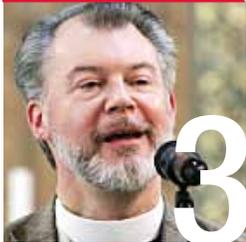


# Episcopal JOURNAL

MONTHLY EDITION | \$3.75 PER COPY

VOL. 12 NO. 1 | JANUARY 2022



**NEWS** Bishop calls for mercy in France's migrant policies



**NEWS** Oregon church defies restrictions on food ministry



**FEATURE** Episcopal bakers tackle yeast, king cakes

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## Episcopalians join communities responding to deadly tornadoes

By David Paulsen  
Episcopal News Service

Episcopal leaders and church members are working with their communities to provide disaster relief and assistance to areas affected by the powerful storm system overnight Dec. 10 that produced deadly and destructive tornadoes across a wide swath of the central United States.

Communities in western Kentucky were among the hardest hit. At least 77 people there were killed in the storms and there were more deaths in Arkansas, Illinois, Mississippi, Missouri and Tennessee, for a total of 92 as of Dec. 18.

The Diocese of Kentucky, based in Louisville, announced on Facebook that it was working with Episcopal Relief & Development and the staff of Presiding Bishop Michael Curry to coordinate assistance to those impacted by the storms.

"As we continue getting updates from around the diocese, we want to thank you for the incredible outpouring of support from around the church — our neighboring dioceses and dioceses around the country, and caring people from literally around the world have been in touch," the diocese said. It encouraged donations to its Bishop's Discretionary Fund and the state government's relief fund.

Some of the worst destruction was found in Mayfield, a city of about 10,000 people about a half hour south of Paducah. The tornado leveled a Mayfield candle factory where an estimated 110 people were working. At least eight people died in the factory.



Photo/Birmingham Museum Trust

### WE THREE KINGS

In a watercolor entitled "The Star of Bethlehem," (1890), Sir Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898) places the star in the hands of an angel hovering by the manger, where the Magi present gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the baby Jesus. Epiphany, Jan. 6, marks the revelation of God incarnate as Jesus Christ. The three kings' visit commemorates Christ's physical manifestation to the gentiles.

That tornado reached wind speeds estimated as high as 206 mph along a path that stretched more than 200 miles, according to state and federal authorities.

No Episcopal churches are located in Mayfield. Some of the congregations in surrounding communities offered their support, including St. John's Episcopal Church in Murray, southeast of Mayfield.

"We are praying for all those affected by the tornados and storms, especially the people of Mayfield," St. John's Episcopal Church said

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## Diocese of Pennsylvania reopens churches by rediscovering their communities

By Egan Millard  
Episcopal News Service

By the time St. John's Episcopal Church in the Philadelphia suburb of Norristown, Pa., closed in 2015 after 202 years, the parish had about 35 members and was \$260,000 in debt.

The cost of maintaining the ornate, neo-Gothic church — the oldest place of wor-

ship in the town of 35,000 — was rising. The church "had a lot more funerals than we had baptisms," senior warden Bill Kilgour told the Philadelphia Inquirer at the time. "We just didn't have any young families and children coming up through the ranks."

But what seemed like the end turned out to be the beginning of a new chapter in the church's life. Since its 2017 revival, the parish has been reborn, with a new community that

looks more like the town it serves.

In the last 20 years, Norristown's proportion of Hispanic/Latino residents has jumped from 10% to 27%, many of them from Puebla, Mexico. Pennsylvania Bishop Daniel Gutiérrez recognized that the shifting demographics presented an opportunity to reach new people, and he enlisted the Rev. Andy Kline, who speaks Spanish, to revive St. John's by getting to know the neighbors and celebrating their culture.

Now the church has a thriving 60-member congregation, including 20 families. It hosts a consistent stream of baptisms — at least 11 this year — fiestas and weddings, in addition to regular worship services in English and Spanish.

St. John's is one of three "resurrection churches" — along with St. Stephen's Episcopal Church and the Church of the Crucifixion, both in Philadelphia — that the Diocese of Pennsylvania has reopened in the last five years

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Photo/Egan Millard/ENS

Dancers and musicians perform at the Church of the Crucifixion in Philadelphia.

Due to U.S. Postal Service delays, subscribers may receive Episcopal Journal later than usual.

## CONVERSATIONS

## We can stay open to conscious and subconscious prayer



By Linda Ryan

I WAS SHOPPING in the grocery store not long ago, and something occurred to me.

I suddenly noticed that I slowed down when approaching an intersection with another aisle. Then I looked both ways to make sure nobody turned toward my cart or crossed my aisle to another.

I found I do the same thing in buildings with hallways. When crossing intersections, I check out what's happening in the walkways to my right and left. I suppose this habit comes from driving, where constantly watching for other drivers is not only necessary but a safety requirement. Looking both ways is imperative while driving but pretty much an automatic response in different situations.

I've been thinking about other things I

do automatically. Walking to the refrigerator to get a pitcher of iced tea may be a conscious thing, but I don't have to direct my hand to grasp the handle and lift it.

I don't have to tell my lungs to work harder and faster when walking and getting out of breath. They do it as a response to my heart pushing blood and my brain keeping track of how much oxygen that blood is moving to the rest of the body. I stumble, and my inner ears tell the labyrinth to respond to attempt to keep me upright — at least, most of the time.

What else do I do subconsciously? I

trip over something and subconsciously reach out for something to grab onto to keep me upright. The cat knocks something off the desk, and I reach to catch it (the cat usually wins).

I put toothpaste on my brush and begin brushing my teeth. I don't have to consciously direct my hand to move around my mouth, getting my gums, my teeth, and all the crevices between. I do many things without thinking a lot about it, things I do every day or many times a day. Is it a habit? Subconscious thought? Or something else?

Some years ago, I had an automobile accident where a ladder run over by an

18-wheeler in front of me on the freeway hit the side of my car. I found myself in a sliding skid, foot on the brake pedal (where it shouldn't have been) and saying, "Jesus, help me!"

It worked; I wasn't hurt except for a bit of whiplash and a very slight concus-

sion. At that time, it wasn't a conscious prayer, although I remember saying it and meaning every word.

There have been other times when I have consciously prayed, such as when I heard the news of disasters, illnesses, deaths, or dangerous situations. Sometimes it was an arrow prayer to St. Anthony to help me find things like my glasses, keys, or something else I had lost.

Usually, my conscious prayers are directed to Jesus, although I often write prayers to God when reflecting on something. I wonder, why don't I pray to the Holy Spirit?

Then I have to wonder, do I ever pray

**Do I ever pray subconsciously, without verbalizing or even thinking of prayer?**



Photo/Wikimedia Commons

"Young Nun at Prayer," by Sergei Gribkov, 1852, Russian Museum.

subconsciously, without verbalizing or even thinking of prayer? I know I have considered things I do as a wordless prayer, such as knitting a prayer shawl or scarf for someone in particular, but what about those I knit without anyone special in mind?

My mind can wander once I have a pattern in my fingers and don't have to pay close attention to it. Does it still count as a prayer shawl if I'm not actively praying at the time?

I know that I have subconsciously prayed as I walked in particularly familiar or breathtaking places. I have also prayed when hearing or even participated in making music, particularly religious music. I never wanted to be a soloist, but small or large groups seem to magnify my prayers' strength and sincerity.

But my mind goes back to subconscious prayer. I think of places like monasteries and convents where people deliberately enter to devote themselves to lives of prayer and service, a form of

prayer in action.

People go into churches at all hours to pray and seek comfort, and very possibly some go in just to sit in a quiet, dry, warm place. But who can say that as they sit, they aren't in some kind of prayer, even if they aren't really familiar with what prayer is?

Come to think of it, how familiar are any of us with prayer? Is it a habit reserved for Thanksgiving dinner or "Now I lay me down to sleep"? Is it like an arrow being shot toward heaven to get us out of trouble or ask for something we need urgently? Is "Our Father, who art in heaven" the only prayer we can say when we feel we need to pray? Do we have particular Psalms or verses that we use when we are in distress? Do we consider those prayers, whether conscious or unconscious? Do objects like rosaries or strings of beads help focus our prayers or become almost subconscious as the beads slip through our fingers like water over rocks in a stream?

Do we feel we have to kneel to pray? Can we do it sitting or even lying down? Can we do it when we're moving around, or must we stand still? Must we do it aloud, or can it simply come from the voice of our hearts and minds? Can we sing it? Can we even dance to it as David danced before the altar?

How do you pray? What do you get from it? How do you feel when you pray? Does just sitting and meditating feel prayerful? When you do or make something for another person, do you also offer it to God as a prayer? ■

*Linda Ryan is a co-mentor for an Education for Ministry group and keeps the blog Jericho's Daughter. This article was first published at Episcopal Café ([www.episcopalcafe.com](http://www.episcopalcafe.com)).*

## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK



THIS MONTH'S JOURNAL certainly reflects the church at its best and worst.

