

About

# Episcorific

Heya! you're holding the twelfth issue of Episcorific, a zine for and by the young adults of the Episcopal Church. The big idea? Young adults are not big church-goers 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 12, ADVENT 2010

Now this is the story all about how  
My life got flipped, turned upside down  
And I'd like to take a minute just sit right there  
And I'll tell you how I became the American  
Anglican heir to the West Hills Episcopal  
born and raised. In the church pew  
is where I spend all my Sundays  
Sing - ing out, praying, com-  
munin' all cool Learning 'bout  
the Creed in my Sunday School  
W h e n the priest came by,  
and be- fore my stood

**(w)rap  
your  
gifts!**

I Tried to make  
sure I was up  
to only good  
got wisdom  
and cour-  
age,



edge and holy care  
He said you got so many gifts,  
you're a Holy Spirit heir

knowl-

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# A Note from the editor(s)

Dearest Readers,

I'm sitting here in the dining room at my Uncle's house in Dallas, Texas. A gas fire burns the dust that's accumulated in the fireplace since the last time it was used in February. My Aunt yells from one floor to the other at my cousins, asking if they want to go see the new Harry Potter movie tonight. I grimace at the thought of sitting in a theater. My mom sits across from me and takes "candid" pictures of me using my over-sized camera, they all consist of me making a "stop taking my photo" face. The Dallas Cowboys just scored, bringing them to only losing by three points now... I'm not sure if they'll make it. I nurse the stubbed toe I got earlier trying to chase down a tiny dog in a huge house. In the midst of all of this, a thought crosses my mind. We need to get ready.

This issue is all about Advent, the season of preparation. In preparing for the coming of Christ at Christmas, we are all called to ready ourselves for the joy of the season. To most people, Advent is just an excuse to eat bland or stale-tasting candies out of a cardboard calendar. To others it is another set of prayers and candles added to the Sunday services.

We decided on "Wrap Your Gifts" as a proper title for the issue because of the joy of the advent season. I am not a huge fan of wrapping presents. It just doesn't seem practical. I find it difficult to bring myself to do five minutes of work for less than 20 seconds of shredding. However, I do find the point in wrapping for the kiddos. They go through three levels of happiness. There's joy in the anticipation of what gift may come. There's excitement in being involved in the revelation of that gift. There's euphoria in the gift being fully revealed. Now, unless the gift is socks and

# Check it out!

## 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](http://episcopalchurch.org/youngadults) & [episcopalchurch.org/campusministries](http://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

# 12 days of Christmas

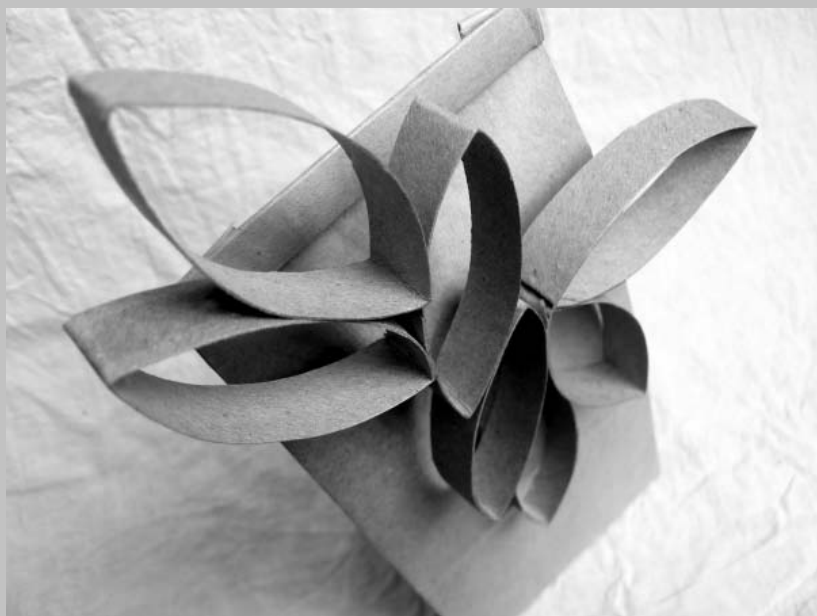
1. what's the biggest gift Christmas brings to your life?
2. Were you ever in a church Christmas pageant? Tell us about it!
3. How has your experience of Christmas changed as you became a young adult?
4. We often have many cherished childhood Christmas memories.. but what about as a young adult? Do you have a recent memory of a Christmas that was extra special in some way?
5. Tell us about a favorite gift you have given to someone and why it was special.
6. Sing us a line or two from your favorite Christmas carol/hymn/song! (or the whole thing!)

*Do it while you're on break and send us the video before the 12th day of Christmas (January 6)!*



3. Apply a thin line of glue to the edges you want to affix to your gift.

4. Carefully press the leaves to your gift and hold until set.



And there you have it! A lovely, leafy gift topper - totally unique and practically free for the making.

*Originally published at [www.thegiftedblog.com](http://www.thegiftedblog.com).*

the kiddo isn't a huge fan of warm feet, there usually follows a period of screaming and jumping around. We then realize that the impracticality of wrapping a present has paid off well. A gift just isn't the same unless it's been wrapped, unwrapped, and revealed.

In the same way that we wrap the newest toy, we are called to wrap the spiritual gifts that God blesses us with each and every day. We here at Episcorific hope that you will wrap the gifts God gave you, allow others to unwrap them, and share with them in the joy of the revelation of God's gifts.

