

THE APOSTLE

+ Chris & Sharon's
Choice

+ Scruffy Hospitality
in Knoxville

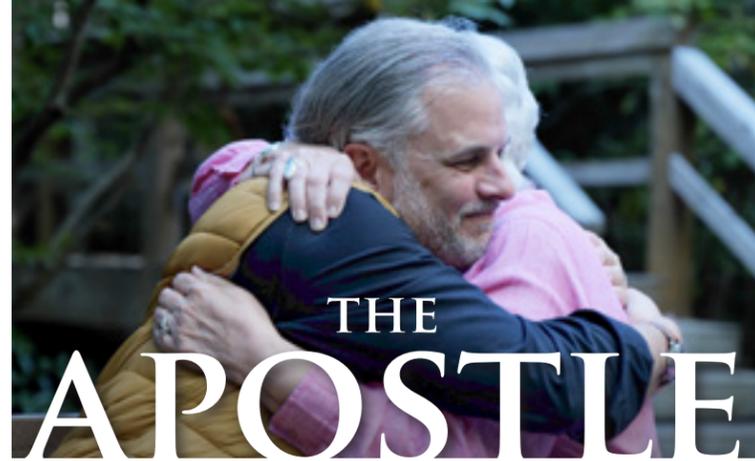
+ Stable, single &
joyfully serving
students

... and more



ANGLICAN CHURCH
IN NORTH AMERICA

REACHING NORTH AMERICA WITH THE
TRANSFORMING LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST



Late Pentecost & Advent 2022

featured stories:



Scruffy Hospitality
By Ernie Didot



Stable, single & joyfully serving students By Ernie Didot



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editors' note:

In this broken world, human relationships are often painful and messy. But when the Lord's grace can shine into that messiness, the light and goodness of the Gospel is shown to the world, revealing the beauty of restoration with each other and him now and the hope of the ultimate restoration of all things to come. In this issue of the Apostle, we dig into the ministry of relationship, sharing the stories of a Rector who was adopted and reunited with his birth mother later in life, a campus minister leading a thriving ministry with college students, a unique cross-cultural experience in Uganda, and Knoxville's "scruffy" kind of hospitality. Be sure to also catch the bonus audio and video content available.

The Rev. Canon Andrew Gross, Editor-in-Chief · **Rachel Thebeau**, Senior Editor · **Ernie Didot**, Managing Editor



MATTHEW 25 INITIATIVE

JUSTICE + MERCY | CONTENDING FOR SHALOM



In Turbulent Times Become a M25i Anglican - By Christine Warner

When we fly, irregular activity in the atmosphere causes turbulence. Pilots navigate these pockets by studying the information, adjusting the pitch, informing the passengers, and planning for the best course forward. They move from automatic to manual, from routinely active to proactive.

As Anglicans living in turbulent times, we too may be looking for more direct ways of participating in the justice and ministry work of the church. Perhaps also as Anglicans, we hope for a way rooted in contemplative activism—acting and serving from places of rest in God.

The Matthew 25 Initiative exists to support, encourage, and equip practitioners companioning the vulnerable, the marginalized, and the under-resourced communities of North America. In these spaces, we find Anglicans who grow food for the hungry and displaced, who visit and advocate for the incarcerated, and those who mentor and educate children of refugees and immigrants. In these spaces, the church steps into the role of companionship with those who practice contemplative activism. As one Body, we root ourselves in the Gospel and step into a direct experience of being Christ's hands and feet.

When our lives are marked by comfort, it is often a result of pursuing comfort. When our lives are marked by Christ, it is often because we are not far from those with whom he identifies: the hungry, the prisoner, the sick, the stranger, and those without homes.

Matthew 25 Initiative is both a safe space that focuses on the needs of practitioners, as well as an invitation to the Anglican church at large. It is an initiative that invites us to taste, see, and take part in what is afoot. Here, the church considers what is happening, what is needed, how to support, and how to more fully be the hands and feet and kindness of Christ, but also encounter Christ himself. We get to be a part of healing and mending, and we find that we ourselves are healed and mended, formed into Christ-likeness.

In turbulent times, become a Matthew 25 Initiative Anglican. Come see and join and be transformed. We offer a light to a dark world, an apologetic to the skeptical, and the love and glory of Christ to the world he loves.

If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy those who are in need, then... you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.
Isaiah 58:10-12



Learn more at AnglicanJusticeAndMercy.org



Scruffy HOSPITALITY



IN KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE

By Ernie Didot

“A scruffy little city on the Tennessee River.”

That is the description Wall Street Journal reporter Susan Hargigan gave Knoxville in 1980 before the city hosted the 1982 World’s Fair. After successfully hosting the event, what was intended as a slight was eventually embraced by the city with bumper stickers sporting the slogan, “Keep Knoxville Scruffy.” It was in the context of this Scruffy Little City’s reputation that the Rev. Jack King began to ponder, “What would it look like to be hospitable here in Knoxville?” He thought, “Maybe we just have to offer a kind of scruffy hospitality where we may not be at our best – and that’s all right – at least we’re getting together.”

Eight years ago, as King was in his second year as Rector at Apostles Anglican Church (located in the Cedar Bluff neighborhood of Knoxville), he and his wife, Emily, were caring for younger children with a full calendar and asking, “How can

we have good relationships with people beyond just Sunday morning? I guess because of the culture we grew up in, you had to put your best foot forward when guests came over. But maybe it’s got to be a lot simpler than that if we’re actually going to build friendships and build spiritual community around the table.” King decided to share what he was thinking in his blog, Knox Priest, and in the process found out what he really thought about hospitality.