To take the latter first, a former CEO of Saint Francis Ministries, the Rev. Robert Smith, betrayed the trust of his board and, by extension, supporters of the largest foster care agency based in Kansas.

Saint Francis is no small operation, with 1,600 employees serving 11,000 people in six states and its website states it is "firmly entrenched within the Episcopal tradition."

As the story states, an investigation confirmed that Smith used agency funds for personal purposes, directed millions of dollars to and poorly supervised an IT vendor with which he had a connection and used agency funds for such schemes as a food operation in El Salvador run by his wife and the purchase of hundreds of baseball tickets to resell at a profit.

Smith misled his board, as directors have said, by not giving them key information, but for their part — they trusted him. So, apparently, does the Diocese of Chicago, where Smith is canonically resident, having suspended him from functioning

as a priest, then reinstating him with some mandatory remedial measures, stating that he simply showed "poor judgment."

A commenter on the Episcopal Café website, which posted the story, wrote, "a friend who's a pastor in another denomination has said to me, 'the problem with you Episcopalians is you're too deferential to your clergy, when often we don't deserve that deference' and I'm starting to see his point."

This is obviously not to tar clergy with a broad brush, but perhaps people of faith need to remember that clergy are human and when they are in official positions, need oversight like anyone else.

The "best" is represented by church work in Kentucky, where tornadoes ravaged thousands of lives, and in Europe, Navajoland, Massachusetts and Oregon, where St. Timothy's Episcopal Church is continuing to feed homeless people despite attempts to stop its activity by city officials in Brookings. The Diocese of Oregon, to its credit, says it will defend St. Timothy's in court, if need be.

It's rough work, caught between the genuine concerns of middle-class homeowners and the needs of "the least of these," but the difficult places are where Jesus lived. ■

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Episcopal Journal is an independent publication, produced by and for members of the Episcopal Church in the United States and abroad. Episcopal Journal is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt charitable corporation, registered in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Episcopal Journal is published monthly by the Episcopal Journal, Inc. Episcopal Journal is published monthly and quarterly in partnership with dioceses and individual churches and is distributed to individual subscribers. Postage paid at Bryn Mawr, Pa. Postmaster: Send address changes to: Episcopal Journal, P.O. Box 937, Bellmawr, NJ 08099-0937. ISSN: 2159-6824

## NEWS

# Convocation bishop urges French authorities to change policies after migrant deaths in English Channel

By Egan Millard  
Episcopal News Service

**B**ishop Mark Edington, of the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe, urged French authorities to immediately change some of their policies on the treatment of refugees and migrants after 27 migrants died trying to cross the English Channel on Nov. 24.

The deaths shone a spotlight on inhumane conditions for migrants in France, Edington said, arguing that if the French government will not provide basic humanitarian assistance to migrants, churches and other charitable groups must be allowed to do so.

In an open letter issued Nov. 27, Edington said the deaths of the migrants, who drowned when their small boat capsized during a journey from Calais in northern France to England, were “an eminently avoidable tragedy.”

One of the reasons migrants are trying to cross the channel, he said, is the hostility of French authorities to their

die trying — including at least 1,146 in the first half of 2021.

The Paris-based convocation, which includes congregations in seven countries, has made assisting refugees and migrants a central mission in Western Europe. It runs the Joel Nafuma Refugee Center, a day shelter for refugees in Rome, and parishes have undertaken individual and collective efforts to feed, shelter, resettle and integrate refugees.



Edington

In recent years, parishes in France and Belgium had focused some of their efforts on the Calais area, where thousands of migrants have ended up in the hopes of reaching the United Kingdom. Episcopalians had been delivering food, medical supplies and other essential goods to the “Jungle,” a massive makeshift refugee camp in Calais that housed about 6,000 people before French authorities dismantled it in 2016.

Since then, Edington said, French authorities’ policies of deterrence have made migrants’ living conditions even worse — and made it much harder to help them. As of October, between 2,000 and 3,000 were living in forests, abandoned buildings and other dangerous conditions in Calais, Dunkirk and the surrounding area, according to Human Rights Watch.

Police regularly evict migrants from the land they are staying on, forcing them to move along and often destroying their tents and other supplies. Most Calais encampments experienced this every 48 hours in 2020 and 2021, HRW reported.

Local authorities have severely restricted the ability of churches and charities to assist migrants by enacting laws that ban the distribution of food and water, erecting fences around encampments, and aggressively policing and intimidating aid groups, according to HRW.

As of December 2019, authorities have arrested or charged 33 people in France because of their efforts to provide humanitarian aid to migrants, according to the migration research group ReSOMA. ReSOMA identified 171 such people across the European Union, including priests.



American Cathedral in Paris Dean Lucinda Laird, second from left, and former convocation Bishop Pierre Whalon, fourth from left, distribute gifts from the Love in a Box ministry at the Calais camp in December 2015.

Thomas Huddleston, one of the convocation’s two “welcoming officers” for migrants, told Episcopal News Service he was not aware of any Episcopalians who had been charged or threatened, but he said the legal situation has limited their ability to provide aid in the area. Though the American Cathedral in Paris and the convocation parishes in Belgium continue to provide direct assistance to migrants in their cities, they no longer distribute supplies in the Calais area.

In his open letter, Edington said the French policies are cruel and unacceptable.

“It is difficult to comprehend governments standing in the way of charitable agencies seeking only to provide for the basic humanitarian needs of those who are suffering, exposed, and starving,” Edington wrote.

“As both citizens and Christians, we are bound to call on all governments to take immediate steps toward permitting both faith-based and secular charitable agencies seeking to provide humanitarian assistance to have access to the places vulnerable populations gather, and to offer what support they can without qualification or need for accreditation. A way must be found to place the basic human needs of the suffering first in the calculus of interests — at least among governments that claim to be based on an irreducible respect for the basic rights of each human being.”

The inhospitable conditions and policies for migrants in France are the primary reasons they end up in Calais in the first place, Edington and Huddleston said; they gather there in the hope of reaching the United Kingdom, believing they might receive better treatment there.

The deaths of the 27 migrants in the English Channel might have been prevented if their living conditions were

better in France, Edington told ENS.

At the very least, the French government needs to “not act in such ways as to make their suffering all the worse and bring them to decide that the desperate gamble of a 34-kilometer journey in a tiny raft across water that would cause death by hypothermia within five minutes is better than staying in France,” he said.

“The majority of refugees felt that England would be a better place to settle,” said the Rev. Sunny Hallanan, rector of All Saints’ Episcopal Church in Waterloo, Belgium. She is also the vicar of the St. Esprit mission in Mons, Belgium, near the French-Belgian border, which serves primarily Burundian refugees and asylum-seekers.

She and her parishioners have been helping refugees and asylum-seekers in Belgium, where there are fewer restrictions on humanitarian aid, hoping that they might stay there rather than trying to get to Calais and England.

“We tried to convince refugees to stay here when possible,” she told ENS. “Unfortunately — perhaps because they speak English, not French or Dutch — there are still so many who continue to risk their lives to try to go to England.”

Conflicts among European nations and the U.K. over how to handle the migration crisis in Europe have worsened the situation, Edington and Huddleston said. While governments blame each other and refuse to take responsibility for people within their borders, suffering and death continue.

“The British and French governments are just pointing at each other, arguing that each is the one responsible for rescuing people at sea, for trying to offer some type of safe house and legal pathways,” Huddleston told ENS. “That has just been exacerbated by Brexit and COVID. So what you see generally in Europe is governments on both sides of borders reneging on their international responsibilities.”

“France argues that it is only a way-point for those seeking asylum in the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom argues that France ought to be doing more to intercept these refugees before their desperation leads them to take to sea. While these interminable arguments provide grist for the media, human lives are lost as though they meant nothing,” Edington wrote in his open letter.

“We do not presume to advise the governments of our nations on how to share responsibility for the plight of those fleeing war, violence, despair, and corruption. We are clear, however, that they hold this responsibility — for the same reason that we all hold a responsibility to the least, the last, and the lost among us.” ■



A sign hanging on the fence outside a refugee camp in Brussels in 2015 asks, “What if it were you?”

presence in the country, which is compounded by restrictions on the care that churches and charities may provide to migrants. Edington called for an immediate end to those policies while national leaders and the European Union sort out larger issues of migration.

“Our communities stand ready to act in any way consistent with our beliefs and commitments if called upon for assistance by the civil authorities. But while the arguments and posturing continue, we insist that basic humanitarian assistance be made available immediately,” Edington wrote.

The English Channel disaster is the latest episode in a migration crisis that has unfolded over the past decade. From 2011 through mid-2021, 9.2 million people have applied for asylum in Europe (not including Turkey), according to the United Nations.

