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FOR CHRIST. FOR THIS TIME. FOR ALL TIME.
A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Stretch

It’s an exciting time to be in the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia. As you’ll see in these pages, our congregations are finding new and creative ways to engage in community, to further their mission and to promote outreach.

Amidst this excitement and energy, we face challenges. Some churches are battling with declining numbers, while others face budget and building woes or employment challenges. But here, in this special issue of the Virginia Episcopalian, we invite you to look at these commonly shared obstacles not as stumbling blocks, but as opportunities. In short, we invite you to stretch with us. Let’s stretch out of our comfort zones as we explore new ways to “do” church in our Diocese. Let’s look, with fresh eyes, at the road before us. Let’s consider what unique gifts and talents we can bring to bear in Virginia and beyond.

We’ve called this Winter 2014 issue of the magazine “Stretch.” It’s a new year, full of new energy and new opportunities. We hope these pages equip you with the ideas and inspiration you need to keep stretching, keep reaching, keep growing in faith here in the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia.

EMILY CHERRY
Editor

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

‘Gun Free’ Zones Not the Answer

With reference the Fall 2013 article, [“Looking Back, Looking Ahead: General Convention”] of the Virginia Episcopalian, I must take issue with the whole concept of declaring “gun-free” zones as an answer, or even a mitigation, to gun violence. Regardless of one’s feelings, pro or con, about gun ownership and firearms laws, gun-free zones are no solution.

Virtually all of the mass shootings in this country have occurred in so-called “gun free” zones – theaters, schools, universities, shopping malls, churches, etc. Would-be shooters deliberately target gun-free zones because such zones permit them a much longer interval to kill and maim before someone – yes, with a gun – shows up to stop them.

Far from being safer in a gun-free zone, I feel at higher risk. If the rule makers simply want to feel good about themselves, let them proclaim gun-free zones, but it is a delusion that puts us all at risk.

TED WILLIAMS
Ware Parish, Gloucester

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The Episcopal Diocese of Virginia is a part of the worldwide Anglican Communion and the Episcopal Church. We are a community of more than 80,000 baptized members and 425 clergy in 38 counties of central, northern and northwestern Virginia, serving the world through 182 congregations, two diocesan schools, two diocesan centers and six diocesan homes, and home to the largest Anglican seminary in the world. Our episcopal seat is the Cathedral Shrine of the Transfiguration, Orkney Springs. Organized 1763.

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On the cover: Join us in our journey as we stretch our boundaries, our limits and our comfort zones in an effort to breathe new life and energy into our shared ministries, in this issue of the Virginia Episcopalian magazine.

Illustration: John Dixon
These days, there is much being said and debated about the numerous challenges facing the Church. This is happening with regard to not only the Episcopal Church but also every “mainline” denomination in the Western Hemisphere. Without a doubt, the problems are very real and quite alarming: declining attendance, strained or depleted financial resources, neglected physical plants, and the overall aging of congregations, to name only a few of the issues. Of course, there are numerous places that prove the exception, but nonetheless this has been the general trend for more than 30 years, and we are facing such worries in the Diocese of Virginia.

Even so, I just don’t feel the doom-and-gloom attitude that could be so easy to adopt. I remain an optimist about our larger Church and about our Diocese in particular. God is sovereign and the Church is the Body of Christ. These two facts are why I strongly believe that the Holy Spirit is moving now in the Church’s life and witness.

Where the Spirit is present, our challenges are transformed into opportunities. With the Spirit’s guidance and power, it is a good and healthy thing for us that we must face the difficulties. It is nothing new for the Church to be confronted with make-or-break realities; indeed, past crises, however prolonged, have proven to be times of birth in the Church’s life. The history is clear: Over the centuries, whenever the Church has become comfortable and prestigious and privileged, we have invariably fallen into our worst patterns of complacency and self-interest. So I firmly believe that the Church is at its best when things get tough. In short, I think that we are now in the midst of a spiritual awakening and (dare I say it?) institutional renewal.

In my travels and encounters across the Diocese, I certainly experience the challenges that befall any given congregation. But no less do I learn about amazing ministries and stories that are happening all the time. (It’s strange how we can so quickly overlook these good things and instead emphasize the negatives in church life.) Your three bishops are now rather routinely baptizing adults during Sunday visits, and adult confirmations frequently outnumber those for adolescents. These are quite positive statistics, fitting in with the demographics of the present time; the majority secular population no longer assumes baptism of infants and confirmation of teens. Moreover, our congregations in virtually every setting are facing their challenges head-on, with vision, creativity and passion. You’ll enjoy reading about some of these stories in the pages of this issue of the Virginia Episcopalian.

You yourself can make a big difference for your congregation, and these are precisely the times when the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ is counting on every one of us to step up. Attend worship faithfully every week – this is where all vitality of a church community begins. Pray each day for your congregation and the larger Diocese. Work toward the biblical standard of the tithe (10 percent) in giving to your church. Become better and better educated about the Bible. (Are you taking part in the Bible Challenge for reading the Scriptures? If not, see our diocesan website at theodiocese.net.) Be an evangelist; share your story of faith as readily as you speak of movies, restaurants or books.

Support outreach partnerships, your ministry in and to the world, so that the Church can make a real, tangible difference for people. If more and more of us in the congregations of the Diocese of Virginia did even some of these things, we (and our surrounding culture) would see a genuine resurgence of the Church’s witness and ministry.

I don’t think that I’m stepping too far out on a limb by saying that we are in danger of letting the times pass us by. But, as people of God, our charge is to shape the times in which we live. As the beloved hymn urges us, “Stand up, stand up for Jesus.” Now is our time to do just that. +
For this issue of the *Virginia Episcopalian*, we set out to find stories to energize and inspire you, and to equip you to look at how you “do” church in new ways. Our goal throughout this magazine is to put on our thinking caps and look for creative examples of how churches are discovering innovative solutions to increasingly common problems, from budget woes to building maintenance.

In the next few pages, you’ll find a sampling of what we call “Stretch Stories.” These are stories of churches that have tried something new, thought outside of the box, engaged with their communities and enhanced their ministries. We know you’ll find some inspiration.

INTERGENERATIONAL AND INTERCONTINENTAL OUTREACH

The Rev. Connie Clark, Buck Mountain, Earlysville

Almost four years ago, while looking for new ways to do service within our community, members of Buck Mountain Church started providing a monthly worship service at the recently opened assisted living facility, RoseWood Village.

Very soon, we were asked to provide services twice a month, plus on holidays. The reason we were so popular? The music we chose. My background as a chaplain in nondenominational settings had taught me the value of using the hymns found in *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, as well as other denominations’ hymnals. Soon we developed a hymn booklet specifically for our ministry, with large type and easy-to-use formatting.

What’s most interesting is how this ministry has grown. When Buck Mountain decided to send seven pilgrims to Tanzania last year to visit our Carpenter’s Kids village, the folks at RoseWood Village wanted to hear all about our mission work.

When we returned for our service the following week, a woman handed me an envelope containing $2,750 in donations from the residents in support of our mission trip!

Of course, we have made this an intergenerational ministry: by bringing our Sunday School kids to worship with the residents or sing songs for them; by inviting our youth group to come and serve their homemade snacks and chat with residents in our coffee hour.

The latest development was that this year we teamed up with Region XV’s Ministry with the Aging to place a 10-hour-a-week chaplain at RoseWood Village. Donna Lydon is the lay pastor at Good Shepherd, Boonesville, and a member of Buck Mountain. She is extraordinarily gifted in pastoral care, and has added much to the daily lives of the residents.

This has become so much more than the occasional monthly service at the assisted living facility up the road. The relationships are deep and the partnership is a beautiful thing.

COMMUNITY RESPONSE DURING TIMES OF TRAGEDY

The Rev. Catherine D. Hicks, St. Peter’s, Port Royal

In the second half of 2013, Episcopalians in Caroline County learned firsthand about how partnership in mission and ministry can unleash God’s power in our communities.

In May 2013, the Boston Marathon bomber was buried in Caroline County. This burial created controversy in the county and, as a result, the Board of Supervisors, the Sheriff’s Department and local pastors formed a group to seek ways to promote cooperation and understanding.

The Rev. Bambi Willis, rector of St. Asaph’s, Bowling Green, and I are members of this group, and our churches have engaged in some new ways in the community life.

One of the goals of our groups is for our churches to be more visible and active in spreading good will and promoting cooperation. One of the first projects of the group was to cook for the Caroline High School football team before every home game.

In October, the people of St. Peter’s took a turn cooking. We went to the high school and served homemade macaroni and cheese, chicken, string beans, rolls and dessert. We let the team know that our church cares about the young people in our community and that we were there to show our support. The team was very appreciative of our dinner. One young man jumped up and gave me a hug when I came to his table to say hello. “I just have to give you a hug for that macaroni and cheese!” he said.

Later in October, one of the students at the high school died during a fitness test during his gym class. Only a few days later, a girl at the high school committed suicide. In
response to these tragedies, the pastors’ group put together a Circle of Faith. Ministers in the county encouraged their congregations to come together on the first Sunday in November to pray. This gathering was a powerful witness of the love and caring of Christians for the well being of our community, and our belief in the power of God’s love to bring about positive change.

JOYOUS, GROWING, INVITING AND CARING

The Rev. Jenny Montgomery, St. Andrew’s, Arlington

One of the most visible signs of vitality at St. Andrew’s can be seen in our Plot Against Hunger vegetable garden. Six years ago, a rather large garden plot was designated, tilled and planted.

This year we have donated over a ton of food to the Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC). All ages from the church have helped joyfully to plant, weed and harvest our garden. Volunteers from the community help as well.

Our feeding ministry does not stop with the garden. On Thursdays, our upper parking lot is used for the distribution of food from a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. Conceived by a mom in our community who wanted to have fresh produce available to feed her growing family, this program now has over 100 subscribers. The CSA also donates fresh produce to AFAC. On Super Bowl Sunday, St. Andrew’s will again be the host site for AFAC’s “Empty Bowl” fundraiser.

How do we want to be known in our community? We want to be known as “that beautiful church on the corner of Lorcom Lane and Military Road that is joyous, growing, inviting and caring.”

BACKPACK BUDDIES

Fred Williams, St. James’, Leesburg

In Loudoun County, the wealthiest in the nation, one in six children dies not know where his next meal will come from, which affects their health, their academic achievement and the entire school community. In 2012, St James’, Leesburg, began working with two local elementary schools to provide weekend meals for those children.

Each week during the school year, St. James’ receives food donations and buys food, all in individual-sized portions. The food is shelved in our pantry, then organized and bagged for each child. Many volunteers come to our Backpack Buddies pantry, located in the St. James’ Parish House, week in and week out to package pudding and fruit cups, stock shelves and fill bags of food.

In the 18 months from initial planning to today, the St. James’ Backpack Buddies program has touched, and been touched by, many in the community. Several faith groups gave us input on how we might begin to organize ourselves, and one provided $1,000 worth of tuna to help stock our pantry. A community service group donated 2,000 soup packages. An area employer designated a summer food and reading pilot program as its volunteer focus, and procured food and volunteers to stock the food. A Brownie troop delivered a mountain of donated food. The parent supporters at the schools have provided thousands of servings of food items. A local fire chief opened his station during the summer to collect weekly distributions of food bags and books.