We hope that the following essays, articles, poems, and artwork offer a glimpse of those gifts. We pray that God continues to bless each and every one of you in the same ways that we see every day around us. We love the fact that y'all have a story to tell, and we hope that you'll continue to share it with the greater church.

Love to all and Happy Advent,

Ross Heinsohn  
*Webmaster, Editor*

*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](mailto: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.*



# advent 2010: wrap your gifts

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# Wrap Your Gifts

with a Lovely  
Leaves Gift Topper

by Charissa Pomrebn

In budget-conscious, eco-friendly times like ours, the time is right to wrap your gifts with a creative twist!

Supplies: Toilet paper roll, scissors & strong glue (I used Aleen's Original Tacky Glue).



1. Flatten the tube, then cut it at 1/2" intervals to make leaf-shaped rings.



2. Make a free-form shape with the cardboard leaves by dotting glue on the side of a tube, then pressing it to another. Pinch and hold as glue sets. Build, leaf by leaf, until you are pleased with the design.

I was passionate about it. I devoted a lot of time and energy to it. Was my love of making gifts beautiful frivolous to God? Did he care that I had just turned a ramen package into ribbon? Was I supposed to turn my blog into a Christian gift wrapping blog?

Then God led me to a section in Exodus and my heart leapt. God commissions a fleet of craftsmen to execute his custom design for his dwelling place, the tabernacle:

“The Lord spoke to Moses: See, I have called by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: and I have filled him with divine spirit, with ability, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, in every kind of craft. Moreover, I have appointed with him Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have given skill to all the skillful, so that they may make all that I have commanded you.” Exodus 31: 1-6

I could hardly believe what I was reading.

It was the first time I saw so concretely: God gives us the ability to create. Not in an abstract sense, but quite concretely. He filled Bezalel with his own spirit, the knowledge to skillfully manipulate precious metals, cut stones and carve wood. Not only does God give his spirit so we can teach, display faith, and minister, he gives “knowledge in every kind of craft”. God gives skill to all the skillful.

Are you a crafter? A maker? A garage tinkerer? Got any creative skill at all? This isn't just an odd thing you happen to have a knack for, it is an ability given to you by God. It is something to be used well. The ability to create beautiful things isn't unimportant to God. In fact, He is the source of our ability to do so.

Now when I wrap gifts or work on my blog, I do so with an inner confidence that God is at work in me. It's harder to trivialize my passion as I once did. My way with gifts is an ability and intelligence from God. It's a gift to be grateful for, to steward, to learn how to love others with. I've come a long way from feeling that my creative interests are somehow outside of God's will for me. They are a part of his will for me.

Thank you, God. May you continue to show us the gifts you've given us.

*Charissa loves discovering everyday ways to be creative. She can be found photographing acorns, stitching gift bags, and printing with celery at [www.thegiftedblog.com](http://www.thegiftedblog.com).*

# advent parousia

Purify our  
conscience,  
Almighty God,  
by your daily  
visitation,  
that your Son  
Jesus Christ, at  
his coming, may  
find in us a  
mansion prepared  
for himself; who  
lives and reigns  
with you,  
in the unity of  
the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and  
for ever.  
Amen.

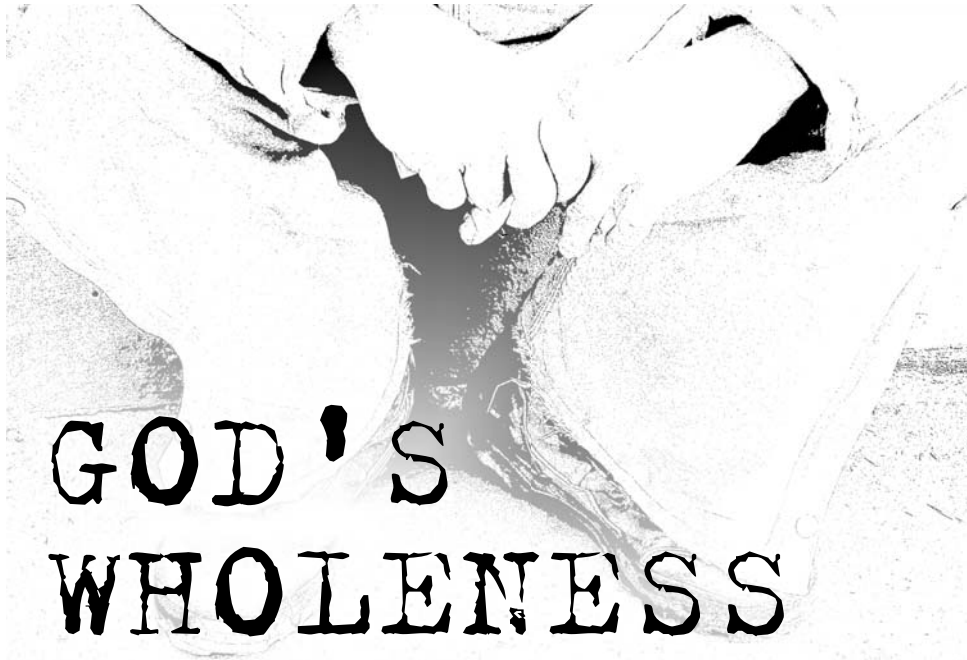
*Collect for Advent 4*

“There are many...creative and life-giving ways to wait. What do you dream of, what does that healed world look like? Once you have the beginnings of a concrete picture, an attitude of expectation will lead you to see that vision becoming reality in small and quiet ways.”

*Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori  
Advent 2010 Address  
[http://www.episcopalchurch.org/  
79425\\_125862\\_ENG\\_HTML.htm](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/79425_125862_ENG_HTML.htm)*

*“The clutching hand of the baby is, for most of us, something we can't resist. The Christmas story outrageously suggests that putting our hand into the clutch of a baby may be the most important thing we can ever do as human beings – a real letting-go of aggression and fear and wanting to make an impression and whatever else is going on in us that keeps us tied up in our struggle and violence.”*

*Archbishop Rowan Williams  
Advent Article  
<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/3090>*



# GOD'S WHOLENESSES

*by Wesley Arning*

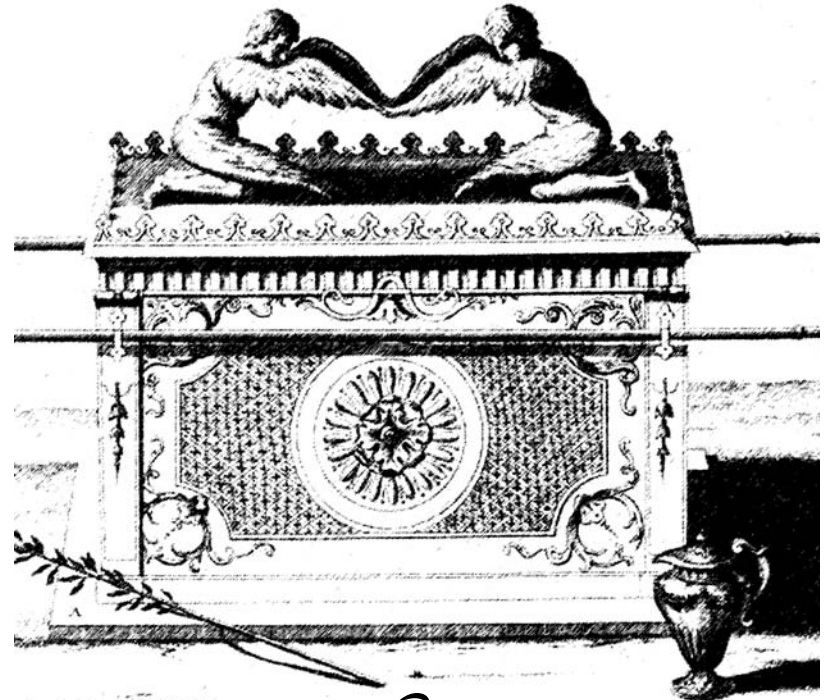
Some people are born gift givers. I think we all know those people in our lives. It's a part of who they are—they don't think, they just simply give. Sadly, I was not born with this spirit of giving to anyone and everyone I know, but I'm learning.

From my years of giving and receiving gifts I have realized that I'm never fulfilled, no matter how much I give or receive. The feeling wears off over time. I never feel like it's all there. I think our culture has given us the push to never be satisfied. Jesus, on the other hand, is the total package. He is the ultimate gift and supreme gift giver. When I look at Paul's fruits of the Spirit I

can't help but find myself checking off the fruits I do well with and the ones I need to improve on.

Are we to look at the fruits as a checklist? "Well, I have patience, but I need to work on faithfulness." Or are we to look at it as a whole? If we don't have all of them, then we're lacking in every one.

I watch people from my comfortable view in one of the last pews in the church. They all confidently process down to the altar during communion, dressed in nice clothes; they seem to have it all together. But what I've learned is that we are all broken, carrying burdens and sins that we just



## *Filled With Divine Spirit*



*by Charissa Pomrehn*


It took a while to admit: I am a blogger. When I began, I had some common beginners' jitters. I was self-conscious. Overly aware of my work being made public. I wrote, re-wrote, and revised each blog post before pressing "Publish".

But I also had another kind of anxiety.

You see, I write a blog about gift wrapping. It's devoted to thoughtful, fresh, and green ideas for gift wrapping - because, simply, I love to wrap gifts. In an increasingly virtual world, gift wrapping is a chance to use our hands and imagination. It's an opportunity to celebrate the joy of giving. And I love that wrapping gifts can serve as a creative outlet for the ordinary person. No MFA or art history degree required!

But as I continued to wrap gifts and blog about it, a nagging question lingered: What does God think about all this? Sure, blogging about gift wrapping isn't one of the Seven Deadly Sins, but it doesn't seem particularly virtuous either. And yet


 Now, quite frankly, that pisses me off. Especially if the church also has the mantra, "Youth are the future of the church"... pardon my language, but that's dull  The youth, the young adults... WE are ALL part of the body of the church.


GOD  chose the nomadic people to be his chosen people. The Hebrews were CONSTANTLY moving and not very happy with it...

"By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept, when we remembered you, O Zion,  
 As for our harps, we hung them up on the trees in the midst of that land.  
 For those who led us away captive asked us for a song, and our oppressors called for mirth:  
 "Sing us one of the songs of Zion"

#### HOW SHALL WE SING THE LORD'S SONG UPON AN ALIEN SOIL?

If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill.  
 Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you,  
 if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.  
 Remember the day of Jerusalem, O Lord,  
 against the people of Edom,  
 who said, "Down with it! Down with it! even to the ground!"  
 O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction,  
 happy the one who pays you back for what you have done to us!  
 Happy shall he be who takes your little ones, and dashes them against the rock"

It is our call to respect the dignity & worth of ALL human beings. Even if they're in a frat, even if they're a hipster, even if they work in a cubicle and just graduated from college! Especially in those cases.


