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GRACE NOTES

A Monthly Magazine Published by Grace Episcopal Church

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*December / January Theme:
Prepare the Way*

From Mother Jenny, *Priest Locum Tenens*



Prepare the way for what?

That's my question for this issue of Grace Notes, a double issue that encompasses the months of December and January. As Christians, that means Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany are the liturgical seasons of the church year in which we are invited to journey to Bethlehem to celebrate the birth of Jesus, Emmanuel, God with Us, the Light of Christ made manifest in the world.

For most of us this is not our first journey to the manger. We have made this journey for many years. In preparation, we've made Advent wreaths and on each of the corresponding four weeks devotedly lit the purple or pink candle. We've said prayers and maybe even participated in an Advent Quiet Day. We've gone to church on Christmas Eve and sung "Silent Night" by candlelight. We may have even returned to church for Christmas Day eucharist. We've put out the crèche and observed the twelve days of Christmas. We've celebrated the Feast of the Epiphany, singing about the three wisemen who place their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh before the baby Jesus.

Year after year we do all these things. We buy gifts for our loved ones. We decorate the tree. We put a wreath on the front door and maybe candles in the windows. We sing carols. We bake cookies and prepare Christmas dinner. We welcome in the New Year and soon thereafter take down the tree and store the decorations away for next December.

And yet, we are preparing the way for what? What do we expect to happen in our lives, in our homes, in our parish, in the world this Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany, this December and January? World peace? Happiness? Health and well-being? Enough of everything for everyone? All of the above? Sounds great. And yet, what if the thing we are preparing the way for is a simple "yes" that comes from as deep within us as it came from within Mary when the angel Gabriel appeared to her? What if, to whatever task God sets before us, we were to respond, "Yes! Let it be to me according to your word"? "Yes! Let it be to me." "Yes! Let it be." "Yes!" And then be prepared to be blessed beyond our wildest dreams.

May your Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany be filled with many blessings.

Mother Jenny+

The Rev. Dr. Jenny Montgomery



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Grace Notes Submissions and Publication Schedule

Grace Notes is published ten times a year by Grace Episcopal Church, Alexandria, Virginia. All parishioners are encouraged to contribute articles and photos. The deadline is the fifteenth of the preceding month. Articles and photos should be emailed to grace.notes@gracealex.org and will be subject to editing. The Grace Notes team includes Joyce Ames, Kevin Hamilton, Diana Jarrett, and Liz Rugaber.

On the Mind of Father Santi



THE REV. SANTI RODRIGUEZ,
ASSOCIATE RECTOR

Complicated Joy

How are we to understand the Advent journey to Christmas? How are we to make sense of the Joy to the World laid in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes? I think the trick is spending time in moments where joy breaks through the complications of our ordinary lives.

Advent is a time of expectation and a season of hope. We expect and hope for joy. But joy does not work like a withdrawal from an ATM. Henri Nouwen reminds us that "Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day." We get to choose to open our hearts to joy even when keeping our hearts open is complicated.

I love the way the Reverend Anne Robertson describes joy: "the good mood of the soul." We know what that good mood of the soul feels like--and we crave it. It is a moment of deep spiritual connection with others, or with God, nature, and the universe. Joy is a feeling of intense appreciation of our lives. Colors seem brighter and we feel freer. We smile spontaneously and feel like dancing.

Joy is also the most vulnerable human emotion. That is how Brené Brown describes it: "When we allow our hearts to fill with the indescribable feeling of joy, we become vulnerable to the possibility of it being taken away, our hearts being crushed, and our hopes dashed on the hard ground of despair." We do not let ourselves feel joy because we are fearful that someone or something will rip it away from us. We are afraid that "we will be sucker punched by pain and trauma and loss." (Brown, *Atlas of the Heart*)

When joy comes to us, it is often accompanied by other emotions that seem to be in conflict: joy and sorrow and gratitude and grief. Since our emotions are often intertwined, choosing joy implies increasing our tolerance to vulnerability, learning to befriend

uncertainty, and leaning into spiritual connection without ignoring what makes this life hard.

Complicated joy recognizes the realities of our world. Complicated joy invites us to embrace the good mood of the soul even amid lousy conditions. The twenty-four hour news cycle and our social media feeds bear witness that our current conditions are the pits.

And so, we ask God to increase our tolerance to vulnerability. We light a candle, and we pray that God will help us to befriend uncertainty--or at least put up with it more graciously. We lean into moments of spiritual connection even as we get reminders that our "connection is unstable." Amid the dark night of the world, we pray for the good mood of the soul.

How are we to understand the Advent journey to Christmas? By accepting the possibility that God calls us to prepare the way for complicated joy. How are we to make sense of the Joy to the World that is laid in a dark and stinky manger in the bleak midwinter? By remembering that with Christ joy is constantly born anew even amid grief, disappointment, and loss.

Advent is a time of expectation and a season of hope. Expect complications. Hope for joy.



Photo Credit: Canva.com



From Mother Emma

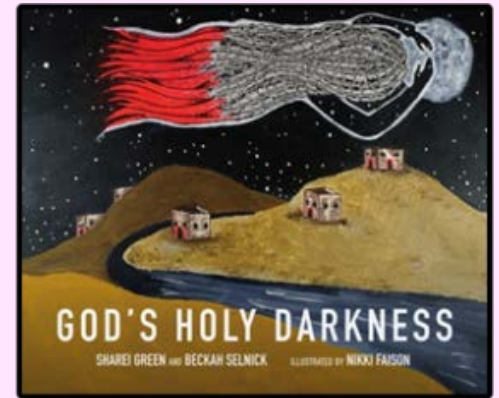
THE REV. DEACON EMMA BRICE,
ASSISTANT RECTOR FOR FAMILY MINISTRIES & GRACE SCHOOL CHAPLAIN

Beautiful, Holy Darkness

Happy New Year! No, it is not January yet, but it is the season of Advent! The first Sunday of Advent occurs shortly after Thanksgiving, and it marks the beginning of another year in the church calendar. Rather than celebrating with a big fireworks display or a countdown in Times Square, the church--as is often the case--uses colors to tell time.

