

About

Episcorific

Heya! you're holding the eleventh issue of Episcorific, a zine for and by the young adults of the Episcopal Church. The big idea? Young adults are not big churchgoers generally. Our lives are hectic and often unstable. We are at the mercy of the education system, budding careers, frequent moves and our own indecisiveness. We are justifiably self-involved as we try to make our place in this world, define the bounds of our lives. But for many of us the church is an important site for that self-creation, a place of expanding the me-box to let God in. So, this is just another attempt at bringing the few, the brave, the young adults of the Episcopal Church into closer communion. Read. Listen. Think. Pray. And when you're ready, lend your own voice to the babble. Let's share our lives of faith.



episcorific.org

Episcorific

for and by the Young Adults of the Episcopal Church

ISSUE 11, ORDINARY TIME 2010



**soapbox
issue**

episcorific.org

A Note from the editor(s)

A big thank you to all those who contributed to this issue, to those who helped spread the word and especially to you for reading. We hope you'll find food for thought and conversation.

Feedback for the authors can be sent to episcorific@gmail.com. Let's keep the conversation going.

Episcorific is a publication for and by young adults, who may or may not otherwise be affiliated with the Episcopal Church. All opinions expressed in Episcorific are the opinions of the writers themselves and are in no way meant to speak on behalf of the official body of the Episcopal Church. The works belong to the authors and artists and you should ask their permission to reprint them outside of Episcorific. Just in case you were wondering,

The Episcorific editorial board consists of Ross Heinsohn, Kathleen Jaco, Hanna Kang-Brown, Eileen O'Brien, Jeremiah Sierra & Jason Sierra.



Check it out!

Upcoming

Gather

Every two years, students from across the church descend on Estes Park, CO to ring in the new year together. Planned by students for students, Gather is an incredible opportunity to meet folks from across the country while enjoying the beautiful snow and slopes of Colorado, and don't forget the awesome New Years party that'll ring in 2011. Read more at episcopalcommons.org/gather.

Episcopal Young Adult and Campus Ministries

As always, the Office for Young Adult & Campus Ministries webpages are full of helpful info as well as upcoming events and job opportunities. episcopalchurch.org/youngadults & episcopalchurch.org/campusministries

Broadcast

A newsletter for young adult and campus ministers with plenty of articles relevant to young adults themselves, explore this monthly update on the latest happenings, opportunities and resources in the world of Young Adult and Campus Ministries

Episcorific
next issue

Wrap your gifts

Where do you see God working in your life/family/friends/church through the gifts of the spirit? Talk about it.

Submit! by November 5



Keep it clean

Brush your teeth

Make it easier for others to hear your passions. Take care of yourself.

Scrub your hands

You can't do work with dirty hands. Clean your hands so you can volunteer at a soup kitchen or a shelter or wherever it is your heart (and hands) lead you.

Tidy your room

So you can get some good work and sleep done in there. Clear off your desk so you can draw or write or do whatever it is you like to do to create.

Wash your feet (and other people's)

Or let Jesus do that for you. Go to church, where you can feel clean inside and out (assuming you took a shower and put on your Sunday Best) and be more ready to serve those who need you most.

Every day when I sit down for a meal at my dining table, my gaze lifts up to meet a framed poster by printmaker, Corita Kent. A former nun and social activist, Corita printed prolifically from the 60s-80s. She's known for her bold use of color, her playful, carefree splotches, and the phrases that usually inspire them.

In this particular poster, it says, "to be fully alive is to work for the common good." A good friend of mine gave me that poster, knowing how much I love Corita's work. Each day, when I see the poster's joyful streaks of red, green, and blue, and the bold handwritten statement, "to be fully alive..." my heart leaps with joy. To me, it says that God wants us to be fully alive. God wants us to be authentic and to live out our deepest desires. And in doing so, the world, in a beautiful and unpredictable way, is served for the better.

In this Episcopific issue, we visit the theme of "soapbox" and hear from young adults across the country on what makes them passionate and gets them up in the mornings. Though the word soapbox was literally used to describe street preachers and union organizers standing on boxes and preaching at people walking by, these stories are far from preachy and pedantic. They are deeply lived, authentic stories that give testimony to this idea that being fully alive to who truly you are really does serve the common good.

What makes you fully alive? What country has your name on it? What irks you yet draws you? What must you create? How does a life in Christ interact with your deepest desires? All these questions and more are answered from unique perspectives in the following pages.

As a new contributing member of the Episcopific editorial team, I look forward to connecting with you and hearing the stories that shape your life. Until then, here's to discovering your self, discovering God, and discovering where your soapbox meets the needs of this world.

—Hanna Kang Brown

Ordinary 2010: Soapbox Issue

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Sand Dollar Cross

by Stacey Carmody

Those who go down to the sea in ships,
Who do business in great waters;

These see Yahweh's works, And
his wonders in the deep.