The need remains great and is, unfortunately, growing. Our program has increased from supporting 142 children at two schools last year to more than 200 this year. This represents about two-thirds of the children who are most in need in these schools. With the power of the Spirit guiding and propelling us, we know we can continue to improve the health and education of the youngest and most vulnerable in our community.

GETTING CREATIVE WITH COMMUNITY

Dennis Dalpino, St. Mary’s, Fleeton

St. Mary’s, Fleeton, has long served as an informal community center, and in that tradition, we inaugurated an annual Oktoberfest in 2010. The emphasis of our Oktoberfest has been its authenticity. We feature real German food, beer and music, with church members circulating among the crowd attired in German dress. Additionally, we feature games, a children’s table, a bake sale and rides in a Model-A Ford.

St. Mary’s is also the traditional leader in the community’s annual Blessing of the Fleet service, in which residents of the lower Northern Neck gather to ask God’s blessing for a safe and prosperous upcoming fishing season. It’s this type of engagement that is reflective of St. Mary’s mission statement, which reads in part, “We share our gifts and talents to minister to the needs of our surrounding community as a reflection of God’s grace and unconditional love.”
JAZZ MASS
The Clergy of St. James’s, Richmond

In the fall of 2012, we began offering a Jazz Mass to our lineup of weekly services. This 5 p.m. Sunday afternoon service features top jazz musicians from the community. The music is paired with a liturgy that is simple, open and sacramental. There’s jazz, poetry, Scripture, prayer, Eucharist and fellowship. For the first year, we met in our sanctuary, which has great acoustics but is a large space. This year, we decided to move the service from the sanctuary to our fellowship hall, allowing us to be more flexible and creative.

Now in our second year, the service brings together longtime members and a new group of people who had not been part of our worshiping community before. The altar is a large round table set with hearty portions of bread, wine and other foods that the earliest followers of Jesus would have consumed at their Agape feasts – olives, cheese, hummus, grapes and more. The hearty portions remind us of the abundance of God’s love.

Holy Communion at Jazz Mass is a natural extension of what happens at the sanctuary altar on Sunday mornings, and what happens musically in jazz. We pray and give thanks to God, and then we share communion and fellowship together.

Jazz Mass is a much more intimate service than our two larger Sunday morning services, but it is growing because worshippers are passing the word around the community and bringing friends. We also have targeted advertising on the local NPR station and have people coming in off the street. It’s a joyous service that has the integrity of good music and good worship.

‘AN EVER WIDENING NET’
Tim Hall, St. Peter’s, Purcellville

St. Peter’s, Purcellville, has a heart for mission. But it wasn’t until we began inviting guests for mission and outreach presentations that we realized how teaming with other Christian organizations could have a multiplying effect on our mission work and help us become more intentional in developing an ongoing mission program. We joined with St. James’, Leesburg, on a mission to the Julia C. Emery Mission School in Bromley, Liberia. Our missionaries returned with an enthusiasm for the Liberian people that reverberated throughout our church. We were inspired to continue to grow the relationship. But how?

Formation of our Mission Committee was a first major step. We sought guidance from Buck Blanchard, diocesan director of Mission and Outreach, and on a visit to St. Peter’s he told us there is more to mission than sending teams. Sometimes the most important mission work you can do, he said, is to support the missionaries that are already doing the work of Jesus’ Great Commission.

We joined with Purcellville Baptist for a Guatemala mission trip, learning from its mature mission model. We developed mission guidelines and a plan of action to do three major things: fund our own parishioners on spirited undertakings they brought before the committee, commit to supporting long-term missionaries, and nurture and expand our own short-term mission capabilities, with an underlying goal of involving the entire parish in mission.

God has blessed us with enthusiastic congregational support as we have intentionally developed relationships with Casa Chirilagua in Alexandria, Servants 4 Him and Redeemer’s House in Guatemala, and St. Peter’s Episcopal Church and School in Caldwell, Liberia. And most recently, God called us last year to work with Episcopal Appalachian Ministries to explore establishing an ongoing relationship there.

So we’ve found that it’s a lot of little things – keeping your options open, giving up control, being team players, seeking guidance, offering assistance, making commitments, welcoming change, providing consistent leadership – that engender a vibrant, consistent and Spirit-filled mission program. With God’s grace and provision, we’ve grown our mission program from a pastime to a passion that helps to fund (and support with time and talent) full-time missionaries in two locations, to send mission teams on four trips in the last two years, and to plan two to three trips in 2014, with invitations offered outside our parish, in hopes of casting an ever widening net to share God’s love. +

For more stories of renewal that couldn’t fit in these pages, please visit thediocese.net/Stretch.
Looking to breathe new life into your church’s ministries? That’s exactly what participants did at September’s Jump Start Conference, co-sponsored by Church of the Resurrection, Alexandria, the Episcopal Church Building Fund and the Diocese of Virginia.

“We’re exploring how we serve God through the Church in the world today,” said the Rt. Rev. Susan E. Goff, bishop suffragan of Virginia, in her opening remarks to the crowd of 80. “Many people today in our churches are experiencing fear and loss and pain as the Church changes, as society changes, as we worry about our church buildings,” said Goff.

Participants spent time in conversation, sharing creative ideas of how their own congregations use facilities in unique ways, from free clinics to providing parking space for a local high school. Julia Groom, president of ECBF, challenged those gathered to take risks. “I believe that God is doing a new thing in our Church,” said Groom, who offered suggestions on how to identify that movement in our own congregations. Most notably, perhaps, was her suggestion for churches to ask themselves, “How are we being relevant to our communities today?”

We invited Groom to share her thoughts and tips with our readers.

I believe it basically comes down to this: What do you want your legacy to be regarding your church? If you want things to remain the same and keep the course steady, then know that your legacy will eventually be one of closure. Personally, if I were a clergy person or lay leader, I would rather take some risks, and know that I had done everything possible to follow God’s call to be a new church, rather than be the person to drop the keys to the church on the bishop’s desk and say “I’m the last one standing.”

Gian Carlo Menotti said, “Hell begins on the day when God grants us a clear vision of all that we might have achieved, of all the gifts which we have wasted, of all that we might have done which we did not do.” Change is difficult. We all know that. But the alternative is failure and death. I sometimes wonder what we are all so afraid of.

There are several issues congregations should consider when evaluating the use of their space. First, what percentage of time is the space being used? Church buildings have the largest carbon footprint of any building in the United States because they are used so little. If your main usage is worship on Sunday morning, that leaves six-and-a-half days a week that your building sits primarily empty and unused. I would encourage congregations to consider their space usage in light of God’s calling us to be good stewards of the earth. We see congregations who suffer from “sticky-handprint-syndrome.” In other words, they have a pristine building and don’t want children’s sticky handprints on the fresh paint. Or there is an unspoken battle going on about moving the Oriental rugs in the library. The day is long gone when we can afford to allow our buildings to be static icons. They should be living, breathing, invaluable parts of our community.

The question for me is, “How can God touch more lives?” We spend a lot of time counting things inside the church: how many in the pews on Sunday morning, how many communion wafers we use, how many stayed for the rector’s forum. Instead, we should be looking at how many lives we can reach and make better with God’s love outside the Church. The needs are many. We suggest congregations invite their community leaders – mayors, police chiefs, community organizers – into the church and ask them how they, as a congregation, can...
Historically, we were a traditional, Episcopal institution with a small endowment used to make loans to congregations who wanted to build, expand or renovate. When we realized the Episcopal Church was closing four buildings a month, every month (514 over a decade), we decided we needed a way to become more relevant. So, we launched “Buildings for a New Tomorrow,” a national symposium geared to facilitate an honest, gritty, realistic discussion on the future of church buildings. We also started the Recasting of Building Assets process, a year-long, intense program to help congregations rethink and, better yet, re-imagine, how they are using their buildings and what they might do differently.

ECBF will offer “Buildings for a New Tomorrow” in April 2014 in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. And meanwhile, the congregations present at the Jump Start Conference will continue to re-examine what the future holds for them. “The Church is being called to act in different and new ways in order to continue being Christ’s body in the world,” said Goff. “We’ll step out of boxes today, prescribed by the four walls of our church buildings, and we’ll joyfully, faithfully and hopefully step together into all of the possibilities that God has prepared for us as God’s Church in our midst in the 21st century.”

Can you share some examples or stories of churches that have successfully repurposed their buildings for new ministries and/or income streams?

There are so many great stories of hope and success! In our Recasting of Building Assets process, we worked with four congregations in the Diocese of the Rio Grande. Through community involvement, one of them discovered that a Montessori school was looking for a new home. Over the summer, they reorganized some of their underused parish hall, made a few renovations and are now the home to a full, 40-student pre-school. Their bold decision has led to greater community involvement, better use of their building and, eventually, a significant revenue stream. A second parish in the same diocese realized that there was nowhere to go in their small community on a Friday evening after 7 p.m. except a bar. They stopped thinking about how to get more pledging units in the door on Sunday morning and started thinking about how to serve. Their plan is to open the parish hall on Friday evenings, offer free WiFi, and sell desserts and coffee, just so people will have a common, safe place to gather. How great is that?

What concrete steps, tips or take-aways can you share with churches who are interested in starting today to breathe new life into their ministries?

Step one, get honest about your situation. People are not coming back to church. Hiring the perfect priest or doing a neighborhood evangelism campaign is not going to change things. As one of my colleagues likes to say, “We are selling something that no one is buying.” We need to change the game.

Next, understand your finances, and if you are depending on an endowment to balance your budget, know how much time you have left.

Third, understand your building. How much do you really use it? Could you save money by doing an energy audit? How can it become an indispensable community asset?

And finally, get to know your community. If you are struggling, be honest and vulnerable about your situation. Tell your community that your congregation is committed to being a partner in solving the issues that face the whole community. Invite people in to see what you have to offer.

How has the work of ECBF changed or evolved in recent years?

ECBF will offer “Buildings for a New Tomorrow” in April 2014 in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. And meanwhile, the congregations present at the Jump Start Conference will continue to re-examine what the future holds for them. “The Church is being called to act in different and new ways in order to continue being Christ’s body in the world,” said Goff. “We’ll step out of boxes today, prescribed by the four walls of our church buildings, and we’ll joyfully, faithfully and hopefully step together into all of the possibilities that God has prepared for us as God’s Church in our midst in the 21st century.”
In January 2012, Church of the Resurrection, Alexandria, found itself in a precarious position. Its rector had retired and, in considering a search for a new rector, the congregation had to face some hard facts. Average Sunday attendance and the number of pledging members were declining; an operating budget deficit had reached the high five figures; our nearly 50-year-old building had major capital expenses looming on the horizon. And, there were 27 other Episcopal congregations within five miles of the church. Fortunately, generous bequests had provided reserve funds that allowed Resurrection to take a measured and systematic approach to considering its future.

With that consideration in mind, the vestry appointed a Re-Visioning Committee with the following charge: By Dec. 31, 2013, Church of the Resurrection would embark on a course of action to preserve the values and missions of the congregation as a transformed and sustainable parish. The committee began with a comprehensive list of more than 20 options, ranging from shutting the doors of the church, to sharing clergy with another congregation, to merging with another church, to using the church property in new ways.