Most come from the Middle East — especially Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq — and African countries beleaguered by war, persecution, famine, economic instability and other humanitarian crises. Many have endured perilous journeys by sea to reach Europe, and many of those



Photo/Felicity Handford

The Rev. Sunny Hallanan volunteers at a refugee camp in Maximilian Park in Brussels.

## AROUND THE CHURCH

PENNSYLVANIA continued from page 1

by reorienting the churches' ministry to respond to their communities' shifting demographics and spiritual and material needs.

Buildings that once faced the prospect of sale after their congregations folded now host lively Latino congregations, feeding ministries and outreach to homeless people. The congregations don't look or sound like they did before, but that's the point, diocesan leaders say.

"The three resurrection churches' previous iterations ... had become completely disconnected from their communities," the Rev. Kirk Berlenbach, the diocese's canon for growth and support, told ENS. "The core of their [new] identity ... is to serve the community."

Upon becoming bishop in 2016, Gutiérrez implemented a strategy of experimentation and adaptation. A relentless optimist who views a closed church not as a permanent end but as an opportunity to repurpose, Gutiérrez told ENS: "If you look at all the successful companies, they don't replicate what someone else has done; it's something brand new. And I want us to think that way, like a startup."

Gutiérrez, whose family has roots in what is now New Mexico going back to the 16th century, previously served as canon to the ordinary in the Diocese of the Rio Grande and, before his ordination, as the mayor's chief of staff and director of economic development in Albuquerque.

One of his first actions as bishop was to stop the potential sale of the three historic churches in Philadelphia and Norristown, all of which had stopped having regular worship services between 2013 and 2016.

St. John's was not "actively marketed" for sale because of the continuing homeless ministry there, but the other two were listed for sale.

"Selling property is just sort of survival, rather than thriving," Gutiérrez said. "This diocese is not going to survive; we're going to thrive."

Diocesan staff and clergy have embraced Gutiérrez's leadership style, describing the cultural and strategic shift that followed his consecration as "a period of renaissance" after years of normalized decline and turmoil.

Gutiérrez's predecessor, Bishop Charles Bennison Jr., clashed with the diocese's clergy and denominational leadership, particularly regarding his handling of assets and real estate. Bennison closed some 23 "redundant churches" during his 14-year tenure.

Since 2000, the practice of closing, merging and selling churches with low Sunday attendance has become common in the Episcopal Church and other Christian denominations. As of 2020, the Episcopal Church has 6,356 churches after hovering around 7,200 for most of the 20th century.

The Diocese of Pennsylvania was founded in 1784, though many of its congregations were originally Church of England parishes before the American Revolution, including Christ Church in Philadelphia, which was established



Photo/Diocese of Pennsylvania

**A family gathers for one of the many baptisms that have taken place at St. John's Episcopal Church in Norristown, Pa., under the leadership of the Rev. Andy Kline.**



Photo/Diocese of Pennsylvania

**Pennsylvania Bishop Daniel Gutiérrez embraces the Rev. Yesenia Alejandro at a celebration for the reopening of the Church of the Crucifixion in Philadelphia.**

in 1695 and was a place of worship for some of the Founding Fathers.

"This is an old colonial diocese — there's Episcopal churches within three miles of each other," Gutiérrez told ENS. "I'd rather have one on every corner."

Down from 193 churches in 1964, the Diocese of Pennsylvania today has 134 churches throughout Philadelphia and four of the surrounding counties. As of December 2020, it had an endowment of \$79.8 million.

"We're blessed with a significant endowment in this diocese," said Berlenbach, canon for growth and support. "But in 20 years, [Gutiérrez] would rather see half the endowment and twice the churches than selling the churches and growing the endowment to service a smaller diocese. He would rather recast those assets to make a difference in our churches so that our churches can make a difference in our communities."

The diocese is not using its endowment to fund the reopenings, according to canon for communications Jennifer Tucker. Each church has its own combination of funding sources.

"If we had simply decided to put millions into them, it would not guarantee success," she told ENS.

St. John's ministry has been funded by the parish endowment and donations as the diocese is "moving them toward self-sufficiency," Tucker said.

The diocese takes care of building ex-

penses since moving its offices to the property, which has "resulted in substantial savings for the diocesan budget," she said. St. Stephen's gets funding from its own endowment and rental income, with the diocese paying the vicar's salary.

At the Church of the Crucifixion, the rector's salary is also paid by the diocese through a budget item for Hispanic ministry, and the church is being renovated through a private nonprofit partnership supported by fundraising.



Photo/Egan Millard/ENS

**The Rev. Betsy Ivey, the Diocese of Pennsylvania's canon for growth and support, is seen with the Rev. Mike Giansiracusa, vicar of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Philadelphia.**

For the diocesan leaders, reopening churches doesn't mean trying to return them to their previous iterations. It means changing what they offer — and changing the mindset. Where others might see an albatross, Gutiérrez and his staff see unrealized possibilities.

"If you start from the negative, you have so much more difficulty getting to the positive," the Rev. Shawn Wamsley, the diocese's canon to the ordinary for evangelism and administration said. "Whereas if you see the opportunity that's present here, you're already in a much better spiritual and mental state to let the Holy Spirit move through that."

The diocesan staff is reminded every day of the opportunities created by repurposing church properties because of where they work. In 2019, Gutiérrez moved the diocesan headquarters from a downtown Philadelphia office building to the former rectory at St. John's in Norristown.

The campus also includes a soup kitchen and homeless day shelter — which continued operating despite the parish's closure — and the church itself, which now has a largely Latino congregation as a result of Gutiérrez's and Kline's efforts.

Kline has worked in parish ministry and homeless outreach in Norristown for 10 years. He built the new congregation at St. John's largely by getting to know the neighbors, hanging out at the taquería two blocks away, and "walking the neighborhood and meeting people and seeing what they needed," he said. "Once you made that pastoral contact, they found that you wanted to celebrate

their culture."

Many of the attendees are families who are eager to bring their children to Sunday school, Kline said, and they'll invite him to celebrate the Eucharist at their homes for birthdays and other special occasions. The highlight of the year is the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe in December, which includes a procession around the neighborhood and a mariachi band.

"People had said, 'Oh, a Mexican community will never work here,'" Gutiérrez recalled. "When we had our [first] fiesta for Our Lady of Guadalupe, it's a freezing December evening and people were packed in there, kids bringing flowers, they were walking in a procession around the block. And the music!"

Whereas St. John's has built a new congregation focused around Sunday worship, St. Stephen's in downtown Philadelphia has been reborn as "kind of a test lab for what it looks like when you don't have a Sunday morning congregation," Wamsley said.

The area around St. Stephen's has changed radically since the church was built in the 1820s. Its imposing castle-like building four blocks from Independence Hall once towered over a neighborhood of brick houses owned by professionals and merchants, as well as the original campus of the University of Pennsylvania. The parish was a high-society hub where "the congregations were large and on great occasions massed around the doors, clamoring for admission," according to a parish history.

Today, it is wedged between a hospital, a shopping mall and a courthouse. No longer a residential neighborhood, the area is now bustling with commuting office professionals and hospital workers and patients, as well as homeless people, according to the Rev. Mike Giansiracusa, vicar.

After the congregation folded, the diocese decided to repurpose it to serve its new neighbors, reopening it in 2017. Instead of being open for an hour for Eucharist on Sunday morning, it is open during weekdays for people to come in for peace, quiet and prayer amid the noise of downtown.

There are noon prayer services on weekdays, including a popular healing prayer service, as well as a new Sunday afternoon service. But a large part of its mission is just to be open to whoever walks by, rather than sustaining a regular congregation. Giansiracusa describes it as "caring for souls through sacred encounters."

"We were never going to have a congregation, and we didn't want one," he told ENS. "What we wanted was a sacred encounter with whoever came in."

The well-preserved church, the oldest Gothic Revival building in Philadelphia, offers a sense of sacred oasis, with history and art everywhere you look, giving it the nickname "Philadelphia's Westminster Abbey."

It is one of the earliest American churches to adapt church architecture from the Middle Ages, with an upper tier wrapping around the edges of the broad nave, directing one's attention to

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## AROUND THE CHURCH

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a mosaic of the Last Supper above the altar. Tiffany stained-glass windows line the walls, and various nooks and alcoves showcase marble sculptures, including a renowned children's memorial. Glass floor panels in one section of the church show grave slabs underneath — a churchyard that was built over in 1878.

Giansiracusa welcomes anyone who wants to come in and offers to pray with them. He has bags of essential supplies on hand for homeless people who might need them. Often, people just need to sit and reflect.

“Their doors are open to provide solace for caregivers and people visiting the hospital. A lot of those people have just come down an elevator in a hospital having seen a loved one, perhaps for the last time, so how do you help that transition?” Wamsley said.