Psalm 107: 23-24

I express my faith with many symbols. I am a collector of icons, rosaries and crosses. I have a nice collection of cross necklaces of many varieties that I wear, but the one necklace that I come back to the most is my sterling silver cross with a sand dollar in the middle. There is a poem that claims the sand dollar as a Christian symbol- with its various markings denoting the crucifixion, Jesus' birth, doves and an Easter lily. For me, the sand dollar cross symbolizes even more than that. The cross symbolizes my faith, and the sand dollar the ocean- two things that bring serenity to my life. In fact, in the summer months there are days where I attend to these two passions in the same day: I attend church in the morning and lay on the beach in the afternoon.

The cross and sand dollar are melded together- further symbolizing for me that nature and God are one, and that creation and science are not opposites. Our faith was born along the seas of ancient lands. The sea is referred to in the Bible many times, and also in the Psalms. Is it any surprise that many of our churches that are near coasts have "By The Sea" in their names? Also no surprise to me is the fact that our presiding bishop is a former oceanographer who understands the important relationship between the watery wonders of creation and scientific fact. Biology without faith or faith without biology can limit the scope of our understanding. I was not always a person of faith so it took me a long time to realize that I can believe in evolution and Christianity. It was a joy to realize that there was a faith for me that allowed me to believe in both openly and freely.

When things get rough, I reach for the sand dollar cross pendant around my neck and touch it. It calms me and is a reminder of what I'm about, what my passion is and why I rise every day.

Happy Medium

by Bill Wong

I am currently studying in University of Southern California's entry-level masters program in occupational therapy (OT). By the time you read this article, I will be doing first of my level 2 fieldwork assignments, which means that I will be expected to do what an entry-level occupational therapist will do except for the fact that I will supervised by a licensed occupational therapist to make sure I follow the rules and regulations.

Why is this significant? I am not afraid to speak my mind about God, spirituality, and church. However, in the setting that I have been exposed to and will continue to do so until the end of my career as an occupational therapist, religion in general is a subject that must be discussed in caution- whether it's with my clients or in the "occupational therapy world". Simply put, I must find a happy medium.

So, I have developed an approach to solve this dilemma, especially since I am thinking of practicing in psychosocial. First, as I am building occupational profiles of my clients, I will particularly pay close attention if they reply "Christian" or "non-religious" to determine the boundaries on what religious subjects I can discuss with them. Second, in the "occupational therapy world", I will just listen or read and adapt, practicing caution, to keep the occasions where I learn things the hard way to a minimum.

Third, on the flip side, I will do what I can to spread the word to various Episcopalians about what OT is. I feel that I will be bringing a unique gift from God to the leaders in the Episcopal Church- assisting leaders throughout the Episcopal Church in keeping them from burning out from doing ministry work. I believe that burnout is an issue a lot of leaders in the Episcopal Church are ignoring due to the fact they want to be unselfish and/or feel that other people are not reliable. My dream is to create or add to a ministry that will address the health and wellness for leaders in the Episcopal Church.

In summary, I am inspired to use my evangelical gifts in appropriate situations in my professional world. Meanwhile, I also am enthusiastic about using my knowledge in OT to assist leaders in the Episcopal Church in doing ministry more effectively from a health standpoint.

ordinary

Grant us,
O Lord,
to trust
in you with
all our
hearts;
for, as
you always
resist the
proud who
confide in
their own
strength, so
you never
forsake
those who
make their
boast of
your
mercy.

The term Ordinary Time was first used with the liturgical reforms which followed the Second Vatican Council. The reformed liturgical calendar took effect on the first Sunday of Advent in 1969. Before this there were two distinct seasons known as the season after Epiphany and the season after Pentecost respectively. Liturgical days in these times were referred to as the -nth Sunday after Epiphany or Pentecost, or Feria II,III,IV,V or VI after the -nth Sunday. Since then, many Protestant churches have also adopted the concept, along with the Revised Common Lectionary which is based on the Catholic liturgical reforms of the late 1960's.

not exceptional in any
way especially in quality
or ability or size or
degree

What are you called to do/be this ordinary time?

How are we called to gather strength in the ordinary times to hold us through the extraordinary?

Jesus showed us that God works through the ordinary and the even less than ordinary. What can we learn about what it means to be Christian in ordinary times?



Growing in Mission

by Robin Denney

Living in a post-war country is something I never set out to do. All through college I was convinced that my goal was to work as a vineyard manager, and I could not imagine ending up anywhere except my family's vineyard. But God stepped in and changed all that. It turned out farm management was not my passion in life, and as I tried to start my profession after college I felt incredibly unfulfilled. I felt God drawing me toward something new. Dragging my feet and constantly making mistakes, I started on an adventure that has changed my life and awakened me to my passion: dwelling in the love of God.