The Re-Visioning Committee presented the options to the congregation at several brainstorming sessions. Many of the ideas that emerged focused on increasing membership or generating new revenues. The congregation formed separate working groups to explore new ideas for facilities and partnerships, but none seemed likely to resolve all of Resurrection’s issues.

The Re-Visioning Committee found itself focusing on two very different possibilities. The first was to ensure Resurrection’s short-term survival by a...
The Re-Visioning Committee has recommended a course of action with three separate threads:

- Continuing a longstanding tradition of outreach to its community.
- Strengthening attention to congregational development activities that welcome newcomers and support current parishioners.
- Leveraging property to provide a new facility that encompasses church and a new housing mission.

The first two threads continue the traditions that have guided Resurrection in its 50 years of existence. The last recommendation challenges Resurrection to strike out in bold new directions to redefine its relationship to its community – and to its own future. Whatever the future brings for Resurrection, most in the congregation agree that the Re-Visioning year has been one of spiritual growth as we have tried to hear God’s call more clearly. +
“What to do?” That’s the question we ask ourselves time and time again in our faith journeys. In 2012, that was the question when several properties were returned to the Diocese following litigation. Through the fog of uncertainty, a light began to shine. A still, small voice was heard. And the Dayspring initiative was created, giving to the five continuing congregations and the whole Diocese a new energy and new path to continue God’s mission.

That same question – and that new path – can be found beyond the litigation, and beyond the walls of those five congregations.

“What to do?” The energy that surrounds the Dayspring movement and the continuing discernment of that question is not unlike the energy that begins to churn inside a person who seeks a deeper connection with God in order to respond to God’s call. It’s the same energy that drives a group of people thinking about how to better equip those who are called to lay ministry, the fruits of which will be seen early next year. It is based on the idea that we are all called to ministry in God’s church, and ministry is found through prayer and discernment in community – a light shines, a voice calls. We do our best to hear and interpret that voice, and to respond as God would have us.

Here, we explore the process of discernment in the Diocese of Virginia – and how we can all be a part of that process.

AN OPEN HEART, AN OPEN PATH
Fresh eyes on the discernment journey

When the Rev. Deacon Frederico Garza began discerning a call, he started with something of a blank slate. “I had no idea what I really wanted to do,” said Garza. “I just knew I needed to do something.”

So he turned to his vicar, the Rev. David Perkins, then of All Souls’, Mechanicsville. Garza had joined the team to launch the new church plant of All Souls’, and quickly became involved in outreach projects and the youth group. He was employed as an engineer – but “there was a dissatisfaction with it,” said Garza. “I needed to do something else.”

Enter the diocesan discernment process. Perkins, who had chaired the Task Force on Ministry and the Committee on the Diaconate under Bishop Peter Lee, encouraged Garza to attend one of the first Diocesan Discernment Retreats in May 2006. The retreat introduces a group of folks to the art of spiritual direction and the orders of ministry, and is an important first step in the discernment process.

Another crucial part of that process is the Parish Discernment Committee. Guided by a trained Diocesan Spiritual Discernment Facilitator, the aspirant works with members of the congregation to explore a path of discernment. “I think that what’s exciting [is that] people would find this a way of being in community that helped them feel like they were really part of the body of Christ,” said Liz Ward, current chair of the Committee on Discernment. “Discernment is not about just having one
person make a decision. It’s about providing spiritual formation for a community of people.”

For Garza, the experience involved a lot of silence and reflection. “There were no answers, there were only questions,” said Garza. A member of the group would ask a question, and they would sit, often in silence, and ponder that particular topic.

And when all was said and done, Garza followed a call to the vocational diaconate, an order focused on servant ministry with an emphasis on bridging the gap between the Church and the world through work with the poor, the weak, the sick and the marginalized.

“I really think that this process, if it’s properly understood, gives any person in the parish who has a holy stirring of any kind an opportunity to seek discernment,” said Perkins. And in that way, “It affirms lay ministry. It affirms that everyone has moments of call.”

It’s that focus on lay ministry that plays a large part in the discernment landscape for the Diocese of Virginia. The Rev. Dr. Sam Faeth is chair of the Committee on Leadership Formation.

“I think that’s something the Diocese of Virginia can be very proud of,” said Faeth. “We have a dedicated space for encouraging and supporting the ministry of the laity. That is really significant.”

An important part of this structure is working with the demands of everyday life. A while back, Faeth sent out an e-mail to her congregation, asking what the church could do to facilitate their participation in a Lenten series. Would meals be helpful? A particular time of day? Child care?

The answer across the board was that there was nothing that the church could do to make folks participate outside of a Sunday worship service. They were too busy, too exhausted, too overextended.

“This is the sort of reality that has changed across the culture,” said Faeth. And so the focus, she explains, needs to be on broadening accessibility, and on asking the question, “How can we bring church to you?”

One answer to that question is a series of upcoming webinars offered to empower and equip both laity and clergy for leadership. Working with the Rev. Canon Pat Wingo, canon to the ordinary; Ed Keithly, adult vocation officer; and Julie Simonton, congregational development and stewardship officer, Faeth and the Leadership Formation team are focusing on building a set of resources that are free and easily adaptable to different times and settings.

“I think that people who are leading in the Diocese are eager to lead faithfully

The Truth About Discernment
Debunking common myths

ED KEITHLY

“Discernment Retreats are only for future priests and deacons.”

Not true. Discernment retreats are for anyone looking to explore a call to leadership in the Church, whether that is lay or ordained leadership. It’s unreasonable to expect that those who attend discernment retreats will come without any preconceived idea about their call, but the hope is that those attendees come with an openness to be guided in a different direction by the Holy Spirit.

“Excitement about becoming an Episcopalian through reception translates to a call to ordination.”

Many Episcopalians join the Church as adults received from another denomination, a trend that strengthens and enriches the Church. The joy new Episcopalians feel for the sacraments and their newfound church can sometimes feel like a call to ordained ministry, but this is often not the case. The newly received should spend a few years of settling into a church community to be certain a call to lead is genuine. There are many ways to love and serve God beyond ordained ministry.

“I need to hurry through this process because I’m not getting any younger.”

Discernment in a hurry is not discernment. No matter how young or old, discernment is not a process that should be rushed. The best discernment is careful, thoughtful, intentional, and free of self-imposed time constraints. It’s a myth that the Episcopal Church forces clergy to retire at age 72. While clergy persons must leave their current cures at 72, they don’t have to stop doing ministry for good. Many clergy maintain vital ministries long after they reach their retirement age.
and well,” said Faeth. “But sometimes it’s hard to know where to go for the resources.” The first webinar will focus on creating a welcoming church, with future topics planned to meet the educational needs of leaders in all orders of the Church. “The opportunities are boundless,” said Faeth. “I think that the challenge is to keep the quality up, to be in tune with the needs of the Diocese.”

And the needs of the Diocese are constantly changing, particularly as they pertain to discernment and ordination. “We are trying to help people be more realistic about what their call may look like,” said Ward, the Discernment Committee chair. “A priest will not necessarily have full-time work in one church. ... We are asking the seekers questions about how they would handle that kind of situation,” she added. “We are trying to help people grow in their awareness of some of the realities of what it would mean to be a priest in the present and the future, given what’s happening in the landscape of the Church.”

So just what is happening in the landscape of the Church? According to the Very Rev. Dr. Katherine Hancock Ragsdale, president and dean of Episcopal Divinity School, the problem can be attributed to both social and economic sources. “As religion becomes less central to U.S. culture, fewer people choose to belong to churches,” she writes in her essay, “Disrupting the Institutional Imagination: A Seminary for the Twenty-first Century,” published in the anthology, What We Shall Become (see full review, p. 23). “Churches may find themselves unable to support full-time professional leadership...in response, seminaries have begun to teach students to anticipate, perhaps even to embrace, the possibility of bi-vocational lives.”

Here in Virginia, Ragsdale adds, “Virginia Theological Seminary has created a program [called the Second Three Years] that provides continuing education, support and mentoring to students for the first several years after graduation” as one way to help students prepare for some potentially harsh academic realities. The Diocese also sponsors Fresh Start, a support and resources group for clergy in transition.

For Faeth and the Committee on Leadership Formation, the truly exciting piece of the discernment puzzle in Virginia is the focus on inclusivity. “The first gift we ask for the newly baptized is an inquiring and discerning heart,” said Faeth. “In every single baptism I do, it always feels fresh to ask God for those particular gifts. An inquiring and discerning heart is not just for priests and deacons or those in elected positions. It’s for those who are serving Christ.”

An inquiring and discerning heart is not just for priests and deacons or those in elected positions. It’s for those who are serving Christ.

The Rev. Dr. Sam Faeth

“Discernment retreats are the first step in the ‘vetting process.’”

For many dioceses, “discernment retreats” are where the bishop, the Commission on Ministry and other gatekeepers on the road to ordination make a decision about whether a seeker can go forward toward postulancy. In a sense, that model of retreat serves as an extended interview. This is not the case in Virginia. We feel faithful discernment starts with seekers, in their community. The decision to move forward after the retreat belongs to the seeker and the presenting priest, not the bishop’s office, canon or Commission on Ministry.

“My friends say I should be a priest, so I should be a priest.”

Many get their first sense of call from an external push like a kind word from a friend, but it’s unlikely that a friend who sees a gift in you is seeing the full picture. Only through careful, intentional discernment, individually and within the community of the Church, about all aspects of your call (e.g., spiritual gifts, financial and family situation, the realities of ordained ministry) can a seeker really see the way forward.

“Going to seminary is the best way to discern vocation.”

This is a very expensive way to discern call. “Just going to seminary” often circumvents some of the hard questions that need to be asked before entering the leadership formation process. Surrounded by those who have discerned a call to ordained leadership, it’s hard to separate your personal call from your classmates.

“Excitement about becoming an Episcopalian through reception translates to a call to ordination.”

Many Episcopalians join the Church as adults received from another denomination, a trend that strengthens and enriches the Church. The joy new Episcopalians feel for the sacraments and their newfound church can sometimes feel like a call to ordained ministry, but this is usually not the case. The newly received should spend a few years settling into a church community to be certain a call to lead is genuine. There are many ways to love and serve God beyond ordained ministry.
“Awake, my soul, stretch every nerve, and press with vigor on; a heavenly race demands thy zeal, and an immortal crown, and an immortal crown.”

From the 18th-century hymn by Philip Doddridge, these rousing words are intended to inspire endurance for the everyday races that we all must run as part of the larger journey of the spiritual life. Though the hymn speaks of “a heavenly race,” I suspect we are not meant to consider ourselves to be in a competition. However, participating in a race usually prompts us to put forth our very best, whether or not we have a chance of winning. We stretch ourselves with all the vigor and zeal we can muster.

Perhaps the message is that the rewards of the spiritual life are worth every effort we are able to make. This is a true and noble sentiment, to be sure. But let us be realistic. What happens when the singing is over? What happens when these beautiful words meet the sometimes drab, sometimes downright ugly realities of our lives – when “vigorous” is the last word we would choose to describe ourselves?