Right as the days are getting very short and the nights seem endless, the church calendar invites us to begin a season of preparation for the great gift of Christmas. We cover our altar (and clergy) in purple linens, and we light another candle each week to guide us toward the Light of the World--the newborn Christ. During the season of Advent, we journey together through the darkness.

I recently purchased a new book for the Godly Play room entitled *God's Holy Darkness*. (Swing by and read it when you can!) Despite being a beautifully illustrated children's book, the first two pages are pitch black with plain white words that read: "Darkness and blackness and night are too often compared to lightness and whiteness and day and found deficient, but let us name the beauty and goodness and holiness of darkness and blackness and night."



As we move through this holiday season, how can you find beauty and love in darkness? How can you challenge your assumptions about dark and light imagery? I wonder what new perspectives you might gain on the hymns and lessons we read when you approach darkness as beautiful and holy rather than something to avoid or fear.

Maybe the darkness is literal for you this new year. Maybe the change of seasons or a later work shift is leaving you with more darkness in your life. Or maybe the darkness is metaphorical for you. Maybe you are in a period of uncertainty. Maybe you're like me and your continued attempts to predict (and control) the future are once again falling flat. Wherever you encounter darkness this winter, I wonder how you will notice God's presence, God's love, and God's holy beauty in the dark.



God uses darkness and blackness and night to show love for the world.

Creation began in the dark.

"In the beginning ... darkness covered the face of the deep"
(Genesis 1:1-2).

God poured out love and brought all things into being.
Creation is God's work done in holy darkness.

OPS & COMMS

Operations & Communications @ Grace



KEVIN HAMILTON,
DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS & COMMUNICATION

Churches continue to be targets for email scams and “phishing” (emails that look like they may be legitimate in an effort to get you to click on a harmful link). Below are some pointers to spot potential scam/phishing emails. This is not an exhaustive list but highlights a few common signs that an email is not legitimate. Please remember, if you ever receive an email from a Grace church staff member that you are unsure of, feel free to call the church office to verify its authenticity. Thank you to Father Santi, who was willing to help me out with this month’s article!

The “From” Email Address

Grace clergy and staff use their gracealex.org email addresses for parishioner communications. If you notice an email that says it is from a staff member but has a different address, it may be a scam in disguise!



Financial Assistance Requests

Clergy and staff will never email you directly asking you to purchase anything, request gift cards, or solicit any money from you personally. This is a red flag that the email is not legitimate.



Misspelled Words

While not always the case, often times phishing emails will have misspellings, especially of words that may not be as common for the person sending the email. This can be another pointer that the email is not legitimate.

New Email Message
From: Padre.Santi1234322@gmail.com

Dear Friend,

I really need your help! I am so busy dealing with several tasks here at Grace **Episkopal** Church and could really use your help in **buying some gift cards** for people in need.

You can [click here](#) to find a place where you can buy gift cards at a discount for churches and email me the redemption codes.

Thank you!

Never Click a Link in a Suspect Email

If you suspect that an email you have received from Grace clergy or staff may not be legitimate, **DO NOT CLICK ANY LINKS!** This is a way scammers often access your computer or device!





Grace Episcopal School



**PATTI CULBRETH,
HEAD OF SCHOOL**



The students at Grace are excited to celebrate the birth of Christ and prepare the way for a new year. December will fill us with anticipation for the many blessings we have in store for 2024.

November started the holiday spirit of compassion.

- Our parents celebrated a Gala with “A Night at the Museum” theme and raised money for improved sound and lighting equipment for Merrow Hall--a blessing to both church and school.
- We held a special Veteran’s Day assembly to learn from a Navy doctor and nurse and to have every grade level complete a special service project for our veterans.
- We built “Tom the Turkey” with cereal boxes to share with families who count on the Grace Food Pantry.
- We took school photos to capture the journey of each student.

December will allow us to continue with service to the community.

- We will make goodie bags for the children of Food Pantry clients for an extra holiday surprise.
- We will create a mitten and hat tree after the holidays with donations going to the children of Food Pantry clients.
- Our School Board will honor our teachers and staff with a special holiday luncheon with Secret Santa surprises.

We also celebrate the season with special chapel services with Mother Emma.

- We will have a visit from St. Nicholas on the same day we have a special birthday song for December birthdays.
- We hope our holiday show for parents, featuring traditional Christmas carols and a sprinkling of Motown holiday cheer, will be a big hit.

And, of course, there were a lot of learning leaps!

- We finished our first trimester and shared progress reports and conferences with parents. Full steam ahead!

We all look forward to our holiday break with time to rest and play--and time to celebrate the birth of Jesus! *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.* (Luke 2:14)

Wishing all a very Merry Christmas and a New Year filled with God’s blessings!



Vestry View

BILL MALONE,
SENIOR WARDEN



With the year coming to a close, this will be my last article in Grace Notes as your senior warden. I have learned a lot about Grace Church in this past year. And what I've learned is good news.

This is a Christ-centered parish. That pious phrase means this: We know that all love worth telling about is, at some level, sacrificial—we are willing to trade time and treasure that's precious to us for something greater.

That is the story of this parish's founding in 1855, of its rebirth after the Second World War in our beautiful nave, and of our community today. It's even the story of every family.

Grace possesses this trait because of an enduring hope. A hope based on faith, "*the conviction of things not seen,*" scripture says. (Hebrews 11:1)

Our faith and our love for one another are unseen because they dwell in the heart. But our hearts accomplish a lot of very visible work: A heritage in liturgy that calls forth the Spirit, sustaining the best collection of people you'll ever know. An impulse to help anyone who needs it, like providing food for hundreds of neighbors each week. A commitment to good character, one that raises up a new generation of children and young adults we're proud to call our own.