 I keep hearing the same things all over... in MS, in CA, in friends of all places. We're looking for something and we're coming up short because it feels like no one cares until we have kids or careers or spouses...

ugh. -Blount Montgomery

can't let go. We don't come to the altar as a whole person; we come searching and yearning for something more. We come wrapped up like a fancy Christmas present, but inside we're banged up, scratched, and broken.

The message of Jesus Christ calls us to take ownership of our brokenness. We were given the gift of Jesus but we were also given each other. Every Sunday afternoon I go to Nashville to "Church in the Yard." At this event we hold a church service in the small courtyard at Holy Trinity, and then we have a free lunch after the service. The congregation is made up of Nashville's homeless. These people have been through it all, and in my time serving there I have felt the brokenness of others and realized my own when talking to them.

What we have to offer is not normally nicely wrapped. It is raw human emotions that tear at the heart. It's the story of a man out of work who has been living in his truck for a year, or a man who lost his sister because she died sleeping on the streets in the middle of winter. That hit the heart. We're all broken and we're looking to become whole.

Without love there is no joy, without both we can't have goodness, and without faithfulness we can't have peace. It's the same way with people. We are One Body seeking and searching for the wholeness in ourselves and each other. When Jesus was born it was God's act of not simply reuniting Himself to His people, but also reuniting mankind together. We have to open our eyes to God's kingdom here and now, not as a nicely wrapped gift but in our toils and strife as we seek to become whole again. Just like with the fruits, we must strive for all, not just some, and then share that with others.

I see bits and pieces of the fruits of the Spirit. I think we all see it around us and try to be a part of it. As we open our hearts in this season of Advent may we come to know that Christ in the world is not simply a good action here or there but a total package. As we continue to build up our brothers and sisters in the quest for self wholeness in the fruits of the Spirit, may we also come to find Christ Jesus in His most glorious wholeness as Lord and in His quiet humbleness as a child.

# Finding God Conversation

by Joshua Orsak

Reading the Gospels, it is hard to shake the feeling that one is listening to one side of a telephone conversation. So much of what is written is really Jesus speaking 'at' people, rather than 'to' them. Sure there are questions peppered in, but they seem more like literary devices than the words of real people.

The reason for this is simple: the Gospels are based on an oral tradition that rose up around the person of Jesus. Since what was retained was primarily what He said, and not what was said to Him, the Gospels come off as a series of sayings and events rather than as the life of a concrete individual. And His lessons





seem more like sermons, rather than one part of a broader conversation, which they probably were.

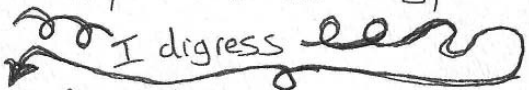



There are a few exceptions to this tendency in the written Gospels, and one can be found in Mark 12. Here we have an example of Jesus in conversation, and while it still feels like a lot is being left out, we get a much more organic picture of Jesus' interaction with those around Him. There is a particularly beautiful exchange with one of the teachers of the law in verses 28-34, where Jesus gives the Greatest Commandment. Jesus is impressed by the young man and you can almost feel Jesus smiling when He tells the man that he is 'not far from the Kingdom of God'.


For me the primary picture of Jesus is God in this everyday person, talking to people, having conversations with them. In and through those conversations lives, and ultimately the world, were changed.




## We Are Nomadic

So, I'm <sup>25</sup> right?  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a century old. Born in 1985 and the  is radically different. I had cassette tapes  that would buzz in my walkman. Whenever my mom would use her car phone  which came in a bag that was the size of my backpack. NOW jr. high students have cell phones  and some people don't even have landlines anymore. Technology is moving at a high pace!

I digress   
Speaking from where I am right now in my life, I am nomadic.  I am searching  for a place to call home, a person to share that home with, and a meaningful engagement and improvement of the world around me.  This might sound like navel-gazing, but I think that it's an important realization.

I worked for the church  And largely, the established church is one in which from kindergarten (sometimes earlier) til senior year of high school, you are supported and formed in doctrine and practices and community. **BUT** what happened to me... and what has happened to a lot of folk my age, once reaching college is this sentiment:

 { See you back in church when you're a real adult and have a family!! xoxo }

this prayer, the Church is entering into the biggest re-gifting scam of all time. Certainly we're not fooling God, but we ask for the gifts of a pure conscience and the continued presence of Christ only to turn around and say, "Happy Birthday, Jesus!" Well, on the surface that's what seems to be happening. There could be more... (let's hope so.)

The gift God gives us is the same one we give back. So on the count of Re-gifting in the First Degree, we are guilty. But if there is such a thing as the perfect crime, then this is the one I most want on my rap sheet. That, at His coming, Christ may find in us a mansion prepared for himself... that is one of those (many) gems you run across in the prayer book whose depth of paradox is only rivaled by its beauty. Not that I could, but I won't make trouble in explaining it. Somehow the surprise is lost when you do that. The frenzy of anticipation fizzles. What I endeavor to do this Advent, and I invite you to as well, is to hang on to that image of a place, a mansion within me, where I can enjoy the daily visitation of Christ. With all the hustle and ring-ting-tingling too, I pray that my preparation and anticipation will be for the Lord's coming whether in the clouds or to the place he has been preparing in me.



by Lisa Jacob

# in the

This image of Jesus as someone who engaged in dialogue and dialectic is of supreme importance to me. For me the primary picture of Jesus is God in this everyday person, talking to people, having conversations with them. In and through those conversations lives, and ultimately the world, were changed. It must have been an experience like no other: to be able to sit and talk to God in human form, like He was any other person. It is in conversations with others that I personally have had the most profound encounters with Christ, and so that image of Jesus is the one that I cling to most.