Several years ago, I was going through a difficult time at work. I was in the midst of a major professional transition, and I was not sure exactly where I was headed. Though this was certainly not one of the worst moments of my life, I can firmly say that I did not feel vigorous or zealous. Then, one of my mentors gave me a piece of advice that has stuck with me ever since: “Joe, sometimes you have to fake it ‘til you make it.” She was not suggesting that I should pretend to be something I was not. Rather, her point was that I needed to move forward with a sense of purpose even when I had not a clue what that purpose was. I had to act with confidence that I would get where I needed to be, though I did not know just where I was going.

My friend is not religious in the least, but her words have always put me in mind of one of my favorite teachings of Jesus: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear…Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these” (Matthew 6:25a,28b-29 NRSV). Take a look at the broader passage, Matthew 6:25-34 or Luke 12:22-31. I think it is easy to interpret this teaching as if Jesus is telling us, “Be more like those lilies or those birds who haven’t a care.” However, I suspect that Jesus is acknowledging that he knows exactly how we are. It is in our nature to look toward the future, whether fretfully or not. But Jesus is inviting us to look to a reality that is even deeper than our own nature, deeper than our own needs and concerns.

You see, it is in God’s nature to know us and provide for us: “…indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:32b-33 NRSV). Our job, in spite of ourselves, is to behave as though we believe God’s abundance is greater than our need, even when anxiety and worry threaten to get the best of us. In this sense, our job is to “fake it until we make it.” Ultimately, we will “make it” because when we focus on the abundance and justice of God’s reign, our vision is transformed to see that there will always be enough.

But we have to ask ourselves: enough for what purpose? What does “making it” actually entail? In his teaching about worry, Jesus is not trying to be a therapist who is primarily interested in helping us to make it through our individual fears, as laudable a goal as that is. Luke’s version suggests that when we are less anxious, we have more to give: “Do not be afraid, little flock…Sell your possessions and give alms” (Luke 12:32a,33a).

Once again, Jesus asks us to take a broader view of reality. Focusing on God’s abundance opens space in our hearts and minds so that we may be generous members of our communities. Even when we feel bereft of vigor and zeal, even when we are afraid to face the future, Jesus provides us with the tools to press on and do the work God is calling us to do. +

Dr. Joseph Downing Thompson Jr. spends lots of time at the Virginia Theological Seminary, where he is an M. Div. student from the Diocese of Missouri and is also employed in the Bishop Payne Library as a curator of the African American Episcopal Historical Collection, a joint project of the seminary and the Historical Society of the Episcopal Church.
Jesus calls us to change and to be changed. Through word, action and prayer, Jesus leads us on our journey of discipleship – together – to steward the gifts God gives us to do the transformative work God calls us to do.

Jesus describes our call to reverse cultural value systems through his blessings and healing of the poor, the hungry and the rejected. Jesus demonstrates our call to love our enemies through his embrace of those who do not keep God’s laws and his forgiveness of those who persecute him. And Jesus simply is our call to transformational prayer. He invites us to be awake with him. Shows us how to be still. Then gives us the words to draw us ever deeper into God’s transforming Kingdom.

But … BUT … how do we interpret these Gospel examples into 21st-century Episcopal churches – especially into the many churches experiencing reduced budgets, dwindling volunteers, declining worship attendance and increased competition for charitable giving? Our churches often feel like we’re in the ministry of finding the resources just to keep the doors open rather than in the transformative life of discipleship amongst, betwixt and between all of God’s children, wherever they may be.

How we do it is by embracing the example of the Gospel and telling our own stories of Jesus among us.

“Stewardship … and Change” is a new opportunity to share our stories and resources throughout the Diocese of Virginia. Features on our website, in the e-Communiqué, on Facebook and through the Virginia Episcopalian will highlight what’s trending in books, blogs, programs and anything else we find inspiring. And I do mean “we.” Be in touch with what’s inspiring you and your parish … and answer the call to change and be changed.

Many resources are found online. If an electronic resource is of interest but your access is limited, please contact our office and we will gladly mail a copy.

**Apocalyptic Stories and Stewardship**
[tinyurl.com/DOVstewardship1](tinyurl.com/DOVstewardship1) or tens.org

“Stewardship is also about how we raise our children, how we earn our livings, how we treat each other and how we are engaged in our communities.”

**The Art of Spiritual Conversation in a Changing Culture**
[tinyurl.com/DOVstewardship2](tinyurl.com/DOVstewardship2) or barna.org

“According to Barna research, only 4 percent of unchurched adults were invited to church by a friend and actually went, 23 percent were invited but declined and 73 percent were never invited at all. Why do you think this invitational model isn’t working?”

**It’s Social Ties—Not Religion—that Makes the Faithful Give to Charity**
[tinyurl.com/DOVstewardship3](tinyurl.com/DOVstewardship3) or ideas.time.com

“Three-quarters of all household charitable giving goes to organizations that have religious ties.”

**Laundry Love**
[tinyurl.com/DOVstewardship4](tinyurl.com/DOVstewardship4) or ecfvp.org

“Sometimes the way to get people ‘back to church’ is by starting a different kind of church.”

**What We Shall Become**
[tinyurl.com/DOVstewardship5](tinyurl.com/DOVstewardship5) or churchpublishing.org

“We have struggled for a generation to find our bearings, structurally, as the circles defining who we are drawn wider and wider and our expectations and norms as well as our gifts become even more abundantly diverse and at times in apparent conflict within themselves. … Some essays argue that significant change to our structures is needed for effective ministry; others illustrate what can be accomplished within the structures we currently inhabit. All call us to consider where we fall short as a church and challenge us to perceive barriers in our current system and eliminate them.”
St. Peter’s, a mission congregation in Richmond’s Church Hill neighborhood, is a small group with a big heart. For over 150 years, members of St. Peter’s have worshipped together. But recently, illness and deaths have led to a decline in the congregation. And they wanted to find new life in the church and community.

“We knew it was time to revamp and to extend,” said Olivia Brown, senior warden, “and to reach out to our community.” So the parish leaders got together with their interim vicar, the Rev. Bruce Birdsey, to create an intentional plan to breathe new life into the congregation.

Most of the members don’t come from the surrounding neighborhood. Engaging those neighbors was a big part of the plan. “We want to be a vision of faith to the community,” said Brown.

And so they’ve partnered with the nearby Peter Paul Development Center to host a food bank on the first and third Wednesdays of every month. Members of St. Peter’s serve coffee and doughnuts to attendees, and make conversation. Most recently, St. Peter’s hosted a community fish fry, and reinstated a Bible Study program. Every Monday, the children from Peter Paul attend chapel at St. Peter’s, with a guest homilist.

The congregation also has become more involved with the local Episcopal community, issuing invitations to nearby churches to join them in Sunday worship. The goal here is fellowship, and “getting ideas from them ... and for them to listen to some of our ideas for the community,” explained Brown. Many of the Richmond area churches already have large volunteer contingents who work with the nearby Peter Paul Development Center on a regular basis, so it’s a natural connection. In his role as interim vicar, Birdsey is reaching out to build relationships with other nearby churches and community organizations. Eventually, the congregation hopes to grow to be able to attract a full-time vicar.

The idea is to work with the community to build up a faith-based support system founded on the needs identified by their neighbors. “We want people to know us as welcoming, friendly, loving, caring and God-loving people who accept everybody and anybody who wants to worship with us,” said Brown.
St. Peter’s work is part of a larger, evolving vision for the Episcopal Church in Richmond’s East End – and that vision is an interesting model to consider. The Diocese has partnered with St. Peter’s as the foundation of this work, so it can serve as the “sacred center” for a number of varied ministries to the East End community, explained the Rt. Rev. Shannon S. Johnston, bishop.

The East End is home to high poverty levels and high levels of need to match. “As we cast this new vision, it is going to bring great change on the ground,” said Johnston. Already, the Episcopal community has several anchor points in the East End. In addition to the Peter Paul Development Center and St. Peter’s, the Church Hill neighborhood is home to the Anna Julia Cooper Episcopal School, a tuition-free middle school for families of limited resources, as well as St. John’s Church. “Together, these organizations provide the bedrock for a vibrant, socially conscious and far-reaching Episcopal community based on faith and outreach,” added Johnston. Episcopal congregations from across the Richmond area are also involved in volunteer efforts in the East End. In December, Johnston toured the nearby Armstrong High School to explore the concept of partnering with the school in a mentoring program.

The Rt. Rev. Susan E. Goff, bishop suffragan, is working with Johnston and the East End ministry team to coordinate the efforts. “There’s a new, fresh wind of the Holy Spirit – a growing energy – that’s present in this East End work,” said Goff.

But the work being done here extends beyond the East End in scope. “Our hope is that the work we do here will be a model for how we as a diocese approach this type of revitalization,” said Goff. “There are other congregations encountering similar struggles – congregations that want to find new life and to engage with their communities in creative and faithful ways. Whatever we learn here will be directly applicable in so many other places.”

Learn more about the Episcopal organizations in Richmond’s East End neighborhood.

Anna Julia Cooper Episcopal School
annajuliacooperepiscopalschool.org

Peter Paul Development Center
peterpaulcenter.org

St. John’s Church
historicstjohns.org

St. Peter’s Church
stpeterschurchhill.org

At St. Peter’s neighborhood fish fry, members of the congregation invited the community to take part by distributing free tickets.
In 2013, the Diocese of Virginia entered into partnership with one of the fastest growing and most vibrant programs in the Episcopal Church. Just six years ago, the Episcopal Service Corps hosted six sites across the United States. Today, that number has grown to over 25 programs – and one of them is right here in our own Diocese.

So just what is the Episcopal Service Corps? It's a national network geared toward equipping young adults through service, community building and spiritual formation – and the various programs that make up that network can look pretty different. At the Abundant Table Farm Project in Ventura County, Calif., for example, interns focus on the disconnect between land, food and table. Through the Society of St. John the Evangelist Internship Program in Cambridge, Mass., young men and women learn about the rhythm of the monastic life. The common thread that ties the different offerings together is a focus on community, social justice and faith formation. Most programs are residential, and provide the participants with a modest stipend and housing.

In Virginia, the form that the Episcopal Service Corps program has taken is a model that has gained traction throughout the United States in recent years: intentional community. Grace-on-the-Hill is a residential program offered through St. Andrew’s, Richmond, in partnership with the Diocese of Virginia. Grace-on-the-Hill “invites young adults in their twenties to engage their Christian faith through a 10-month period of service, vocational discernment and leadership formation.”

A large part of the experience is community: living in intentional community with others and working in partnership with the residents of the surrounding Oregon Hill neighborhood, where the three residents of the program currently live. “When I first heard the words ‘intentional community’ in regard to this program, I envisioned an apartment-sized monastery in the midst of Oregon Hill, a place where contemplative silence was the norm, and one where our rhythm of life was dictated by the Daily Office,” said the Rev. Abbott Bailey, rector of St. Andrew’s, who serves as co-program director of Grace-on-the-Hill. “I expected a great many things, and I could not have been more surprised, or more pleased, with the way things have turned out.”

Bailey works with Paris Ball, director of Christian Formation for the Diocese, who serves as the other co-director. The two meet with the residents each week. “We share community meals where we gather in the kitchen and rummage through the fridge and pantry until we agree on a common meal,” said Bailey. “We have weekly prayerful gatherings where we can bring to the table our existing spiritual disciplines or explore new ones; thus far, we have studied particular passages of Scripture, practiced our mindfulness, heard the words of T.S. Eliot and prayed a compline service, among other activities.”