I arrived in Liberia three years after a peace agreement ended their fifteen year civil war. The war destroyed their prosperity and infrastructure and killed ten percent of the population. As a member of the Episcopal Church's Young Adult Service Corps I worked for a year at

an Episcopal university, teaching agriculture and designing curriculum and programs for the school farm. After a year at home I headed out again as an agricultural missionary of the Episcopal Church, this time to Sudan --four years after the end of twenty-three years of war between the north and the south, a war that claimed two and a half million lives. I have been in Sudan for almost a year and a half now as the agriculture consultant for the Episcopal Church of Sudan, working to develop an agriculture department for the Church.

War destroys everything. It freezes a place in time, outside of development. War leaves no one untouched by the trauma and leaves behind a depth of division, hatred and pain unfathomable in societies that have not experienced it in living memory. When I first began living in this context I found it difficult to see God in the world around me. All I could see was the depth of the brokenness and the desperation of the

Join the Party!

The concept is simple: get together with your faith community -- your parish, your school, a neighboring church or synagogue or mosque -- and dedicate yourselves to improving your community that day, by getting your hands dirty cutting carbon emissions.

Easy ways to cut carbon emissions include:

- * Install weather-stripping, efficient lighting and more insulation in your parish;
- * Plant trees;
- * Harvest community gardens to demonstrate local food solutions;
- * Organize a carpool/bike to church Sunday (Oct. 10 is a Sunday);
- * Host a bike-repair workshop or install bike racks outside your church;
- * Paint your roof white to cool off without air-conditioning.

Whatever you're doing, celebrate with music, food, prayer, dancing -- be creative and have fun together. You can either create your own work party or join one already happening in your town. To do so, visit the Episcopal Church's website, or go to 350.org's campaigns page.

Why 350? 350 parts per million is what scientists say is the safe upper limit of carbon in the atmosphere; the current level is 390 ppm. As May Boeve from 350.org writes, the number 350 is "a symbol of a world where murderous heat waves, massive flooding and oil spills large and small aren't the new norm -- as well as a vision of a more just and whole planet we can build together." To return to 350 ppm, we need to cut our carbon emissions... which is what the Global Work Party is all about.

Why the Episcopal Church? I think Jesus would be pitching in. His life was committed to defending "the cause of the poor and needy," to raising up those whose voices were not heard. And, in case that's not enough, our church specifically supports the kind of work happening on 10/10/10. General Convention 2009 passed the Genesis Covenant, a resolution strongly encouraging all of us (parishes, church schools, camp and conference centers...) to reduce energy use in all of our facilities by 50 percent over 10 years. At General Convention 2006, we passed resolutions titled "Acknowledge and Reduce Global Warming," and "Recognize Global Warming and Reaffirm Church's Environmental Responsibility."

The faith community has been there in the past, lending our moral voice and our bodies to social movements that have changed the course of history. "The arc of history is long, but it bends toward justice," Martin Luther King once said. 10/10/10 is an opportunity to build and showcase the global climate movement, and to launch and amplify the call to action in thousands of communities. It's an opportunity to bend history toward justice.

Join the party. Get to work with your faith community. Have fun working to cut carbon emissions. And make sure the world's leaders see and hear you doing so. If you are planning to participate in or organize a 10/10/10 event, I want to hear about it. E-mail me at mschut@episcopalchurch.org.



Mike Schut

my camera. They were all dressed in school uniforms so I said in as much French as I could muster "School? Is that your school?" gesturing at the tents. They eagerly bustled me over to the tents and I tried to take pictures but next thing I knew I was backed into a corner! I snapped a few pictures of the makeshift school before getting them to go back outside.

Since they had sung so beautifully for me I wanted to sing a song for them, but the only song I know in French is "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes"... Much to my delight, they joined in! And then they sang some other songs for me. I tried to ask them to show me around the area but instead we ended up in a big circle holding hands. ("show me around... show me a round..?") They started singing some silly song and playing a game which they wanted me to join in. I imitated their movements, dancing around in the circle and laughing. I have no idea what they were saying but it didn't really matter. We had so much fun together despite the language barrier and I was so thankful for the bridges that Christ builds between us all. We may not be able to share in much, but we shared God's love that day.

Singing and dancing with those children, being a part of their joy and silliness as well as trying to help the sick ones get better, brought to mind Christ's words from Matthew: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Truly, the kingdom of Heaven belongs to the children of Haiti.

10/10/10

global work party

In a recent article on Episcopal News Service, Mike Schut, Officer for Environmental and Economic Affairs at the Episcopal Church Center wrote,

Climate change just may become the issue of our time -- many think it already is. Massive flooding in Pakistan, the heat wave and wildfires in Russia and flash floods in India have topped this week's news. Last week an enormous piece of ice -- four times the size of Manhattan -- broke away from Greenland. These are precisely the kinds of events that climate experts the world over predict will increase in frequency and strength as the globe warms.

With stats like that it can be hard to find hope, but Mike points us to a moment from which we can take great hope. On 10-10-10 (October 10 of this year) 350.org is sponsoring a global work party with over 1,400 events in 130 countries. This follows on the tremendous success of last years protests which mobilized 5,200 demonstrations in 181 countries. First we speak, then we act, read on for Mike's invitation to the Episcopal Church:

need. I was focused on the impossibility of the tasks at hand and easily lost hope. Where was God?