This has been the nature of the youth groups I've led: sitting with a group of individuals focused on important moral, religious, and theological issues and through that conversation finding God. One person brings up some point, another comes along and criticizes it, or bolsters it, and through it all we try to reach out to something bigger than ourselves. In those moments, through these people at this time, just talking these matters through, I feel lifted up to some higher place, and I know that we are all reaching out to something ultimately real, and that it is also reaching out to us. It is not like God is one factor within the conversation. The Revelation of God takes place in and through the conversation itself, through the struggle, the self-examination, and the directing of

hearts and minds toward the Divine. That is what Christianity, and revelation, is all about to me. This transcendent experience, found in and through dialogue and community, has colored my entire view of the Bible. I see scripture as a dialogue between God and man, and between man and man, and I see God's Revelation as being within the very fabric of that dialogue.

When Jesus is called "The Word of God" I take that to indicate that we are in conversation with the Divine, and that Jesus is the center of that conversation. Whenever people of good conscience come together to try to discover who they are in their relationship with each other and with God, and use dialogue to overcome their isolation and find something deeper, higher, and better, if you look with the right eyes, you can see the Incarnation of God. You can see Jesus Christ.

I know  
that we  
are all  
reaching  
out to  
something  
ultimately  
real, and  
that it  
is also  
reaching  
out to us.

# Enter: The Light

The Light comes in,  
through the open door;  
flung wide by a heart  
ready for blinding, painful  
becoming. Mary sat,  
under an olive tree,  
lifted her chin, bravely:  
“be it unto me...”  
and became: Theotokos,  
a Bodhisattva for  
the children  
God was calling:  
to open.  
The Buddha, sitting  
under his Bodhi tree  
felt the universe  
wake up, and smiled  
a wide, deep, endless  
smile: midwifing the world.  
They sit together,  
bare foot and young.  
Singing a lullaby to suns  
born in their laps.  
Take up the Light  
and bear the sweet,  
burning, theos  
within your heart.



# Preparation

by Charles McClain

*Purify our conscience, Almighty  
God, by your daily visitation,  
that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may  
find in us a mansion prepared for himself;  
who lives and reigns with you, in  
the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

—Collect for the 4th Sunday of Advent

Ask my mom about my skill and expertise with scissors, glue, tape, or any other such crafty implements. Go ahead. Ask her. You done? You should be, because there ain't much to say other than all I ever brought home from school was gobs of construction paper thoroughly moistened and wadded with some combination of glue, glitter, pipe cleaners, or little plastic googly eyes. So when I think of wrapping gifts, the image is of me, as a kid, running around the room getting the stick-on bows stuck to my feet while my mom ruled over a kingdom of boxes, ribbon, tape, cards, and carefully chosen gifts—except for mine. My mom, of course, never wrapped my gift while I was in the room. I did get to see everyone else's gifts go into a box and become surprises. My frenzy came from the secrets being created, and the anticipation of the moment when all would be revealed.

I won't give myself so much credit as to say something trite like, “The greatest joy of Christmas is giving.” I do enjoy giving more than receiving, but it doesn't come from some pure sense of generosity, or a spiritual whatsit out there zapping me with the doohickey of the season. Most of the time I wouldn't even say it comes from God; I'm really quite selfish. I love giving gifts; to have that secret surprise, and—at just the right moment—spring it. The anticipation before giving the gift is what really jazzes me up. This is why you will probably never receive a birthday gift from me that arrives on time.

As we prepare for the coming, the advent, of Christ into the world, either commemorating the first time or looking toward the next, there is an undeniable sense of anticipation. But what do we really have to offer? The collect for the fourth Sunday of Advent presents God with an interesting proposal. By praying

friends with today, eventually trained me to be a Eucharistic minister, something I enjoyed doing more than anything else throughout my week. I made friends with a man named Jim, who put the band I was playing bass guitar for at the time on the bill to play at the beer tent during the Walleye festival. I also became good friends with Pam, a kind-hearted lady that was not just the Deacon of the church and a professor I knew from my school, but also someone I could approach and talk to about anything. There was Fred, a 92 year man old that still rode his bike five miles to attend church every morning and always went up last to receive communion. He would give me a wink and a smile after standing up from kneeling for communion. Then there was a friendly, funny man named Tim who was the Senior Warden that used to refer to me as “Fr. Drew” when we would greet each other during the Peace, so of course I replied to him with “Fr. Tim”. I looked forward to Sundays. Those 10 a.m. Eucharist services made me feel complete.

**Sadly, the life I led there didn't last for very long. The church was, because of the declining numbers of attendants over time, financially unable to keep open. After 126 years of its existence, Calvary Memorial Episcopal Church closed in May of 2010.**

Sadly, the life I led there didn't last for very long. The church was, because of the declining numbers of attendants over time, financially unable to keep open. After 126 years of its existence, Calvary Memorial Episcopal Church closed in May of 2010. The last service was a gathering of congregants from Calvary.