“I remember my imagination really being captivated by the biblical word for hospitality, which is the Greek word ‘Philo Xenia.’ It’s a compound word that means, ‘love of the stranger.’ And you actually kind of hear the word ‘zinnia’, like in the opposite form of that ‘xenophobia’ that’s the fear of the stranger. So, if I think about it Biblically, hospitality is the love of the stranger – the spirit of welcome.” King explained how there is a Southern expression, “Come put your feet under my table”, but that things change and are even better when you can say, “You can put your feet on the table.”



“To me, that sense of loving and welcoming one another from anonymity into a kind of knowing is what is at the heart of hospitality. I heard someone describe it as ‘putting someone else at ease.’” He continued, “So it’s not just catering to them, it’s kind of drawing them into the warmth of conversation that is meaningful.”

King is sitting on the front porch of his newly built house while sharing about these ponderings from eight years ago. Much thought was put into the architecture of the freshly built house to reinforce these ideas of hospitality so that guests would sense an open, welcoming flow when visiting. The reverberating effects of the article began to influence how he and the church shaped their ministry, and as he learned later, his ideas were beginning to get traction in unexpected places with people he did not even know.

For example, in 2019, writing on the website, Treehugger, boasting 2.6 million users, Robin Shreeves quotes Father Jack in her article, ‘In Praise of ‘Scruffy Hospitality’, “Scruffy hospitality means you hunger more for good conversation and serving a simple meal of what you have, not what you don’t have. Scruffy hospitality means you’re more interested in quality conversation than the impression your home or lawn makes. If we only share meals with friends when we’re excellent, we aren’t truly sharing life together.”

She goes on to write, “It’s more than okay to be scruffy. We can have the kind of open, welcoming home we long to have where authenticity shines, even if our kitchen floors do not.”

King explains how as Anglicans, reverence is very important in the church but it doesn’t mean that you’re uptight; rather, his hope is that there is an authentic approachability which translates to welcoming people into

your home and life. “It’s got to be more organic than something that is always planned. Life’s too busy. If everything is going to be where it’s got to be at a certain standard, it’s going to get longer and longer out to where you actually are face to face with people.” He explains that we give the invitation to the table to the baptized, which is how we should live into our faith, but we should be thinking about the other spaces where we can welcome people, like the family table, who have not been baptized. “There’s a sense of the liturgy after the liturgy too. And I think that family tables are a sense of like, okay, the liturgy on Sunday has ended, now there’s an opportunity for the liturgy of your table.”

King’s vision on hospitality has led the church to form Table Groups where each meeting will have two essential elements: a time of sharing food together and a time of prayer. Deacon Michelle Bickers, coordinator of events and hospitality at Apostles, says that “we’ve kind of misunderstood hospitality in our culture, that it is entertainment, but entertainment is



really a different thing than hospitality.” She explains how one of the biggest hesitations to hosting Table Groups is that “people are worried about what their house looks like and so they really are hesitant to invite people in because maybe their kids threw a truck at the wall, and they had to go back and spackle over it. They’re afraid to have people come in and really see maybe the way they live because they envision everybody else living in a magazine.” Bickers has learned that “people don’t care what your house looks like, they really want to be welcomed and accepted in your house and they are not looking around to see if everything is perfectly dusted...God has invited us to his table; we’re seated alongside him. He doesn’t hover over us, he sits next to us...our job as believers is to really invite others to be at the table with us. That’s how we can love them and help them feel dignity and respect as we invite them into the church.”

Apostles Anglican even provides a Table Group handbook, “Mealtime Prayer Liturgy.” Included in it are suggestions like:

- Light a candle at the beginning of the meal saying, “Jesus is the light in a world of darkness.”
- Read the Phos Hilaron (O Gladsome Light)
- At the end of the meal, provide prompts for group discussion and/or prayer such as, “Where have you experienced the goodness of God today?”
- Read The Lord’s Prayer together

At the end of the discussion [interview?] on hospitality, King became animated as he shared an insight they gained while studying the ‘Gospel and the Christmas Carol’ a few years ago. “One of the things that you notice about the story that you can often miss is: how does Dickens end the novel? Scrooge is at the table. He begins estranged and he lives alone and it’s dark and cold. He goes through the visit of the three spirits. He has repentance. How does the novel end? He’s at a table with family on Christmas Day. It’s the sign of restoration. The restoration of friendship that this is how it ought to be. That’s how the story is going to end for us, right? The Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Every common meal has an eschatological sense. This is good, and there’s more coming.” One can easily see that as a church body embraces the invitational nature of scruffy hospitality, that this will be an ever-expanding foretaste of the great feast, filled with goodness, restoration, warmth, and friendship – at the table of Jesus, our Lord and King.



ALWAYS FORWARD

EQUIPPING **EVERY** DIOCESE TO BECOME A CHURCH-PLANTING MOVEMENT

- Gospel-Centered
- Sacramental
- Missional

THE
PODCAST IS
BACK





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STABLE, SINGLE,



JOYFULLY SERVING STUDENTS



For many students, a crisp, Fall, Saturday evening at JMU would be prime time for some heavy partying. For InterVarsity students though, they hosted a bonfire event on the property of Church of the Lamb (Diocese of Christ Our Hope). Here, 150-200 students have shown up to sing songs of worship and hang out together. Tiki torches are scattered amidst frisbee throwing and competitive games of spikeball. The bonfire is so intense that some have difficulty approaching it to roast their marshmallows. A worship band, piled into the back of a pickup truck, strikes up the music and the students start singing, following along from a shared file of lyrics on their cell phones.