I've learned a lot more good news than that, but there isn't space in this or any other issue of Grace Notes.

I also want to say something about what's on many people's minds, the loss of our rector. We are experiencing grief—even though this separation may be temporary. Two things are worth saying about grief in the context of our community.

First, significant losses are always multiple losses. When we are separated from a loved one for any reason, we realize how all relationships are part of a fabric in life, and a tear leaves many broken threads. We should acknowledge these but not be overwhelmed by them. Step back and think first: I know where this is coming from, and it will be okay.

Second, whether it's a family or a community like ours, there will be many ways of expressing grief. The way we express grief outwardly is mourning. Mourning can take many forms. Some need to talk, some must be silent, some need to work on an intellectual framework, some need to go on as normal and do the feeling later, some need a sense of justice and action, some need to be numb or even absent, and most are served by some kind of ritual. Good people play all these roles and sometimes more than one at a time.

Let us be patient with ourselves and one another, for the sake of the Christian love we aspire to embody—a God-inspired, character-building love we want our youth to grow into.

Now, about the future. This summer and fall, the vestry had many discussions about our mission and vision. Our mission is solid, but there seem to be so many choices to make about what's next.

I would posit that rather than worry too much over always getting it right, we do everything with confidence, focusing on what is sure to shape our best decisions anyhow—our values. This parish has never been perfect, but I know deeply it will always be virtuous, kind, and joyful. Search far and wide and you'll never find better qualities by which to pick your religion or your friends.

Thank you all for affirming my faith—and my belief in Grace Church—this year. Wishing you a blessed Advent and a merry Christmas.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill". The letters are cursive and fluid.

Bill Malone

malone.bill@gmail.com



Campus Matters

ROBBY SCHRUM,
JUNIOR WARDEN



The junior warden is racing to complete some long-standing projects before the end of the calendar year!

First, four window wells on the east side of Merrow Hall have been installed. With that, the water-mitigation project outside Merrow Hall should be complete.

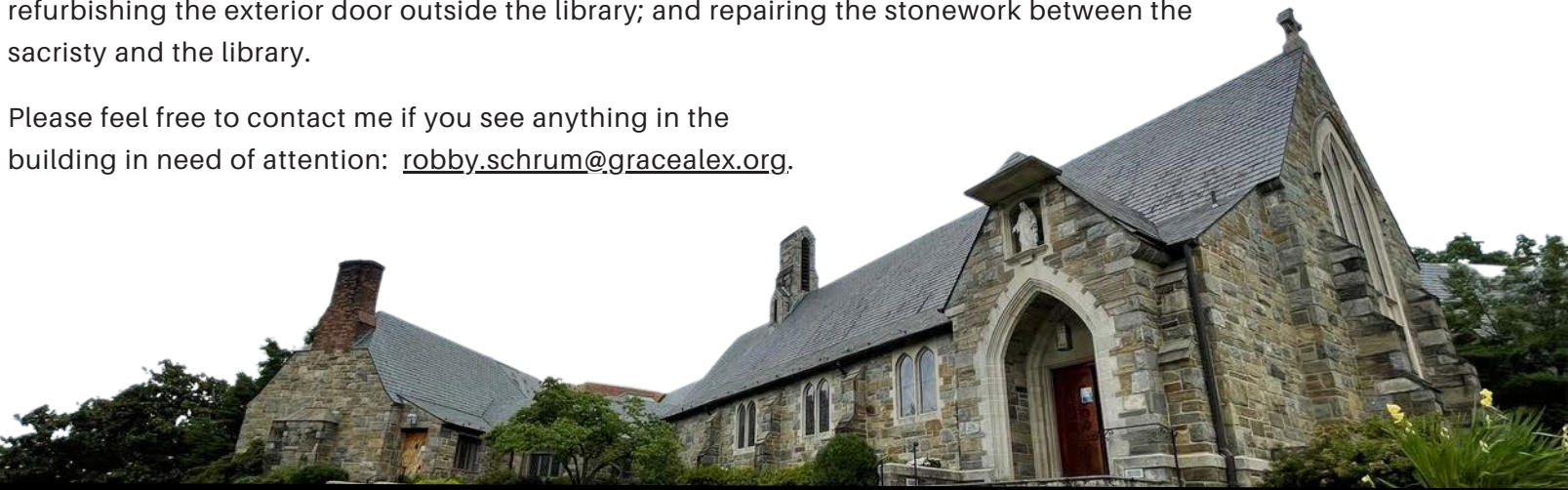
Second, a new refrigerator and freezer have been installed in the Merrow Hall kitchen. Special thanks to Fellowship Team Leads, Jane Rosman and Lynn Rohrs, for managing this effort.

Third, new commemorative plaques have been installed below the stained-glass windows in the nave. Thanks to those who supported the refurbishment of the windows--and to Evan Robinson for seeing this project through to completion.

We've finished sanding the railing running up the steps from the glass doors to the library door. Next up will be painting that railing and exploring lighting solutions to make that path along the church easier to navigate in the dark.

A few items remain on the to-do list: investigating problems with hot water and water pressure in the Merrow Hall kitchen; addressing some minor drainage issues with the ice machine; looking into air quality in the choir room; refurbishing the exterior door outside the library; and repairing the stonework between the sacristy and the library.

Please feel free to contact me if you see anything in the building in need of attention: robby.schrum@gracealex.org.



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GraceEpiscopalChurchAlexandriaVa

Facebook Group



Grace Episcopal Church:
Members and Friends
(Alexandria, Virginia)

YouTube



Search for Grace Episcopal Church
Alexandria Virginia on YouTube.

X



@graceepisalexva
(Formerly Twitter)



Para Dios no hay nada imposible

Father Santi reflects on the Annunciation and the reminder that with God nothing is impossible.

