Sunday, Aupetit paid tribute to the firefighters at a special Mass held at the basilica of Saint-Eustache, Paris’ second-largest church, on the right bank of the Seine river. He gave a Bible that had been rescued from Notre Dame to a group of the firefighters, who were honored at the Mass, according to news reports. Notre Dame parishioners also were in attendance at the service in the 17th-century church, as their home church stood empty and silent.

“Everyone is affected by what happened to Notre Dame. Easter is a holiday we celebrate every year, all our lives. Clearly what happened at Notre Dame added to the importance [of the service],” Parisian Michel Ripoche told the Associated Press.

A chamber orchestra and choir paid tribute to the cathedral on Easter Sunday by staging a flash mob and playing Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy” on the bank of the Seine across from the cathedral, according to an ABC News report.

“It’s important for me, because I can play the violin. So I can do what I can do,” said American violinist Lisa Fogler. The group also performed “La Marseillaise,” the French national anthem.

The fire — apparently an accident that began during renovation work — destroyed Notre Dame’s roof and spire, but the interior was largely saved. The government of France, French corporations and individuals from around the world have pledged more than \$1 billion

toward a rebuilding campaign. France’s President, Emmanuel Macron, pledged to rebuild the cathedral within five years.

The most famous of the world’s medieval Gothic cathedrals, Notre Dame was begun in 1163 on the Île de la Cité in the Seine and was considered finished in 1350. It rose on the site of two earlier churches. Prior to those churches, the site held a Gallo-Roman temple dedicated to Jupiter. Some of the Roman ruin can still be seen below the cathedral. About 13 million people visit the Roman Catholic cathedral each year.

At Washington National Cathedral, a place that has known the impact of disaster since an August 2011 magnitude 5.8 earthquake caused tens of millions of dollars of damage, Dean Randy Hollerith expressed solidarity with another cathedral in what he called “a small sisterhood of globally recognizable Gothic cathedrals.”

Evensong at the cathedral on April 15 included a prayer for Notre Dame and a copy of the prayer was placed in the church’s St. John’s Chapel for those who wanted to light a candle for the church community in Paris.

“Our hearts are breaking for their loss, but we know that this great cathedral has touched and inspired millions of people around the world, and that impact can never be destroyed,” Hollerith said.

The Rev. Broderick Greer, canon pro-

centor at St. John’s Cathedral in Denver, wrote a prayer for Notre Dame, which the cathedral offered on its Facebook page “from one cathedral to another.”

The Rev. Vicki Geer McGrath was among the many Episcopalians who posted their prayers and reflections on Facebook. She told parishioners at All Saints’ Episcopal Church in Millington, N.J., where she is the rector, that buildings do not make a church; however, “a place that is built to hold and inspire the faith and prayers of believers, and to contain the hopes and aspirations of all men and women, becomes a vessel and vehicle of holiness, no matter how

simple or how grand.”

McGrath wrote that she was moved by people — “their faith and hope on very public display” — who gathered in the streets of Paris, praying and singing hymns as they watched Notre Dame burn.

Acknowledging the increasing secularization of Europe and the United States, she suggested that it is time for all Christians “to pray earnestly and daily for the renewal of our faith in Christ and for new life for the church” and “each one of us will be inspired and directed to be God’s agents in a new flowering of faith and life in Christ.” ■



Photo/Reuters/Philippe Wojazer

Smoke rises around the altar in front of the cross inside Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris after a devastating fire consumed the roof and steeple.

Small Palm Sunday fire breaks out at New York cathedral

Episcopal News Service

The day before the Notre Dame fire, on Palm Sunday, a fire broke out in the crypt of the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York, sending smoke into the 124-foot-high stone nave and forcing the evacuation of about 100 people. The fire began after the 9 a.m. service had ended. The 11 a.m. service was moved outside, as was the Sunday soup kitchen.

Cathedral dean Clifton Daniel said the fire started in an art storage room and was contained to that space. About three-quarters of the art was saved, but the fire destroyed a valuable icon and a 16th-century chair, as well as some prints, drawings and carvings, he said. He credited the New York Fire Department’s prompt response for keeping the damage to far less than it could have been.

The cathedral was open on April 15, but because of ongoing cleanup, public tours were cancelled, as were three services scheduled for Monday of Holy Week.

Recalling his reaction to hearing about the Notre Dame disaster, Daniel said, “my first thought, even though I wasn’t here, was oh, God, it’s just like the fire in 2001 here.”

A week before Christmas Eve, a six-alarm fire burned through the timbered roof trusses, which caved in, destroying the north transept, he said. The 2001 fire also severely damaged the Great Organ

and two of the cathedral’s Life of Christ Barberini tapestries. Sections of the cathedral were closed until 2008 for cleaning and restoration.

“My second thought was oh, the trauma, the trauma. It will take years to recover from the trauma. You will recover, but it will take time,” Daniel said. “And then I thought, those poor people, all that suffering, all that history, all that hope. It’s going to be a tough time.”

Daniel said some people asked him if the two fires this week were a sign. He told them they showed “we’re in a season of dying and rising.”

Flames may have destroyed art at St. John the Divine and a large part of Notre Dame, “but, you know what, we rise again,” he said, noting that the 2001 fire

left the cathedral “a little bit scarred” but still at work among the people of New York.

“I feel confident that Notre Dame will be repaired, restored, renewed and will go on about its mission,” Daniel said, adding that along with the hard work that will be required in the coming years comes “an opportunity for renewal and strength to move ahead.” ■



Photos/Clifton Daniel/ENS/via Facebook

New York firefighters run hoses into the Cathedral of St. John the Divine.

A Palm Sunday service is moved outside to the cathedral’s lawn.

NEWS

TRAFFICKING continued from page 1

across three of the city's boroughs.

The bus terminal served as the first station. Located near Times Square, it is the nation's largest and busiest bus terminal. It's open 24 hours a day and, because of its location in a tourist district and its nearly 200,000 daily visitors, the terminal has long been a hot spot for traffickers, pimps and others who scout for vulnerable women to coerce into prostitution.

Each stop reflected Jesus' journey on Good Friday and the burden of commercial sexual exploitation, featuring opening devotion and liturgy from faith leaders, as well as speeches from trafficking survivors. Attendees visited a shelter and service provider for homeless youth, a strip club, an area of the Bronx known for street prostitution, a human trafficking intervention court in Queens, John F. Kennedy International Airport and a hotel in Brooklyn known for commercial sex.

"This was the most profound experience I've had this Lent. [We heard] from survivors of sex trafficking who, after such suffering and degradation, have resurrected into a new life of service and advocacy — women who have found their voice and are now empowered to help others. The prayers were very moving. I led at the third station and at the last. The suffering of Jesus felt real on this day," said Yvonne O'Neal, a member of the New York diocese's task force and the Episcopal Church's representative on the United Nations NGO Committee to Stop Trafficking in Persons.

"Sex trafficking is on the increase. I wonder who among us in the pews on Sunday mornings are the Johns in this horrific industry. Are they listening to the message of Jesus Christ? The Diocesan Task Force Against Human Trafficking is bringing awareness to this scourge throughout the diocese. I want us to talk about this evil from the pulpit — our priests should not be afraid to address these hard issues of various forms of interpersonal violence."

Kevin Booker, who recently became a member of St. James' Episcopal Church in Manhattan, said he attended the event to learn more about the Stations of the Cross and ways he could help combat sex trafficking.

"The mechanisms of sex trafficking in the city are insidious and surround us on a day-to-day basis, and we're not really aware of it," he said. "If I can pray my way into the situation, into awareness about it and be around people who are really motivated to do something ... this event, in a strong way, feels like an answer to prayer."

New York is in the midst of a trafficking epidemic, according to news reports, and police, task forces, faith groups and

other activists have been working to combat this multilayered issue. Jim Klein, New York Police Department Vice Enforcement Unit inspector, told AM New York that his team has found 12-year-old girls and 35-year-old women working as prostitutes, some of whom are forced to have sex 25 to 30 times a day.