There was a period during the service for people to go up to

the lectern and share their thoughts and experiences of Calvary. I had some things jotted down on a piece of notebook paper that I wanted to share. As I got to the microphone, I felt I should shorten it and keep it simple. Instead, I opened my mouth and words came flowing out of it without me even able to stop them. I was always very skeptical of the churches where the people speak in tongues, but that evening, at the dusk of Calvary's existence, I felt a warmth move through me allowing me to speak, not in an ancient language, but in clear affectionate words, about how much the church and people there had meant to me, and how meaningful it was to be a part of them. I felt safe, clean, loved, and also a small part of a much larger body of human beings that were all good, blessed people.

## God With Me

When I rise in darkness,  
sleep hanging in mournful tatters,  
You are there.  
As I begin another day,  
still carrying the burdens of the last,  
You are there.  
You rise in me like sunlight,  
You settle on me like sweet dew,  
You lie waiting in the beating of my heart.  
I am here,  
You are here.

*poems by C. Josephine Robertson*



# 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...*

Well, as the words to your pal Sally's favorite secular holiday song go, "And so this is Christmas...and what have you done?" Are you ready? Are you freaking out? Are you whining?

When I go visit my brother and his family, the older nephew and I get to go out on our own, and do our thing. Our thing consists of going to the "train store", which to normal people is just a regular big-box toy store, with a scary giraffe as the mascot. I'm sure you know the one I'm talking about. Anyway, the five year old nephew could care less about the other toys in the store...he only has eyes for trains, especially blue ones that are named after certain doubting Disciples. He is obsessed. He's had to be escorted out of the store, several times, by his parents...literally kicking and screaming. This kid LOVES, LURVES, LUUUUHUUUHVES, trains. He is, hands down, the easiest person in my family for whom to buy gifts.

I remember the first time we went to the train store, on our own, to pick out a new train. My brother pulled me aside and told me to call him if things got ugly. I looked at him like he'd gone crazy...and just nodded my head, remembering that small children are highly volatile and toys to kids are like chum in the water to sharks. I started to feel like I might not want to do this thing, after all. But I had promised. And I refuse to break promises, especially not to small children who look like me.

The nephew actually gave me directions to the store, from his backseat. As I pulled in, parked, and turned off the car, I turned around to look at the blue-eyed cherub. "Bilbo (yes, that's what I call him; no, that's not his real name), we are going to go shop for a new train, buddy. I want you to

So that's when I felt determined to find a church. I was 21, and hadn't been to church in years. There had to be a church out there for me, one that had a form of liturgy and style of worship that was more traditional. I wanted a church that was open-minded and accepting at the same time. I did remember for a brief time

**I knew I believed in God, and I still believed in the Christian message of salvation. I considered myself spiritual, but not religious, but deep down, I wanted that sense of community you get from practicing a faith alongside other people.**

in my teen years attending St. John's Episcopal in Saginaw with a childhood friend and his family, before they moved out of state. Since then I had read up and followed the Episcopal Church in the news and such, and I remembered reading about the controversy surrounding them because of the election of openly gay bishop Gene Robinson back in 2003.

I had been drawn to this little Episcopal church on West Genessee street in Saginaw called Calvary. It always stuck out to me when driving by for some reason, so I decided to go there on a Sunday and get a feel for it. At the church service I met a warm and accepting set of people. They were

thrilled to see young blood show up to the church. I quickly made friendships there. The services followed a routine but the people there were so full of life that it always felt fresh and new. They were interested, accepting, loving, humorous, and for the most part, laid back. The sermons by an older priest, Don Tepe, weren't lectures on obedience, they were thoughtful words that were calming and made absolute sense. At the end of hearing any of those sermons, I would want to hold a set of principles to live by, not out of fear, but out of desire. I also grew accustomed to using the Book of Common Prayer, a beautifully compiled, poetically written, flexible and at the same time structured guidebook that led me through all the services and quickly became my inseparable companion.

In no other place in my life was I able to check all my worries and fears at the door, and enter a place with a complete sense of calm, belonging, and comfort. They quickly found ways for me to be involved. Dave, a person that I am good





# finding Home

*by Drew Christiansen*

In the late summer/early autumn of 2008 I had been doing my best to enjoy my first summer back in my hometown of Saginaw, MI since going through my initial training with the Army reserves. I was due to finally start college that fall and I had been out living on my own for the first time ever. I spent a lot of time that summer with my good friends Cody and Nick who were up for the summer from Chicago where they went to school. We were all fond of spending summer nights drinking, talking about music we liked, and relationships with women, much like most guys at young ages. I was dating someone that summer who was caring and mature and had a set of morals that I respected.

She knew I hadn't been to church in years but knew I was familiar with it as it was part of my upbringing. I told her I was open to the idea of going to a church again so I went with her to a Monday night service at her church on the west side of Saginaw.

As we walked out of the church after the service, she could sense that I was agitated. She asked me what was on my mind. On the ride home, I gave it to her straight. I told her how I was raised in a similar church and how that religious leader of her's said everything I felt was the exact opposite of words I felt the actual Jesus of Nazareth or the Christ I knew from the Gospels would've used. I told her how because of the negative tone of fear and judgement, I had shied away from organized Christianity. I knew I believed in God, and I still believed in the Christian message of salvation. I considered myself spiritual, but not religious, but deep down, I wanted that sense of community you get from practicing a faith alongside other people.

remember something. We are going to share at the play table. And when it's time to leave, we are not going to whine or freak out. Ok? Now, what are we going to remember? "We are gonna share at the play table. And we are NOT going to whine or freak out." And so, we got out of the car, and ventured into the gaping maw of the toy store. I felt like I might throw up.