THE REV. SANTI RODRIGUEZ, ASSOCIATE RECTOR

El adviento es un camino de preparación para el nacimiento espiritual del adorado hijo de Dios. En este caminar, Dios dispone nuestros corazones para recibir a Jesús plenamente. Dios también dispone a nuestras familias y a nuestra comunidad de fe para servir, amar y anunciar la buena noticia de Jesús. En esta disposición, Dios nos da la capacidad de ser compañeros y compañeras que comparten su vida cotidiana. Es así que el Padre nos envía a una misión de justicia, esperanza y reconciliación. Enviados en misión descubrimos las huellas de Dios en todas partes.

Y quizás nos preguntamos: ¿Cómo podemos hacer esto? ¿Cómo podemos ser una comunidad de justicia, esperanza y reconciliación?

Yo encuentro inspiración en las palabras del Arcángel Gabriel a María durante la anunciación del Señor. (Lucas 1:26-38) Dios mandó al ángel a un pueblo de Galilea llamado Nazaret. Y el ángel encuentra a María en su hogar - quizás orando o posiblemente entretenida pensando. Entre todas las cosas que el ángel le dice a María, estas son las palabras que más me mueven el corazón: "El Señor está contigo... No tengas miedo... Con Dios no hay nada imposible."

Son estas palabras las que disponen mi corazón para entender la belleza del mensaje de Gabriel a María: "El Espíritu Santo vendrá sobre ti, y el poder del Dios altísimo se posará sobre ti." Es un mensaje que resuena en mi alma y reverbera en mi vida. Aunque sé que este mensaje es la revelación de cómo Dios se hace carne y mora entre nosotros, también comprendo que este mensaje es para cada uno de nosotros y para nuestra comunidad de fe: El Espíritu Santo vendrá sobre ti, y el poder del Dios altísimo se posará sobre ti. Dios se encarna en nuestras vidas. Dios participa especial y particularmente en nuestras vidas y nos transforma. Dios nos adorna con todo lo necesario para las tareas que Dios nos encomienda.

Inspirados por esa imagen de María y el ángel, nos invito a que a través de la época navideña, nos dejemos guiar por el Espíritu Santo - quien nos muestra el camino que lleva hasta Dios. El Espíritu que prepara nuestros corazones para recibir a Jesús con más devoción.

Unámonos en esta preparación. Dejemos que Dios disponga nuestros corazones. Preparémonos para recibir de Dios la tarea de cosas que a veces parecen imposibles. Que podamos seguir sirviendo y amando a los más necesitados en nuestra comunidad. Que aceptemos el camino de la conversión personal. Que dejemos que el Espíritu se pose sobre nosotros para afianzarnos en el compromiso a la justicia, la esperanza y la reconciliación.



Opinion: Youth Perspective

***The Crucible* and the Importance of History**

Annie Eason

The Crucible, a play written by Arthur Miller in 1953 as an allegory of McCarthyism, details the Salem witch trials of the 1690s. Named after Senator Joseph McCarthy, McCarthyism is the belief that if one were to have slightly leftist sympathies, one would be considered a communist and that “communist” individuals must be taken care of as their existence would harm democracy from within. *The Crucible* is a lesson that sometimes mass hysteria only benefits powerful people who can use it to their gain. It is also a lesson that history can and will repeat itself if it is unfamiliar to the general public.

To summarize the play, John Proctor, Elizabeth Proctor, and many others did not believe in their church’s teachings—specifically, Reverend Parris’ teachings—but were still faithful Christians. Abigail Williams, the girl with whom John had an affair, was accused of witchcraft with her friends because she danced in the woods. Abigail confessed to witchcraft to Reverend John Hale but treated herself as a redeemed saint as she listed names of people she didn’t like with the devil, as did the other girls in her party. In court, she and the other girls pretended that Mary Warren was trying to bewitch them as she testified against them. She and her party were even seen as “the voices of Heaven” by Judge Danforth in court. Mary, who knew the truth about the situation, succumbed to the power of the court and Abigail as she was forced to align herself with Abigail and her party in order to escape persecution, making Abigail look more innocent. Mary did so because she was threatened that if she didn’t confess to witchcraft, she would be hanged. In the end, Elizabeth, John, and many others who disagreed with Abigail and with the church in general were set to be hanged or hanged at a later date. Hale, originally supportive of the court, lost complete faith in the court.

In using 1690s Salem—a theocratic society—as his setting, Miller clearly crafts his plot to be in line with the general American society of the early 1950s. The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) deported, imprisoned, and questioned in court many Americans suspected of having communist beliefs. Many of the so-called communist beliefs were simply leftist and would probably have been accepted

today. Those who knew accused people were scared to associate with them, as they would be accused of being a communist sympathizer. Hollywood also reacted to HUAC by not making movies that criticized America and/or its government.

Just like HUAC, it can be said that the court, used by Abigail in *The Crucible*, also persecuted people for their beliefs, specifically beliefs that went against the church and Abigail’s reputation. In Mary’s case, the only way for her to avoid persecution was to side with Abigail. If she were to continue to testify, it would falsely incriminate her, as she would be forced to take up the challenge of defaming Abigail’s saintly status, which would be impossible. Furthermore, Abigail uses her power as a “saint” to accuse people of witchcraft, much like McCarthy used his power to accuse people of having communist beliefs for his own political gain. Their abuse of power further brought into question the validity of the systems that allow and help carry out their actions—just as Abigail used the power of the court to hang those she saw as a threat to her own image and life, and just as HUAC used the power of the court to persecute Americans that they saw as a threat to democracy for their beliefs.

It can certainly be argued that it is a greater worry that the court in *The Crucible* was even able to hang people without sufficient evidence than it was that the people even believed in witchcraft and its greater hysteria. It can be similarly argued that it was a greater worry that those who had even slightly leftist sympathies or beliefs were subjected to potential prosecution than the “Red Scare” itself in the 1950s.