I was angry with God for the state of the world; that such evil should go unchecked, and as long as I was angry and depressed, I could not see that God was there. But with time--and prayer--slowly my heart was changed and I was able to see through new eyes. Love, laughter, hope, friendship, sacrifice, and community all still exist in the midst of profound tragedy. The Love of God cannot be destroyed or defeated. The triumph of Love is not always easy to see, but it is always there.

Here in Sudan I used to get frustrated by the lack of resources. It seemed to me that everywhere I looked there was not enough to do the work we were being called to do--and the needs all around were just too much. I had been called to

an impossible task and the cost of failure would be hunger and need among the people. Then one day after visiting some people who had been displaced I was reading scripture, and this phrase caught me: "You cannot serve God and wealth" (Matthew 6:24). At first I congratulated myself for not serving wealth. After all, I was sitting outside a hut in rural Sudan. Then it hit me: I was serving wealth every day with my attitude of scarcity. I was refusing to see God's abundance in the world around me. With new eyes to see abundance, I finally saw that the people of the church were sharing what little they had, and inviting the displaced to live and farm among them. Some of the women were cooking edible leaves from the forest, and the fruit from thousands of wild mango trees was about to ripen.

Each of us is on a journey, called by God, whether we are in a post-war country or a wealthy suburb. God shapes us slowly as we submit our will in humility, as we offer our hearts and our lives to God. Slowly we learn to fall in love with God. Prayer becomes our source of peace, hope, and life. We stumble often as we try to follow Christ. But the Love of God is always there, waiting to enfold us, welcoming us to our true home, inviting us to dwell there every moment of every day.

"I felt God drawing me to something new."

CHECK IT OUT:

Young Adult Service Corps:

<http://www.episcopalchurch.org/yasc>

Mission Personnel Blog:

<http://missionpersonnel.blogspot.com>

Robin Denney's Blog:

<http://robin-mission.blogspot.com>

She

by Margaret Ellsworth

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. My teenage sister and I are sharing a prayer book, but neither of us is really looking at it. We feel our way along the familiar words that we've said hundreds of times before.

With the Father and the Son she is worshiped and glorified. I hear my sister stumble in her reading, surprised by what I've said. I continue, She has spoken through the Prophets. She shoots me a quizzical look. I know what she'll ask me on the car ride home from church: What's up with that "she"? Why does it matter?

I could turn her question back on her: What's up with that "he"? God is not male, any more than God is female. These human categories are too small to contain the Creator of "all things seen and unseen." All our words will fall short. "If you have understood," says St Augustine, "then what you have understood is not God."

But I know that won't cut it for an answer. Language is important; why else would the writers of the creed have spent so much time and energy getting it just right? Our language, imperfect and inadequate as it is, is one of the only things we have to bring us closer to God. Take Jesus, for example. When he prayed, he spoke to his Abba, his daddy, one who knew and loved him intimately. He taught his disciples to pray the same way—to grow closer to God than they thought was possible.

The experience that hit me the most was going out on a mobile clinic visit to a village outside of Croix-de-Bouquets. We took with us supplies to give the mothers of malnourished children and vitamins and anti-worm medication (and some candy and stickers too!). When we got out of the truck I saw some of the most beautiful landscape I've ever seen: mountains and trees and wide swaths of land. The earthquake did not crumble the church that the people were gathered in to receive what we had brought.

My French and Creole aren't much to speak of but I know enough to at least try to get my point across in conversation. The principal of the school there (set up in tents while the school is rebuilt) was so proud of his village and his people. He introduced us and the women and children smiled up at us, four strangers from far away. Then the women began to sing and it was the most beautiful song I've ever heard, one of welcome and joy and thankfulness.

We separated into stations and I was put with the vitamin-a capsules and anti-worm medication. If the child was under three then they had to have liquid medication, distributed in little cups. One by one the women came over, shyly glancing over at me and handing a piece of paper to Ramon-the-nurse. He would mark on the chart and then either gesture for them to get medication from me or that they were finished. Getting the little ones to drink their medication was difficult and I tried to be as helpful as I could. The small-cup-distribution-system was not working though---the anti-worm medication went everywhere (including all over me!). But I held those children while their

But I held those children while their mommas tried to pour it in their mouths and the universality of children-not-wanting-to-take-medication hit me in an amusing sort of way.

mommas tried to pour it in their mouths and the universality of children-not-wanting-to-take-medication hit me in an amusing sort of way. These women want their children to be well and grow to be happy and healthy, just like mothers all over the world.