Before the pandemic, the church hosted regular musical performances, and it is still used as a rehearsal space for a youth orchestra and other rental purposes. The diocese plans to use the space as a diaconal training center and a base from which new deacons can extend their various ministries in the city.

“My hope is that we are able to be a resource and a place of openness for anyone struggling to live out their vocation. And I think we're positioned in the right spot to do that.”

If St. Stephen's offers peace and quiet, the Church of the Crucifixion about 10 blocks away offers a colorful, joyous atmosphere. On Sept. 15, the church was packed with people celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month. The side aisles were crowded with food and craft vendors, and at the front of the church, musicians played traditional Puerto Rican and Mexican songs while women danced along.

Among them was the Rev. Yesenia Alejandro, who was charged by Gutiérrez with reviving the church, which closed



Photo/Egan Millard/ENS

*The Rev. Yesenia Alejandro (in blue) dances at the Church of the Crucifixion.*

in 2013 and reopened in the summer of 2021. Alejandro was ordained the diocese's first Latina priest in October 2020, through a local formation program that Sandra Montes, dean of chapel at Union Theological Seminary, designed for her.

In a few months, the church has become a hub of activity. Groups use the space for Latin and Irish dance lessons. Flea markets help local artisans sell their goods. In recent months, there have been sewing lessons, musical performances, open mic nights, historical lectures and vaccine clinics, among other offerings.

The atmosphere in the church now harks back to the parish's heyday. Founded in 1847 as the second Black church in the diocese, the church once counted Marian Anderson and W.E.B. Du Bois among its members, with the latter calling it “the most effective church organization in the city for benevolent and rescue work.”

“When I came in, I felt that there was a spirit here,” Alejandro told ENS. “I knew that there was something here; I just couldn't pinpoint it. But then we

started to do all the ministries, whether it was the food ministry we started with. ... We started to do so many other things that it started to just light up.”

The parish's food ministry serves about 600 people each week; those who receive attend a brief prayer service first.

“Before they get the groceries, we always pray together, and we have Italians, we have Chinese, we have folks from different places, and everybody does the Lord's Prayer in their language,” she said. “When we started, we wanted to continue to serve the Latino community, but the reality is that we're serving all walks of life.”

Four Sunday services — two in Spanish, one in English and one bilingual — are held throughout the day to accommodate shift workers. Services that celebrate children and teach them how to serve as acolytes have been a big draw, Alejandro said, as well as traditional Mexican celebrations like the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Day of the Dead, which the parish celebrated in late October. Colorful altars with photos

of deceased relatives and friends, candles and flowers brightened the church in an event that was a first for the parish but will hopefully become an annual celebration, Alejandro said.

The diocese has developed a program to help other congregations that feel stuck to reinvent themselves, using some of the lessons from the resurrection churches, called “Casting Nets: Start-Up Plan for Churches.” The program, which is in four parts and can take as little as 10 weeks to accomplish, asks parish leaders to “dream what your church might be if it was not expending so much energy focused on buildings, people and money.”

Diocesan leaders hope that the pandemic has helped churches see that they are more capable of making real, innovative change than they thought. Churches that were not tech-savvy were suddenly doing livestream services and Zoom Bible studies, thanks to help from the diocese.

“The fact that we're on church time, change seems to take so long,” Wamsley said, “but we got into the pandemic and ... our churches made the transition in our diocese on a dime, and we're talking a matter of days or weeks.”

But to undertake a bigger transformation, some churches may have to let go of their ideas of what a successful church looks like.

“So many of our churches are stuck trying to operate according to models that ceased being viable decades ago, and they're getting frustrated. ... They're still trying to do all the things they were doing 50 years ago because otherwise they're not a ‘real church,’” Berlenbach said.

“We're trying to say, ‘No, being a real church is all about, what are we doing to know Jesus and what are we doing to make the transforming love of Jesus known in the community? Reground yourself in that.’ And that frees them from the burden of the past.” ■



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## NEWS

# Diocese of Chicago lifts priest's suspension related to Kansas foster care provider

By Sherman Smith  
Kansas Reflector

The Episcopal Diocese of Chicago in December said it lifted the suspension of the Rev. Robert Smith that had been related to his actions as CEO of Saint Francis Ministries, the largest foster care provider in Kansas.

The church in August suspended Smith from functioning as a priest after conducting an independent investigation into allegations of his financial misconduct at Saint Francis. The church lifted the suspension after receiving assurances that no new allegations would surface and that federal authorities were not preparing to file criminal charges.

Smith is canonically resident in the Diocese of Chicago, which has required him to undergo ethics and fiduciary training. He was CEO of Saint Francis, which is based in Salina, Kan., from 2014 to 2020.

Rebecca Wilson, partner at a public relations firm that handles inquiries for the Diocese of Chicago, said the church's investigation "did not identify any wrongdoing on the Rev. Smith's part beyond errors in judgment."

Morgan Rothenberger, spokeswoman for Saint Francis, declined to answer questions for this story.

"Saint Francis Ministries continues to work through several issues in regard to its prior management," Rothenberger said. "Until those issues are resolved, we do not believe it appropriate to make

any comments."

Last May, Saint Francis posted a statement on its website from the current CEO, William J. Clark, that the organization is seeking to stabilize its "most urgent concerns," restructured the leadership team, changed internal financial processes to enhance oversight and secu-



Smith

Clark

Photos/Saint Francis Ministries

riety, and strengthened governance for the board of directors.

Kansas Reflector first reported on the allegations surrounding Smith's departure from Saint Francis in a series of stories in 2020. An internal investigation by Saint Francis concluded that Smith charged \$469,000 in personal expenses on the nonprofit's credit cards and entered into reckless business arrangements, with his board's approval.

Smith arranged to pay \$11 million to an acquaintance to develop IT software that crashed and destroyed the organization's financial records. He authorized payments earmarked for cash bribes to officials in El Salvador, where his wife planned to harvest a "miracle" food to

pay for international ministries, and spent \$65,000 on Chicago Cubs tickets in the hopes of scalping them for a profit.

Smith disregarded warnings in 2019 about the cost of entering into a contract to provide foster care services in the Omaha region and hid the true cost of the contract from his board. Nebraska officials, who had to refinance the deal earlier this year, are now considering a recommendation by the state's inspector general to sever ties with Saint Francis.

Wilson said church leaders lifted Smith's suspension based on recent developments, including the absence of new allegations in the Nebraska inspector general's report.

Laura Howard, secretary of the Kansas Department for Children and Families, has indicated that a forthcoming audit report on Saint Francis finances won't reveal any new allegations against Smith.

The Diocese of Chicago received an affidavit from Saint Francis affirming that Smith returned the funds he spent on Cubs tickets, Wilson said.

Bishop Mark Cowell, diocesan bishop of Western Kansas and also the Hodgeman County attorney, assured leaders of the church there is no ongoing FBI investigation concerning Smith. The FBI declined to comment for this story on the possibility of an investigation, and Wilson said the church has no confirmation of Cowell's ability to assess the situation.

As a condition of his reinstatement, Smith must take nonprofit management classes on ethics and fiduciary responsi-

bilities at Northwestern University. He also must work with an executive coach who has experience with ordained leaders and participate in "regular spiritual direction with a seasoned priest to reflect on his vocation."

Bishops with the church plan to meet with Smith, also known as Father Bobby, to review his progress before March 31, 2022 and again before June 30.

Smith resigned as Saint Francis CEO in November 2020 after an attorney's investigation substantiated allegations of financial misconduct that previously were outlined by two whistleblowers.

The investigation included an interview with an accountant who wondered if the level of spending on Bill Whymark's IT enterprise amounted to embezzlement. Whymark is the step-brother of David Schafer, a Chicago-based attorney Smith hired to serve as general counsel at Saint Francis.

A review of invoices and emails from Whymark showed Smith spent little time reviewing the invoices before approving them, even though they reflected an improbable amount of time billed by Whymark.

Wilson said Whymark declined to speak with church investigators.

In written responses to questions for this story, Smith said he never was a business partner with Whymark, even though one of Whymark's companies formerly identified Smith as a business partner on its website. Smith down-

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## TORNADOES continued from page 1

in a Facebook post. The storms had knocked out power to St. John's.

Bowling Green, Ky., was another community hit hard as a tornado killed at least 12 people, leveled homes and left a shocked and battered community to pick up the pieces.

The Rev. Steve Pankey, rector at Christ Episcopal Church in Bowling Green, told Episcopal News Service in a phone interview that the tornado cut its



Photo/Courtesy Diocese of Kentucky

The Diocese of Kentucky posted on Facebook this photo of a display in Bishop Terry White's front yard along with the quote, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

path of destruction mere blocks from his home. From his porch he said he can see where neighbors lost roofs or sections of their homes in the storm, which packed winds estimated at 155 mph.