It is important today to keep history in mind when analyzing current events. The study of history continues to be ignored with the rising expenses of college and the seemingly growing disdain for the field. The understanding of basic history can fundamentally change one’s perspective on the world and current events, yet it continues to be ignored in our society as powerful people see it as a “useless” career and weaponize the general unfamiliarity of history as a tool for political gain. If history continues to be ignored and pushed away, then history will repeat itself, and those who are unacquainted with history will not only be unable to see events for what they are, but also will be more subject to manipulation by powerful figures who use that lack of knowledge of history for their own benefit and aims.

Diocesan News



by Liz Rugaber



Closing the Gap between Religion and Life: Highlights of the 229th Diocesan Annual Convention

Grace's two lay delegates to the Diocesan Convention, Doug Prince and Liz Rugaber, along with clergy Reverend Emma Brice, Reverend Jenny Montgomery, and Reverend Santi Rodriguez, joined with more than 430 other lay and clerical delegates from across the Diocese at the Fredericksburg Convention Center, November 2-4, for the 229th Annual Convention of the Diocese of Virginia.

Delegates to the Convention have several responsibilities, including the election of leaders to governing bodies, passing a budget for the upcoming year, and voting on resolutions that come before the Convention. The Virginia Diocese is the largest Episcopal Diocese in the nation, with 179 congregations. It spreads from Richmond in the south to Harrisonburg in the west, Winchester in the north, and the Northern Neck to the east.

The full Convention proceedings are available in both Spanish and English on the Diocese's YouTube channel.

Our new Bishop E. Mark Stevenson is warm and has a fun sense of humor. While much "official business" was conducted, the mood at the Convention was often giddy. History was made in a small step: when Bishop Stevenson was giving his pastoral address, he had to turn over the Presiding Chairmanship to the Right Reverend Gayle E. Harris, the first time a Black woman has presided over a Virginia Diocesan convention.



Bishop Stevenson's First Pastoral Address

In his first Convention address as Bishop of Virginia, the Right Reverend E. Mark Stevenson said that the church today must focus on "closing the gap between religion and life," a concept first coined by the former Roman Catholic Archbishop Derek Worlock of Liverpool. Several exercises performed by the delegates throughout the convention asked how we individually will answer the question, "How do you close the gap between religion and life?" To listen to Bishop Mark's full pastoral address, skip to 35:22 in the YouTube link.

Grace's Own Chrissie Crosby Elected to the Diocesan Standing Committee

The Standing Committee, on which Reverend Santi Rodriguez sits, serves as the council of advice to the Bishop. Chrissie Crosby was elected as one of two lay members of the Standing Committee's Class of 2026 (a three-year term). Congratulations Chrissie!

Resolutions Adopted, Including Exciting Affordable Housing News

The Convention adopted four resolutions. The full text of these resolutions is available here. There were two "technical" resolutions, the first pertaining to electronic copies of the Book of Common Prayer, and the second establishing a process for bishops and deacons to transfer to The Episcopal Church from churches in communion with The Episcopal Church, similar to existing provisions for priests. The fourth one was a resolution in response to the outbreak of war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, praying for peace.

The third was the most interesting resolution, pertaining to affordable housing development on church property. It calls on the Diocese (and parishes) to endorse state legislation to establish "by right" development of affordable housing on land owned by any church, faith community, or religious institution within the Commonwealth of Virginia. Establishing "by right" use of church property would expedite the process and reduce the costs of building affordable housing on church property. These types of laws are known as YIGBY laws, for YES IN GOD'S BACKYARD. California just passed such a law, signed by California Governor Gavin Newsom in October 2023. Did you know that our own Alexandria Region's Church of the Resurrection, for which former Grace Church parishioners Jo Belser and Theresa Lewallen serve as clergy, constructed a 113-unit affordable housing development on a portion of its land? YIGBY laws encourage more developments like this.

This resolution was strongly supported by Virginia Diocesan Homes (VDH), an affiliate of the Diocese of Virginia. (Convention delegates vote on nominees to serve on VDH's board.) VDH's vision is for the Diocese of Virginia and its parishes to use its property and assets to their fullest potential to serve God and our communities.



Budget

The Annual Convention passed a budget balanced at \$6,070,600 on the strength of increased parish contributions. The increases may be due in part to the 2021 Convention Resolution R-1a, which established the Virginia Plan for Covenantal Giving. This Covenantal Giving Plan requires every parish to contribute, by 2025, ten percent of a three-year average of its parish giving to the Diocese. Featured in the 2024 diocesan budget is increased funding for campus ministry, a four-fold increase to the Bishop's Minority Scholarship program, and the calling of a Minister for Congregational Vitality.

Other Highlights

On Thursday evening, Bishop John Perumbalath of the Diocese of Liverpool, England, preached at a Service of Evensong; skip to the YouTube link at 24:30 to hear his sermon. The following day, the Right Reverend Gayle E. Harris, Assistant Bishop of Virginia, delivered a powerful sermon at the Convention's celebration of Holy Eucharist.

The renowned Dr. Catherine Meeks, founding Executive Director of the Absalom Jones Episcopal Center for Racial Healing, addressed the Convention virtually via Zoom. She spoke on racial justice and took questions from the audience. View her incredible speech here at 1:33:59. She challenged anyone who wants to dismantle racism to first ask themselves, "Do you want to be healed?" and to do the inner work required. She has a new book out called *The Night is Long but Light Comes in the Morning*, in which she offers a meditative guide for the work of racial justice "to forge an individual path to making a difference."

The Reverend Rock Higgins, rector of St. James-the-Less in Ashland, was this year's recipient of the Meet Me in Galilee Award, which recognizes outstanding ministry in the field of racial justice and healing. Reverend Higgins is a leader of the Triangle of Hope, a covenantal relationship between the Dioceses of Virginia, Liverpool, England, and Kumasi, Ghana, dedicated to transforming the long history and ongoing effects of slavery in our world through repentance, reconciliation, and mission.