After we finished up I wandered outside where a gaggle of children promptly mobbed me and





by Kathleen Jaco

In July I spent a week in one of the hottest places I've ever been in my life: Haiti. I myself and eleven others from Alabama and Tennessee went to Croix-de-bouquets, just north of Port-au-Prince, to plant an orchard at a children's nutritional clinic called Lespwa Timoun (Hope for Children). One in twelve children born in Haiti today will not live to celebrate their fifth birthday according to recent World Health Organization statistics. Malnutrition is a significant factor in the mortality rate of these children. Many do not have the security of knowing where their next meal will come from and are exposed to diseases that prey on their weakened immune systems. Lespwa Timoun provides nutritionally enhanced meals, vitamins, immunizations, health monitoring for children as well as nutrition education for their parents. Approximately 1000 children are served in the nutrition program each year .

How can you put into words the joy and happiness that still persists in one of the most desolate places in the world?

The hardest part about going on a mission trip to Haiti is trying to tell people about it when you return. How do you describe the desperation? How can you put into words the joy and happiness that still persists in one of the most desolate places in the world? Bear with me as I attempt to describe the indescribable.

I'm not sure what I was expecting when we left--perhaps that's a good thing. I went with an open heart and mind, ready for what God had to show me that I could bring back and share with others. What He showed me was a people who have not lost hope, despite being crammed in tents three inches apart or in mud huts baked dry by the sun. Despite their desperate situation they still praise God.

But if language can be a door to God, it can also be a wall. I have a friend who hears Father-prayers and can't help but think of her own father, lashing out at her as he loses his grip on sobriety once more. And that gets in the way of her prayer—it separates her from God. If our language has any purpose, it is to bring us closer to God. What do we do with language that has the power to drive us further away?

Language isn't one-size-fits-all. There will always be images or metaphors that speak differently to different people, but throughout history we have used this God-language as a wall; these are the words we have, and if they don't describe you or your experience, then you must not have access to God. And if these walls are blocking the work of the Spirit, then perhaps we need to take them down.

We spoke a common language once, so the story goes, before we were divided from each other at the Tower of Babel. Some say that this division was reversed at Pentecost—when the Spirit blew through the crowd, and the people of God, gathered from many lands, could understand each other again.

But was it really a true reversal? After all, the crowd wasn't suddenly able to understand the language of Galilee. Instead they all said, "These Galileans are speaking my language!" And all the better for the crowd. If the disciples had preached in only one way, how many listeners would never have heard the story of God's deeds of power?

If God had wanted to undo Babel—to turn back the clock, erase the chaos of diversity, and put us back under one language and one culture—then God would have done it. But that's not what happened. Instead, the Spirit met them where they were. With tongues of flame, no less! These faithful Jews knew how God acted; they knew all the right words. They thought they understood. Still, the Spirit blows where she will, as always, and does something new. In all the polyglot babble of Pentecost morning, the story going around was the story of Jesus—and how God brings new life to everyone, in every tongue.

Why does it matter, which words I use to declare my faith? The simplest answer is that I want to act against the oppression that happens when God-language and male language become too intertwined. But perhaps more truly, I use feminine language because it brings God out of the box for me. The unfamiliar words remind me that God cannot be constrained by familiar language. No matter what words I use, God is greater than I could ever hope to convey. My preconceptions are shattered, every time, when I feel in my mouth the sound of that she.

{PENTECOST}

by Cortney Dale

Life is unpredictable; or maybe it's just mine. Either way, I know that three years ago I couldn't have imagined what colors my world today: South Africa. Two years ago I arrived there, one year ago I left and in between I collected enough memories to fuel a lifetime of **inspiration**.

I went as part of the Young Adult Service Corps, a program of the Episcopal Church, a program that gives young adults the opportunity to work for **social justice**. I worked at an after-school program with rural farm children – I taught them their ABC's, and they taught me a better way to see the world. And still, almost a year back on American soil, the **rainbow** nation still inspires me.

Maybe it's because in South Africa things like **forgiveness** and **reconciliation** aren't lofty abstract ideas but concrete processes that are unfolding to this day. Maybe it's because South Africa is an example of how Christianity can truly improve the human condition. Maybe it's because former Archbishop Desmond Tutu is one of the most lovable figures of our time and as Episcopalians, we can claim a certain with **kinship** him.

Most of all, it's because sometimes when I pray, I try to name off all seventeen of the kids I worked with: Bongiswa, Siphokhazi, Bongisani, Buzwe, Nyangayethu, Thembelani, Xoliswa, Annelisa, Asisipho, Lindakhaya, Thembelani, Sethu, Xoliswa, Xolani, Lebo, Uyolanda, Sibusiso, and Ayihlome, and their faces, their smiles, their **laughter** and the funny way they'd say my name ("Mees Coooo-nee") are some of the things I hold close to my heart. They give me something to remember and something to work for.

Our efforts on earth are subject to gravity. By some accounts, South Africa is slipping. Unemployment and crime rates are on the rise, not to mention a government that seems less and less trustworthy. But that's no reason to lose hope. **The Holy Spirit** always lifts us up. I feel immensely blessed to have all these experiences, and I've come to define feeling blessed as seeing **the divine** roots of my luck. But maybe that's just me.