The homes of two members of his congregation were destroyed, while about a dozen other members reported lesser damage, such as roofs blown away or falling trees hitting the structures. The power remains out for much of the city, Pankey said, but no one in the congregation was killed or seriously injured.

"Yesterday, in a sort of big empty parking lot, there were just dozens, if not hundreds, of pick-up trucks and folks unloading chain saws and trash bags, whatever they could, and walking into the affected neighborhood and helping people," Pankey said. Members of his congregation also spent part of the day clearing and sorting through debris with one of the parishioners whose homes were destroyed.

"It's been pretty awe-inspiring, seeing the community come together," said Pankey, who also serves on the Episcopal Church Executive Council.

Christ Episcopal Church didn't lose power, but internet and phone services went out for several days. The congregation, meanwhile, was raising money online for its clergy discretionary fund to be used for disaster relief.

For her Dec. 12 sermon, the Rev. Rebecca Kello, associate rector at Christ



Photo/Wikimedia Commons/State Farm

An aerial view of Mayfield, Ky., shows extensive destruction from the December tornadoes.

Episcopal Church, sought solace in the words of the prophet Zephaniah: "You shall fear disaster no more."

"Many of us woke without power after a restless night of sheltering from the tornado that has wracked our town," Kello said, according to text of the sermon posted to her blog. "Those of us who were unharmed realized the depth of devastation and disaster that our neighbors faced as they lost everything."

A tornado that touched down in Monette, Ark., killed one person and

injured five at a nursing home while damaging other buildings in the small northeastern city near the Missouri state line. The few Episcopal congregations in that part of the state reported no injuries or building damage, according to the Diocese of Arkansas officials.

"We are currently checking on families in the Monette-Leachville area with whom we have relationships and will determine the best ways we can assist them once we know more," communications director James Matthews told ENS by email on Dec. 13. ■

## NEWS

# Navajoland's feeding ministry resumes for winter

By David Paulsen  
Episcopal News Service

Last year, the Episcopal Church in Navajoland launched an emergency feeding ministry to help families weather the turbulent early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. After a summer 2021 hiatus, the ministry resumed for the winter, just before Thanksgiving.

Episcopal leaders serving the Navajo Nation gathered with volunteers Nov. 18 at the mission's headquarters in Farmington, N. M., to sort a final shipment of food items and load them onto trucks to take to Navajoland's three regions. The food then was divided further into individual portions for distribution to about 300 families.

Among the items were turkey, potatoes, dressing and pie for the families' Thanksgiving dinners.

"This is really about getting the food and resources to those who need the most," the Rev. Joe Hubbard, vicar at St. Christopher's Mission in Bluff, Utah, told ENS. Elders and families with small children are among the ministry's priorities.

The Thanksgiving week deliveries contained enough food for families to "get them through the holidays," and another distribution was scheduled for December in time for Christmas, Hubbard said.

Navajoland leaders had conducted similar monthly food distributions for about a year, starting in May 2020. More than 3,800 boxes of food, as well as clothing, hygiene items and toys, were provided to families in 25 communities, including more than 1,650 children, according to a Navajoland summary.

Those deliveries were put on hold in May 2021 "in hopes to save some money to help families during the holiday season," G.J. Gordy, Navajoland's communications director, told ENS.

The winter months often are the most economically difficult for Navajo families, Gordy said, because the growing season is over and families face the added cost of buying firewood or propane to heat their homes. With the feeding ministry resuming, "we're hoping to continue this for the next six months."

The deliveries in November were made possible in part by donations of nonperishable foods from the Utah-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, known widely as the Mormon church. Other food was purchased directly from wholesaler Sysco, with help from the monetary donations that Navajoland continues to receive from around the Episcopal Church.

"We have been blessed with just an outflowing of love from the wider church, with donations that have allowed us to purchase the food," Navajoland Bishop David Bailey told ENS. "There's



*Genevieve White and her son, Ryan, above, volunteer at Good Shepherd Mission in Fort Defiance, Ariz., to fill boxes of food, right, for delivery to Navajo Nation residents as part of a feeding ministry of the Episcopal Church in Navajoland.*



*The Rev. Leon Sampson helps load a trailer with food to be boxed and delivered to Navajo Nation residents.*

not enough words to say thanks."

That financial support was especially welcome in the months after the March 2020 start of the pandemic, when the rate of COVID-19 transmission on the Navajo Nation reservation was among the highest in the United States. More than 1,500 Navajo Nation residents have died during the pandemic. Daily cases have risen again this fall, though not as high as last winter, and 58% of residents are now vaccinated.

"So many people have lost loved ones and friends and family members to this virus," Hubbard said. "We're seeing that this virus is not going away."

The reservation covers more than 27,000 square miles in the Four Corners region of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah. More than 30% of households lack running water, and many of the 175,000 residents live below the poverty line in isolated villages far from the nearest grocery store.

The Episcopal Church created the Navajoland Area Mission in 1978 by carving out sections of the dioceses of Rio Grande, Arizona and Utah, in an effort to unify the language, culture and families of the region. The churchwide triennial budget now includes a \$1 million block grant to support Navajoland.

"The Episcopal Church Office of

Development continues to partner with the Episcopal Church in Navajoland to support fundraising efforts for core operations and essential ministries," Cecilia Malm, the office's associate director, told ENS by email. "Development staff provide professional consultation in areas such as annual giving, major gifts and endowment fundraising and encourage support for Navajoland through social media and other communications channels."

Episcopalians interested in supporting Navajoland's ministries can donate online.

For the week of Thanksgiving, the food assembled by Navajoland leaders was divided to feed about 100 families in each of the mission's regions. All Saints' Episcopal Church in Farmington was used as the operation's staging ground, and food for the San Juan region in New Mexico was distributed from there. A no-contact process was established, with volunteers placing boxes in the backs of recipients' vehicles due to the region's elevated COVID-19 case count.

The boxes included a mix of canned goods and other nonperishable items, as well as fresh produce and meat.

Many families in the Utah region, in and around Bluff, lack fresh water plumbing and are receiving gallons of drinking water with their food boxes. Hubbard, church volunteers and a 10-member crew from AmeriCorps worked together to deliver nearly 300 boxes of food, or four boxes per family, on Nov. 19 and 21 to the Utah communities served by St. Mary's in the Moonlight Church in Oljato and St. John the Baptizer Church in Montezuma Creek. Among the nonperishable items were staples like rice, dried beans, flour and sugar.

Going forward, the distributed boxes will contain about enough food to assist families for two weeks, Gordy said. Navajoland also is raising money to help Navajo Nation families pay to heat their homes during the winter. ■

Photos/Leon Sampson

Photo/G.J. Gordy



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## NEWS

# Massachusetts congregation to house Afghan families

By David Paulsen  
Episcopal News Service

St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Newburyport, Mass. in early December began opening its doors to Afghan evacuees, welcoming a family of 13 who took up temporary residence at the church.

A second Afghan family, with 11 members, was also scheduled to be hosted by St. Paul's as part of the congregation's response to a churchwide call to "welcome the stranger." The United States is accommodating 50,000 Afghans who fled their home country after the Taliban took control in August.

"It is a privilege to offer support for these families in such a crucial way," the Rev. Jarred Mercer, rector at St. Paul's, told the Salem News. "The call to do all we can to love and support these friends, whose lives have been put in grave danger in their home country because of their relationship to ours, is a moral imperative of our time."

Mercer's congregation converted classroom and meeting space at St. Paul's into temporary living quarters while an immigrant support organization, the International Institute of New England, works to find permanent housing for the families. Mercer told the Salem News the church is still lining up donations of beds, a crib, linens, towels and toiletries to help the new arrivals feel at home.

Episcopal churches across the United States are stepping up in a variety of ways

to help the evacuees, who were allowed into the country under a humanitarian parole program.

In Oklahoma, Episcopal volunteers are welcoming Afghan families at the airport in Oklahoma City. An Episcopal congregation in Watertown, Wisc., recently helped fill two moving trucks and five cars with supplies for refugees staying at Wisconsin's Fort McCoy.

A New Mexico congregation launched a donation drive for supplies, while a Wyoming congregation has taken steps to sponsor an Afghan family in Casper.

Some Episcopalians and congregations are providing direct support to the 11 local affiliates of Episcopal Migration Ministries, or EMM, which is coordinating the Episcopal Church's efforts to serve these new neighbors.

Episcopalians in cities without an EMM affiliate still can lend a hand by connecting with affiliates of one of the other eight resettlement agencies.

The humanitarian parole program is separate from the refugee resettlement program that EMM and the other agencies facilitate on behalf of the State Department, though the agencies plan to provide services to Afghan evacuees similar to what has been provided since 1980 through



Photo/St. Paul's via Facebook

*St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Newburyport, Mass., converted classroom and meeting space to temporary living quarters for Afghan evacuees who are being welcomed to the community.*

the refugee resettlement program. Those services include English language and cultural orientation classes, employment services, school enrollment, and initial assistance with housing and transportation.