Photos Credit: Doug Prince & Liz Rugaber

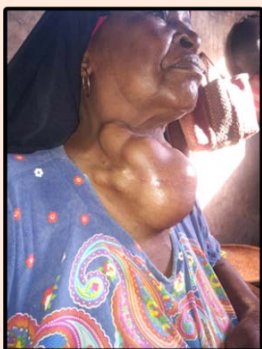
Mission Focus: Health Tanzania Foundation

By Henry and Priscilla Ziegler

This is a brief update on our Tanzanian companions and our mission with them. We have been medical missionaries in Tanzania since 2005 and Henry continues to return in person twice a year. As Christians, we are called to walk in love with our neighbors here and throughout the world. We are especially called to be companions with the marginalized and those most in need. Through your prayers, donations, and participation, you are walking with us in love and creating miracles.

During the last year, we have been partnering with Muhimbili University, Tanzania's national medical school, to develop a family medicine training program that will train doctors for districts and underserved communities throughout Tanzania. That our small faith-based program is helping develop such a national-level program is amazing. Our Buguruni Anglican Health Centre (BAHC) and Socioeconomic and Education Transformation for Health (SEET), our community mobilization nonprofit, will form the urban community teaching site for the family medicine residency.

Equally amazing is the impact that we are having on needy individuals and families. Let me describe a few examples. In 2018, fourteen million Tanzanians lived in extreme poverty, earning only seventy-one U.S. cents per person per day. About twenty-six million (forty percent of the population) lived below \$1.90 per person per day. Survival is the priority and health problems are often put off or ignored.



This woman is from a village where the poor use less expensive local salt that does not contain iodine--unlike the commercially produced salt that does contain iodine. This led to her hypothyroid and a large goiter.

Hypertension and diabetes are killing more and more Tanzanians. Doctor's visits, self-testing, and medications are expensive--not affordable for many Tanzanians. BAHC has monthly free high blood pressure testing and diabetes screening and monitoring. The women and the crowd around her are at a monthly screening event at BAHC.



Despite progress, Tanzania has some of the highest maternal and newborn death rates in the world. There are also over a million orphans in Tanzania, some due to the high maternal mortality rate. With the maternity program at BAHC, its staff are saving mothers' and babies' lives. The most recent example is truly a miracle.

In mid-September, Dr. Maxwell performed a normal delivery with both mother and baby appearing to be fine. Walking to his office, he was frantically called back because the mother had had a seizure and collapsed on the floor. When Dr. Max arrived, she had no pulse. He thumped her chest three or four times and was able to elicit a pulse. The oxygen level was seventy-nine percent, which is not compatible with life. She was immediately given oxygen and suctioned. Multiple IVs were started, and blood was obtained from the nearby regional hospital. A day later, the mother and baby left the hospital with no apparent health problems. With the likely diagnosis of pulmonary embolism, she was anticoagulated with aspirin since other anticoagulants were not feasible economically or logistically.



Dr. Max with the miracle mother and at a follow-up a few months later

For the past several years, BAHC has had an operating room where C-sections and other gynecological surgeries can take place. The picture is of a C-section baby and a healthy mother and child.



Unfortunately, violence against women and children occurs worldwide. One of SEET’s initiatives is training everyone in the community to address this problem. Over 70,000 community members have been trained.

In one instance, two children were sexually abused by their father, and their mother covered this up. The children spoke out and the father and mother are now in jail. Unfortunately, the relatives blamed the children for talking. To protect the children from violence, social services moved the children to a foster family in a different part of the city. Social services asked St. Augustine Primary School, our partner school, if they would take the children as students because the family could track them in the public school system. The Health Tanzania Foundation and St. Augustine agreed to split their school and food costs. Our SEET nurse counselor, Agnes Mhada, has begun talking with the children to help them through this unimaginable trauma. The children will need ongoing support and we are asking for a sponsor to help them.

AIDS remains a leading cause of death in Tanzania. Our Tanzanian partners manage a large comprehensive HIV/AIDS program. With consistent treatment and nutrition, patients are now able to live a fairly normal life. To support children with AIDS, Buguruni Anglican Health Centre has an AIDS club where the children meet and support each other.

Please pray for our mission and donate if you can. If you’re interested in volunteering, please call Henry at 703-887-1574, his cell phone. You can also email us at hdziegler@yahoo.com if you would like to receive our newsletter or find out more about our programs and how you can help.

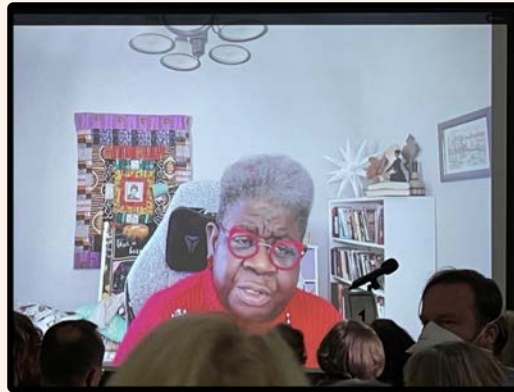
May God Bless Us All.



Dr. Catherine Meeks Addresses the 229th Annual Convention



by Doug Prince



Dr. Catherine Meeks, a retired distinguished professor of sociocultural studies and the founding executive director of The Absalom Jones Center for Racial Healing in the Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta, addressed the 229th Annual Convention via livestream due to her illness. In her speech, she discussed her journey of working to liberate herself from the oppression of racism and shared her insights that can be helpful to others on the same journey.

Dr. Meeks has dedicated her life to working on dismantling racism, and she characterizes herself as a “midwife to the soul.” Her most recent work is a spiritual guide to restoring oneself from racial trauma and committing to the long work of dismantling racism. She emphasized the importance of making sure the work of dismantling racism leads somewhere rather than being just another set of “we did a lot of work, we did a lot of stuff, and we’re really tired, but we really don’t know what we really have accomplished.”