At Covenant House, a youth homeless shelter that served as the event's second stop and proxy for the fourth station where Jesus meets his mother, approximately 23 percent of clients have been commercially sexually exploited, said Covenant House New York Executive Director Sister Nancy Downing. "We witness how the life, dignity, hope and dreams of hundreds of young people are stripped of them by sexual predators," she said, noting that the issue of sexual exploitation goes far beyond New York City.

Covenant House operates in 31 cities across six countries in the United States and Latin America, serving more than 80,000 youth. "Imagine 23 percent of 80,000 young people," said Downing.

In 2017, the NYPD rescued one person a week from sex slavery and



Photo/Lynnaia Main via Facebook

The Rev. Adrian Dannhauser is associate rector at New York's Church of the Incarnation and chair of the Diocese of New York Task Force Against Human Trafficking.

arrested 228 pimps while working 265 sex trafficking cases, the Post reported — more than twice the case load of 2016. "Trafficking is a bigger problem than what the numbers show," Klein told the New York Post. "On average, a pimp is going to have at least four or five women, girls, that he's going to be working. [And] I haven't locked up every pimp." Many of those victims are from New York, recruited in their neighborhoods or online.

Among the survivors participating in the event was Gigi Phoenix, who came to New York at age 18 and was recruited at the Port Authority terminal by a pimp who coerced her into sex and drug use. Outside JFK airport (the sixth stop and 10th station), Shandra Woworuntu, an Indonesian survivor-advocate, discussed how she was stripped of



Photo/ENS

The Port Authority Bus Terminal served as the first station for Stations of the Cross for Sex Trafficking Survivors, led by the Diocese of New York Task Force Against Human Trafficking.

agency and the American dream, much like Jesus was stripped of his garments.

"He made you carry a cross you could not bear," Dannhauser told Phoenix, reflecting on the story of many trafficking victims. "We pray for victims who remain entrapped and enslaved in the sex trade ... We hope to instill in them a sense of self-worth that will allow them to seek hope."

The Stations of the Cross event marked the beginning of a campaign against a proposal to decriminalize sex work in New York state. In an open letter to the New York Daily News, newly elected state Senators Julia Salazar and Jessica Ramos said their bill would "repeal statutes that criminalize consensual sexual exchange between adults and create a system that erases prostitution records for sex workers and sex trafficking survivors so they can move on with their lives."

Under New York's current penal code, immigrants, women of color, trans women and LGBTQ youth bear the burden of laws supposedly designed to protect them, the state senators said. "People arrested for prostitution are then diverted to the Human Trafficking Intervention Courts, or HTICs, which conflate all sex work with sex trafficking and claim to treat sex workers as 'victims' while essentially treating them as 'criminals,'" the letter continued. Anti-trafficking advocacy organization Polaris gave New York state a "D" on its criminal record relief report card.

Yet on the steps of one such court in

the borough of Queens, faith leaders and attendees criticized the decriminalization proposal. Victims of sex trafficking should not be criminalized for their victimhood, they concurred, but traffickers and sex buyers should be.

"Prostitution and trafficking are violent trades; there is no such thing as safe prostitution. That's why it's so hard to fathom that we have legislators looking to decriminalize the violent, harmful disease-ridden, trauma-laced sex trade," said the Rev. Que English, a senior pastor at the Bronx Christian Fellowship, CEO and founder of Not On My Watch NYC, and convener of Traffic-Free NYC. English called the decriminalization proposal a "demonic dark bill in the making" and cautioned that it would lead to legal brothels that view pimps as entrepreneurs.

"These efforts are being built on discriminatory practices, built on the backs of predominately black and brown communities and the most vulnerable among us," she continued. "These legal brothels ... will not be on Fifth Avenue, they're not going to be on Park Avenue, they will not be in Country Club or Riverdale. They will be where we find massage parlors and liquor stores on every corner, in our poorest districts, while the buyers will continue to come from the other side."

However, both English and the bill authors advocate for more education and early intervention for vulnerable children 11-15 years old, as well as employment services, healthcare and housing. ■

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PHOTO FEATURE

Easter celebrations: He is risen!

Episcopal churches marked Easter Sunday, the holiest day in the Christian year, with Eucharistic services, music, flowers, egg hunts and brunches.



The shield of the American Cathedral in Paris features an image from the city's coat of arms — a sailing ship. It refers to the French capital's Latin motto: "fluctuat nec mergitur." (She is rocked, but does not sink.) Dean Lucinda Laird wrote to Episcopal Journal that the motto "means a lot right now in the context of the tragic fire [at Notre Dame]."



Photo/courtesy of the American Cathedral

The Great Vigil of Easter service takes place the night before Easter Sunday. At the American Cathedral in Paris worshippers hold candles in the darkened church, symbolizing Christ as the coming of light.



Above, Paul Winter, artist in residence at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York, plays at the 2017 Easter Sunday service.



Right, the Rev. Canon Patrick Malloy, sub-dean at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York, gives communion to an adult holding a child dressed in Easter finery.

Photos/Kay Winter



Photos/Danielle E. Thomas

Washington National Cathedral's Easter Sunday service, left, includes a procession with choral singers and colorful banners, above.



Photo/Solange De Santis

Brian Santangelo, 2, places a flower during the children's "flowering of the cross" at Easter Sunday services at St. Thomas Church, Mamaroneck, N.Y.

FEATURE

Maundy Thursday clinics offer foot care

By David Paulsen
Episcopal News Service

Foot-washing ceremonies, a tradition enshrined in the Book of Common Prayer, were part of Maundy Thursday observances in Episcopal churches, re-creating an act of service that Jesus performed for his apostles as “an example, that you should do as I have done.”

Some dioceses and congregations expanded their Maundy Thursday (which fell this year on April 18) activities to include foot-care clinics and free socks and shoes for the clinics’ patrons, who typically are the churches’ homeless neighbors.

“For a lot of people who are poor and homeless, their feet are their primary mode of transportation,” said the Rev. Steven King of Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Omaha, Neb., who organized the cathedral’s second annual foot-care clinic.

Similar clinics were scheduled for Maundy Thursday at St. Luke’s Episcopal Church in Jamestown, N.Y., and at Christ Church Cathedral in Cincinnati, where the annual event goes by the name “Sole Clinic.”



Photo/Steven King

Volunteers from an Omaha, Neb., beauty salon tend to the feet of patrons at the Maundy Thursday foot-care clinic at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in 2018.

“A lot of this is just talking and hanging out while we’re washing their feet,” Cheryl Eagleson, Sole Clinic’s lead organizer, told ENS. The cathedral also offers a hot breakfast, bagged lunches and a choice of new shoes.

In San Diego, several Episcopal congregations work together on Maundy Thursday to turn the diocese’s Episcopal Church Center into a full-service stop for homeless residents. Foot washing and shoe distribution are included, but patrons also can visit a shampooing sta-

tion, get a haircut, visit with a dentist or a doctor, take pets to see a veterinarian and listen to live music while enjoying a hot meal.

“It’s just a day about loving people that the world considers disposable,” said Hannah Wilder, communications



Photo/Diocese of San Diego

The foot-care clinic hosted by the Diocese of San Diego features foot washing and other services, from free shoes to vet checkups for pets.

director for the Diocese of San Diego.

In Maundy Thursday services, the Book of Common Prayer recommends foot-washing ceremonies after the Gospel reading and homily. The Gospel readings recount the story of Jesus’ Last Supper with his disciples. Jesus washes his disciples’ feet in John 13:1-15, and in Luke 22:14-30, Jesus responds to a dispute among the disciples by admonishing them and commanding them to serve, rather than wield authority.

The word “maundy” is an Anglo-French word derived from the Latin “mandatum,” which means “commandment.” Jesus told the disciples, “a new commandment I give you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you.” (John 13:34)

In congregations that take that call to serve a step further on Maundy Thursday, their foot-care clinics often complement well-established feeding ministries, through which volunteers already have established connections with the people whose feet they will wash.