Residents serve part-time on staff at a local non-profit, school or church ministry. They spend time engaging with the St. Andrew’s congregation, and planning outreach projects in their neighborhood. Most recently, the residents and program leaders celebrated the news that the Jessie Ball DuPont Fund has awarded the program a grant of over $100,000 to fund future growth of Grace-on-the-Hill.

“An important aspect of Grace-on-the-Hill is to invite young adults to place their holy desire to engage in Christian service into context — as not something that is primarily about ‘doing for’ but ‘being and doing with,’” said Bailey. “By intentionally entering into the various communities in which they find themselves, including the neighborhood and their worksites,
the residents are connecting in ways that seek to honor the relational space held by Christ through which life thrives.”

Part of the allure of the program is its goal to connect the church with the community outside its own walls – and to get young people involved in exploring that concept. “Through deeply engaging in their workplaces, local congregation, neighborhood and in each other, the residents of this program are able to examine what it means to be in community through various lenses,” said Ball. “For young people who are considering their own vocation, the multi-faceted doorways through which they can enter in and connect with each other and with God allow many avenues of discovering not only more about their worlds, but also themselves.”

We asked this year’s three Grace-on-the-Hill residents to share their perspectives on the experience so far. Here’s what they had to say.

**VINCENT H.**

VASSAR COLLEGE GRADUATE

ST. ANDREW’S SCHOOL INTERNSHIP

As a member of Grace-on-the-Hill, I have been asked to write about community engagement and modern-day faith experience. But today I am thinking of the 13th-century Dominican friar Meister Eckhart. In his sermon “The Virgin Birth,” he expressed the relationship between community and faith very simply: “I was thinking on the way I was walking here: I should not have come were I not prepared to get wet for friendship’s sake. If you have all got wet, let me get wet too.” Community engagement, for Eckhart, does not have to do with the faith that, by travail, we beget ourselves in the image of the Father. The soul need not hasten to God as her goal, but is rather at her goal constantly, in God’s “Is-ness.” Eckhart walked in the rain in the faith that sharing in the commons of life with others, whatever might come of it, is to participate in the work of incarnation. This faith is love.

I walk across the street to help in a Baptist food pantry and free luncheon for the homeless. We are starting a clothes laundering service in January. I walk to the school a block away to help one-on-one with struggling students, serve lunch, take the kids out for recess.

Opening to life’s sheer “givenness,” we partake in a faith that ever engenders new possibilities for mutuality, reciprocity, and love. Faith lacks life without community, just as fire alone cannot exist. Faith requires that we infuse into others and into our own otherness. We need this faith to keep changing. When we partake in this faith, we enter the wilderness of a supreme perfection. The father of faith wandered into the wilderness in the faith that its promise was already fully bestowed. We are likewise invited out of all our little faiths into a faith that calls us to be celebrants of life with others, where we are given gifts of newness more quickly than we can possibly receive.

**MEGAN-DREW TILLER**

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA GRADUATE

DIOCESE OF VIRGINIA MISSION & OUTREACH INTERN

Living in this kind of intentional community with my roommates, I am able to reflect on what it means to work for the Church, and to explore my fears of personal inadequacy in the face of societal shortcomings, such as dealing with the growing poverty and homelessness. I am free to grapple with the promises I made in my Baptismal Covenant: to seek and serve Christ in all persons, to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being. We have been asked to live simply in terms of material wealth, and I have found that the physical de-cluttering of my life has led to a similar mental change, allowing me a mind and heart open to the Holy Spirit’s stirrings around me.

**TEFESA WILLoughBY**

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND GRADUATE

WILLIAM BYRD COMMUNITY HOUSE INTERN

Community is such a central part of my experience with the Grace-on-the-Hill program. The communities of St. Andrew’s Church and Oregon Hill have been so warm, innovative, engaging and radically welcoming. Engaging with the community is a great way to strengthen one’s own faith, and is an important part of a modern-day faith experience. I believe reaching out to others, particularly those most vulnerable, is an integral part of being a Christian or spiritual person. I believe it is necessary for sacred gratification. It is also exactly what Jesus did.

I feel the most joy when I am deeply connecting with others. I have interacted with the Oregon Hill community in many ways. Often it is through the St. Andrew’s community. In addition to attending church and coffee hour, I and my fellow Grace-on-the-Hill residents have attended various gatherings, prayers, Sunday School/adult forums and book studies.

We have also been involved with Oregon Hill and Richmond through various neighborhood activities, including promotion of the Rapid Transit program, helping out at the food pantry at the Baptist church next to our house, participating in a neighborhood beautification project and visiting the Richmond City Jail. My relationship with St. Andrew’s has grown and I hope it continues to do so. I feel so blessed to be part of the Grace-on-the-Hill program. ❤️

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Follow along with the Grace-on-the-Hill journey by keeping up with the residents’ weekly blog at standrewsoregonhill.wordpress.com.

Find out what the Episcopal Service Corps is all about by visiting episcopalservicecorps.org. Interested in joining one of the 25+ programs across the United States? Applications are being accepted through August 2014.
The mission statement of Trinity Church, a congregation in Charlottesville, is “to be an intentional, multicultural Christian community of reconciliation, transformation and love.” Over the course of the last three years, Trinity has focused its energy on one of those areas in structuring its programs, sermons and life within the parish. This past year, the Trinity congregation, led by the Rev. Cass Bailey, put its focus on love and how the congregation might reach out and be involved in the city of Charlottesville. Bread and Roses is a ministry that helps transform lifestyle choices surrounding the acquisition, cooking and eating of food in an urban context. The ministry came together out of a year-long consideration in which members of Trinity studied Thomas Keller’s Generous Justice: How God’s Grace Makes Us Just. Using the book as a guide, they focused not only on the biblical foundation of justice, but also on what that justice might look in their community involvement.

“There’s not only a need to feed people, but to attempt to address some of the systemic issues behind that hunger,” said Bailey. “This ministry is really geared toward transformation, and really trying to change the way people think and relate to food. We are interested in long-term and lifestyle changes.”

In the initial phases of the Bread and Roses Ministry, Trinity raised $70,000 of the $90,000 project total to renovate its kitchen. The commercial-grade kitchen will be the hub of the project, offering a place to provide after-school meals, as well as teach classes on cooking home-grown and farm-produced food.

Trinity has applied for a Mission Enterprise Zone Grant from the Episcopal Church to fund the second phase of the project. Read more about this grant program below.

This second phase of the project will staff a person one day a week during year one and two days a week during year two. The role of this staff person will be to foster partnerships within community and oversee program development. Trinity has already raised $14,250 toward the grant’s matching target, including funds from a diocesan Mustard Seed Grant, Region XV and three other Episcopal churches in the Diocese: Christ Church, Charlottesville; St. Paul’s, Ivy; and St. Paul’s Memorial, Charlottesville.

Development of phase two began with a conference in December aimed at bringing people from the community and local churches together to talk about the importance of the ministry and the theological foundation behind its conception.

Trinity has always had a history of being engaged in the community. “One of the things we are trying to do with this effort, given our size and the scope of what we want to accomplish, we really can’t do by ourselves,” said Bailey. “We really need to rely on partnerships with other churches and community organizations. We began this ministry by really focusing on establishing those partnerships and relationships with other churches.”

At the 2012 General Convention, the Episcopal Church established a Mission Enterprise Fund with the goal to administer grants totaling $1 million from 2013-2015. The potential “zone” is defined as “a geographic area, as a group of congregations or as an entire diocese committed to mission and evangelism that engages under-represented groups, including youth and young adults, people of color, poor and working-class people, people with a high-school diploma or less, and/or people with little or no church background or involvement.”

Trinity, Charlottesville, is one of several Virginia congregations that applied for a grant, and 50 will be awarded across the Episcopal Church between 2013-2015. Learn more about Episcopal partnership opportunities at episcopalchurch.org/page/let’s-invent-together.
For members of Christ Church, Alexandria, community engagement has not been focused solely on their existing congregation, or even their surrounding neighbors in the Alexandria area. Instead, they’re turning their attention to the greater Episcopal community through an innovative program called “Christ Church On-the-Go.”

The concept was a simple one: to show support for those congregations that had recently emerged from years of litigation. As Christ Church On-the-Go took formation, these Dayspring congregations, as they are known, were in the process of returning to their home worship spaces and starting fresh, while facing a unique set of obstacles. Members of Christ Church wanted to find a way to show support.

Betsy Hahn, a parishioner at Christ Church, was in the congregation the day Buck Blanchard, director of mission and outreach for the Diocese, spoke on the topic of “local” mission work. Blanchard presented the idea that you don’t have to leave the country to be on a mission; you can look around and see what kind of support you can provide closer to home.

Hahn used that meeting as an opportunity to discuss with fellow parishioners what that kind of mission work could look like at Christ Church. Hahn suggested they put together small groups to visit the Dayspring congregations. Theirs would be a ministry of presence. Members of Christ Church felt that they could offer support by “just showing up” – because “being there for people matters,” Hahn explained.

And so the first Christ Church On-the-Go trip, to The Falls Church, Falls Church, was born. Since that initial visit, they have made mini-pilgrimages to worship at St. Margaret’s, Woodbridge; Epiphany, Herndon; and St. Stephen’s, Heathsville. Depending on the distance of the destination church, the group has ranged in size from three to 18 people. Members car-pool to the churches, share in the service and fellowship, and stop for lunch or tea on the way home. In addition to the support they have received within their own parish for this type of community outreach, the congregations they visit have been overwhelmingly positive about their presence, and for the solidarity shown.

The members of Christ Church receive blessings themselves from this outreach. “It’s very good for us when we visit because it’s inspiring to us,” said Hahn. “It may have started out to support [others], but it is making us grateful for what we have. We are building, but we are building from a base we already have. How well they are doing with it is inspiring.”

As the members plan return trips to the Dayspring congregations, they also build up their internal community. “We have gone to Falls Church and celebrated with them … and this Sunday we are going back again. It’s our way of continuing the relationship. Showing up and then returning is valuable.”

The plan is to expand on the program. The Christ Church On-the-Go participants will make return trips to the churches they have already visited – but they’ll also add small mission churches to the rotation. By expanding the reach and scope of their visits, they hope not only to build fellowship with other Episcopal congregations, but also to gain exposure to other types of worship and church experiences – and to use what they learn within their own parish.
When it comes to themes of awakening and renewal, perhaps no place speaks more powerfully than the Shrine Mont Camps. Here, Bishop Gulick reflects on the power of these camps as a tool for evangelism, as a place of welcome, as a reminder to open our eyes to faith.

She was an occasional participant in youth group at a parish in Richmond. Her mother’s friend, a very committed Episcopalian, described Shrine Mont Camps to her, and helped her find scholarship funds. And in the summer of 2013, her life in Christ Jesus began. Upon returning from a session at St. George’s Camp, she said these life-changing words to her mother: “Mom, I want to be baptized.” Our campers’ lives are changed on that mountain every summer as, baptized or not, they fall ever more deeply in love with God, who loves the world and who loves them in Jesus Christ.