When I read the Gospel, I find deep roots for intentional peacemaking. Reading scripture motivates me to strive even harder for social rights and justices among my brothers and sisters in this world. Crises of healthcare, war, hunger, poverty, nuclear weapons, and environmental destruction are not solely political issues. These are all matters of life and death, which means they are first and foremost matters of the church. Jesus dedicated his ministry on earth to achieving justice for the poor and a vision of God's reign on earth. I don't understand how folks can claim to be Christian without also being peacemakers. These are not part-time obligations that Jesus suggests we adopt. Peacemaking is a requirement for Christians, a requirement that calls for total investment and dedication to unconditional, unlimited and uncompromising love. Love God and Love your neighbor.

If we want to grow into a mature faith and become authentic disciples of Jesus Christ, then we must take a stand against the culture of violence and become peacemakers... regardless of what other people might say. We must rise above such opposition and embrace God's love for us so that we will not be ravaged by the same anger, resentment and violence that leads to war. As Nouwen says, "to live a life in the Spirit of Christ today means to opt for a way of being in the world that in no way pays tribute to the forces of destruction" (Peacework). We must say no to violence without being corrupted by it.

We can do this because we know that the world in which we suffer has already been overcome by Jesus Christ. Jesus has already conquered this world. He tells his disciples before his death that rejection and persecution would not rob them of their peace. Be brave in the midst of trouble, Christ says. I have already conquered the world.

Allison Liles is the Associate Rector of St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Huntsville, Alabama. She currently serves as the Vice Chair for Public Witness of Episcopal Peace Fellowship's National Executive Council.

PEACEMAKER SOAPBOX

by The Rev. Allison Sandlin Liles

We learn from Jesus in the Gospel according to Luke that there are two commandments for us to follow as Christians. We must love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our strength and with all our mind, and love our neighbors as ourselves. Love God and Love Each Other. This is the simple and hard truth Jesus asks of all Christians. I understand these two commandments as instructions to live a life of peace. And while I do believe that most Christians think that a life of peace is important, I find that most of us do not actually wage peace in our lives.

Society has placed targets on the backs of peacemakers in our post-9/11 world. Ideas of peace are dismissed as impractical, naïve and idealistic...three words that have been used to describe my worldview during the past few years. Likewise, I have found that actively working for peace through demonstration, lobbying or preaching leads to name-calling such as radical, fanatic or even “hippie”. I feel that Christians fear such labeling and so as a group, we tend to do nothing. While Christians might believe that such a neutral position does nothing against peace, it does nothing establishing peace either. Too often Christians do not want to be seen as trouble makers. Christians do not want to create discomfort within congregations or alienate family members. And so too often, Christians remain silent. But this passivity in the face of violence abandons Jesus’ teachings. Rather than aligning ourselves with God’s reign of justice and peace, we are opting for the status quo of war and injustice.



by Jeremiah Sierra

Brother's Blood /

GOLDEN GIFTS

*O God,
whom saints
and angels delight
to worship
in heaven:
Be ever present
with your servants
who seek
through
art and music
to perfect the
praises offered
by your people
on earth; and
grant to them
even now
glimpses of
your beauty,
and make
them worthy at
length to behold
it unveiled
for evermore;
through Jesus
Christ
our Lord.
Amen.
(BCP 819)*

by Charles McClain

Somehow, we are each given an impetus, a spark of something that begs us to synthesize as we go about in our daily life and work. There is a secret assembly going on inside, marrying our concrete experience of the world to our deepest hope for it, or as in Psalm 19, “the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart.” Before I continue, it is my sincere prayer that what follows and the bit that preceded would be acceptable to the Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Now rather than some dry, and for my part, ill-researched discussion of a made-up brand of mystical Christian cognitive dissonance (mCcd for short), I’d like to talk about how my passion intersects with faith. At the risk of sounding a bit airy, I’ll call it synthesis and collaboration which, in my life, finds its fullest expression in music. I have learned more about living in a community with all the dangers, toils, and snares that go along with it by writing and recording songs with my friends than most any other experiences outside the walls of the church. I’ve made more friends than money, then lost some of the best of those, and written fewer compositions than you’d think after playing together with the same two guys for nearly ten years. The real treasure has been found in the process: synthesis and collaboration.

The greater part of this year has been spent writing and recording a long composition called “Brothers’ Blood / Golden Gifts.” Without getting into too much detail, our process has always been long sessions of improvisation, letting ideas come as they will and shaping them into a finished, or at least abandoned, final product. These ideas come inevitably from a very personal place. As years have gone by they seem to come a little more freely than they did at first. You could say that practice makes perfect, but there is more at work than that. As more of our life together has unfolded there is less and less to hide behind and fewer reasons to try. It’s

I was experiencing tremendous discomfort because I was devoting time to something I had not planned for, would not have gone to had I known what was in store, and was frustrated that I wasn’t getting the relaxing meditation I needed and thought I signed up for. And additionally, that I felt that the “average person” would have thought they were signing up for a relaxing meditation session, not a discussion group, if they read the same flyer that I had read. (Yes, I confess that I think those were the exact, self-righteous words I used.)