JMU students and Computer Information Systems majors, Ian Rischell and Brian Thomas, arrived a little early to help build the bonfire. Ian has been a small group leader for two years with IV; the level of maturity that IV has called him to has helped him grow spiritually. “You are asked to plan the Bible studies by yourself along with the co-leader, and you are called to be an example to the people. CJ gives us a baseline in what to do but you don’t ask CJ what to do next, you have to take the reins and do the best you can.” Ian also reflects, “What attracted me the most to IV was the community. They do a very good job at community. They put on a lot of events to get to know each other and get to know the Lord better.”

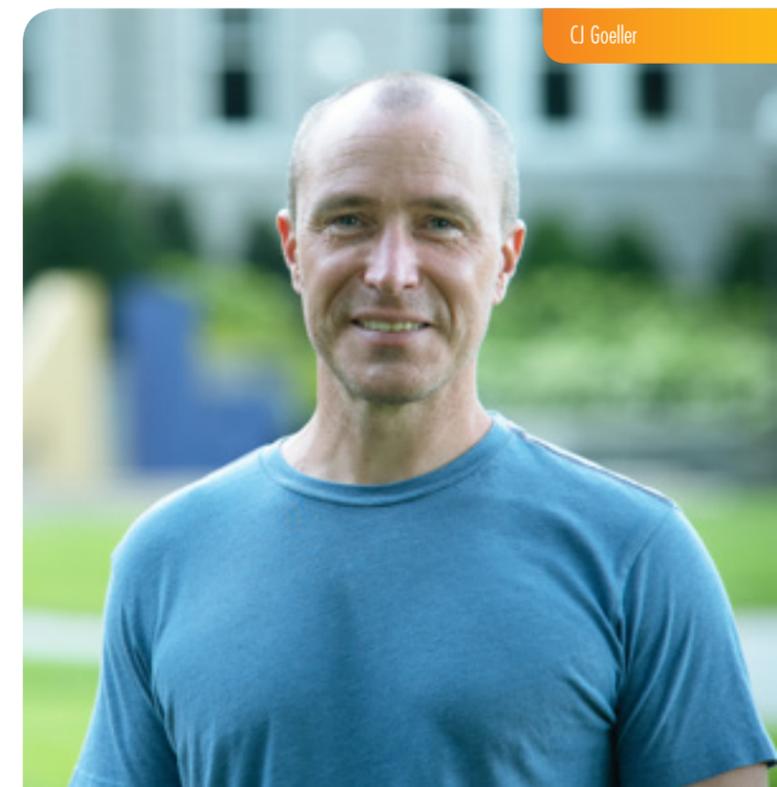
Brian commented on what drew him to IV: “I was intrigued by the idea of small groups and large group and of meeting up every week in a small group. CJ really makes sure that we don’t structure ourselves as a program but as people. That community aspect is a big thing.”

CJ has certainly matured in age at JMU having ministered through InterVarsity on the campus for over 27 years. He has been courted by other ministries and within InterVarsity to “move up the ladder” but he explains that early on in his ministry, his second year, he was impacted by reading The Rule of St. Benedict. In addition to vows of chastity and poverty, the vow that stuck out to him was of stability. He was challenged to be stable and not just change when things get difficult. CJ

observed how college and youth pastors often use their vocation as a steppingstone instead of taking it seriously as a vocation in and of itself to be honored. “Students would ask me, ‘Are you going to be leaving anytime soon? Because I’ve had three youth pastors since middle school.’ I realized, ‘Oh they’re experiencing the hurt of instability.’” CJ said that he got to a point in his life at which he thought, “I think I’m fruitful at what I do. It brings me joy and satisfaction in life. I think I still have a lot to learn from this vocation, and so...this is where I am to be. It is not only a call to a vocation, but to a location – to a people.”

Goeller has been attending Anglican churches in Harrisonburg for several years now and occasionally will bring students with him to attend. He explains how students, “are looking for a grand, emotional experience, and I understand that, I was there, but when I bring students and I explain to them everything that is happening in the service and they understand the heart and the meaning behind it, it opens up a whole world to them.” He will often hear them reflect how they were blown away when kneeling and confessing their sins at church; to open their hands like a beggar to receive communion, it means something to them.

CJ Goeller



By Ernie Didot

Standing on the James Madison University (JMU) “Quad” (the grassy, symbolic center of campus), InterVarsity (IV) Campus Pastor, CJ Goeller, explains why JMU has one of the stronger IV chapters in the nation: “The thing I think that makes us strong is the fact that we have students who are actually leaning into the Lord and are not just running programs. They’re not every year replicating something or using pre-made Bible study books or some kind of evangelism tactic to reach the campus; they’re opening themselves to the Lord – to the Holy Spirit, saying, ‘Lord, what would you have me do? Who would you have me be?’” When asked about the specific size of the chapter, CJ is somewhat reluctant to give a total number, but rather, quantifies the InterVarsity size by the number of small groups, which currently is around 48 with anywhere from 8 to 20 in each group. Large group attendance and participation is not the highest point of emphasis but rather discipleship and the study of Scripture.