The feeding ministry at Christ Church Cathedral, in downtown Cincinnati, is called the 5,000 Club, and it typically draws more than 100 people to a free dinner every Tuesday. Eagleson, who serves as the cathedral’s head verger, makes announcements about the Sole Clinic on three Tuesdays leading up to Maundy Thursday, so those interested in participating can register and get their feet sized for new shoes.

The Sole Clinic has been a cathedral tradition for several years. Last year, Southern Ohio Bishop Thomas Breidenthal and several Episcopal clergy members joined more than two dozen other volunteers in serving 92 clinic guests, Eagleson said. They also gave out 280

pairs of socks and 180 sandwiches.

Eagleson distributed nearly 140 tickets at the 5,000 Club dinners. She upped the number of shoes purchased and expanded the washing stations in the cathedral’s undercroft from eight to 12. The cathedral budgets about \$2,500 for the annual event, mostly to cover the cost of shoes, supplies and a meal.

“It is a very important ministry to me,” Eagleson said. “Having the opportunity to serve one another in whatever capacity is a great thing.”

King, who serves as director of congregational life at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Omaha, said in an interview with ENS that he was inspired to start a Maundy Thursday foot-care clinic after hearing about a similar ministry at Trinity Episcopal Church in New Haven, Conn. He also saw an opportunity to build on the Omaha cathedral’s feeding ministry, which on Wednesdays serves about 100 homeless neighbors, many of them staying at a nearby shelter.

Last year, at the cathedral’s first Maundy Thursday clinic, the congregation gave away 110 pairs of shoes, and thanks to the publicity the event generated, King prepared for the turnout to double this year. Additional



Photo/Christ Church Cathedral

Cheryl Eagleson leans on boxes of shoes that were distributed at a foot-care clinic at Christ Church Cathedral in Cincinnati.

services include an enhanced foot-washing station, where volunteers from local beauty salons soften calluses and perform pedicures. A local podiatrist volunteers his time and advises guests on any health issues related to their feet.

Other priests have asked King for advice in replicating the clinic at their congregations. “It’s really not a hard thing to do but both reveals and proclaims a really important piece of our faith,” King said. ■

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NEWS

Episcopalians continue humanitarian response along Southwest border

By Lynette Wilson
Episcopal News Service

A month and a half ago, asylum-seekers arriving in Nogales, Mexico, faced a three-week wait for an initial interview to enter the United States legally. More recently, those wait times have more than doubled, putting a strain on humanitarian relief efforts.

“The biggest challenge is the wait time ... It’s up to eight weeks now, and we need to keep collecting monetary donations to feed these people,” said the Rev. Rodger Babnew, a deacon at St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church just across the border in Nogales, Ariz.

Like other Episcopalians living along the Southwest border — which stretches more than 1,550 miles from Brownsville, Texas, to San Diego, Calif. — Babnew’s ministry has turned toward meeting the humanitarian needs of asylum-seekers. Through an ecumenical partnership with the United Church of Christ and the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Babnew coordinates the Diocese of Arizona’s border ministry, which includes a 600-person capacity shelter system (including two homes set aside for people quarantined with chickenpox and measles) in Mexico, where asylum-seekers receive a place to sleep, food, medical attention, clothing and transportation assistance.

Asylum-seekers began arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border in caravans last fall, many of them attempting to cross through Tijuana to San Diego. Since that time, asylum-seekers increasingly have moved east along the border, to crossing points in Arizona, New Mexico and Texas.

By definition, asylum-seekers are fleeing violence or persecution in their homeland and seeking sanctuary elsewhere. When asylum-seekers arrive at the U.S.-Mexico border, typically they are given a number that guarantees their place in line for what’s called a “credible fear” interview.

If credible fear is established, asylum-seekers are given an electronic bracelet and released from U.S. custody, the majority reuniting with family members already in the United States while they await a formal asylum hearing. Wait times for court hearings now can last up to two years.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents might release asylum-seekers onto the streets and at bus

stations, as the government does not provide humanitarian assistance. This is where faith-based and other nonprofit organizations come in, supplying asylum-seekers with shelter, food, medical care, clothing and assistance booking travel arrangements so they can reunite with sponsors, typically family members. Increasingly, as trust has grown, border agents cooperate with faith-based and other humanitarian groups and release asylum seekers into their care, said Babnew, at least in Nogales.

Unlike in El Paso, Texas, where

fleeing gang- and drug-related violence in Central America’s Northern Triangle, a region that includes El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. More than 700,000 people have been forcibly displaced by violence in the Northern Triangle. (Forcible displacement is a global phenomenon affecting a record 68.5 million people worldwide.)

“Rates of violent death in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala are some of the highest in the world and comparable with those of other armed conflicts internationally,” wrote Noah Bullock, executive director of Cristosal, in response to a New York Times’ editorial that called for building up Central America, rather than building a border wall.

“The optics of death and destruction in the region differ from those of traditional armed conflicts, yet the humanitarian consequences are acute; people are tortured, raped, disappeared, killed; families torn apart, livelihoods and property are destroyed,” he wrote.

Cristosal is a San Salvador, El Salvador-based human rights organizations with longstanding ties to the Episcopal Church. Because of its early work addressing forced displacement, the organization receives funding from USAID and has expanded its operations into Guatemala and Honduras.

In late March, President Donald Trump announced his administration would cut \$1 billion in designated aid to El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. The aid funds programs like those developed by Cristosal that address poverty, gang violence, security and drug trafficking. Some lawmakers criticized the president’s decision, saying the aid cuts would only worsen the situation on the ground.

In February, Trump declared a national emergency to build a border wall, citing an invasion at the southern border. More recently, the president declared: “Our country is full” and called the U.S. asylum system a “scam.”

Trump made curtailing immigration a centerpiece of his 2016 campaign and, since taking office, has issued executive orders and has supported policies and legislation to cut legal immigration.

“As we have seen over the past two years, the administration is creating chaos at our southern border in order to advance harmful policies like long-term detention of children and disregarding guaranteed rights of asylum-seekers. The Episcopal Church believes that families, children, and individuals seeking protection should not be condemned as

creating a national emergency or crisis, but rather should be recognized as children of God who deserve to be treated with fairness and dignity,” said Broemel, who works for the church’s Washington, D.C.-based Office of Government Relations.

“There are strategies and solutions to process asylum-seekers in a safe and orderly manner, to address the situations forcing these persons to flee in the first place, and to ensure that the U.S. is maintaining its moral and legal obligations when it comes to asylum-seekers,” she said. “The Episcopal Church has official policies passed by General Convention that urge the administration to employ such strategies as increasing aid to Central America, employing alternatives to detention, modernizing our ports of entry, and hiring child welfare professionals to assist with the children and families at the border.”

On April 4, the Episcopal Church joined the National Immigrant Justice Center and other human and civil rights and faith-based organizations in issuing a framework to address the “crisis” at the border. The framework “describes steps the U.S. government must take to uphold U.S. and international law, and basic human rights, in a region that has been increasingly destabilized by the president’s anti-immigrant agenda.”

In November 2018, the Diocese of Rio Grande, whose geographical territory includes 40 percent of the Southwest border, hosted a summit that brought together people engaged in borderland ministry to share experiences and practices.

This network of Episcopal borderland ministries has led to increased cooperation across the Southwest. For instance, when immigration agents in the Rio Grande region told Babnew they intended to release 1,500 asylum-seekers over a three-day period, he called Rio Grande Bishop Michael Hunn, and together they found shelter space for everyone.

The Rio Grande diocese also has responded to humanitarian need in El Paso and in Las Cruces and Albuquerque, N.M., where St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church recently helped 55 asylum-seekers over a four-day period. When the asylum-seekers were released from U.S. custody, the church provided them with beds, shelter, food and medical care and helped arrange transportation to reunite them with family members.

In El Paso, the Rev. Justin Gibson, vicar of St. Francis on the Hill, issued a call on April 3 for baby formula, some of it for new mothers unable to produce breast milk to feed their babies.