EMM also has invited Episcopalians and their congregations and dioceses to support that work by making donations online to the Neighbors Welcome: Afghan Allies Fund and by volunteering in

other ways, which they can do through an online form.

In Newburyport, a coastal city of 18,000 about 45 miles north of Boston, St. Paul's has been working with International Institute of New England since August, when the United States expedited the end of its 20-year war in Afghanistan and withdrew troops from the country.

Some Afghans fled to the United States through the special immigrant visa program, which is open to people who fear persecution for their work in support of the U.S. government.

The humanitarian parole program is intended to accommodate others arriving amid the recent crisis in Afghanistan who do not yet have legal residency status. Once in the U.S., some may be able to apply for special immigrant visas, while others will apply for asylum.

"This is a time for our whole community to come together, and in this season of giving and generosity, to do all we can to support these arrivals who are in such great need," Mercer told the Salem News. ■

## Episcopal Migration Ministries resettles its 100,000th refugee

Episcopal Church Public Affairs Office

Episcopal Migration Ministries, one of nine national agencies responsible for resettling refugees and special immigrant visa holders in partnership with the U.S. government, announced that it has resettled 100,000 individuals since it was formally established in the 1980s.

"We mark this milestone with much thanksgiving and gratitude for all who have partnered with our dedicated staff in this vital ministry of serving our global neighbors forced to flee their homes in search of safety and security," said Demetrio Alvero, operations director for EMM. "Jesus exhorted us to love our neighbors—as he demonstrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan. We do this through intentional, loving, and practical care of others' needs."

As the refugee resettlement and migration ministry of the Episcopal Church, EMM has 11 affiliate offices in nine states. In addition to welcoming and integrating newcomers, EMM is also the church's convening place for collaboration, education, and information-sharing on migration.

The Episcopal Church has served immigrants to the U.S. since the late 1800s, when the church opened port chaplaincy ministries. In the 1930s, local parishes collected donations to provide steamship passage for those fleeing Nazi Europe.

From those early efforts, the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief began, the forerunner to Episcopal Relief & Development and EMM. In the mid- and late 20th century, the church partnered with other faith orga-

nizations to resettle those oppressed by the Iron Curtain and the genocides of Southeast Asia.

In his Christmas video message (posted on the public affairs page of [www.episcopalchurch.org](http://www.episcopalchurch.org)), Presiding Bishop Michael Curry highlighted a poster produced by the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio in 1938, titled "In the Name of These Refugees — Aid All Refugees," that depicts the holy family fleeing to Egypt.

"Christmas stories are reminders that Jesus came to show us how to love as God loves," Curry says. "One of the ways we love as God loves is to help those who are refugees, those who seek asylum from political tyranny, poverty, famine, or other hardship ... Ministries like Episcopal Migration Ministries, the work of this church, have helped to resettle 100,000 refugees as of December 2021. That work goes on. ... In the name of these refugees, let us help all refugees."

Since August, EMM has been actively involved in the Afghan humanitarian crisis that unfolded when the Taliban took control of the country and thousands fled their homeland. In November, EMM learned it had received two major grants to support its work with Afghan refugees as well as other asylum seekers.

"For more than 80 years, long before the United States established the formal refugee resettlement program, Episcopal congregations and dioceses have been welcoming those seeking safety and protection," said the Rev. C. K. Robertson, canon to the presiding bishop for ministry beyond the Episcopal Church.

For more information, visit [www.episcopalmigrationministries.org](http://www.episcopalmigrationministries.org). ■

SAINT FRANCIS continued from page 6

played his attendance at Whymark's wedding and said he never received compensation from Whymark's companies.

"With board approval, Saint Francis made an investment with Bill Whymark's company. I did not," Smith said.

Smith said he has not been questioned by the FBI. He declined to say whether he reported personal expenses made with Saint Francis credit cards as taxable income.

"My personal taxes are in order and are not a matter for public discussion," Smith said.

Smith said he is currently serving as provost at the Christ Cathedral in Salina. A provost usually is an administrative officer at a cathedral.



Photo/Saint Francis Ministries

*The entrance to Saint Francis Ministries, the largest foster care provider in Kansas, is seen.*

Kansas Reflector obtained a copy of an email he sent to church members alerting them to the publication of this story.

"I learned on Friday, December 10, that that Diocese of Chicago issued a statement and responded to a series of questions from a reporter with the Kansas Reflector concerning what it calls disciplinary action against me, relating to my resignation from Saint Francis Ministries more than a year ago," Smith wrote in the email. "This is an egregious violation of sacred trust by the Diocese of Chicago ... I have talked with the bishop and have informed the vestry. The support I have received is deeply gratifying as I believe your support to be as well." ■

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## NEWS

## Oregon parish continues feeding homeless despite city restrictions

By Egan Millard  
Episcopal News Service

An Oregon parish that has been providing critical services to homeless people despite opposition from neighbors is now taking a stand against new restrictions on its feeding ministry imposed by city officials in Brookings, on the coast near the California state line.

On Oct. 26, the Brookings city council passed an ordinance that restricts distribution of free meals to twice a week. St. Timothy's Episcopal Church currently distributes meals four times a week.

"There's no question in my mind that it's directed at us," said the Rev. Bernie Lindley, vicar at St. Timothy's. The congregation will continue feeding homeless and hungry people four times a week in defiance of the ordinance with the support of the Diocese of Oregon, which is prepared to defend the parish in court if necessary.

St. Timothy's fills a social service void in an area where there are many unhoused and transient residents but few resources available to them. A recent count found 121 homeless people living in the ZIP code that covers Brookings, Lindley said, but the small city doesn't provide homelessness services and there are no homeless shelters in the county.

For years, the parish has provided a variety of services for homeless people, including its soup kitchen and pantry, showers and restrooms, COVID-19 vaccine clinics and an advocacy team that helps homeless people sign up for affordable housing wait lists, get identification cards and obtain benefits.

But Brookings has recently seen a backlash against the homeless and those who care for them, including St. Timothy's. In June, 29 residents petitioned the city to stop St. Timothy's homeless min-



Photo/Bernie Lindley

Volunteers prepare food at St. Timothy's Episcopal Church in Brookings, Ore.

Timothy's is operating a restaurant in a residential area, which is banned under local zoning laws. Lindley said the city told him that the only way St. Timothy's soup kitchen could continue operating legally would be to get a conditional use permit, but that would only allow meal service twice a week.

"If we applied, we'd have to stop feeding two days a week, and we're not going to do that," Lindley told ENS. "So if we applied, it would be disingenuous of us to do so. There's no way we're going to apply."

By continuing its regular meal service, St. Timothy's risks legal action from the city, including possible fines. But if it comes to that, Lindley is confident that the church can win in court, especially because St. Timothy's has the Diocese of Oregon on its side.

Bishop Diana Akiyama and diocesan chancellor Emily Karr "are in regular conversation" with Lindley, said Alli Gannett, the diocese's director of communications.

"The diocese fully supports St. Timothy's and Father Bernie, and [we] are here to work with the city of Brookings," Gannett told ENS. "If there were to be any fines or anything, I know that our diocese is willing and able to fight those."

Lindley described the city's actions as an affront to the religious freedom guaranteed by the Constitution that would not stand up in court.

"The founding fathers did not want [the government] to prevent homeless people from being fed," he said.

"The diocese is pretty hopeful — also from seeing other churches in other parts of the country face similar issues and the churches have prevailed," Gannett said.

Akiyama visited St. Timothy's in



Photo/Bernie Lindley

A volunteer distributes food at St. Timothy's Episcopal Church in Brookings, Ore.

October to volunteer at its COVID-19 vaccination and testing clinic, swabbing the noses of those who came to be tested. The Oregon Health Authority designated St. Timothy's an official clinic in September, granting it \$405,000 to continue testing and vaccination.

"The diocese has been focused on supporting St. Timothy's in their ministry," Akiyama wrote to the diocese afterward.

"It seems that the good work of embodying Christ's love for the world is

threatening to those who do not recognize the compassion that is alive at St. Timothy's.

"Beyond being highly organized, well-staffed, and attentive to detail, the folks at St. Timothy's are serving with a heartfelt commitment to those in need," she continued.

"Let's all remind St. Timothy's, the city of Brookings, and each other of the wondrous work that is revealed when we awaken to the truth that what we "do to the least of these, you do to me." ■



Photo/Alli Gannett

Oregon Bishop Diana Akiyama administers a COVID-19 test at St. Timothy's Episcopal Church in Brookings, Ore.

istries, citing dangerous and disruptive behavior by people staying in the parish's parking lot.

The mayor and members of the city council have been critical of providing services to homeless people, saying it attracts them — and problems associated with them — to the area.