Dr. Meeks started her speech by reading a poem called “The Second Life” by David Whyte, which describes two types of lives: the uncourageous life and the courageous life. The uncourageous life wants to make its way through life easily, assume the strange and dubious honor of not being heard, and inhabit a difficult form of stillness. It wants to stop the whole world and keep it stopped, refusing to stir until given an exact and final destination. This life just wants to lie down, close its eyes, and tell God it has a headache.

On the other hand, the courageous life looks on and listens with some wonder and even extends a reassuring hand to the one holding back. It knows well enough it will have to give up everything, including its life, to find its true path. Dr. Meeks encouraged everyone to reflect on which life they are living and to choose a courageous life.

Dr. Meeks then discussed the conflict in the journey of dismantling racism, which is the conflict between the desire for comfort and the desire for justice. She said that comfort is the enemy of justice because justice requires us to be uncomfortable. She urged everyone to embrace discomfort and to move beyond the fear of being uncomfortable, saying that discomfort is where growth happens.

She also emphasized the importance of truth-telling and the need to confront the truth about racism. She said that racism is a lie that has been told for so long that it has become the truth for many people. Truth-telling requires us to acknowledge the truth about ourselves and our society, and it requires us to listen to the stories of those who have been oppressed. Dr. Meeks urged everyone to believe the stories of those who have been oppressed and to recognize the ways in which they have benefited from the oppression of others.

Dr. Meeks also discussed the importance of community and the need to build relationships across racial lines. She said that building relationships requires us to be vulnerable and to be willing to listen and learn from others. It also requires us to recognize the humanity of others and to see them as part of our family.

In conclusion, Dr. Meeks urged everyone to choose the courageous life, to embrace discomfort, to confront the truth about racism, to believe the stories of those who have been oppressed, and to build relationships across racial lines. She emphasized that the work of dismantling racism is a long and difficult journey, but it is also a journey that leads to freedom and liberation.

To view the full video of the address, visit the Diocesan YouTube channel at this address: <https://youtu.be/kVZ9L7kPWRw?si=dq67lGd1a6rt0tU9>.



JUNE HUBER

Grace-ful Worship

Amazing Grace

I intended to submit this article for last month's issue of Grace Notes, but we were traveling and I didn't finish it in time. I like the story so much I decided to submit it now.

The hymn "Amazing Grace" sounds like it's telling someone's personal story, and it is. If you don't know the story, I'd like to share it with you. If you already know some of the story, maybe you'll learn new parts of it. I did! But before I proceed, let me make something clear: virtually all of this article is taken word-for-word from a post by Abby Forton, Class of 2022, on the website of Geneva College (<https://www.geneva.edu/blog/uncategorized/hymnology-amazing-grace>). I spoke with Abby and obtained her permission. She writes so clearly and concisely that I couldn't possibly improve upon it. Her portions of my article (most of it) are in italics.

It was December 1772, in Olney, England. At the age of 47, John Newton began to write a hymn that would grow increasingly more popular over the next 349 years. In his song "Amazing Grace," Newton writes about a grace that is immense; he writes about the grace of God that saved him from his wretchedness. By looking within the hymn, one is able to understand a little bit about Newton's personal conversion. Although every person's conversion story is unique, there is something about this hymn that remains relatable to Christians everywhere. Newton discusses where he was when he found God, or rather, when God found him. He was a wretch. He was lost. He was blind in sin.

Newton's mother died while his father was away at sea. Newton's father remarried and the couple had another child. Following in his father's footsteps, Newton began his life's career by searching throughout the African coast for slaves to capture and eventually to sell for profit. On one journey, Newton and his crew encountered a storm that swept some of his men overboard and left others with the likelihood of drowning. With both hands fastened onto the wheel of the boat, Newton cried out to God saying, "Lord, have mercy on us." After eleven hours of steering, the remainder of the crew found safety with the calming of the storm. From then on, Newton dated March 21 as a day set aside for a time of humiliation, prayer, and praise.

Upon arriving safely home, Newton did not venture out to seek more slaves; instead, he began to learn Hebrew and Greek. He occasionally accepted requests to speak about his conversion in front of various congregations. Newton was eventually ordained and began to lead his own church. God changed him from a man who was an advocate for the slave trade to a man actively working towards abolishing it. Newton's literary work against the slave trade encouraged abolitionist William Wilberforce to continue his legal fight against slavery in England.

In later years, Newton began to lose his memory. Although his thoughts were limited, Newton said he could remember two things: "That I was a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior." With this conviction of new life that he found only in Christ, Newton passed from his earthly life in 1807, at the age of 82. But Newton did live long enough to see the signing of The Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade.

The song 'Amazing Grace,' although originating in England, appeared in the colonies later accompanied with a different tune, more commonly known as "New British." This song grew in popularity, but not because it was catchy tune, but because the words that Newton wrote related to every human being who encountered the saving grace of Jesus Christ. This song touched many people at various stages of their spiritual walks.

Since the day that Newton penned the lyrics to 'Amazing Grace,' it has grown in popularity and has been present at numerous key moments in our country's history. Newton experienced the darkness and hopelessness of his sin and the consequence of following his own corrupt ways. He focused on fulfilling what he wanted to do in his life, looking to the direction of God.

'Amazing Grace' speaks of the sweetness found in Christ's grace for his children. As humans we are lost, blinded by sin, and need saving. Jesus's saving grace is amazing! Continuing onto the second stanza, Newton writes that it was grace that taught his heart to fear the punishment of his sin and it was also grace that those fears were relieved. This precious grace appeared when he was standing in that vicious storm, the moment he first believed. Through the trials and storms of life, it is grace that brings us through life, and it is grace that will lead us to heaven."