“Formula — that’s a sign of how desperate the situation is,” said Hunn. “Women are under such stressful conditions that they are not lactating; we reached a different level of humanitarian need.” ■



Photo/Jose Cabezas/REUTERS

People belonging to a caravan of migrants from Honduras en route to the United States walk through Tapachula, Mexico in April.

asylum-seekers crossing through Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, have been held in fenced-in areas under bridges while waiting for credible fear interviews, things have gone more smoothly in Nogales, a city of 20,000 an hour’s drive south of Tucson.

“We don’t have that, we don’t have people sleeping on the border or standing in line,” said Babnew, in an interview with ENS.

At the current rate of 100,000 “migrants” attempting to cross the border monthly, 1 million will have entered over a 12-month period. Asylum-seekers and migrants are not one and the same; the latter is someone who typically moves temporarily for work or other reasons.

“Each asylum-seeker who enters the United States and expresses fear of return or declares an intention to seek asylum is granted an interview with a trained U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) asylum officer,” said Lacy Broemel, the Episcopal Church’s refugee and immigration policy adviser, in an email message to ENS.

“If [asylum-seekers are] found to have a credible fear of returning home, they are legally entitled to be able to apply for asylum and present their case to an immigration judge,” she said.

In recent years, asylum-seekers increasingly have joined the flow of migrants seeking economic security in the United States. Many of them are

NEWS

Bible Challenge connects parish with women's prison

By Richelle Thompson
Episcopal News Service

On both prison cots and comfy parlor chairs, two communities in the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania are taking a singular journey of reading the entire Bible together over the course of the next year.

The Rev. Jennifer Mattson presented an idea to the leadership of St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Lancaster, Pa.: take up the Bible Challenge — an initiative to read the entire Bible over the course of a year, by taking 15 minutes each day to read sections from the Old and New Testaments, a psalm, and a proverb. But Mattson didn't stop there. She wanted to extend the initiative to the local women's prison, inviting the inmates to participate in the Bible Challenge alongside the people of St. Thomas.

"This is a congregation truly willing to try new ideas," said Mattson. "Their commitment to inclusion and love blows me away. Reading Scripture is foundational to discipleship, to having a relationship with God. There is something so profound about being steeped in God's word. When you do that as a community, I think there's something transformational that happens."

In a congregation with an average Sunday attendance of 100, 60 people of all ages joined the Bible Challenge. And the congregation made a commitment to the prison as well, purchasing 30 Bible Challenge books for the women's spirituality group there.

"These are ladies who have been isolated, rejected, for all sorts of reasons," said Stacey Catigano, a chaplain at the prison and postulant for the diaconate. Doing the Bible Challenge with the people of St. Thomas "reminds them that community is beyond walls, beyond barbed wire, that God is with them. This practice is a divine thread, connecting

them to the larger community."

The path to this shared journey of engaging Scripture wasn't straight.

Catigano didn't plan on ministering in a prison. After a career as an assistant chaplain in the Army, she thought she was called to hospice ministry. But for one reason or another, things weren't working out, and the needling idea of volunteering at a prison kept resurfacing.

It was difficult at first: hot, lots of angry people, not the type of ministry Catigano thought God was calling her to. That is, until one day, she looked at the prison roster and noticed a bunch of women with the same first name as hers, even spelled the same.

"God converted my heart that day. I had been 'othering' the women in the prison, and I realized that I am them and they are me, and we are all children of God," said Catigano, her voice tight with emotion. "I see beautiful things happening here. God is definitely here."

Like Catigano, the Rev. Jane Miron had no desire to visit prisons. She lived out her diaconal vocation through food banks, clothing closets and other hands-on ministry. The locked doors of a prison scared her.

But Catigano's repeated invitation to help with a Bible study in the prison wore down Miron's resolve, and she made her first visit.

"During that time with the women, something changed for me," Miron said. "The honesty and realness of the women keeps me balanced and focused ... I can get so caught up with doing 'God's work' and being busy in the church that I forget

that we are called to go out into our communities — all of our communities."

Miron and Mattson alternate leading the women's spirituality group at the prison, along with Catigano. People have covenanted to pray with and for one another throughout the year, Mattson said. In the congregation, affinity groups are

much bigger community: More than 1 million people have participated in the Bible Challenge since it began in 2011, said the Rev. Marek Zabriskie, founder of the program.

"We've experienced enormous spiritual hunger in the Episcopal Church as well as other mainline churches," said Zabriskie, now rector of Christ Church in Greenwich, Conn.

"Members have been eager to engage Scripture and to develop a daily spiritual practice of reading the Bible in a prayerful manner that leads to spiritual growth and transformation."

Zabriskie said this is the first such prison/congregation partnership for the Bible Challenge, but other creative partnerships have flourished, such as with schools and book clubs.

"It can work wherever there is a willing spirit," he said.

For Miron, the Bible Challenge is both an opportunity to dive deep into Scripture — and to live out its words.

"Whenever we yoke with other groups that are in a different place or different part of our community, I think there's something really powerful in that," Miron said. "It's so easy to get isolated in our individual parishes — any time you partner with different groups and focus on what we have in common, on God's word, then it strengthens your spiritual foundation and leads to our collective spiritual growth." ■

Richelle Thompson is deputy director and managing editor of Forward Movement, a ministry of the Episcopal Church that publishes books and other resources.



Photo/Jennifer Mattson

Jay and Pat Anderson and the Rev. Jane Miron, left to right, of St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Lancaster, Pa., are participating in the "Bible Challenge."

developing: parents with kids under the age of 13, the Wednesday lectionary group. In the prison, participants are engaging the Bible Challenge in a variety of ways, from lectio divina (literally meaning "divine reading," an ancient practice of praying the Scriptures) to adventure/comic book Bibles.

"God speaks to people in different ways," said Catigano. "Overall, what I've noticed is that the women know that I am reading the Bible and that the people of St. Thomas are reading it with them. It broadens the sense of community, and that's very important to the women. For me personally, this process connects me to God and connects me to God's community in a very profound way."

The women's spirituality group and the people of St. Thomas are part of a

Court upholds tax exemption for clergy housing expenses

By Mary Frances Schjonberg
Episcopal News Service

In the latest installment in a nearly decade-long effort to have the Internal Revenue Service's clergy parsonage exemption declared unconstitutional, the federal Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled just the opposite.

A three-judge panel said March 15 that the principal effect of the tax exemption is "neither to endorse nor to inhibit religion, and it does not cause excessive government entanglement."

Seventh Circuit Judge Michael B. Brennan, writing for the unanimous panel, said "any financial interaction between religion and government — like taxing a church, or exempting it from tax — entails some degree of entanglement." But, he wrote, only "excessive entanglement" violates the U.S. Con-

stitution's Establishment Clause. The clause in the First Amendment prohibits the government from establishing an official religion, unduly favoring one religion over another, favoring religion over non-religion or vice versa.

The opinion marked the second time that the Seventh Circuit has overturned Judge Barbara Crabb of the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Wisconsin, who has ruled that IRS Code Section 107(2) is unconstitutional. That section allows the exclusion from taxable income of cash housing allowances to "ministers of the gospel," if certain conditions are met.

"The tax code treats ministers the same as hundreds of thousands of nonreligious workers who receive tax-exempt housing for their jobs — that's not special treatment, it's equal treatment," Luke Goodrich, vice president and senior counsel at Becket Fund for

Religious Liberty, a nonprofit law firm that intervened in the lawsuit on behalf of various ministers, told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.

Freedom from Religion Foundation leaders Annie Laurie Gaylor, Anne Nicol Gaylor and Dan Barker have claimed for years that the IRS "parsonage exemption" violates the U.S. Constitution by providing preferential tax benefits to religious leaders. (Anne Nicol Gaylor has since died and been replaced in the suit by a representative of her estate, Ian Gaylor.)