Lindley spoke to Episcopal News Service by phone while working his other job: unloading a catch of crab from his commercial fishing boat. He explained that the city council claims that St.



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## FEATURE

# 'The Great Episcopal Baking Show' still stirs up fellowship in South Carolina

By Mary Frances Schjonberg  
Episcopal News Service

**B**aking and binge-watching television both have been pandemic diversions. Clergy and lay leaders at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Charleston, S.C., capitalized on those habits last Epiphany when they produced "The Great Episcopal Baking Show," echoing the extremely popular "Great British Baking Show."

The idea came up during a Zoom staff meeting in mid-December 2020 as the participants wondered "how to bring people together when we're not going to be in-person this Christmas?" explained Andrea McKellar, who at that time was the digital ministry coordinator.

"We are a really big congregation with a small space so there wasn't a way to gather safely without excluding people," she said, adding that members did not go back to in-person services until May 2021.

The bake-off was such a hit with the congregation that, while there are no current plans for a "second season," parishioners still talk about how wonderful it was to see their leaders in a different context. McKellar said St. Stephen's 2020 effort could be replicated by other congregations for this coming Epiphany, or for Shrove Tuesday (March 1, 2022).

The organizers asked three bakers to make the sweet pastry known as king cake that is traditionally served on Epiphany but is perhaps more commonly associated with Mardi Gras. The bakers used the Betty Crocker quick king cake recipe.

McKellar, who also serves as the Diocese of South Carolina's ministry developer and is a member of the Episcopal Church Executive Council, said that the project snowballed after the Rev. Laura Rezac, associate rector, suggested a baking competition. The finished product was a 12-minute video, which McKellar edited and shared on the church's YouTube channel where the parish is still posting Sunday services.

They had one main criterion for the bakers. "We had to make sure we had people who didn't mind making fun of themselves," she said.

Saying she loves to cook but not to bake, vestry member Cynthia Held declared in the video that "this thing right here, scares me ... yeast. We're not very good friends. We've hardly met."

For the competition, the organizers recruited Held; the Rev. Adam Shoemaker, St. Stephen's rector; and the Rev. Greg Smith, St. Stephen's deacon, but gave them little information about what they would be making. Serendipitously, none were bakers.

"We didn't plan on it being people with no baking experience but that ended up making it more fun," McKellar said.

McKellar and the Rev. Courtney Davis-Shoemaker, assistant rector at St. Stephen's, suggested a list of ingredients to have on hand. Davis-Shoemaker, who is married to the rector, dropped a bag outside each baker's home that included a crown, an Episcopal apron, the king cake recipe, a plastic baby to put in the cake, colored frosting and glitter sugar.

The bakers had four hours and could phone one friend and do one internet search. Shoemaker called a parishioner to ask to borrow her stand mixer and he went to the internet to find a video on dough braiding. "It was extremely difficult to replicate what the video instructed me to do," he said.

Held also struggled with the braiding but that wasn't all. "The hardest part for me was trusting the yeast and rise of the dough," she said. "I had no idea if it was doing its thing."

Noting that he had assembled all but one of the ingredients, Smith in the video said the only thing missing was experience. He struggled

simply to follow the recipe directions. "I was definitely out of my comfort zone," he said, adding that he had to Google some baking terms.

The organizers kept the video part easy, the "film crews" were simply told to use their cellphone and to record horizontally, minimize background noise and pause a bit before speaking to give video editor McKellar room for splicing together their clips. Held said her children formed her film crew and found their task easy. Smith's wife "held the camera and laughed at me throughout the filming," he said.

During the video, Shoemaker takes a break from baking to briefly tell viewers about Epiphany. "We wanted it to



Screenshots/St. Stephen's video

Andrea McKellar helped organize "The Great Episcopal Baking Show," served as the emcee and edited the bakers' videos into the final 12-minute show.

← The Emcee

↘ The Contestants



Vestry member Cynthia Held, above, declared in the video that yeast "scares me."

The Rev. Greg Smith, St. Stephen's deacon, right, said, "I have never baked anything in my life."



## ↘ The Entries



be a formation activity for the church in the midst of the fun," McKellar said, adding that the producers were aiming for "formation and fellowship in a creative way."

The competition was done under the rubric of COVID-19 safety protocols. Bakers baked in their home while family members filmed them. The judges collected their cakes from tables placed outside of the church and took them home for their role in the competition, which family members recorded.

One judge, Dr. Scott Curry, is an epidemiologist, one of two in the parish, so "we had medical consultants on this project," McKellar said with a smile.

The other judges were Bishop Charlie vonRosenberg, former Diocese of East Tennessee bishop and past provisional bishop of South Carolina, and his wife Annie vonRosenberg, Verger Mike Shewan, and parishioners Thelma Shine and Edna Monroe.

Held's cake was declared the winner.

Videographers uploaded their clips to Dropbox. McKellar watched episodes of the British version with an eye toward the narrative of each bake. She used Open Shot, a free open-source video editing software and created other needed graphics with Canva. Royalty-free music came from Fesliyan Studios.

Parishioners are still talking about the competition and the video, according to Smith. It was the right thing to do, he added. "Our parish needed something to bring us some fun and togetherness during our time of COVID isolation," he said.

Other bakers and non-bakers in the parish were inspired to try their hand at king cake after viewing the video.

However, none of the competitive bakers have baked again since. Shoemaker said he might try to bake another king cake with his kids this year "if for no other reason than to give our family a good laugh watching me attempt the braiding again!"

Smith said his wife Lyn "wanted me to quit while I was ahead."



The Rev. Adam Shoemaker, St. Stephen's rector, above, used his one phone call to ask parishioners Rich and Jane Clary if they would lend him their stand mixer.

It's not too late for Epiphany 2022. The St. Stephen's bakers and judges did their parts over three days during the week between Christmas and New Year's. "I probably spent 30 hours editing because there was so much footage to work with," McKellar said. "And we knew if it was over 15 minutes, people wouldn't watch."

Shoemaker said his advice to any other congregation considering such a competition is to remember that "there was a lot filmed that we ended up not using in the final video." He said McKellar was a masterful editor.

"For other congregations wanting to try this, I'd say keep in mind the time it will take to put the supplies together, do the baking/recording, and then to edit it all down into a finished product," he said.

St. Stephen's members are not clamoring for a 2021 competition, in part because the parish is now back in the church. McKellar said that "the feedback we're getting from people is that they're tired of video but something like this that's short and fun, I think people would watch." ■

The Rev. Mary Frances Schjonberg is a former senior editor and reporter for Episcopal News Service.

## FEATURE

# Faith traditions lack support for female leaders, experts say

By Linda Brooks

Women have made great progress in business and politics, but in the world of male-dominated religious faiths, acceptance in leadership roles is still difficult to achieve, although slow change is happening.

That was one of the conclusions drawn at a Dec. 9 panel discussion of “Women’s Evolving Influence in Male-led Faiths,” sponsored by the Associated Press, Religion News Service and TheConversation.org.

In 1974, the Episcopal Church was one of the earliest Christian denominations to ordain women, a move that was very controversial. In 1988, Barbara Harris was the first woman elected as a bishop.

Women’s voices are heard in other faith organizations but without the legitimacy of ordination or title, their voices are not heard or accepted at the same level as their male counterparts.

“Our ability to lead depends on who is listening,” said panelist Emilie M. Townes, dean and distinguished professor of womanist ethics and society at Vanderbilt Divinity School.

Townes was joined by Ingrid Mattson, chair of Islamic studies at Huron University College at Western University; Carolyn Woo, distinguished president’s fellow for global development at Purdue University and Jue Liang, visiting assistant professor of religion at Denison University.

The discussion was chaired by Roxanne Stone, managing editor of Religion News Service. The discussion will be followed by stories on the three news services examining the roles of women in major religious traditions.

The panel discussion focused on why

women continue to pursue active roles in religious organizations despite often being barred from full leadership and ordination and what they feel they can contribute to their denominations and communities “often breaking barriers along the way,” according to Stone.

Mattson noted that most people only reach out for spiritual guidance in moments of crisis, so it is important that they can find that guidance from men and women.

There is no formal ordination in Islamic tradition and there have been male and female scholars, however men have usually held public leadership positions. In North America, there is a more congregational life centered around the mosque where men’s influence is greater, she said.

Townes sees today more women than men responding to a call to ministry, entering seminary and becoming chaplains, congregation pastors, religious community organizers or professors. Women should explore all options and not limit themselves on how they feel they are called to serve, she said.

Woo spoke about her upcoming book on “Women’s Leadership in the Catholic Ministries” in which she debunks the myth that women have no impact in the Catholic church because only men can be ordained.

This thinking has led to the idea that women do not matter and make no contribution. Yet the social services ministries in health, education, caretaking are predominately led by women, she noted.