“InterVarsity was started in England as a student-led ministry to students and it’s part of our [InterVarsity] heritage. We’ve really leaned into that heavily here at JMU. Developing student lead-

ers who are capable of leading other students, that was my personal experience, and I still believe that the Holy Spirit can work in 18 to 22-year-olds to lead 18 to 22-year-olds and you don’t need a lot of professionals. You don’t need a seminary degree. You need a heart of faith, a willingness to serve, a willingness to suffer and to go through difficulty. If those things are present, God is going to use anyone who’s willing.”

Nestled in the Shenandoah Valley in the city of Harrisonburg, Virginia, JMU (20,070 undergrad students), is sometimes called the Interstate University because Interstate 81 runs north and south cutting through the middle of campus. “We say we are here to make, mature, and multiply disciples of Jesus. So that’s on the radar of every student leader. That’s why we’re here. We’re not here to run programs; we are not even here to have small group meetings or small group gatherings. We’re here to care for each and every individual who presents him or herself to us.” CJ uses the word “maturity” a lot which he explains might run contrary to the therapeutic language in our culture. “This [maturity] happens through one-on-one disciple – making where we’re teaching things like spiritual disciplines. But just as importantly, how to suffer and struggle and embrace trial and not avoid difficult people, difficult circumstances, or families.”



THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF DISASTER RELIEF

By Emily Misner



The ripple effect of disaster response is incredible. In 2017, ARDF partnered with the Diocese of the Western Gulf Coast to assist victims of Hurricane Harvey. Deacon Shelly Sorem was asked to be part of a discernment team to help disperse these funds. She says, “that little saying YES changed my life.”

After Hurricane Harvey, people who had lost everything were living in hotels across Houston. Deacon Shelly and her Daughters of the Holy Cross Chapter reached out to see if anyone needed help. They connected with three single moms and took them shopping for groceries and toiletries.

“funds from ARDF go way beyond just giving someone a meal or just giving someone a Bible - the ripple effect is incredible.”

Even before Hurricane Harvey hit Houston, one of these moms, Brittany, was struggling to get by. Her mental health problems were exacerbated by the trauma of natural disaster. ARDF provided funds to get her the mental help and medications she needed. However, Brittany ended up in prison, due to a crime she had previously committed. When Deacon Shelly visited her, Brittany showed them the Bible she was

now reading to the other women in her pod. Shelley was amazed to see that “funds from ARDF go way beyond just giving someone a meal or just giving someone a Bible - the ripple effect is incredible.” Christ’s transforming love was still working. Today, five years later, Brittany is clean, sober, and has completed FEMA disaster response training so she can help women struggling through similar experiences.

A ministry of presence to those who are grieving and struggling is one of the most important ways the Church can show how much they care. Deacon Shelly says, “ARDF provided the funds so that we can sit in the mess, and we can walk through the mess. That’s what you do in the body of Christ - we walk together through the good, the bad, and the ugly.”

ARDF is excited to have Deacon Shelly serving on ARDF’s National Disaster Response Task Force. It is our prayer that this Task Force can help equip and mobilize more churches to reach out to those in need after disaster strikes, showing the love of Christ in powerful ways which continue to ripple outward.

If you are interested in learning more about or donating to ARDF’s disaster response efforts, visit ardf.org/relief or email our National Disaster Response Network Director, tommy@ardf.org.

CJ is single and from time to time, the local Anglican churches have called upon him to preach and address the topic of singleness. Goeller chuckles about how matchmakers within the church and even married friends have over the years attempted to manipulate dinners and encounters to meet single women. “I take their attempts as a joyful thing; that friends are trying to bring me into what they find joyful. But the thing is, I find singleness joyful, and as joyful as they find their marriage, that’s as joyful as I find singleness. There’s a capacity in singleness that brings tremendous freedom, availability, and capacity to be on call at a moment’s notice in the lives of students.”

“I can’t speak for all singles ‘cause I think there are some singles who are yearning to be married and I think that’s beautiful. But God has certainly used singleness to allow me to commit not just time, but emotional, social, and spiritual attentiveness to the campus and students that I’m ministering to.”

A few years ago, CJ was speaking at a singles retreat and referred to I Corinthians 7 which talks about the goodness of being single. He shares how a single woman confided to him with tears in her eyes saying that after 50 years of her life thinking that being single was defective, or that something was wrong with that she couldn’t get a man, no one had ever told her that being single is good! “I think it’s a liberating, freeing thing for singles to hear that their status in life is honored and valued by God.”

“I think the church knows very well how to help married folks fulfill their covenant vows, and that’s good. But many people are called to singleness. And so how can we as a church help singles know how to live as faithfully to that vocation as we help married folks live faithfully to the vocation of marriage? I would be curious to see what the church could do if they were to take the call to singleness seriously and empower singles to be single and to use their life well.”

Over the years, CJ has developed a reputation in the community for being quite the host – an invitation to his dinner includes a feast of food and drink. He considers that singleness and stability intersect at hospitality. Students who have become his friends and have gone on to graduate will return to Harrisonburg, and CJ can enter right back into meaningful conversations with them as he hosts with a well-prepared meal, mixed drinks, and the heart space to remain open to those relationships over time. “Friends are actually more like family.”