The plaintiffs say that although the foundation gives them a housing allowance, IRS rules deny their attempts to claim the related expenses under the parsonage exemption because they were not deemed "ministers of the gospel." Annie Laurie Gaylor is a layperson, as was Anne Nicol Gaylor, her mother. Barker, the foundation's public relations

director, is an ordained minister whom the foundation says "gradually outgrew his religious beliefs."

Reacting to the latest ruling, Gaylor called the exemption "so clearly a hand-out to churches and clergy, and it so clearly shows preferential treatment and discriminating in favor of ministers."

Brennan, a President Donald Trump appointee who has been on the court since May 2018, wrote that the foundation says the exemption "renders unto God that which is Caesar's." But this tax provision falls into the play between the joints of the Free Exercise Clause and the Establishment Clause: neither commanded by the former, nor proscribed by the latter.

Gaylor told the Associated Press that the foundation was weighing whether to ask the full Seventh Circuit to review the case or take it to the U.S. Supreme Court. ■

FILM REVIEW

‘Best of Enemies’: Real faith and racial reconciliation on the big screen

By Mark I. Pinsky
Religion News Service

In a darkened North Carolina parking lot, an angry black woman waves her Bible in the face of an equally angry, shotgun-wielding white man who has just told her his weapon speaks for him.

“This here does the talking for me,” she shouts in the new film, “Best of Enemies.” “Same God made you, made me!”

Not the most promising start for a buddy movie. And definitely not what Hollywood screenwriters mean when they say their protagonists “meet cute.”

Set in Durham, N.C., in 1971, before the erstwhile textile and tobacco factory town became overshadowed by Duke University, the movie spotlights a dramatically unlikely — but nonetheless true — pairing: a local Ku Klux Klan leader named C.P. Ellis and Ann Atwater, a black community activist and single mother.

Through their friendship and shared Christian faith, the two demonstrated the possibility of reconciliation in the midst of a traumatic school integration controversy.

Based on Osha Gray Davidson’s 2007 book, “The Best of Enemies: Race and Redemption in the New South,” the film opened nationwide in April and stars Academy Award nominee and “Empire” star Taraji P. Henson as Atwater and Academy Award winner Sam Rockwell as Ellis. Anne Heche plays Ellis’ wife, Mary.

The film is firmly in the feel-good, “uplifting” movie genre — complete with a “Green Book”-ish resolution.

But while “The Green Book” featured what some African-Americans criticized as yet another cinematic “white savior,” the human savior in “Best of Enemies” is Atwater, a powerful black woman.

Despite its Best Picture Oscar, “The Green Book” also stirred controversy for inaccuracies pointed out by the family of its now-deceased African-American hero. By contrast, “The Best of Enemies” has the virtue of being accurate to both characters’ and their families’ recollections.



Ann Atwater, left, and C.P. Ellis, right, talk as they wait to see the premiere screening of the video documentary “An Unlikely Friendship” on Nov. 9, 2001, on the University of North Carolina campus in Chapel Hill, N.C.

At the film’s premiere earlier this month in Durham, Henson said she was in awe of Atwater, who died in 2016.

“Ann was able to put her differences aside and see C.P. Ellis as a human,” the actress told the Duke Chronicle. “She was able to tap into his heart, and by doing that, she changed his heart.”

On the red carpet outside the restored Carolina The-



Photo/courtesy Astute Films

From left, Sam Rockwell, Babou Ceesay and Taraji P. Henson in “The Best of Enemies.”



Image/courtesy Astute Films

“The Best of Enemies” film poster.

atre in downtown Durham, Henson told a television reporter that the story of Atwater and Ellis was “a living testimony of love winning.”

And faith played a key role.

This odd couple bonded during an experimental 10-day encounter event between a group of black and white North Carolinians, held at a local junior high school. Funded by a federal grant and administered by the North Carolina AFL-CIO, Durham’s “community summit” on racial reconciliation was styled after the problem-solving seminars known as “charettes.” This style of seminar derives its name from its origin among French architects.

The two longtime antagonists were thrown together as the co-chairs of the charette, which was dubbed “S.O.S.” for “Save Our Schools.”

“Well, in the first five days of the meetings, we had a choir come in, a gospel choir, a church choir — to come in and do some singing,” Atwater recounted on NPR in 2005. “And C.P. was sitting there, and first he started clapping his hands. And he wasn’t clapping his hands even along with us; he would clap an odd beat. So I grabbed his hand and trying to show him how to clap along with us at the same time ’til we learned him how to clap.”

At the end of another session, according to the Raleigh News & Observer, “a black choir sang inspirational gospel tunes. Atwater knew Ellis was coming around when she caught him tapping his foot to the music.”

In the movie, the music incident unfolds quite differently than Atwater recalled in real life. In the movie, an angry white man responds to a suggestion that they include inspirational music in the program by saying, “Gospel music doesn’t have anything to do with this!”

Other real-life events were also far more dramatic than how they were depicted in the movie.

The two characters almost came to blows outside of a school during the integration crisis, Atwater told NPR’s Melissa Block.

“When I’d walk up to the school building, I had my white Bible in my hand,” Atwater said. “So I told C.P. we would see whose God would be the strongest, my God or his God. I always said if they’d said something

to me, I was going to knock the hell out of them with my Bible.”

After battling for a decade over court-ordered school integration, they found that they had two things in common: poverty and powerlessness. Both had hard lives.

Atwater, a diabetic, barely survived on public assistance and her small salary as an organizer for a community organization called Operation Breakthrough. Ellis had to work two jobs to help support a child with multiple disabilities.

“I worked my butt off and never seemed to break even,” Ellis told radio host Studs Terkel in one of two appearances on his program. “They say, ‘abide by the law, go to church, do right and live for the Lord and everything will work out.’ It didn’t work out. It kept gettin’ worse and worse. I began to get bitter.”

Ellis had become an unenthusiastic churchgoer by the time he met Atwater. In the film, he is disconcerted when, sitting across from him in an assigned seat in the school’s cafeteria, she says a silent grace over her lunch.

Eventually, faith transformed both Ellis and Atwater.

“In church, the preacher says that if you want to be like Jesus you must be ‘born again.’ That really is the only way I can describe it,” Atwater wrote in a newspaper column. “We couldn’t be friends without forgiving one another.”

Many of Atwater’s family members, including her daughter, were in the audience for the film’s Durham premiere, which benefited the Rev. William Barber’s Poor People’s Campaign. The film’s first public screening was the previous morning for an audience of 600 Durham school students in honor of the school desegregation fight that is the centerpiece of the movie.

Not everyone was impressed by the friendship between Atwater and Ellis.

The two were subjects of articles from the New York Times to the Nation magazine, a book by Terkel, and a 2002 PBS documentary entitled “Unlikely Friendship.”

At the time, some skeptics saw the charettes and Atwater and Ellis’ joint speaking appearances as the embodiment of feel-good, wishful thinking.

But the pair was undeterred by such criticism.

“God had a plan for both of us, for us to get together,” Atwater said in her eulogy at Ellis’ 2005 funeral, following his death at 78 from Alzheimer’s, according to the Los Angeles Times obituary. ■

Freelance writer and author Mark I. Pinsky lived in Durham during the time depicted in the book and movie.

COMMENTARY

Why talk about women priests now?

By Margo Guernsey

I was born in 1974. I am not Episcopalian. I was raised in a UCC church with a male minister, but knew of plenty of women ministers and never questioned women's leadership in the church. I'm of the generation that always knew of Episcopal women priests, and did not know the struggle that came before. I always assumed it was the norm.

About seven years ago, I learned about the Episcopal ordinations that took place in Philadelphia in 1974, and was blown away by the bravery of the women involved. At what point did they decide to challenge a venerable institution? How did they consider the risks? The more I have uncovered, the more I respect others who were an important part of the process including the members of the Church of the Advocate (site of the ordinations), the priests who were taken to

This was not a small event. The ordinations in Philadelphia in 1974 rocked Christianity by questioning who speaks the word of God. By celebrating their call to the priesthood, these women suggested that God does not have a gender. The media flocked to the story. Major print and broadcast networks covered it for two years.