It is not just the campers whose lives are transformed. The transformation and reclaiming of faith that occur in the lives of the amazing young adults we hire each summer are equally significant. It has been a profound joy for me to do work with our staff during their week of pre-camp training. In recent summers, topics covered included: What do Episcopalians believe and why does it matter? How are the Holy Scriptures used and treasured in a camp context? And this past summer, I led sessions on how baptism and Eucharist teaches us “whose we are” in a world that is always trying to tell us “who we are.”

Imagine my joy when, in mid-summer, I received a call from camp director Paris Ball asking me to return to the mountain for the staff break. Three counselors told Paris that as a result of our time together in training week, and as a result of the way God had shaped their lives through their summer of service, they wanted to be confirmed.

On a warm and sunny July afternoon at the Cathedral Shrine of the Transfiguration, a member of the Church of the Brethren, a former Baptist and a young woman raised in the Episcopal church who had postponed her confirmation twice before were presented by about 60 of their fellow counselors. They renewed their baptismal vows and received confirmation. These new, clear and passionate Episcopalians were found by the love of God, because part of the evangelism strategy of the Episcopal Church in Virginia involves investing in the lives that come to the mountain in Orkney Springs summer after summer.

The transformation of our college-age staff is about claiming the legacy of the faith given by parents, priests, church school teachers and youth ministers in the crucible of young adult life experience. For our counselors, the faith of childhood becomes the owned and claimed faith in Jesus lived as a young adult. It is this newly owned faith that makes our young adult Episcopalians such magnetic witnesses for the campers entrusted to their care.

Most weeks in my ministry as a bishop, I find myself asking Christians or soon-to-be Christians this question: Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ? On the mountain at Shrine Mont, in the year of our Lord 2013, the answer was a resounding yes! +
Over the past year and a half, the Task Force for Reimagining the Episcopal Church, created by Resolution C095 at General Convention 2012, worked to develop “a plan for reforming the Church’s structures, governance and administration.” Consisting of 24 clergy and lay leaders from across the Episcopal Church, as well as two representatives of the greater Anglican Communion, the Task Force was appointed by the Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori, presiding bishop, and the Rev. Gay Clark Jennings, president of the House of Deputies, following a round of nominations across the Church that took place in the fall of 2012 and garnered more than 600 nominations.

To answer these questions, and others that have arisen, the Task Force for Reimagining the Episcopal Church has taken to social media, reaching out through Facebook and Twitter. On its website, the Task Force has provided an engagement kit designed for groups of all sizes, as well as a timeline of its work, beginning with the first meeting in February of 2013 and ending in November of 2014, when the Task Force will present their findings and make recommendations for the future.

The movement to restructure the current system is quite widespread, stemming from a 2011 proposal from the Rt. Rev. Stacy Sauls, the Episcopal Church’s Chief Operating Officer, which called for substantial changes to the Church’s constitution. As it currently stands, approximately 47 percent of the Episcopal Church budget goes to fund administration, governance and General Convention, leaving 53 percent for the mission of the Church. At General Convention 2012, 90 of the 400 resolutions presented were related to restructuring the Episcopal Church, and Resolution C095 was passed unanimously in both the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops, leading to the creation of the Task Force for Reimagining the Episcopal Church.

Through prayerful discernment, the Task Force has identified a number of questions whose answers will guide their work.

- Who are we as Episcopalians? What is our particular identity?
- How is Episcopal identity being expressed and renewed in the context of the 21st century?
- How has our Church-wide organization evolved, and does the current paradigm best support our identity and calling in today’s context?
- What do we need from a Church-wide organization today and going forward?

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The Task Force will next consider how best to capitalize on the energy surrounding this issue, and how to invigorate the Church for the possible changes ahead. Members will take into account all that they have learned through their data gathering and then design a plan in the form of one or more resolutions for General Convention 2015.

Learn more at reimaginetec.org
The Rt. Rev. Susan Goff, bishop suffragan, set the tone in her homily when she noted that when the congregation was first planted and later thrived, “No one imagined it would lead to this place and this time today.” But she added that none of the blessings of their time together were lost or wasted. “In God’s economy, no act of praise or service or thanksgiving is ever wasted. No act of planning or pruning is ever meaningless. It is all wrapped up forever in the mantle of God’s love.”

That theme was echoed by speakers from the congregation who, through anecdotes and reflections, spoke of how Christ the King had changed their lives. Amid tears and laughter, the sharing was a poignant tribute to a congregation that once envisioned building a church on the property that became their last home. After years of mission trips, hayrides, a community garden and youth events, divisions related in part to wider Church issues had reduced the congregation to a precious few. At the end, it was those remaining in the congregation who came to the Diocese to say that their work together was done.

Yet the transformations brought about by Christ the King continue to impact the lives of those who once considered the congregation to be their family, and who will carry the lessons learned to other churches and ministries.

One man spoke of a “dark spot” in his life, which had prevented him from spiritually investing in community. That was all changed one day at Christ the King – as he put it, an unexpectedly charismatic moment in an Episcopal congregation. A woman spoke of Christ the King as the first congregation she and her family picked to be their own, rather than a place they were referred to by others. Christ the King “seemed different and it seemed right,” she said. Another member, referring to the diverse religious background of those who came together to form the congregation and their initial lack of knowledge of all things Episcopal, said that, for all she knew, a collect was “a gassy baby.”

The sharing time during the service seemed partly a reunion for those who had already dispersed and partly a wake for a meaningful spiritual chapter in their lives. At the end of the service, the cross, parish registry and liturgical items were given back to the Diocese, through Goff. As the end to the Service of Endings with Hope for New Beginnings drew near, the bishop offered a final prayer: “May the witness of the people who have ministered in the name of Jesus Christ through this congregation be undiminished and may God’s work continue, forever.”

“Now you come to this moment of letting go, of celebrating the goodness and blessing of your life together as the Church of Christ the King, of offering thanksgiving, and of turning the journey and all it has entailed over to God.”

“You have been shaped and changed forever by the experiences you shared on your journey together. Although the once thriving Church of Christ the King did not thrive forever – and nothing in this world does – yet nothing has been lost. The love, the faith, the service, the hope, the striving for the fullness of the Kingdom of God – none of it is lost, none of it was wasted.”

“You will continue to bear fruit, wherever you go, wherever you find your church home, wherever you live and work, wherever you serve. And in that God will be served.”

–The Rt. Rev. Susan Goff, September 2013 Sermon
It’s a great time to be an Episcopalian.

That may sound counter-intuitive, given the recent run of lawsuits, dwindling Sunday attendance and tight budgets. But what community of faith is better suited to deal with changing dynamics and demands than the Episcopal Church? The genius of Anglicanism has been to reinterpret the church’s role in changing times, cultures and contexts. We’ve done it many times before (think of the post-Revolutionary War era for U.S. Episcopalians!) and we are now called on to do it again.

That’s why it’s so inspiring to read *What We Shall Become: The Future and Structure of the Episcopal Church*, which is absolutely brimming with innovation and optimism. This collection of essays by some of the most insightful thinkers in our church was crafted in response to the work of the Task Force for Reimagining the Episcopal Church, which will report to the 2015 General Convention.

The weighty challenges are fully acknowledged. One writer compares the shift toward secular life in the 21st century to the Reformation in terms of its impact on the Church. But the imaginative responses to these challenges are equally weighty. It’s reassuring to note that many of them are already pursued by our Diocese and parishes. For instance, Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows writes of the substantial structural changes that have been made in the labyrinthine systems of the Diocese of Chicago over the past few years. It was observed that silos had grown up that prevented close collaboration among diocesan staff members. Relationships between the diocesan staff and some of the parishes had become strained. Those issues were addressed by organizational and cultural changes at the diocesan level.

Though our challenges in the Diocese of Virginia are not identical, we are following many of the same paths. For example:

- The executive committee of our diocesan staff consists of the three bishops, the canon to the ordinary, the chief of staff and the treasurer. This nimble team is charged with preventing “silos” from growing up in various part of our operation.

- As a staff, we see our role as more and more a networking agent for the parishes, providing opportunities for parishes to learn from each other. You will see that at the Annual Council in January, where the State of the Diocese presentation Friday morning will showcase interesting and inspiring examples of how parishes and individuals are spreading the Word.

- Customer service is a term that may sound out of place in church life, but it’s what we’re emphasizing in the way we respond to calls for help and support from our parishes. Timely, helpful responses are our goals. As was summed up in a recent brochure about the diocesan staff: “We are the staff. You are the Diocese.”

The essays in this compelling volume deal with similar issues and challenges for the Episcopal Church, as well as for parishes. A theme that runs through these writings is that it’s not a case of throwing out all our traditions and past – underused buildings, bureaucratic structures – in favor of something new and innovative that will relate to the 21st century disdain for denominational identity. It’s a question of how to draw from the past to become relevant again in the future. That’s a nuance that connects easily with Anglicanism.

As is so often the case, there’s an irony at the heart of our work together. As Baskerville-Burrows notes, it’s interesting that the Church, which is in the business of transformation, “is one of the most difficult organizations to transform.” We are change-averse until we bring God into the conversation. That’s the spark that sends us forward with confidence. +
WANTED: Young Adults and the Church

It’s a challenge that church leaders consider on a regular basis: How do we attract young adults to church? How can we become more welcoming for young families? How can we enhance our campus ministry experiences? And what are today’s young adults looking for in a church community, anyway?

The truth of the matter is that these aren’t questions with black-and-white, right-or-wrong answers. So we asked a few folks to consider these questions and share their perspectives with us.

JANICE DEAN
St. Paul’s Memorial, Charlottesville

I am looking for a church where I can develop and maintain real relationships with people who represent the beautiful range of human diversity along the full spectra of age, sex, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, language, country of origin, socioeconomic status, ability/disability, political conviction, etc. I want a church where I can belong because there is so much variety among individuals that no one stands out any more than anyone else, and where everyone is seeking community in Christ while acknowledging and engaging our differences.

I love the worship style of the Episcopal Church, and I love being able to join a worship service in any Episcopal church in our country and feel like I know what is going on, however, I grew up in a very diverse community and, in this way, I often feel that I do not completely belong to the Episcopal Church because almost none of the Episcopal churches I have attended reflect the diversity of the communities that surround them. The primary exception to this is a worship service I attended at Virginia Theological Seminary, where the convergence of peoples from throughout the Anglican Communion naturally blossomed into a rich worship service grounded in a strong sense of authentic community in Christ. I am looking for this type of community – one that bridges real, difficult differences in a way that allows us to see the richness these differences bring to the human experience and that gives us a slightly larger view of our Common Creator.

MARGEL SNEAD
St. Thomas’, McLean

Prior to finding St. Thomas’, my husband and I were looking for a church where we felt at home. We were welcomed at St. Thomas’ from the moment we set foot through the door and were struck by the warmth we felt from the parishioners. I was also looking for a place where I could share my gifts and where I felt needed. I didn’t want to be an anonymous church-goer and also didn’t want to be valued simply for my demographic. Having the opportunity to share my gifts has made me feel like more than just part of the church community. I feel like part of a family. To me, that is the most compelling part of a church community.

EDIE SELLERS
St. Christopher’s, Springfield

I was born an Episcopalian. Through my senior year of high school, I was very active in the Diocese of Virginia.