He finds that students are refreshingly direct – maybe blunt – wondering about his singleness. “I had a Q&A one time in this group and a guy raised his hand asking me, ‘So, what’s it like being a eunuch?’” CJ said that everyone laughed except the student, so he thinks he didn’t know what the word meant. But CJ sees how his singleness allows students to be authentic, to open up honestly, and to enter into great conversations. “Yeah, being single...there’s just a beautiful simplicity to singleness.”

CJ Goeller is an active member of Church of the Lamb, Keezletown, Virginia.





CROSS-CULTURE

TWO-WAY YOUTH MINISTRY IN UGANDA

By Ernie Didot

The stated purpose of the ACNA's Every Tribe and Nation Initiative (ETNI) is to, "...build a network of people from all nations through relationships, respect, and resources across ethnic, national, and regional lines for the release of leadership into the next generation." While that stated purpose is certainly a mouthful, equally challenging for Bishop Andrew, Canon Leah Turner, and The Rev. Sean Norris was to summarize their ETNI sponsored trip to Uganda in August 2022. The 12-day visit to the country by the nine-person delegation included intensive travel days to minister, encourage, learn, and build relationships throughout the nation of Uganda. By all accounts, the trip was a tremendous success.

In his fourth year as Bishop of the Anglican Diocese in New England, Williams describes the Diocese' focus as:

- 1) Developing leaders
- 2) Children and Youth Ministry
- 3) Church Planting
- 4) Spiritual Reawakening

For him, this trip struck a lot of those chords as four of the youth went on the trip, two of whom had immigrated to the U.S. from Kenya when they were very young. "The first-generation immigrant parents in the church are trying to hold on to their culture and roots amidst the Western culture



baggage, while forging in a third-culture direction. Leah and the ETNI are trying to incorporate the children of first-generation parents into the church while bridging them to the values and culture of their country of origin." Bishop Williams went on to describe how these trips contribute to leadership development; they provide strategic tools in developing their mission both locally and international.

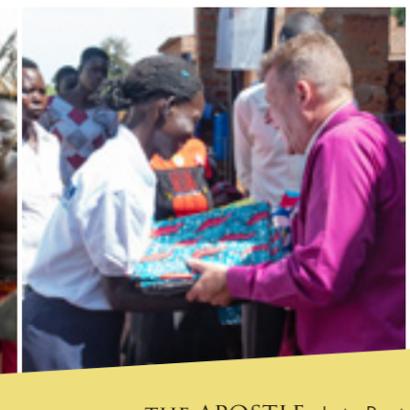
Canon Leah Turner ministers at Grace Anglican Church and their sister church, Faith Anglican Community Church, which worships in the Kikuyu language from Kenya. The youth group is combined from the two churches and is the crux of Leah's work in ETNI. Over the past few years Leah has built strong relationships throughout Kenya and Uganda and it was these relationships that served to lay the groundwork for the trip – making it possible to draw closer to the body of Christ in Uganda.

The Rev. Sean Norris, co-founder of Dandelion Ministries, served as the chaplain to the Bishop on the trip and counseled in many ministry opportunities with the Ugandan youth. "Many of them are dealing with a whole new level of pressure and expectations from modern influences (like the internet) combined with traditional, cultural expectations." Sean shared how after they broke the groups up into girls and guys, the questions and obvious struggles began pouring out as they demonstrated a freedom to share with the team. "We fielded questions ranging from, 'how to pay my bride price?' to all the

pitfalls in dealing with the internet onslaught. While they are in a different culture, they needed a place for someone to hear their pain and struggles, and to refresh them with the gospel message of God's love for them through their challenges." The serious issues brought before the team made them realize the deep need for access to trained counseling, healing, and resources for the young people.

Bishop Andrew, Leah, and Sean were unanimous in their admiration for the key leader of the trip, Audrey Patra. Director of Love Unveiled Ministries in Uganda, Audrey was described by the Bishop as being, "one of the most anointed young ladies he has ever met. Grace, love, and authority define her character. Wherever she goes there is a trail of restoration and reconciliation." The team witnessed the fruit of her work in programs for women who had no means for supporting themselves and their children and discipleship formation amongst college students.

For the youth on the team, they discovered that youth in Uganda are dealing with some of the same struggles that they are but caught a glimpse of how blessed they are in their daily lives in the United States. Bishop Andrew observed that, "They also witnessed the spiritual thermals of the trip – spiritual warfare as we moved through a spiritual climate that was raw. They saw us struggling and praying to make it through at times." There were challenges every day on the trip where they needed to pray, God answered, and the young people witnessed it.





RAISING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF THE ACNA ▶

Charles “Biko” Che Guevara, one of the Kenyan-American students who went on the trip, was blown away by how devoted the Ugandan youth were to God. “The most important thing I learned on the trip was that I am not alone. God walks with me everyday, and I saw that happen with the Ugandans who were dedicated to God in their daily life experience.”

Before the trip Biko was asking the questions that many “third culture” youth ask who experienced life to some degree in their parents first country or culture but grew up in the second culture of the United States. He was asking, “Who am I? Am I Kenyan or American? We still practice Kenyan traditions and culture at home but with my friends at school it’s American.” One important thing he learned about himself in this trip was how deep his passion for writing was; to express himself to God and to others everyday through writing. “God helped me to see that writing is a gift and tool that I need to use consistently in my life.”

Archbishop Kaziimba (Uganda) and Bishop Pons (Nebbi) took time to meet with the group and humbly allowed the group to pray for them. There was an overarching connection with the leadership as they wrestled with the unexpected circumstances brought on by Covid and its aftermath.