We are now in a historical moment where patriarchy, white supremacy, untruthful media, and other oppressive structures are flexing their muscles. For people on the front lines, there is a day-to-day challenge of survival. Within any struggle, there is also opportunity to learn from the leaders who have come before us.

The Philadelphia ordinations confronted patriarchy in new ways, simply by being direct. Male bishops and priests who participated in the civil rights movement, and spoke publicly on behalf of women's rights, were suddenly forced to examine their own positions in a patriarchal institution.

The ordinations upend generally held assumptions about civil rights and gender. In the 1970s, most leaders of the women's movement supported white women's issues at the expense of women of color, and low-income women. Black male civil rights leaders tended to focus only on race, and not on other forms of oppression. Yet there was an intersectional element to these ordinations. Eleven white women were ordained in a black city church, under the leadership of an African-American rector who was actively supportive of the Black Panther Party. An African-American woman led



Photo/courtesy Episcopal Church Archives

Eleven women kneel at the altar of the Church of the Advocate, Philadelphia, during their ordination on July 29, 1974.



Photo/RNS/Chris Sheridan

From left, the Revs. Alison Cheek, Carter Heyward and Jeannette Piccard celebrate a eucharistic service at Riverside Church in New York on Oct. 27, 1974.

ecclesiastical trial, and the bishops who ordained them. They jeopardized their careers, their parishes, and their futures, in order to support a group of women who were called to the priesthood.

As a former union organizer, student of the civil rights movement and college history major, I understood these ordinations as a kind of civil disobedience that has been forgotten to history classes and the next generation. I believe they should be a part of our national narrative when we tell the story of twentieth century America. That is why I embarked on a journey to make a feature length documentary film, currently titled "The Philadelphia Eleven: To Be Whole."

the procession, and would later become the first woman ordained a bishop in the Anglican Communion. A number of the women ordained identified as queer. They did not feel safe making that public; yet the white male bishops ordaining were prepared to defend them if anyone were to raise the issue publicly.

What can we learn from this intersectional challenge to a patriarchal system? I do not think there is ever one clear answer; but there is a lot to contemplate. I strive to make a film that will inspire viewers to go beyond first impressions to a deeper discussion.

The women ordained in 1974 and 1975 stayed true to their call to



Photo/courtesy of Margo Guernsey

Director of Photography Nikki Bramley, right, records an interview with the Rev. Marie Moorfield Fleischer for Director Margo Guernsey's film on the first women ordained in the Episcopal Church.

the priesthood despite institutional obstacles, and by doing so they challenge us to look at our own lives. How do we pursue our vocations regardless of whether society is ready? How do we keep our integrity when it feels like the easy answers ask us to compromise? How do we stand up for justice in every moment when life pulls us in so many different directions? I can imagine post-film discussions where we all reflect on how the story of the original women priests asks us to consider big questions that confront us in our own lives.

In 2015, I, along with my friend and fellow filmmaker Nikki Bramley, started filming the women ordained

"irregularly," because we did not want to lose the opportunity for the women to tell their own stories. The generation that lived through the irregular ordinations have a personal connection that only they can relate. I recognize how different that experience is from my own. I find I am at my best as a director when I am listening and allowing the protagonists of the story to lead. We need to finish filming while we still have the first women priests with us. ■

Margo Guernsey is a documentary filmmaker based in Boston, Mass. For more information about "The Philadelphia Eleven," go to TimeTravelProductions.com.

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FILM REVIEW

In new film, Mary Magdalene is reimaged

By Cathleen Falsani
Religion News Service

Daughter. Sister. Doula. Repairer of nets. Fisher of men (and women). Revolutionary. Believer. Healer. Baptizer. Companion. Witness. Disciple. Apostle to the apostles.

In the new film “Mary Magdalene,” the biblical character Mary of Magdala is all of these things and more — but not the one role in which she was historically (mis)cast: the so-called “fallen woman.”

Misunderstood, misinterpreted, and maligned, only in recent years has Mary Magdalene’s reputation been restored, both by official religious decree and in popular consciousness.

In the new film, Rooney Mara’s depiction of Jesus’ closest female follower — “Mary you are my witness,” he tells her after she washes his feet before the Last Supper — is the embodiment of this contemporary (some might say “corrected”) vision of an ancient archetype.

For nearly two millennia, Mary Magdalene’s enigmatic persona has captured the imagination of artists of all stripes, from painters, iconographers and sculptors, to novelists, musicians and poets.

In most of these portrayals, Western art has depicted Magdalene, variously, as a voluptuous ginger-haired temptress, a sorrowful penitent who weeps as she prays for forgiveness and a dutiful follower clutching the foot of the cross on which Jesus suffers or cradling his feet while his mother holds his crucified corpse.

“Mary Magdalene” director Garth Davis and his filmmaking partners went into their initial stages of research “assuming we would be making a film about a prostitute,” said producer Iain Canning. “We were just sort of embarrassed and horrified that we’d been part of a mistaken narrative. So that was even more a catalyst and reason to fast-track as much as we possibly could a different interpretation.”

Raven-haired, lithe Mara, who is perhaps best known for her title role in David Fincher’s thriller “The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo,” portrays Mary Magdalene with an almost hushed delivery. Her understated, clear-eyed portrayal lent new dimension to the woman who is at once sacred icon and artistic iconoclast.

The result is a nuanced and quiet, almost contemplative, film where viewers might find themselves leaning in to listen more closely.

The film debuted in the United Kingdom and Europe last year, but its U.S. release was delayed when, in the wake of the #TimesUp and #MeToo movements, producers sought a new distributor to replace the Weinstein Company. The film found a new home at IFC, which released the film on April 12.

“I’ve been trying to write in the voice of Mary Magdalene for maybe 35 years — it may be my oldest impulse,” said Marie Howe, the former poet laureate of New York and author of the 2017 collection “Magdalene: Poems.”



Rooney Mara stars as the title character in the new film “Mary Magdalene” alongside Joaquin Phoenix as Jesus.

“Like so many women throughout the Western, Judeo-Christian world, I was compelled by Mary Magdalene because she seemed like me, she seemed recognizable. At the same time, I sensed that the woman I saw in paintings and who was described by priests and church fathers was a lie,” Howe said.

In Howe’s poetry, Magdalene is a kind of everywoman. In some poems she is a mother, in others a single woman and then a young girl. In the poem “Magdalene — The Seven Devils,” based on the biblical passage in Luke that describes Mary of Magdala “from whom seven devils were cast out,” the poet reimagines what those “devils” might have been.

The first was that I was very busy.

The second — I was different from you: whatever happened to you could not happen to me, not like that.

The third — I worried.

The fourth — envy, disguised as compassion.

“She’s you,” Howe said. “She’s me.”

The exorcism of Mary is one of the more harrowing scenes in the “Mary Magdalene” film. What possesses her, as with Howe’s depiction, is less a demon than her having a mind of her own — a “sin” she nearly pays for with her life.

It is while Mary Magdalene is recovering from the would-be exorcism that she first meets Jesus, played by Joaquin Phoenix. “There are no demons here,” he tells Mary, smiling as he places a hand on her forehead. “Rest now. Rest in the light.”

Vermont artist Janet McKenzie has created dozens of paintings depicting sacred and biblical characters, including her well-known 2000 portrait “Jesus of the People,” where the model she used was an African-American woman.

McKenzie’s “Mary Magdalene — Invitation to Love” presents the female disciple as a woman of color draped in violet and rose-hued robes and holding a red egg between her tented fingers, a traditional symbol that “Christ is risen.”

“This is Mary Magdalene for the church of the 21st century,” McKenzie said. “(She) is presented here for the women of the church today who teach the children, raise the funds, clean the pews, comfort the sick and dying, preach the word, preside at the Eucharist and work for justice.”