We all had a good laugh, as my peers - none of whom were newcomers - said they had been wondering what was going through my mind as the sole rookie. The group leader said that in fact, that very afternoon he had been talking to someone about revising the flyer to more accurately explain the meeting. Whether or not that was true, it helped me calm down.

As I relaxed, I started hearing helpful tips, none of which were new to me, but all of which I benefited from being reminded of: breathe through discomfort; talk about, rather than act out, feelings of frustration; adjust unrealistic expectations; accept ambiguity, imperfection, and surprises as a normal part of life.

I usually peg my absurd attitude about “Proper use of Language” on my training as a lawyer and journalist, two professions that

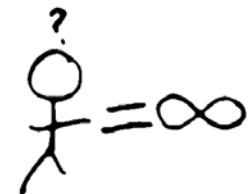
place a high premium on impeccable choice of words.

But recently, and certainly pushed further along by this recent “Mindfulness Meditation” experience, I’ve entered a space in my inner geography where I’m ready to acknowledge that my intolerance when it comes to language is closely linked to certain personality traits of mine (such as being an off-the-charts-control-freak), and not only to my career. I’m trying to be more open to the ebbs and flows of life that I can’t, and shouldn’t, plan in minute detail. I’m striving to be more cognizant of my own imperfections, communication-related and otherwise. And I’m trying to treat myself with the same openness and gentleness with which I’m attempting to treat others: by being less demanding of perfection; more appreciative, rather than judgmental about, different ways of being and expressing oneself; less rigorous in my expectations.

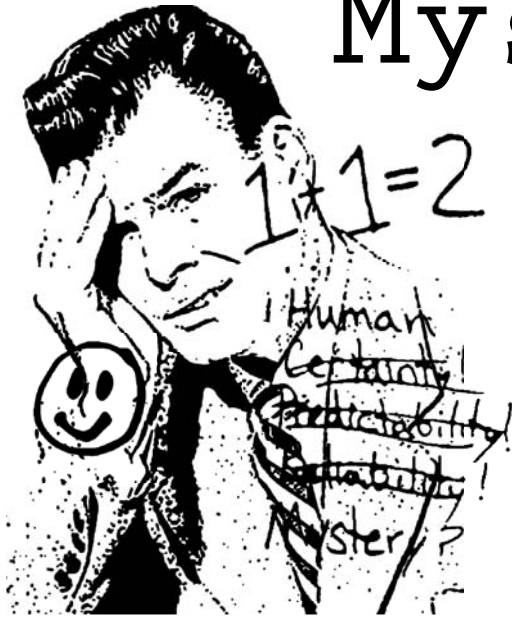
“The more I grow, the less I’m certain about,” I heard the theologian Yvette Flunder say recently, in the first installment of the DVD series “Living the Questions,” which my discussion group has been watching and reflecting on in our theology jam sessions.

My aspiration is to become less and less certain about more and more, and to embrace mystery, doubt, and ambiguity not only in Divine matters, but in human ones, too.

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Human Mystery



by Denise Oliveira

constitutional proportions to always be communicated with through crystal-clear, precise language that unambiguously conveys the intended message. Which explains the fury – yes, fury! – I felt as I sat in a mini-lecture and discussion recently about “dealing with negative emotions.” The gathering had been advertised as 90 minutes of “Mindfulness Meditation.”

Longing for some time of guided meditation to quiet my mind and body, I had planned my work schedule for the day so I could take that lengthy break for the much-needed self-care.

Instead, as the instructor imparted tips on how to deal with emotions like frustration and anger, I struggled with my own. I considered leaving but refrained, thinking it would be disruptive and rude to walk out of a small circle.

I'm glad I stayed, breathed through my emotional earthquake, and listened to the message. But not until I had raised my hand during sharing time and said that I was “Exhibit A” for the topic being discussed: at that very moment, I told the group,

I wish I embraced uncertainty and ambiguity as readily in my life generally as I do in my spiritual life. I'm not sure there is a God; occasionally I lean toward “yes,” often toward “no.” That uncertainty does not cause me anguish, and I'm not driven by a need to find a definitive answer. Yet I participate actively in organized religion, recently created a theology discussion group for a few friends in New York City, and enjoy reading and writing about faith and spirituality, because living life in a state of openness to and curiosity about Divine mystery nourishes my soul and my brain. But in so many other realms of my life, I hate surprises and those proverbial grey areas so very much.

Case in point: Over the years, I seem to have developed a belief that I have a right of

dangerous business sharing the intimate and secret parts with others. I had trouble, and my own brother sits behind the drums.