God has promised goodness and provides his Word in which we can rest our hope. He is our Shield and Portion forever. When our life comes to an end, our possession is joy and peace in Christ. Although our flesh will fail and earth will come to an end, God our creator will remain the same and will be forever with us. When we reach the glorious streets of Heaven, we can sing of God's praise forever in his presence. Because of God's sweet and all-encompassing amazing grace, we can have forgiveness for our past, joy in the present and hope for a future with Him.

The song 'Amazing Grace' is an account of one person's conversion story almost 250 years ago; however, no matter the amount of time that has gone by, the meaning in this hymn is truth for people all over the world.

John Newton was a man that despicably sold other human beings in the slave trade. As he states in the hymn, he was a wretch, but God found him. He was saved by God's amazing grace, and it is that grace that sets God's people free when, at the prodding of the Holy Spirit, we freely accept it for ourselves.

I think you will agree that Abby's writing skills are superb, and I was lucky to find her post among other items on the internet addressing the same subject; and I also think that knowing the history of the hymn will give it more meaning when we sing it.

Photo Credit: Canva.com



Sunday Morning Adult Forum Schedule

We meet in person in the St. Mark Room on the second floor, from 9:40-10:15, or virtually via Zoom (use the link to Adult Forum in the Sunday morning email). Feel free to arrive at 9:30 for informal chatting before the forum. Coffee and tea will be available just outside the St. Mark room.

Dec. 3 (First Sunday in Advent): NO SEPARATE ADULT FORUM - Intergenerational Event (Advent Wreaths) in Merrow Hall

Dec. 10: Sharing Our Nativity Scenes, moderated by Liz Rugaber

Dec. 17: The Art of Watching for the Light, presented by Anne Clift Boris

Dec. 24: Christmas Eve - NO ADULT FORUM

Dec. 31: New Year's Eve - NO ADULT FORUM

Jan. 7: TBD

Jan. 14: Saints in Light: Grace Church Windows, presented by Father Santi and Anne Clift Boris

Jan. 21: Grace Church Budget, presented by treasurer Evan Robinson

Jan. 28: ANNUAL MEETING - NO ADULT FORUM

IT'S NOT TOO LATE to share your creche or nativity scene on December 10! If you're interested, send a picture of your creche to Anne Boris at anne.boris@gracealex.org by December 8, and be prepared to describe it briefly.







Family Activity Ideas for Advent

By Mother Emma

In place of a maze or word search, I invite you to try the activities below as preparation for the great mystery of Christmas!



- ★ Make and deliver treats to neighbors.
- ★ Read a book about Christmas traditions in another country or denomination.
- ★ Write a thank-you note or give a gift to your mail-person or to delivery drivers.
- ★ Pray for peace in your community and the world.
- ★ Learn to say “Merry Christmas” in other languages.
- ★ Take time each day for your advent calendar, wreath, or Jesse Tree.
- ★ Give Jesus a birthday gift by giving a gift to someone in need.
- ★ Write a Christmas card to a member of the Grace community.
- ★ Make a handmade gift for someone you love.
- ★ Pick up trash outside to care for God’s creation.

Hope

Peace

Joy

Love



Doorways *into Joy*

Celebrate Advent & Christmas at Grace

Sunday, December 3 (Advent 1)

9:30 a.m., Intergenerational Advent Wreath-making Event

10:30 a.m., Advent Lessons and Carols with Eucharist, Rite I, *Livestreamed*

Sunday, December 10 (Advent 2)

8:45, 9:00, 10:30 a.m., Saint Nicholas visits (7:30 am as normal)

5:00 p.m., Christmas Pageant

Thursday, December 21, 5:00 p.m.

Greening of the Church

Friday (Viernes), December 22, 7:00 p.m.

Las Posadas & Santa Eucaristía, Rito II

Sunday, December 24 (Advent 4 - only morning services)

8:00 a.m., Holy Eucharist - Rite I

9:30 a.m., Santa Eucaristia - Rito II

Sunday, December 24 (Christmas Eve)

3:00 p.m., Holy Eucharist (especially for families with small children),

Rite II, Auditorium

*5:00 p.m., Festival Eucharist with procession to creche, Rite II,

(musical prelude begins at 4:30 p.m.), *Livestreamed*

7:30 p.m., Festival Eucharist, Rite I

11:00 p.m., Festival Eucharist, Rite I,

(musical prelude begins at 10:30 p.m.), *Livestreamed*

Monday, December 25 (Christmas Day)

12:00 noon, Holy Eucharist, Rite I, *Livestreamed*

Sunday, December 31 (Holy Name of our Lord - only services)

8:45 a.m., Santa Eucaristia - Rito II

10:30 a.m., Holy Eucharist with Christmas Carols Sing-along, Rite I, *Livestreamed*

Friday, January 5 (Feast of the Epiphany)

7:00 p.m., Bilingual Festival Eucharist, Nave, *Livestreamed*

**Child care provided*



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Vestry Class of 2023

Carlos Arboleda - *Assistant Treasurer*
Khacki Berry - *Worship Liaison*
Tracy Enger - *Pastoral Care Liaison*
Evan Robinson - *Treasurer*
Robby Schrum - *Junior Warden*

Vestry Class of 2024

Lauren Gustafson - *Youth Formation Liaison*
Mary Hix - *Outreach & Justice Liaison*
Bill Malone - *Senior Warden*
Dan Pattarini - *Member-at-Large*
Rushad Thomas - *Evangelism Liaison*

Vestry Class of 2025

Keith Davis - *Stewardship Liaison*
Eleanor Reed - *Register*
Jane Rosman - *Fellowship Liaison*
Andrew Serke - *Children's Formation Liaison*
Geoff Whitlock - *Adult Formation Liaison*

Parish Team Leads

Lisa Bellantoni - *Education*
John Boris - *Pastoral Care*
Cindy MacIntyre - *Evangelism*
Jen Pease - *Outreach*
Lynn Rohrs - *Fellowship*
Erin White - *Youth*
Kemp Williams - *Worship*



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