Bishop Andrew said that the most tender moment for him was when he felt led to minister to 1500 kids in a meeting telling

them, “The Father wants to embrace you.’ So I invited the Spirit to come and for them to be quiet, holding out their hands. You could have heard a pin drop. We heard the wind swaying as they were being ministered to in silence. And then they burst into the purest worship I’ve ever heard. That I will take to my grave.”

Everyone on the team expressed the sentiment that is so often the case on trips like this, that they learned and were ministered to far beyond what they were able to give.

The team members recognized a common theme with all of the vicars, priests, and canons they met: all were praying for revival the same way they were. During one of the worship services there was even confirmation that God was saying it would come. There was a sense that the relationships established on the trip could be the catalyst to it. Leah reflected, “I’m so grateful that everyone had fallen in the love with the people and the culture the same way I had. I feel so strongly about the relationships that can be built between here and there. They remind us of the purity of the gospel and how Jesus brings joy in every circumstance. This is not the end. Relationships with the people in East Africa will continue.”

By The Venerable Jessica H. Jones, PhD
Next Generation Leadership Initiative

Leadership crisis or development crisis?

I hear frequently that the Church is facing a leadership crisis. In fact, almost every week I am asked if I know any leaders available to join someone’s team. Sometimes it works that I can help. Every time, however, I also encourage the leader to begin building a system that develops leaders from within.

I am not so sure we are facing a leadership crisis. I think it is more likely that we are facing a development crisis. Consider the programs and events for which you are responsible: in what phase of development is it?

- Phase 1: nothing runs without you
- Phase 2: things run, but don’t grow without you
- Phase 3: things run, and grow, without you

This is a generalization as ministry has many facets that influence its sustainability, but it is a helpful exercise. If all of your programs are in Phase 1, then you won’t have developed leaders to come alongside you in mission.

What steps could you take today to empower others in new levels of leadership? What can you give away? How can you build a teaching ministry, inviting others to learn alongside you as you lead?

The Next Generation Leadership Initiative (NGLI) was created to help dioceses and churches examine leadership development in ways that build systems to deepen the bench:

to raise up the next generation of leaders for the next generation of the ACNA. The ACNA is a church-planting province and you cannot build churches, or reach those within our communities, without developing leaders.

NGLI offers networks for developing leaders in specific people groups:

- Family- focused on developing parish family ministry leaders as well as resourcing our families to disciple at home;
- Student- focused on developing ministry leaders, building systems of leadership for our students, and reaching Generations Z and Alpha;
- Campus- focused on developing campus ministers, partnering with local churches and parachurch ministries, and discipling college-age adults;
- Antioch- focused on raising up ethnic-minority leaders and celebrating the diversity within our communities;
- Women- focused on empowering lay and ordained women to flourish in ministry under their bishop;
- Access- focused on including those with disabilities as equal agents of the Gospel.

These networks gather monthly, offer training, and resource leaders across the ACNA.

Simply put: NGLI exists to help leaders discover, develop, and deploy missional leaders, who will exponentially develop others as well. Where could you use our help today?

For more information, visit:
<https://www.nextgenanglican.com>

CHRIS & SHARON'S

Choice



By Ernie Didot

GOD'S GRACE AMIDST DIFFICULT CHOICES

It is not often in life when you have the choice to discover something about yourself, which could potentially rock your equilibrium and throw you into a completely unknown direction. Do you stay comfortable in the known, never really risking what it would take to understand a mystery, or do you trust in a faithful God, taking the chance that after the door has been opened, only one thing is certain: life will never be the same as it was before?

That was the position Father Chris Culpepper (52) found himself in 22 years ago, when as a 30 year-old youth minister at Saint Andrews parish in downtown Fort Worth, Texas, he received a call out of the blue from his parents asking him to come over to talk and go for a walk

“That’s always how you know something happened in my family when you’re asked to go for a walk – usually it’s good, but sometimes you don’t know. And so, we went for the walk as we always did, and they asked me if I knew a lady named Sharon Kolb. And I mean, I was racking my brain from all facets of my life and just could not come to recognizing the name. And they said, ‘Well, she’s your birth mother.’”

Chris’ birth mother was reaching out to connect with him and he had to decide whether he wanted to follow up with her or not.

“I mean, there’s not a word to describe what that meant. And they said, ‘You know, we’ve always been open with you about it [your adoption]. You’re a grown man. You can do what you want to do with this information.’ And again, just out of the deepest sense of respect, my first thought was, ‘I don’t know what to do with this,’ like, ‘Lord help me here ‘cause I’ve got no idea.’” Chris also added that his parents were lovingly and completely supportive of the decision he made, whatever that might be.

Chris had grown up learning to take 24 hours of time to think through big decisions, so he returned to that practice.

“In that 24-hour period I went home, prayed, contemplated, and thought. The scripture the Lord gave me was pretty simple

and profound. ‘Who are my mother and brothers? ...but those who do the will of my Father in heaven.’ [Mark 3:33-34] And that was enough, you know, that was enough.”

Over thirty years before this moment, Sharon Kolb had a decision to make. She had returned from a trip over Christmas with her best girlfriend and had wondered if she had been frequently sick during the travel due to car sickness. Finding herself still sick after returning home, and missing her period, she and her friend knew she was pregnant.

“My friend asked me on the phone, ‘Well, how can you be? I mean, you’re not dating anybody. How did this happen?’”

“And then I told her about the rape.”