Dr. Elaine Pagels presents
The Many Faces of Jesus

Church of the Holy Cross, Dunn Loring, Va.
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I went to Virginia Commonwealth University and joined the campus ministry, which consisted of five to six people. I’ve valued my time as a camp counselor at Shrine Mont and loved every minute of being a member of Parish Youth Ministries committee.

As an adult, my experiences with the Episcopal Church have not been as moving. I’ve struggled to maintain a relationship with the church as a whole. My struggle to find a place in the Church as a single, 30-something adult has led me to have a crisis of faith.

I want a relationship with members of our faith, and I want to feel as though I am an important part of the church community. I want something longer lasting and more meaningful than the annual outreach events our congregation hosts. I want my congregation to do more outreach in the community surrounding our church. I want to feel as though my participation has made a difference in someone’s life. I want something to look forward to. I don’t want to feel like going to church or participating in activities is a chore. I want to have meaningful discussions and conversations in places other than the church basement (like youth-group!).

ASK NOT WHAT YOUR (CHURCH) CAN DO FOR YOU

THE REV. GREG SYLER

Syler, rector of St. George’s Church in Valley Lee, Md., offered this reflection to the Episcopal Church Foundation’s “Vital Practices.” He explores a new way to consider young adults in the Church today.

Last year, about this time, I was walking around the downtown square of our county seat with Jason Evans, the new young adult missioner [for the Diocese of Washington]. He was new to the diocese and had just come down to spend a few days in St. Mary’s County, to get to know the folks and, literally, the lay of the land. We wrapped up a productive lunch with some lay leaders from the local parishes and were taking advantage of a warm December afternoon to talk about that evening’s dinner meeting with 20 or so young adults.

“What do you want to talk about tonight?” Jason asked. “I want to figure out their level of desire and what they’d like to be involved in,” I said, “but I feel like we keep asking the same questions, over and over, and getting the same results.”

He nodded in general understanding, said he’d give it some thought, and we talked for a bit more before I dropped him off at his hotel so he could have a few hours of down time before dinner.

The question Jason asked surprised me. It had been several years, for me, since God started tugging at my heart, nagging me to get outside of this institution called “church” and meet my own peers, young adults and young families, where they are, where I would be if I were not the veritable definition of the inside-guy. But all I had was the institution’s language, the Church’s vocabulary, and so I kept asking the same question over and over again and getting the same lack of results. I kept asking, “What do you want us to do for you?” And I assumed that if we did those things they would come.

That night, for the first time, a different question was on the table. Jason looked at a group of pretty energetic and relatively connected but very overworked, exhausted, and busy 20-somethings and 30-somethings and asked, “What do you want to do?”

And that question made all the difference. It may sound counter-intuitive that young adults have time left over to even think about adding something else to their plate. So many of them, especially those born in the 1980s and 90s, the Millennials, are dealing with economic stagnation, unemployment, underemployment and the very real fact that they will not earn as much money as their parents – this, coupled with the fact that they are and will be saddled with significant educational and consumer and household debt. Costs have gone up across the board – education, housing and health care being huge drivers – but incomes have stagnated and many of today’s young adults find themselves in an unprecedented and, frankly, perilous financial position.

At the same time, however, many Millennials are incredibly, even ironically optimistic and hopeful about their future and the future of this planet and, for some, the future of Christ’s own body, the Church. They’re the first generation, after all, in a long time that’s actively engaged in creating something new – a new economy, a new, vastly interconnected and wonderfully diverse world.

The question “What do you want to do?” touches the heart of that creativity and, when that’s on the table, there’s in fact an overabundance of passion and energy and vision and time. Asking that question – really and truly asking that question – also implies that there are things that we need to do to get out of the way or that we need to stop doing altogether.

Learning to ask, to really ask, this question and to get out of the way and wait to hear the response is going to feel, to many, like working out a whole new muscle group. There will be awkwardness and discomfort; there will be pain and the need for some soothing balm; there will be crankiness and confusion. But just wait, just a bit, and the Spirit will speak. She’s already at it. +

REUNION, COUNCIL AND AFRICAN AMERICANS

JOHN B. CHILTON

The Diocese of Virginia once included the territories of the dioceses of West Virginia, Southern Virginia and Southwestern Virginia. Each inherited the terminology “Annual Council” from the Diocese of Virginia. In 1956, West Virginia made changes to its Constitution and Canons. Annual Council was renamed Annual Convention, and the condition “of the Anglo-Saxon race” was struck from the conditions for election to Annual Convention. Throughout the history of the Episcopal Church, its Constitution and Canons have referred to the annual meeting of a diocese as a convention. The Diocese of Virginia used that terminology until 1862, when it acceded to the constitution of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Confederate States America and adopted its terminology, Annual Councils.

In 1866, Virginia became the last diocese to renew its ecclesial relations with the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. In part as conciliation to opponents of reunion, the nomenclature “Annual Council” was retained. Virginia thus became the first diocese of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States to use the terminology. Hope was expressed that Virginia would have the honor of leading the Church to dispose of a term that many argued equated church councils with political conventions.

Regarding the status of African Americans, the 1866 Council adopted the following:

Resolved That whenever the colored members of the Church in any parish desire to form a new and separate congregation, such action shall have the sanction of this Diocese. They may elect their own Vestry, Wardens, and Ministers. They shall be considered as under the care of this Council, and their interests as represented in it by the Standing Committee on Colored Congregations.

At the General Convention of 1868, Nebraska applied for admission as a diocese. Like Virginia, and by this time Minnesota, Nebraska used the term council. A debate spanning days ensued over whether that word was constitutional. In the debate, Virginia was given as a positive example. Ultimately, the constitutional question died when the House of Bishops voted to admit Nebraska.

At the next triennial General Convention, the Committee on Canons reported “no action is expedient” regarding “such changes into the Constitution and Canons of this Church as may provide for the representation of minorities.” It also reported it would be inexpedient to change “the name of this body from Convention to that of Council.”

THE STORY OF COUNCIL AND CONVENTION

JULIA RANDE

The annual meeting of the Diocese of Virginia was an aspect of diocesan life clearly affected by the Civil War. During the war years, these meetings noticeably differed from those that came before them, giving them a cast similar to our present-day gatherings.

The diocesan meetings were traveling reunions of the clergy and laity of the Diocese of Virginia. The conventions (not renamed council until 1862) met in a different city each year in a set rotation, which by the 1850s included Alexandria, Staunton, Richmond, Wheeling, Lynchburg, Lexington, Fredericksburg, Petersburg, Winchester, Norfolk and Charlottesville, in a local Episcopal church. With no diocesan staff like today, that congregation made the local arrangements, including procurement of lodging for clergy and lay delegates with members of that congregation.

Attendance in the 1850s in both orders drew from across the Diocese, but most heavily from the region surrounding the meeting. Rail and steamboat lines offered delegates and visitors special travel rates published in the Southern Churchman newspaper, the Virginia Episcopal weekly. Analysis of attendance recorded in the annual diocesan journals of the proceedings reveals that an average of 66 clergy and 57 laity, plus the bishops, attended. The journals do not record the numbers of visitors, but the press frequently commented upon their large numbers and the spirit of the fellowship of the Episcopal community gathered for community as well as for business.

The conventions commenced on the third Wednesday in May, with proceedings lasting until Saturday and a special worship service on Sunday. Lengthy daily meetings addressed diocesan business, while evenings were devoted to meetings of diocesan organizations, such as the Diocesan Missionary Society, and to worship. Accounts portray worship as being as important to the convention as the business proceedings. Services were
What happens when 800 clergy and lay leaders from across the Diocese of Virginia gather for two days and two nights of business, fellowship and conversation? Here’s what you need to know about the upcoming Annual Council meeting.

LOGISTICS
• 219th Annual Council of the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia
• January 24-26, 2014
• The Downtown Richmond Marriott
• Register by Jan. 10.
• Make lodging arrangements by Jan. 8.
• Submit resolutions, amendments, nominations and annual reports by Jan. 8

THEMATICALLY SPEAKING
Attendees will gather under the theme, “Awake, My Soul, Stretch Every Nerve.” In choosing this hymn for a theme, “We embrace an opportunity for us all to take a fresh look at our shared ministries, and to breathe new life into the mission we do together,” said Bishop Johnston.

OUR GUEST CHAPLAIN
The Rt. Rev. Humphrey S. Peters, bishop of the Diocese of Peshawar in the Church of Pakistan and deputy moderator of the Church of Pakistan, a member of the Anglican Communion, will offer meditations in his capacity as chaplain for the 219th Annual Council.

THE STATE OF THE DIOCESE
The Friday morning session of Council will feature a new format full of stories, photos and song aimed at inspiring attendees to stretch outside of our comfort zones, explore new ministries and engage with our communities in creative ways.

ENGAGE AND INTERACT
We’ll also include plenty of time for fellowship and conversation. New this year will be the chance to participate in a real-time, interactive electronic survey to share your thoughts and feedback on our work together in the Episcopal Church.

OUR EXHIBIT HALL
Our Exhibit Hall is the place to stop to learn more about committees, ministry teams and outreach opportunities. Find out about the far-reaching work of the Committee on the Stewardship of Creation; learn more about the Shout It from the Mountain Campaign for Shrine Mont Camps; or get to know the upcoming class of seminarians. We hope you’ll take the time to stroll the Council halls and visit our exhibitors.

WORSHIP TOGETHER
As always, our time together will be grounded in a rich and diverse worship experience, including compline and morning prayer, a mission prayer service, plus a celebratory Eucharist at the nearby St. Paul’s, Richmond.

FULL DETAILS
Visit thediocese.net/Council/2014 for more info, plus links to registration materials. +

Council continued from page 26

Conducted each day at multiple times before, during, and after the business sessions in Episcopal churches and those of other denominations. The press consistently commented on the spirit of this worship, the powerful sermons preached, and the decided effect on the Episcopalians gathered and the local community of all denominations.

Constant military action in Virginia and U.S. Army occupation of various portions of the state throughout the Civil War prompted significant changes to the diocesan annual meeting.
1 Last year, Donna Lyman (right) joined the congregation of Good Shepherd of the Hills, Boonesville, as lay pastoral leader. Here, the Rev. Connie Clark, vicar, and Bishop Goff join Lyman. Supply clergy celebrate the Eucharist once a month at this mountain mission congregation.

2 Bishop Gulick was the keynote speaker for the Parish Youth Ministry’s annual Senior High Weekend at Shrine Mont, which brought a record 200 people to the mountain for a weekend of fellowship and worship.

4 Members of St. Peter’s, Oak Grove, held their second prayer vigil for the people of the Congo in September. The Rev. Deacon Linda Murphy led the service, and the Rev. Deacon Carey Chirico spoke of her experience working with women in the Diocese of Bukavu, Congo. Photo: Amy Kulina

5 and 6 On an October 2013 trip to the Anglican Diocese of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Buck Blanchard and Amy Williams of the diocesan staff met with local leaders to explore partnership opportunities. (5) Williams and Blanchard (far right) join members of Santissima Trindade, a congregation that is rebuilding by reaching out to the local community in traditional and modern ways to proclaim boldly that all are welcome. (6) Williams meets children in Ciudad de Deus, an impoverished area in Rio, during a walking tour with a local missionary priest.
Bishop Gulick addressed a group gathered at Christ Church, Spotsylvania, in November for the Region I meeting. The subject: the Shrine Mont Camps Campaign. Photo: Ben Hicks

Members of St. Martin’s, Richmond, celebrated their 50th anniversary with a series of special events throughout 2013, including a celebratory Eucharist.