What does this all have to do with synthesis? Like I explained before, we don't normally come to rehearsal with polished ideas or pages of written score copied for everyone to learn. We come with ourselves and try to be honest with one another. Perhaps that may sound inflated or nebulous to those who aren't musicians, and remember, I'm not Coltrane and this isn't “A Love Supreme.”

On second thought, it is a love supreme. We came in this time around with experiences of our separate worlds. Our bassist, Brian, had a particularly poignant reality come to bear. In a phenomenal act of courage he began to open up about a portion of his life he felt had always been missing: he never had a brother. The rest of our band is composed of my brother, me, and another guitarist who is half of a set of identical twins. I can't imagine how difficult it must have been to be in a very close-knit community and still feel like an outsider. But it only became a revitalizing force in

our music when he had the courage to share something very personal. When we combined our disparate experience with a shared hope for its reconciliation, the result was something beautiful. The title “Brothers' Blood / Golden Gifts” was his idea, but it came out of the synthesis of our shared experience collaborating together and achieving our deepest hope for one another.

It was a small, but very real, glimpse of the Kingdom in the present. Brian modeled an authentic faith for me. I've come to learn that an authentic faith looks scary from the outside. Much of Jesus' language about the Kingdom involves risk, sometimes to a seemingly hyperbolic degree. In parables there are those who with abandon sell everything they have while others tear out their eyes or chop off limbs. If we can take one risk, let it be to bring ourselves and our experiences, just as they are, to God. Then perhaps, through the work of the Spirit in us and through our shared work, our deepest desire for the world will be to see glimpses of the Kingdom. We are promised that if we seek the Kingdom first then much of the other concerns of life will take care of themselves. I think our deep desire for the Kingdom enables us to share our experience with honesty, conviction, and the courage to tell the secrets. What a golden gift that is.

**It's dangerous
business sharing the
intimate and secret
parts with others.**



SISTER SALLY SAYS

An extraordinary, exceptional ex-sister, superbly sassy and slightly sarcastic. She's here to answer your questions. Why should you listen? Because, Sister Sally Says...

Dear People who Read This With Any Kind of Regularity and Think What I Say Has Relevance,

So, I had this great column all written and pretty for you guys. Seriously, it was pretty good. And then my editor, who I love and adore and shower with gifts when I am in the metro area calls and says that the layout for the upcoming edition is all about soapboxes, and he'd really love it if I could write about what I'm most passionate about. That's totally fine, that's what editors do. I mean, it's not like I totally panicked and spent the next three weeks in a cold sweat because I couldn't nail down one or two or even three things that I would consider myself "passionate" about. I am seriously not joking.

See, your pal Sally used to be what we would call "real high strung", and she could whip herself into a frenzy about pretty much anything from dolphin-safe tuna (I was 13 and went through all the tuna on the store shelf to make sure we were getting the safe kind) to closing the School of the Americas (I was 22 and went to Georgia with a bunch of other

crazed liberals to protest an American military installation), to quitting a job I loved because I no longer respected my boss and was making myself sick keeping secrets (I was 27, and I moved back in with my mother for a whole year). And hello...I freaking joined AND left the convent...clearly neither decision was motivated by a lack of passion on my part.

Being passionate is not something I have to call up in myself. Passion waits unbidden for me to get all ratcheted up about something, and carries me away, sometimes without my consent. It is my first and immediate response to anything that resonates with me, good or bad. Being passionate is something I have to be choosy about, and for the vast majority of my life, I was unable to exert that kind of discipline. It's really only been in the last year that I've been able to actually wield my passion in a constructive way. I suppose admitting that to you and to myself explains the majority of the panic that ensued from my editor's request. Being passionate is important, and giving voice to our

passion is just as important. But you can't be passionate about everything, not everything can raise your blood pressure, make you cry out (in a happy or sad voice), make you stop and ponder, otherwise you would lose your life to your passion, and miss out on the things God has to show you. We can get so wrapped up in the causes, the changes and chances of a world that is bigger and smaller than we fully appreciate, and when we are wrapped up that tightly, we forget that God is calling us to higher passions, fuller lives, deeper presence. We sometimes forget that God even is.

Passion is something that has come slowly to me, over the last year, and it has come through prayer, through time with my therapist and my family, through my yoga practice, and in practicing being fully present, where ever I am. In the final analysis, I'd say the thing I'm most

passionate about is journey, discovering passion, claiming and sanctifying it with the grace and peace of God. That can look however it needs to look, and can move and evolve over time, and comes with a pretty decent guarantee not to drive you all the way to the funny farm.

Being fully present, recognizing and praising the presence of God in all situations opens us up to experience the passion God crowns our heads and paints our hearts with, rather than buying into the latest and greatest crisis the world has demanded we be passionate about. That's where I am. That's what I believe. That's what I live around, in, and through. That's what I'm passionate about.

Stark naked and unashamed,

Sister Sally

College students and chaplains, join us for a new year's celebration like no other at the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, CO! Dec 18-Jan 1. More info at episcopalchurch.org/campusministries. Don't Miss IT!

Gather AROUND the TABLE