Thirty minutes later, we came out of the store, all smiles, with our new twain, and no tears. I was amazed. I felt like I must be the kid-whisperer, or something. As the nephew exclaimed over his present in the back seat, telling the new train about all the other train friends back at the house, I realized something. I was not magic. No, the success of the trip had to do with factors that were beyond my child-charming (bribery). We prepared ourselves for the trip. We knew what we were going to get. We were realistic about what the trip might look like. We hoped for the best, and were willing to be surprised by success.

That's nothing like what Christmas and present buying is like for most of us. At all. We do a lot of freaking out. We do a lot of whining. We forget to be realistic about our expectations for giving and receiving. And sometimes, on our not-so-great days, we have to be lead kicking and screaming away from the experience that should be nothing short of awesome. We are not willing to be surprised, and failure is an excuse for another glass of egg-nog or a bloody Mary.

The nephew and I have made several subsequent visits back to the twain store. There have been no freak outs, no whining, no kicking and screaming. There have been good conversations in the car, many questions asked and answered, and the bond between us grows stronger and stronger. I wonder what it would look like if you and I applied the principles of the twain store to Christmas, to time with our families, to giving and receiving gifts? I bet Christmas would be less whiny and freaky for all of us.

My prayer is that you and your families and your friends share a marvelous Advent and Christmas season, without whining or freak -outs, without fights over the train table, and with the full and incredible knowledge that a very small person, born very long ago, loves you, saves you, is coming back for you, and thinks you are the most wonderful gift in the world.

Mistletoe Kisses, and Candy Cane Wishes,

*Sister Sally*

camp-  
God's gift  
tucked away in a cornfield  
nowhere, ohio

more than just a place – it's a Community  
sustained by the Bountiful Spirit  
broken hearts mended  
empty hearts filled  
lives transformed  
hearts set on fire

faith  
laughter  
love  
seeps into  
each word  
each song  
each smile  
each moment

God's presence is so tangible  
from the painted sunset  
to the crackling campfire  
in the air we breathe  
in the light we see in one another  
God's love is so tangible

everyday a gift –  
the Holy Spirit working in our lives  
the journey of self-discovery  
an answered prayer

camp is a gift  
not only for a week  
for a lifetime  
like God's love  
for eternity



she's been coming to Laxmi for years. In fact, she brought her son when he was a teenager and it is what got him interested in Southeast Asian studies which he is currently studying. After we get seconds at the buffet, a samosa for her, more mint chutney for me, she tells me about her latest favorite gadget, the iPad which she confesses she is addicted to. It fits in her purse and the Notepad app is perfect for taking notes in meetings with

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"We're dry and witty but there's a good bunch of us coming up that are meeting the needs of the world and having fun doing it."

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clergy. She then takes out her Blackberry and shows me how she makes her own appointments. Bishop Bruce gets her ringtones off [www.crackberry.com](http://www.crackberry.com) and gets a kick out of assigning personal ringtones to close family and friends.

She tells me about her other favorite pastime: Scrabble. A former parishioner introduced her to the game and she's been a devotee ever since. "The key is in the two letter words," she tells me. She plays Facebook Scrabble on her Blackberry whenever she has down time. She even plays Facebook Scrabble when she's playing Scrabble in real time with her husband and is waiting for her turn. Her highest score for one word? 95 points.

Her level of energy and enthusiasm is astonishing, even more so when she reminds me of her recent battle with breast cancer, which she won and is now cancer-free. I point out that her

warmth, affection, and playfulness doesn't seem to fit the dry and witty stereotype of Episcopalians. She leans in and says, "We're not just intellectual eggheads anymore. We're dry and witty but there's a good bunch of us coming up that are meeting the needs of the world and having fun doing it." I tell her it's very clear she's a bishop, having fun. She says, "Hanna, you have to have a sense of humor. You just have to."

On our way out, Bishop Bruce tells the owner that she'll be back with her son when he's home on winter break. And with a parting hug, she points out her license plate. It says "OBISPA," Spanish for bishop except she's broken the rules and made it feminine (the female form of "bishop" does not exist in the Spanish language). She grins and waves goodbye.

*Hanna Kang-Brown is a contributing writer and Episcopific editor based in greater Los Angeles.*

convocation of Korean clergy in the Anglican Communion and in 2012, she will be going to China to support the Chinese clergy in the diocese.

Bishop Bruce says she is concerned with overworked ethnic ministers and creates 24 hour retreats for clergy that are essentially scheduled non-work

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“The Episcopal Church’s greatest gift to young adults is inviting them to ask the deep questions in a safe place.”

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days. She is also a big proponent of extending hospitality to her home. It’s common for her to have someone over at 3 pm for tea, then 4 pm for wine, then wine and dinner at 5 pm. She stacks her appointments to give as much face time as possible and when I ask where this value comes from, she says, “My mother.” Bishop Bruce’s mother was Roman Catholic and she herself was a devout Catholic before joining the Episcopal Church as a young adult. “My mother practiced radical hospitality. Growing up, we always had wonderful conversation around the table with neighbors and friends. We always had food and drink.”