St. Margaret’s School, Tappahannock, celebrated the installation of Lindy Williams as the 11th head of school on Nov. 17. Pictured (left to right) are Margaret Broad, former head of school; Carrie Baldwin, former Board chair and chair of the Head of School Search Committee; Lindy Williams; Bishop Johnston; and Bill Tyson, Board chair.

After months of planning and transforming a small unused space of the Historic Pohick Church’s 1932 Vestry House, the Golden Dove Gift Shop officially opened on Oct. 26. The volunteer-run shop was opened as a result of donations from the congregation, and all proceeds will go the church’s outreach ministry. Pictured (left to right) at the ribbon cutting are Vicki Albert, manager; the Rev. Don Binder, rector of Pohick Church, Lorton; Terri Hayes, chair of the gift shop’s Board of Directors; and Mike Elston, senior warden.

On a November 2013 visit to the Diocese of Christ the King, South Africa, Bishop Johnston and Paris Ball, diocesan director of Christian Formation, toured mission and ministry programs with the Rt. Rev. Peter John Lee, bishop of Christ the King. (11) Ball meets with the chaplain for the diocesan Mother’s Union group at a church in Sebokeng; (12) Lee and Johnston visit St. Lawrence Church in Sebokeng; (13) Johnston preaches at the weekly Eucharist at St. Martin’s, a diocesan school.
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**CLERGY TRANSITIONS**

The Rev. Mark R. Feather has been called as rector of St. James’, Leesburg. He has been rector of St. Paul’s Church in Louisville, Ky., since 2003. He will begin his ministry at St. James’ on Jan. 5

The Rev. Carol J. Hancock, who is currently serving as interim priest at Epiphany, Oak Hill, has been called as interim rector of St. John’s, Centreville. She will begin her ministry at St. John’s in January.

The Rev. Howard F. Kempsell Jr. has announced his retirement as rector of St. John’s, Centreville, as of Nov. 30, and is beginning a ministry of spiritual direction. He served at St. John’s since 1994.

The Rev. Elizabeth L. Locher has been called to Grace Church, Alexandria, to serve as assistant for parish life and family ministries. She began her ministry there on Oct. 15. Since graduation from VTS in May 2012, she and her husband taught in Tanzania.

The Rev. Susan S. MacDonald has been appointed as priest-in-charge of St. Paul’s on-the-Hill, Winchester, beginning Jan. 8. She previously served as priest-in-charge at Grace Church in Kearneysville, W.Va.

The Rev. Elizabeth “Betsy” Bagioni Tesi has been called to serve as interim rector at Church of the Holy Cross, Dunn Loring. She has been serving as assistant rector of St. Mary’s Church in Eugene, Ore. She began her new ministry in November.

The Rev. Stuart H. Smith is serving as interim rector at St. Stephen’s, Culpeper. He began his ministry there in September.

The Rev. Charles B. Spigner is serving as priest-in-charge of Trinity Church, Highland Springs.

The Rev. Catherine “Cathy” Tibbetts has accepted the call of Christ Church, Luray, to be rector. She will start on Jan. 6. She has served at The Falls Church, Falls Church, since 2008 in a variety of positions.

The Rev. Ann H. Truitt has been called as deacon assistant at Church of the Resurrection, Alexandria, as of Oct. 13.

The Rev. Hilary T. West has been appointed priest-in-charge at Epiphany, Oak Hill. She has been serving on the staff of St. Thomas Church, Whitemarsh, in the Diocese of Pennsylvania. She will begin her ministry at Epiphany in January.

**DIOCESAN EVENTS**

For a list of church events, visit thediocese.net/events.

**January 11:** Pre-Council Meeting, Epiphany, Oak Hill

**January 23-25:** Annual Council, Downtown Marriott, Richmond

**February 28-March 2:** Diocesan Discernment Retreat, Richmond Hill

**March 1:** Parochial Reports Due

**IN MEMORIAM**

The Rev. Ramsey Richardson, a retired priest of the Diocese of Virginia, died on Tuesday, Dec. 3, 2013. Richardson was ordained to the priesthood in 1964 and served many parishes in the dioceses of Virginia and Southern Virginia during his ministry, including serving as rector at Christ Church, Charlottesville, from 1978 until his retirement in 1991. He is survived by his wife, Emily, three children and six grandchildren. A funeral service was held at St. Paul’s, Ivy.
En estos días, se ha dicho mucho y se han debatido los numerosos desafíos que enfrenta la Iglesia. No sólo se trata de la Iglesia Episcopal, sino también las otras denominaciones “principales” del hemisferio occidental. Sin lugar a dudas, y tan sólo nombrando algunos problemas, estos son muy reales y muy alarmantes. Por ejemplo: la disminución de la asistencia, los escasos o agotados recursos financieros, los edificios sin mantenimiento y el envejecimiento general de congregaciones. Por supuesto, hay muchos lugares que prueban ser la excepción, pero esta ha sido la tónica general durante más de 30 años. Y también en la diócesis de Virginia nos enfrentamos a tales preocupaciones.

Aún así, no siento la actitud de sentirme abrumado, algo que sería tan fácil de adoptar. Sigo siendo optimista sobre toda la Iglesia y nuestra diócesis en particular. Dios es soberano y la Iglesia es el Cuerpo de Cristo. Estos dos hechos son la razón por la cual creo firmemente que el Espíritu Santo ahora se está moviendo en la vida y el testimonio de la iglesia.

Donde el Espíritu está presente nuestros desafíos son transformados en oportunidades. Con la dirección del Espíritu y contando con su poder, enfrentar las dificultades es bueno y saludable. No es nada nuevo para la Iglesia el ser confrontados con realidades decisivas; de hecho, las crisis anteriores, a pesar de ser prolongadas, han demostrado ser épocas de renacimiento en la vida de la Iglesia. La historia es clara: desde hace siglos, cuando la iglesia se convierte en cómoda, prestigiosa o privilegiada, invariablemente ha caído en los peores modelos de complacencia y egoísmo. Así que creo firmemente que la iglesia está en su mejor momento cuando las cosas se ponen difíciles. En definitiva, creo que ahora estamos inmersos en un despertar espiritual y (¿me atrevo a decirlo?) renovación institucional. Disfrutará leyendo acerca de algunas de estas historias en las páginas de este número de nuestro periódico, el Virginia Episcopalian.

En mis viajes y encuentros a través de la diócesis, ciertamente he experimentado los desafíos que enfrenta alguna congregación. Pero no por ello dejo de reconocer los increíbles ministerios e historias que también están sucediendo todo el tiempo. (Es extraño notar cómo podemos tan rápidamente pasar por alto estas cosas buenas y enfatizar en cambio los aspectos negativos en la vida de la iglesia). Durante las visitas del domingo, sus tres obispos ahora rutinariamente bautizan a adultos, y las confirmaciones de adultos con frecuencia superan a la de los adolescentes. Son estadísticas bastante positivas, conectadas con los datos demográficos de la actualidad: la mayoría de la población secular ya no asume el bautismo de infantes y la confirmación de los adolescentes. Además, prácticamente todas nuestras congregaciones enfrentan sus desafíos de frente, con visión, creatividad y pasión. Disfrutarás leyendo acerca de algunas de estas historias en las páginas de este número de nuestro periódico, el Virginia Episcopalian.

Usted puede hacer algo muy importante para su congregación. Y estos son precisamente los momentos cuando la Iglesia de nuestro Señor Jesucristo debe contar con cada uno de nosotros. Asistir fielmente a la iglesia cada semana – aquí es donde empieza toda la vitalidad de una comunidad de la iglesia. Orar diariamente por su congregación y por toda la diócesis. Esforzarse en cumplir con la norma bíblica del diezmo (10%) para su iglesia. Educarse más y mejor sobre la Biblia. (¿Participa en el Desafío de la Biblia para la lectura de las escrituras? Si no es así, consulte nuestro sitio Web diocesano en www.thediocese.net.) Sea un evangelista; comparta su historia de fe del mismo modo que usted habla de cine, restaurantes, libros, etc. Apoye la obra social de la iglesia, su ministerio en y para el mundo, para que la iglesia pueda marcar una diferencia real y tangible en las personas. Si en las congregaciones de la diócesis de Virginia nosotros hiciéramos más algunas de estas cosas, nosotros (y la sociedad que nos rodea) vería un auténtico resurgimiento del testimonio y ministerio de la iglesia.

No creo que sea exagerar si digo que corremos el peligro de dejar que pase la hora. Pero, como pueblo de Dios, nuestra tarea es transformar los tiempos en que vivimos. Como el himno amado nos exhorta, “¡Estad por Cristo firmes!” Esta es la hora precisa para hacerlo.
THE WORLD COULD USE MORE CREATIVE COURAGEOUS & CREDIBLE LEADERS

WE EDUCATE TOMORROW’S CHANGE MAKERS
Readers’ page

A regular feature in the magazine where Virginia Episcopalians can share their voices. For this issue, we asked our readers:

What’s the most creative way you’ve repurposed your church building for mission, ministry or income stream?

St. Patrick’s, Falls Church

Members of St. Patrick’s, Falls Church, transformed their sanctuary into a dental clinic on two Saturdays in October. Chairs in the sanctuary were pushed aside to make room for six dental chairs and equipment. Parishioner My-Linh Tran, DDS, is a member of a group called Hope for Tomorrow, which helped organize the event. Members of St. Patrick’s prepared the space and manned the kitchen as the medical team provided services in excess of $100,000 to 342 patients over the course of the two days.

St. Stephen’s, Richmond

Every Saturday, rain or shine, all year long, the parking lot at St. Stephen’s, Richmond, makes a transformation. Out go the cars and in come the vendors. With tables full of produce, local meats and homemade goods, the St. Stephen’s Farmers Market welcomes the community to their church property. Now in its fifth season, the goals of the market include “connecting God’s call to environmental stewardship to the foods we eat” and “building community by providing the city of Richmond and our local neighborhood with a healthy way to gather and connect with each other.”

Photo: Thuy McMurray

Holy Comforter, Richmond

Twelve-step recovery groups – Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous and Artists Recovering Through the Twelve Steps – have met at Holy Comforter, Richmond, for years. Sometimes their meetings were displaced for important church events. Sometimes not all the parish house doors were locked after a meeting. Parish administrator Carey Perkins noted that Saturday and evening meetings with lots of parishioners around reduced the privacy and anonymity of those meetings. In 2009, then-senior warden John Vandervelde and then-rector the Rev. Geoff Coupland sought a solution.

“We were not making sufficient use of the 1960s “youth lodge” on our parish property, so why not let the various recovery groups use it?” The results have been good for all the parties. Church groups do not have to schedule around the 12-step meetings, the small independent building ensures privacy, and the parish is making good use of an under-utilized building.

“The 12-step groups have made it their own space, painting the interior, putting down rugs and keeping it clean,” said Perkins. The groups coordinate among themselves with little oversight by the parish. With only one door, and that with a push-button combination lock, it is simple. For Holy Comforter – which prides itself on all its hands-on outreach – this simple hands-off approach has become a powerful ministry. +