Sharon was date raped when she was 18 years old. She had known the guy for several months before going out together for the first time on Halloween night when he raped her.

“I went home and didn’t tell anybody and lay down on the bathroom floor. I can remember this so clearly. I put my cheek on the cold tile and thought, ‘What? What do I do?’” she said. “Well, I didn’t do anything. I didn’t tell anybody.”

Sharon had not realized that while she told her friend about the story, her mother was around the corner listening in on the conversation. The next day, her mother told her she had heard everything. The two of them went to her uncle who then found the man who had raped her, and he confessed.

Some family members offered different suggestions for keeping the baby – some even offered to adopt the baby, so as to keep him in the family. None of these options set well for Sharon.

“And then another uncle called, and he said, ‘I can get you an abortion.’ And I said, ‘I can’t do that. As bad as what happened to me, this child had nothing to do with that.’ I told my mother that I wanted to birth him and put him up for

adoption so he would have a mother and a daddy. So, I started praying then that he would be raised in a Christian home, that if I didn’t know him on earth, I would know him in heaven.”

“In my head I kind of separated what happened to me to what I could do for this baby. How could I give this baby life and a mother and daddy?”

However, it was difficult emotionally for Sharon as she processed through the questions and discouragement anyone in her position would have had. She had just graduated from high school but wondered about a job and her future, realizing college was now on the back burner. And there was anger: “This man had taken my first born away from me.”

She and the family decided to have the baby at Florence Crittenton, at that time, a home for mothers in her position in Lynchburg, Virginia, far away from their Gastonia, North Carolina home at the time.

“I was scared to death, alone and confused, and seriously, I did not know anything about being pregnant, birthing a baby, or even how you feel with a baby growing inside of you.” Sharon recalled the first time she felt the baby kick and the intense emotion she felt throughout the whole experience of carrying the baby. She had even researched ways to induce early labor to abort which led her to feeble attempts like getting under the bed and doing pushups with the bed.

But one day she finally did go into labor and was rushed to the hospital and placed in a separate ward. “They pulled my name tag out a little bit so they would know that I was from the Florence Crittenton Home and told me that I couldn’t see him after he was born, but I insisted. My Mother and Daddy came up and they brought him in so I could see him while the nurse held him – she didn’t want me to hold him or bond with him or anything.”

Sharon gestured with her hands and fingers: “I took his little hand, and he wrapped it around my finger like this. And so, I had a touch. And then nothing else...until we were united.”



Chris and his birth mother, Sharon, are sitting on a bench together in a prayer garden at the Ridgecrest Conference Center in North Carolina where the missions conference, New Wineskins, was being hosted. Chris had attended the conference and had tagged on a visit with his birth-mother who lived in the area. They are completely at ease with each other as they tag-team telling the story of how they reunited for the first time since Sharon last touched his little hand as a newborn.



lunches together over the phone and correspond in all manner of communication. Throughout the process of becoming acquainted with each other, Chris was careful to respect and honor his mom and dad; neither he nor they quite knew the full story of why Sharon gave him away. When the full story was shared to him by Sharon, all the pieces started coming together.

After the adoption, Sharon went on to marry and have another son and a daughter. She began to have a yearning to connect with her son and researched to find him. She had left a message with his adopted parents conveying that she was working in Christian ministry, and she learned enough from them to know that he had been raised in a Christian household, which was an answer to prayer. Then she waited for a response.

This information relayed to Chris and the confirmation from scripture motivated him to pick up the phone and call her, but no one answered the phone. He left a message and then hung up, waiting for the unknown.

Sharon later listened to the voice message and asked God, “What do I do, what do I do?” And I heard God’s voice so clearly, God spoke to me and said, ‘I’m giving you the desires of your heart. Pick up the phone and call your son.’”

The next morning Chris was getting ready for work when the phone rang. Providentially, his wife, Margie, was pregnant with their second child, Caleb Isaac, at the time. The thoughts of pregnancy, birth, and life were very much on their hearts and minds as Chris answered the call. “I answered the phone, and I heard her voice and there was just this flood of tears. Because one of the interesting things about being adopted is you don’t know anybody who looks like you at all in the world. And the only person I knew who resembled me at all was my daughter, the only child we had given birth to at that point. And so that was kind of the only part of me that I really had to hang onto. And so, when I heard her voice and we started talking... again, there are no words to describe that.”

Tears were streaming down both of their faces as the story they shared unfolded.

Sharon said, “We talked two hours that morning, two hours that night, and two hours the next day.” They went on to eat

“The more I heard about the story...ok, she was actually date-raped...and then the trauma, and then the healing and how all of that took place... that was when the depth of appreciation grew for what she endured, what she suffered, loving me enough to keep me and give birth to me in spite of all of that.”

The next unknown milestone for each of them was how they would react to seeing each other face to face. After a bit of doubt and second guessing, Sharon came to visit him in Fort Worth, Texas. The big moment came in the airport as Chris held his daughter, Sarah Grace, in his arms (Chris confessed he did that just in case either of them felt awkward to hug each other). Sharon looked around the airport and had begun to think that Chris had decided to not meet her when she heard a voice behind her, “Sharon.” She turned around and her first instinct was to grab Sarah Grace and said, “I have a granddaughter, yeah! I have a granddaughter here, yeah, yeah!”

From that point on it was easy between the two of them, meeting everyone on both sides of the family, and visiting each other regularly. When Chris visits his birth mother now, it is like a big family reunion – a whole new side of him and his life that he never dreamed he would discover.