Her value for radical hospitality seems to extend to the internet. Bishop Bruce designed the website at her former parish and blogs at [www.obispadjb.blogspot.com](http://www.obispadjb.blogspot.com). I ask about the role of technology in the future of the church, and her eyes light up. “I love technology. It’s essential that churches and leaders are on Facebook. We have to Tweet, Facebook. We have

to be active on social media. Online is where people are finding each other. More people are online via Facebook and texting than email.” At the time I write, her Facebook friend count is at 1,084. Bishop Bruce is also active on Farmville, a farm simulation game application on Facebook. I note her enthusiasm for online media and ask, “Would you be willing to do a service on Second Life?” Second Life is a 3D virtual world where users can create an avatar and build a virtual world for themselves, including religious practices and community. “Sure,” she says, although she adds that the only issue she would have with doing a service in Second Life is that being physically present is very important, and Episcopalians bring people around the altar. Being physically present in a virtual world would be a major barrier.

The owner of Laxmi stops by our table to check on us and it turns out that

## Her Ringtones

from [www.crackberry.com](http://www.crackberry.com)

*Head Chaplain:*

“Raiders of the Lost Ark”

(because he always wears khakis)

*Husband:* Frank Zappa guitar solo

*Older sister:* “Bad to the Bone”

*Daughter:* theme song from Peanuts

*Son:* “Masters of the Universe”

(from He-Man)

*Her boss:* “Soul Man”

*Unknown:* “Somebody’s Calling Me”



*poem and photos by Lisa Jacob*

# “We’re not just intellectual eggheads anymore.”

*Lunch with the Episcopific: the 16th Bishop Suffragen-Elect Diane Bruce picks Indian buffet and talks about technology and having fun*

It's easy to get a hold of the Rt. Rev. Diane Bruce, the 16th Bishop Suffragen-Elect to the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles and the first female bishop in the diocese's history. She responds to my email request within the hour writing “call me to set up a time.” Later in the evening, I realize the hour is late so I text her. The next morning, she texts me back asking, “Who is this?” I had forgotten to include my name on the text. I call her and once she knows who I am, she presents me with three options for lunch that include Indian and Mediterranean food. I pick the first one, the one Bishop Bruce keeps warning me is “pretty funky.”

It's called Laxmi Sweets & Spices in Tustin, CA and the first thing I notice when I look it up on Yelp.com is a customer photo of the front of the store. Laxmi is an Indian convenience store/video store with an all-you-can-eat lunch buffet and neon signs up front that say things like “video conversion” and “phone cards” as well as a big poster with the words, “income tax preparation.”

I arrive at Laxmi Sweets & Spices at 12:31pm and as I walk through the strip mall parking lot, Bishop Bruce comes out the front door and greets me with her characteristic smile, the one that looks like she's slightly embarrassed but glad to see you. She has short gray hair and a petite frame and greets me with a hug.



“Come in. Are you hungry?” she says.

We walk into Laxmi and I can see what the Yelp reviewers meant by the cafeteria-like style of the place. In the back of the store, behind several aisles of spices and grains and frozen food freezers, are tables and booths set up on linoleum with water coolers and Styrofoam cups on either side of the aisles. The cash register near the front is next to a buffet, which Bishop Bruce immediately interrogates with the pointed directness one could expect from a former banker from New Jersey.

“We’re going to have the buffet. Tell us

what you have,” she says, pointing at the steel bins of sauces and entrees. The Indian woman working behind the counter describes the different items: samosas, palak paneer, chicken tikka, lamb curry. “What’s this?” she says, to crispy fried vegetables that the woman failed to explain. I’m starting to wonder if she’s doing this for my benefit since she seems to know what the dishes are.

“Oh, this looks good,” says Bishop Bruce and we start loading up our plates with our food. “Have you eaten Indian food before?” she asks me, and I assure her that I have.

We sit down to eat and within the first bites of food, Bishop Bruce is ready for the interview. I’ve collected a list of questions from the Episcopific editorial board and as I run through them between bites of chicken korma and garlic naan, it’s clear she’s answered these kinds of questions many times before. When I ask what she thinks the Episcopal Church’s greatest gifts to this generation of young adults is, she responds immediately with “The Episcopal Church’s greatest gift to young adults is inviting them to ask the deep questions in a safe place.”

Her words sound like well-rehearsed sound bites at first, especially when it comes to ministry in the Episcopal Church, but there is an undeniable energy to Bishop Bruce that sets her apart. It’s as if she shooting the answers right back at you as fast as she can and it’s not just the Jersey inflection. I’ve

heard it attributed to her time as an executive banker at Wells Fargo before she became a priest but I get the sense that there’s more to it than that. Bishop Bruce is energetic and quick, and it’s as if she’s actually having fun being a bishop. A religious leader having fun? Sounds like an oxymoron but Bishop Bruce seems to be proving the old tropes wrong.

Bishop Bruce oversees the 45

parishes in the southern third of the diocese and since being elected in May, she has “hit all 45 in the first 100 days.” “I’m a freeway flyer,” she says, referring to the hours and miles she put in on the freeway. To pass the time and fulfill her love of books, she listens to books on cd and at any

given time will be listening to “one nonfiction book, one mystery, and one trashy romance novel.” “No comedies,” she says, “because I’ll miss my exit.”

I ask her what the largest areas of growth for the diocese and church are, and she immediately responds with, “The largest areas of growth are multicultural ministries.” She directs the multicultural ministries and stewardship for the diocese and her roots as a linguistics major at UC Berkeley help explain the breadth of her ability to minister in different languages. She’s done Spanish services for 12 years and recently did a full service in Mandarin. She says she’s working on her Cantonese. Next year, she will be going to Korea for the

## Bishop Bruce’s Book Picks:

*Traveling Mercies*  
by Anne Lamott

*The Secret Life of Bees*  
by Sue Monk Kidd