“People of color in particular have been marginalized and systematically left out of sacred art,” she said, “but here Mary Magdalene is front and center, celebrated as a dark-skinned woman... she stands and looks at us, feet planted firmly on the earth.”

McKenzie has left space about Mary’s head at the top of the painting “purposefully open-ended” as a “place of unlimited possibility.”

That Mary Magdalene was a prostitute or a woman of ill repute and loose morals is scripturally baseless, a fiction created by Pope Gregory nearly 1,500 years ago, according to Cynthia Bourgeault, the Episcopal priest, modern-day mystic and author of the book “The Meaning of Mary Magdalene: Discovering the Woman at the Heart of Christianity.”

In his Homily 33, in the year 594, Gregory said in part, “She whom Luke calls the sinful woman, whom John calls Mary, we believe to be the Mary from whom seven demons were ejected according to Mark. And what did these seven demons signify if not all the vices? ... It is clear, brothers, that this woman previously used the unguent to perfume her flesh in forbidden acts. What she therefore displayed more scandalously, she was now offering to God in a more praiseworthy manner.”

Some feminist scholars view this as a deliberate, systemic effort to undermine the spiritual authority of Mary Magdalene, transforming her apostolacy into apostasy. Bourgeault sees less conspiracy than cultural projection in Pope Gregory’s assertion that Mary the Apostle was a “penitent whore.”

“In an emerging church hierarchy founded on the assumption of male-only and celibate succession from the original apostles, Mary Magdalene’s apostolacy was clearly an anomaly and a threat,” Bourgeault writes. Such a portrayal is “primarily the work of the church’s collective unconsciousness” and the “inevitable shadow side of its increasing obsession with celibacy and sexual purity.”

Nevertheless, Pope Gregory’s asser-

tion that Mary Magdalene was a rehabilitated sex worker became and largely has remained her prevailing narrative within Christendom, despite the Vatican officially correcting its official teaching about Magdalene in 1969.

(The Orthodox Church never has taught that she was a prostitute, while the Anglican Church first included July 22 as her feast day in 1549 but three years later deleted it. It would be more than 400 years before her feast day was returned to the Book of Common Prayer.)

In 2016, Pope Francis took the church’s efforts to course-correct one step further, by proclaiming her memorial on July 22 an official feast day on the liturgical calendar. The decree, titled (in Latin) “Apostle of the Apostles,” says that as she was the first witness to the risen Christ and announced his resurrection to the disciples, she should be celebrated with the “same level of festivity given to the apostles” as an “example and model to every woman in the church.”

“A lot of Hollywood films that quote from the Bible can be really bombastic,” Canning said. “We really wanted

let the words speak for themselves... and sometimes even no one do the talking and let the experience wash over people.

“We really wanted to create a film that is, at its very core, about love, forgiveness, charity and understanding,” he said.

The film is ambivalent about whether Mary Magdalene and Jesus were more than “just friends.” Erotic or not, their relationship was intimate in the most sacred understanding of

that term, and that’s what is important, Bourgeault said.

Interestingly, Mara and Phoenix, who is 11 years her senior, reportedly have been real-life partners since falling for each other during the filming of “Mary Magdalene.”

“Mary Magdalene was a full apostle of Jesus, one of great brilliance, she walked the talk, which is why he loved her particularly and (why) they were so close. I mean, she really got it. And the film picks up on that absolutely brilliantly,” Bourgeault said.

She found scenes in the film — where Mary Magdalene baptizes women (because they believed social mores precluded a strange man from touching them) and where she has the courage Peter (Chiwetel Ejiofor) lacks to go into a cave to bring water and a merciful touch to dying lepers — especially powerful.

“She’s the apostle not only of a spunky spirit, but the apostle of a transforming love,” she said. “She shows the two are absolutely wedded together in a heart on fire. That’s what we have to have the courage to dig into nowadays if we’re going to answer the angry darkness of the world with the fire of love.” ■



“Mary Magdalene: Invitation to Love,” by Janet McKenzie.

NEWS

Illinois congregation helps families eliminate medical debt

By David Paulsen
Episcopal News Service

Last year, parishioners at Emmanuel Memorial Episcopal Church in Champaign, Ill., took stock of the results of a centennial capital campaign. They had a good problem on their hands: Building renovations, funded. Local charities, supported. And they still had a \$15,000 surplus.

That \$15,000 may not seem like a lot, but with the help of a New York-based charity called RIP Medical Debt, Emmanuel Memorial leveraged the surplus to help wipe away unpaid doctors' bills for 3,617 cash-strapped households across the Diocese of Springfield.

Total debt forgiven: \$4 million. "The forgiveness of debt is a Gospel thing. It's throughout the Old Testament. It's throughout the New Testament," the Rev. Beth Maynard, Emmanuel Memorial's rector, said in an interview. "This is the season of Lent. We are, all of us, people who have been forgiven by God and whose debts have been forgiven by Christ on the cross."

Forgiveness — sealed in bright yellow envelopes — arrived in mailboxes across central and southern Illinois. RIP Medical Debt began sending the envelopes last week to notify recipients that their medical bills have been eliminated thanks to Emmanuel Memorial's intervention.

RIP Medical Debt uses the money it raises from donors like Emmanuel Memorial to purchase bundled financial

portfolios of medical debt, which it then eliminates. The organization's website describes debt forgiveness as "a collective message of care from and for the communities we serve."

News outlets in central Illinois have asked anyone receiving one of the envelopes to come forward and share their stories, Maynard said. The church doesn't have any of the recipients' names because their identities are shielded by medical privacy protections, but Maynard, too, would love to learn more about the lives affected by the debt forgiveness.

Families struggling under the weight of medical debt "might be facing a crippling situation," she said, even if they aren't the usual recipients of the congregation's typical outreach efforts, which include a sack lunch ministry for homeless people.

"It gave us an opportunity to impact a lot of people who might not necessarily come to our door ... or might not necessarily be involved with one of the social service organizations that we partner with," Maynard said.

She wasn't able to say how the congregation first learned about RIP Medical Debt, but the seeds of this outreach were planted 100 years ago, when the church was built from a design by Ralph Adams Cram, the renowned Episcopal church architect who died in 1942. Cram churches are more common in the Northeast than the Midwest, Maynard said, so the congregation, with about 200 member households, takes special pride in its historic building. Therefore,



Photo/Emmanuel Memorial Episcopal Church

The Rev. Beth Maynard, rector of Emmanuel Memorial Episcopal Church in Champaign, Ill., holds a sign promoting the congregation's donation to RIP Medical Debt. She and other church leaders pose with Springfield Bishop Dan Martins, who stands to the right of Maynard.

they had no problem raising \$150,000 for a capital campaign in 2017 and 2018 to celebrate the church's centennial.

Most of that money went toward minor building repairs and new signs, and the congregation set aside some of the proceeds for a local homelessness ministry called C-U at Home, and Empty Tomb, which connects volunteers with families in need.

With the remaining \$15,000, RIP Medical Debt initially estimated that the congregation could help forgive about \$1 million in debt, Maynard said. The charity, by negotiating down the price

of the debt, estimates that it usually can forgive about \$100 in debt for every dollar donated.

On a large scale, eliminating medical debt could have a profound effect on the lives of millions of American families. A recent report in the American Journal of Public Health found that medical expenses were a factor in nearly 60 percent of bankruptcy filings, and RIP Medical Debt estimates more than 43 million Americans have a total of about \$75 billion in past-due medical debt. Another report found that Americans borrowed

continued on page 16

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Same-sex spouses not invited to Lambeth Conference
By Mary Frances Schipberg
Episcopal News Service

Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby is not inviting same-sex spouses to the 2020 Lambeth Conference of bishops.

HE IS RISEN!
Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Italians, Methodists ponder full-communion proposal
The dialogue committee is due to gather again in a previously scheduled meeting April 29 in Austin, Texas, during which, Rome said, some of the its current policies.

Spouses who attended the 2008 Lambeth Conference of Bishops pose on the University of Kent campus in Canterbury.