“You know, God is the author and giver of life,” Chris said as he turned to look at Sharon, the woman who had made the courageous decisions to give him birth and then give him up for adoption. “Jesus promises us abundant life and for anybody – man, woman, unborn child – you know there is healing and there is hope and you are the testament to this. I mean, you are the incarnational real deal, testimony to that truth,” he said to Sharon.

“She carried me because she loved me and the reason that she loved me is because she understood how Christ loved her.”

Sharon then reflected, “Nine months of my life was nothing compared to the life that he’s lived and the love that he got from a mother and a daddy that wanted children and couldn’t have

them. Nine months was nothing. You know, the way I think about it is just through the lens of scriptures. I mean, you go to Genesis and in the very first chapter the Bible declares, ‘In the image of God, he made them. Male and female he made them.’ And when we embrace that most fundamental truth, we really do realize that every single life matters. Every single life has value from conception to natural death. It matters, you matter. God has a plan. God has a purpose. Like, there’s no such thing as an accidental birth. There’s no such thing, ultimately, as an unwanted child, even if a mom and a father can’t raise that child, that child is wanted. So, in that way, you know, not only does God have a plan and purpose for life, but there’s healing and hope in Christ Jesus that meets every single place of brokenness in which we find ourselves. It’s not that it’ll be easy, it’s just that he’ll be with you and that’s all that matters.”

The prayer garden is nestled next to a babbling creek whose sound seemed to increase in volume as their voices became more quiet, more intimate. And then, an unexpected punctuation to the time together arrived in the form of a hummingbird. The whirl of the bird was initially mistaken for an annoying insect buzzing behind Sharon’s head, but then it made a brief appearance in front of both, and then headed off its busy way. “When we see hummingbirds, it reminds us of my grandfather,” Sharon said.

“One of the really fascinating things about this,” Chris said, “and now we’re to the point where I’m beginning to know her and her family situation enough to know that it was her grandfather who was primarily responsible for walking her through that [the pregnancy]. He became the father figure in her life, and he was the one who told her ‘This is not your fault.’”

Chris added, “You know, my parents couldn’t have their own kids, so even having my sister and me to adopt was grace to them and life to them, you know, and healing and hope. And there’s so many parents or married folks out there in these circumstances who can’t have their own kids. Every life matters. Every life is wanted and the Psalm talks about, you know, ‘I knew you even before you were in your mother’s womb.’ I mean, there is such an immutable and an eternal reality involved in every single life that that inhabits flesh and walks the earth.”

Twenty-two years ago, after he had stepped into the unknown and decided to connect with his birth mom, Chris discovered a new relationship with Sharon along with a whole universe of family members. Making that decision led to this moment in North Carolina where they could wipe their tears as they finish telling their story, hug, and step out of the tranquility of the prayer garden before joining more family for a dinner feast.

Father Chris Culpepper is the Rector of Christ the Redeemer Anglican Church in Fort Worth, Texas. Sharon Kolb is retired and lives in the Charlotte, North Carolina region. She is the mother of three children, one stepchild, and four grandchildren.



Life SUMMIT

Falls Church, VA

SAVE THE DATE

JAN.
19-21
2023

A WORD ON ADOPTING FROM ANGLICANS FOR LIFE

I was recently asked, “How can we help young women see adoption as a positive option for an unplanned pregnancy?”

My answer was simple, share positive stories about adoption.

Fr. Chris and Sharon’s story is a great example of a positive adoption story and reminds us that adoption is part of God’s redemption plan that welcomes us all into His forever family.

A recent study, *Adoption & Its Competitors*, conducted by George Barna and the Cultural Research Center bears witness to the importance of sharing positive stories as the research found significant gaps in what women of childbearing age know about adoption, the process, and its benefits.

Furthermore, many people like Fr. Chris, who were conceived in rape, take offense to having the way they were conceived used to justify abortion. While abortions for rape and incest make up less than 1% of voluntary terminations in the United States, rape is used to defend the killing of 900,000 babies annually. In the book, *Victims and Victors*, 300 rape victims who conceived during the assault, were surveyed about preferred outcomes, and the majority affirmed adoption as the best option because the violence of the abortion procedure was as traumatic as the rape itself. The women in the book believed the positive outcome of adoption helped them heal, which should always be the priority for rape victims.

Anglicans For Life believes we must dismantle the misinformation about rape and abortion and we will be featuring the stories of 3 women, 2 who were conceived in rape, and a third woman who was the victim of rape and chose to parent her child, at our annual Life SUMMIT 2023 in January at the Falls Church Anglican, Falls Church, VA. Conception through rape happens but the children conceived still bear the image of their heavenly Father and shouldn’t be exterminated by abortion.

Anglicans for Life also sees the need to provide pastoral support for families that have experienced adoption as part of God’s plan in building their family. Johnston Moore serves as AFL’s Adoption/Orphan Care Consultant (email: Adoption@AnglicansForLife.org) and is available to help your church develop adoption/orphan/foster care ministry and outreach.

To further encourage adoption, Anglicans For Life hosts the Anglican Adoption Fund, where Anglican families can apply for financial grants up to \$2,500 to help offset costs associated with adopting a child. Visit AnglicansForLife.org/give to learn more or make a tax-deductible donation.

We all know someone whose birth mother had the courage to place him or her with an adoptive family. Share their stories with the young women in your church, so they too can see the beauty of adoption!