Liang noted that because Buddha was a man, it has been Buddhist tradition that only men can be monks and leaders. In recent years women’s status within Buddhism has expanded due to two reasons: women are now better educated and nuns have more equal ordination



The panel included, clockwise from top left, Jue Liang, Ingrid Mattson, Carolyn Woo, and Emilie Townes.

with monks, and Buddhism is becoming more liberal as more come to the faith from western countries. There is also a greater understanding of gender inequality and women’s issues. She said she believes “education can insure a future for Buddhist women.”

Defining leadership in their distinct religious groups, the panelists came to similar conclusions. Leadership need not be defined by a title, but in our modern world titles are necessary to be heard. Woo defines leadership as “the ability to have a vision that advances that organization and the capacity to translate that vision into action.”

A formal position or title allows one to vote, to have a chair at the table. Women have traditionally been guides and listeners but for a final answer they will always turn to a priest, an imam, or other male leader and the woman’s voice is lost, according to the discussion.

The internet and social media have provided more opportunities for women’s voices to be heard in a male-dom-

inated religious hierarchy, but there are pros and cons.

Previously the formal power of the church could limit and/or control what information is released. That may no longer be the case, but according to Mattson, women tend to exercise self-censorship.

“Women are cautious, especially with issues about women,” not wanting to be judged as “radical feminists” which could cause them to be censored further, she said.

In the U.S., the internet gives women anonymity and protection, but in many other countries, women’s voices are limited and controlled by the government, Liang and Mattson said.

In Tibet, Buddhist nuns who post articles on the internet use cover stories to bypass the Chinese “great firewall” censors.

In some Arab nations, women are free to discuss religion on television but Mattson said she sees much of this content as “religious infotainment” projecting a government-approved “national vision.”

The panelists were asked if they thought younger generations would demand more change or turn away from their religions. Woo said she feels that some people would insist “we have got to change” and there might be a counter-reaction of the “worst version of Catholicism.”

“The Catholic church will not go away but what people expect of the church and how they hold the church accountable and how we fracture into different groups is what we should be watching for,” she said.

There is optimism and also frustration. Woo says women are the primary evangelizers and “play a very important role in passing on the faith” as mothers, friends and teachers. Women bring a unique perspective to the table but need to be given a seat in order for religious perspective to grow in the future. ■

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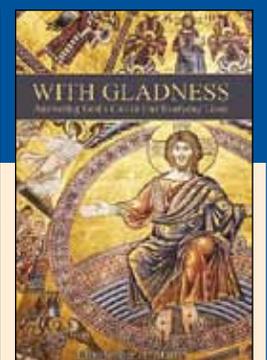
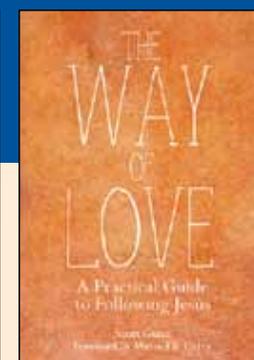
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## FEATURE

## Afghanistan's war rug industry distorts the reality of everyday trauma

By Jamal J. Elias  
The Conversation

The end of the U.S.-led military intervention in Afghanistan has resulted in the withdrawal of most foreign aid workers and contractors.

It may well also spell the demise of the country's war rug industry.

As a specialist in the visual and material culture of the Islamic world, I first became aware of war rugs when I was working on a book on truck decoration in Pakistan and Afghanistan in the 1990s.

Since that time, I've followed changes in this industry and cultivated relationships with Pakistani and Afghan rug sellers.

War rugs — with symbols of war — are distinctive and dynamic in their styles. But they're often misunderstood by buyers, journalists and curators.

### Growth of the market

There is no evidence of the existence of Afghan war rugs prior to the late 20th century.

The earliest rugs seem to have emerged shortly after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 from refugee camps in Pakistan, where millions of Afghans had relocated. Featuring guns, helicopters and tanks, they were small and shoddily made with coarse wool. Rug sellers and souvenir shops pitched them to workers for non-government organizations and Western government officials.

The designs have become more sophisticated over the years.

English words were added, intentionally or accidentally garbled with Cyrillic words and letters to evoke a Soviet connection. After 9/11, fixed patterns started to emerge — a sign that weavers were adhering to templates provided by rug



Photos/Kevin Sudeith, courtesy of WarRug.com

*The rug designs tend to contain symbols — AK-47s, 9/11 and drones — that reflect an outsider's understanding of war. After 9/11, merchants started trying to appeal to an American souvenir market.*

merchants. The images made it clear that they were hoping to primarily appeal to an American souvenir market.

One popular design commemorates the 9/11 attacks, pointing out that it was not Afghans who were responsible, but terrorists from other countries.

Another depicts a map of Afghanistan, professing Afghanistan's friendship with the U.S. with text and images. It has the misspelled word "terrorism" written on the region of the country associated with the Taliban.

The writing on some rugs declares that they're made in Sheberghan, a city in northern Afghanistan famous for its Turkmen weavers.

It's unlikely that they're all made there. However, whether they're made in northern Afghanistan or in Afghan settlements in Pakistan, the word "Sheberghan," written in English, is supposed to signal that these rugs are authentically Afghan.

Such rugs are readily available on eBay and were — until recently — sold by souvenir sellers in Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan's cities with the largest number of foreign workers and tourists. With the Taliban's return to power, it remains unclear what the future of rug making and its market will be.

Over the years, war motifs have found their way into higher-quality, larger carpets, with small tanks appearing where rows of medallions might traditionally have been. Other rugs feature a more comprehensive integration of modern and traditional patterns.

While these larger carpets take substantially more time to make and cost more money than the far more common smaller, coarser rugs, they nevertheless



don't meet the standards of fine carpets, which suggests they're geared more to souvenir collectors than those seeking luxury home furnishings.

### Misreading the meaning of the rugs

Over the past 20 years, Afghan war rugs have garnered considerable attention.

Books in German and English describe, catalog and contextualize them. Magazines and major newspapers have run features on them, and university art galleries have exhibited them.

Within the coverage, there's a tendency to see war rugs as a reflection of the emotional lives of the weavers, who, wracked by war and violence, felt compelled to incorporate these motifs into their designs.

Articles and exhibits often ignore the reality that rug brokers and dealers — not weavers — are the ones who are attuned to fickle market tastes. Studies on labor in the rug industry note that they're normally the ones who supply weavers with new patterns, color schemes and yarn. I've seen the same dynamic in my own long-term observations.

Ultimately, Afghan war rugs are produced for the market. It's that simple.

Yet you'll still see exhibit curators describe war rugs as combining "ancient

practice with the latest in the daily lives of the weavers," or as windows into the perspectives of everyday Afghans — the "underdogs" in a country subsumed by strife.

In 2014, The New York Times reported that weavers had incorporated "the grim realities of life in a war zone into their traditional craft." Six years earlier, Smithsonian Magazine buried a brief acknowledgment that the rugs are for tourists under claims — with scant evidence — that the earliest war rugs were intended for Afghan buyers who resented the Soviet invasion. Later, the writer notes that female weavers drew from their own lives when they incorporated symbols of violence.

### The appeal of the trauma market

With so much evidence showing that Afghan war rugs are produced in response to market demand, why do claims that they're based on the weavers' experiences of war persist?

Part of the answer lies in the global market for handicrafts. Buyers want to feel like they're purchasing artisanal products when, in reality, they're sold by the thousands in chain stores and through online storefronts such as Ten Thousand Villages or Etsy.

Implying that rugs are a source of income for traumatized and destitute Afghan women ignores the reality that the overwhelming majority of profits go to middlemen and dealers. A work-from-home model encourages workers to devote all available time to rug production. It also encourages child labor: Children are either tasked with making the crude rugs or are forced to take up the responsibilities of adults.

The appeal of war rugs — and the insistence that their designs represent a victim's experience of war — seems to reflect a vicarious desire to peer into the emotional experience of Afghan civilians.

In reality, though, this gives primacy not to the actual experiences of Afghans, but to the viewers' and customers' ideas of victimhood. The granular realities of the loss of home and animals, family deaths or food insecurity aren't represented in the rugs. Nor should we assume weavers would wish to put their own traumas on display for the world.

Modern rugs are not venues for self-expression, and the designs tend to contain an index of symbols that reflect an outsider's understanding of war: AK-47s, 9/11, security politics and drones.

Nowhere in the rugs do we see the well-documented psychological and health impacts on Afghanistan's population caused by decades of deprivation and violence.

Real trauma is not only hard to turn into a commodity, it is also hard to live with — even in souvenirs. ■

*Jamal J. Elias is Walter H. Annenberg Professor of the Humanities and Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. This article was first published at The Conversation ([www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com)).*



Some rugs incorporate war motifs, like tanks, into traditional designs.