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Global Mission Conference highlights evangelism

By Global Episcopal Mission Network

We try to combine evangelism with social action,” said Bishop Moisés Quesada Mota in explaining the approach of Episcopalians in the Dominican Republic, one of the fastest growing dioceses in the Episcopal Church. “We are a new humanity that Christ has shown in the church. We are the living gospel of Jesus Christ that has come to life in the church so we can take the message to others and show the light to people.”

Quesada was speaking in a panel discussion at the 2019 Global Mission Conference that his diocese co-hosted with the Dominican Development Group, April 3-5, in Boca Chica, Dominican Republic. Organized by the Global Episcopal Mission Network (GEMN), 120 people from all over the Episcopal Church were wrestling with the role of evangelism in the church’s global mission under the theme, “Sharing Jesus: Mutual Witness in Global Mission.” The bilingual conference included simultaneous translation between Spanish and English.

“The gospel is a different news, a radical news,” said keynote Bishop Griselda Delgado del Carpio of Cuba. “It is the news of knowing that each human being has a dimension inside of themselves that they cannot fulfill without God — the presence of God and the strength of the Holy Spirit. It is news that is different from the dominant culture, where people have so much anxiety and confusion without a horizon. The gospel is the horizon, the space where we are transformed fully. It is radical and coherent. It allows us to find happiness in our lives.”

It took courage for Cuban Christians to witness to their faith in the ideological environment of communism after the Cuban revolution of 1959, Delgado said as she described the steady and multi-dimensional growth of the Episcopal Church in Cuba in recent decades. “We used to say ‘Cuba for Christ.’ Now we say, ‘Christ for the Cuban people,’” she noted in highlighting the church’s effort to integrate gospel proclamation with the social and economic needs of Cubans today.

“While you are doing medical mission, economic development, gender empowerment, constantly seek, name and notice Jesus’s loving presence,” said keynote the Rev. Stephanie Spellers, canon to the Presiding Bishop for evangelism, reconciliation and creation care. “Put your Jesus lenses on wherever you go. Whenever you see God, name and celebrate that, invite other people to celebrate with you, and let God do the rest.”

“When we go into different cultures or spaces where Christianity is not the norm, if all we have is Christian superiority, that is not going to fly,” said Spellers. As she shared her own story of seek-

ing “a love that does not disappoint,” she declared, “This is a story I can share with Muslims, with atheists. If you haven’t figured this out, take time to identify the difference Jesus has made in your life.”

“People in South Carolina often say they are ‘highly favored,’” said Bishop Bill Skilton, former suffragan of the Diocese of South Carolina. “Part of our problem as a church is that we have stopped at being favored, and we haven’t tried being the flavor — the salt. You’ve forgotten your calling to become fishers

the growth of the world church and the intensifying focus on poverty alleviation, the world mission community sent evangelism to the back of the line. As the church as a whole is reviving its commitment to evangelism, we in GEMN feel it’s important to re-integrate evangelism with global mission.”

Conference participants responded enthusiastically to what they heard. “So many of the mission teams that come down here to the Dominican Republic are afraid to talk about their faith,” said

differences in Episcopal attitudes toward evangelism. “I’m 29 years old and I have no problem with evangelism.”

Responding to the common question, “Isn’t evangelism disrespectful to non-Christians?” Spellers said, “It’s disrespectful to shove religion at people, to proselytize and denounce other pathways to God. But if you speak with generosity, curiosity and gratitude, then people respond more positively.”

The conference concluded with visits to congregational and medical mission sites on the island. Patrons of conference receptions were Bexley Seabury Seminary, the Diocese of Connecticut and the Dominican Development Group.

GEMN’s Mission Formation Program preceded the conference, this year enrolling a record 14 participants to spend a day exploring biblical foundations, mission theology, cultural dynamics and the practicalities of catalyzing mission vision and mutuality with companions around the world. The four participants graduating from the two-year program shared their projects: field research on indigenous religious rites in the Philippines; work on GEMN’s curriculum based on “The Way of Love”; exploring ways of enabling Hon-

duran women to economically manage their monthly cycles without missing school or work; and a memoir about working in GEMN since its inception in 1994.

The Global Episcopal Mission Network (www.gemn.org) links dioceses, congregations, mission organizations, seminaries and individuals throughout the Episcopal Church to “proclaim, inspire and ignite the joy of God’s mission.” ■



Photo/courtesy of GEMN

Participants in the Global Episcopal Mission Network’s 2019 conference pose for a group photo in Boca Chica, Dominican Republic, the site of the meeting.

of people and you’ve become aquarium keepers.” The mission conference was held at the Dominican diocese’s Bishop Skilton Conference Center, named in honor of his service as a missionary and, later, assistant bishop on the Caribbean island.

The Rev. Anthony Guillén, director of ethnic ministries for the Episcopal Church, noted how simple greetings can be evangelistic: “When we ask, ‘How are you?’ in the U.S. the response is usually, fine, tired, busy, okay. In Latin culture, the response is always with ‘Gracias a Dios’ added, meaning, ‘Because of God, I am fine.’ There is already a consciousness of God in our lives, proclaimed unashamedly.”

In addition to plenaries by keynotes Delgado and Spellers, an array of 18 workshops addressed outreach to under-evangelized people groups, gospel enculturation, the history of Anglican evangelism, digital evangelism, ‘The Way of Love’ in global mission, mission-encounter with Islam, mission and community at the upcoming Lambeth Conference in 2020, locally empowered economic mission, asset-based community development, interfaith reconciliation, Hispanic evangelism, missionary vocational discernment, and site-specific discussions of mission in the Sudans, Cuba and the Dominican Republic. The Rev. David Copley, director of the Global Partnerships unit at the Episcopal Church Center, updated conferees on the work of that group.

“In GEMN’s 24 years of annual conferences, this is the first conference to focus specifically on evangelism,” said GEMN president Titus Presler. “With

the Rev. Emilio Martin of the diocese, “but mission is based on faith.”

“If you’re only doing actions and not words, you’re leaving out half the story,” said the Rev. Veronika Travis of St. Luke’s Church in Alexandria, Virginia. “We’re hamstringing ourselves if it’s only actions and not words.”

“Evangelism isn’t a dirty word for me,” said Anna Sutterish of the Diocese of Ohio and a senior at Bexley Seabury Seminary as she highlighted generational

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\$88 billion last year to pay for health care.

Emmanuel Memorial’s Mission Leadership Team voted in January to work with RIP Medical Debt to spend the money remaining from the congregation’s capital campaign to eliminate medical bills for households in Champaign County.

The charity quickly identified 201 individual debt accounts in the county and still had plenty of money left over, so the congregation expanded its geographic target to include the whole Diocese of Springfield. By the time Emmanuel Memorial’s donation was exhausted, RIP Medical Debt had purchased \$4 million worth of medical debt, and it prepared to fill its bright yellow envelopes with the good news.

Credit agencies were notified that the 3,617 families’ debt had been cleared, and according to RIP Medical Debt, debt forgiveness does not increase the recipients’ taxes or result in any other adverse consequences. There are no strings attached, nothing expected in return.

“I applaud Emmanuel Memorial

Episcopal Church for their dedication in realizing this important campaign,” RIP Medical Debt co-founder Jerry Ashton said in a church news release. “We feel incredibly privileged to work with any faith-based organization committed to relieving the burden of un-payable medical debt in its community.”

Springfield Bishop Dan Martins was at Emmanuel Memorial on March 31 for a previously scheduled visit, and he, too, praised the congregation’s work for residents across the diocese.

“I am overjoyed with the news of Emmanuel’s exemplary stewardship of the resources entrusted to them,” Martins said in the church’s news release. “The knowledge of the concrete impact this will have on families in central and southern Illinois is a sign of the abundant goodness of the God whom we worship.”

Even small donations go a long way, Maynard told ENS, and she encouraged other congregations to consider partnering with RIP Medical Debt.

“You can make a tremendous impact with a very small donation,” she said. “It’s a terrific way to make a difference.” ■