



Beyond the Pews Vestry Papers May June 2022

Vocation in an Unsafe World

By Diana Wheeler

On May 22, 2015, a Third Order Franciscan Episcopal deacon, an Old Catholic priest and a member of the Brotherhood of St. Gregory met together in San Francisco to confirm the name and documents of an unusual group of friends in ministry. Since then, the [Companions of Dorothy the Worker](#) have cared for the most marginalized folks of the LGBTQ+ community. Many of the companions are folks hurt by the institutional Church, sometimes rejected by congregations claiming to be “open and affirming.” Some are long-time queer activists who had seminary education for ministry in various denominations. And many have moved from their families of origin because of homophobia in their families’ faith communities.

Born from the experience of ministry on the streets for San Francisco Night Ministry and steeped in the Franciscan tradition with a Society of St. Francis friary as its first home base, the Companions adopted the radical hospitality of Dorothy Day and 16 Principles of ethical ministry among the queer community. Every Companion commits to these Principles and to witnessing to the needs of the LGBTQ+ community in their various Christian institutions.

Our founding and current members are as diverse as the community that we serve. We are Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, Old Catholic, Liberal Catholic Church, Lutheran and United Church of Christ. We are lay, ordained, vowed religious and in formation for holy orders. Starting in San Francisco, we are now moving across the U.S. and the globe, with members in Missouri, the UK and Finland. We thoughtfully shepherd inquirers exploring their vocations with us and always consider the safety of those with whom we minister as our primary concern.

Building family and sharing rituals and celebrations of our faith

The Companions meet people wherever they are at on their spiritual and vocational journeys, offering them the gifts of spiritual direction, pastoral care and sacramental opportunities in our local neighborhoods. The rituals and celebrations of the church year have become a Companions tradition and much looked forward to by the members of the queer community. Ashes to Go, Maundy Thursday foot washing on the street and Palm Sunday processions have provided connections to religious roots for folks who would never feel safe attending a church service. The St. Francis Day blessing of pets brings out many people and their companion animals for blessing and conversation. In our charism statement we speak of modeling Christ’s love. In our presence we are demonstrating that the queer community is important to God and that they are loved. Unconditionally.

A goal for Companions is to become so immersed in their local LGBTQ+ communities that they become as family to one another, a very Franciscan value and definitely radical hospitality. We look to reconnect

folks who have been marginalized by the Church with their love for their faith – and to do that with no agenda. We are a support along the way for former seminarians, current clergy, drag queens, queer activists, the trans community and queer youth and their families.

Sharing the struggles of the LGBTQ+ community with the Church and the world

And we are always witnessing to the larger Church the realities of the struggles of the LGBTQ+ community in the Church and the world. Given the progression of homophobic political activity everywhere, this work has become more vital. The progress we thought we had made is at risk, and we need to be prepared. Companions are envisioning our future and working on getting information out on ways to support the queer community and all marginalized persons during these difficult times.

We look forward to making connections with like-minded persons of faith. The Companions of Dorothy the Worker have been observer members of the National Association of Episcopal Christian Communities (NAECC) and have connected with other dispersed communities, as well as members of conventual orders, through our conferences with the member orders of the Conference of Anglican Religious Orders of the Americas (CAROA). These experiences have provided invaluable opportunities to learn and share our witness.

This year we welcomed our first Bishop Visitor, the Rt. Reverend Deon Johnson of the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri, and our third Religious Protector, the Reverend Rick Lopez of Texas. We treasure these relationships which give us the support, advice and accountability that are vital to the safety of those we serve.

Charism Statement of the Companions

The Companions of Dorothy the Worker is an ecumenical Christian community, dispersed or under one roof; encouraging each other and supporting each other in ministry; living by the work of our own hands; depending on God as we strive to make God's love felt in the queer community, which has been marginalized by the Church and the World. We accomplish this ministry by being active companions, living and participating with the people we serve; modeling Christ's love.

We own as our patron the Blessed Dorothy Day. We dedicate our formation to the Venerable Anthony Turney, who was our supporter and protector. We are guided by Franciscan ideals and the spirituality of our beguine foremothers.

Learn more about the Companions of Dorothy the Worker by visiting our website www.companionsofdorothy.org. And please be sure to join us on social media!

The Rev. Diana Wheeler, TSSF/cdw, has been a vocational deacon in the Diocese of California since 2003 and has served several parishes and nonprofits, including the San Francisco Night Ministry and Oasis California. She is a vowed member of the Third Order of the Society of St. Francis and volunteers with several community nonprofits that serve the LGBTQ+ community. In her day job she is an early childhood program specialist.

Resources:

- [I Want to be Like Bean Blossom](#) by Anna Olson, an ECF Vital Practices blog, November 16, 2016

- [Discipleship from the Margins](#), an ECF Vital practices webinar by David Patiño and Atticus Zavaletta, June 12, 2019
- [Multilingual Leadership and Multicultural Churches](#) by Dr. Sandra Montes, Vestry Papers, July 2015
- [Pronoun Buttons: A Sign of Welcome](#) by Lisa G. Fischbeck, an ECF Vital Practices blog, April 5, 2019

The Third Place

By Jon Davis

Many of the assumptions we are currently making about the church, its mission, growth and vitality are outdated, if not all together wrong. The world has changed dramatically in the last few decades and even more so since March of 2020, when pandemic realities began to take hold in our culture and society. Our piety and practice shifted to an unknown, unfamiliar landscape of lock-downs, social distancing, quarantining and wearing of masks. With these changes, we can no longer assume that what worked in the church we grew up in will work in the Post-Christendom, western world of the 21st century.

In 2017, while considering a change in my calling and cure, I looked at more than 75 church profiles. All of them, in one way or another, said they wanted a priest who could bring in young families, children and adolescents and grow the church. The descriptions hearkened back to the 1960s church. They were looking for a great preacher, great music, great programs, all wanting to make the church great again.

The world has changed and so should our assumptions. Episcopalian, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran are foreign words to 40 percent of the culture, even more so for those 30 and under. Mainline denominational churches are a product of a former generation, a relic from the past that most millennials don't understand.

Remember the ancient paths

In Jeremiah 6:16 we are encouraged to:

Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.

When we read the scriptures and hear the words of Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God, he paints a different picture of church, one that we need to recapture, an ancient path to walk. *Ecclesia*, the Greek word for church, means a gathering or assembly, and in this context it describes a community of people anchored in a common faith. As Bonhoeffer would say, they were doing life together. It was a connected and shared experience of coming to know the Lord by faith and repentance and growing in the knowledge and love of the Lord day by day.

If Peter or Paul walked into a modern day, western church, regardless of denomination, I wonder if they would recognize it as church. The church for them was a vibrant community, relational and able to adapt quickly to change. It was innovative in developing the needed structures to sustain the mission to proclaim the Gospel in a variety of situations. It practiced a contextual intelligence, capable of interpreting the culture – like the sons of Issachar, who had the understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do. (1 Chronicles 12:32) The early church was founded in relational/incarnational

ministry following Jesus' practice of *witness* – of being with people, entering their context with understanding and divine empathy. This was the Pre-Christendom model of church and we need a Pre-Christendom model for a Post-Christendom world.

A surprising Fresh Expression

In 2017, vocational restlessness led me into [Fresh Expressions](#), where I found people longing for church done differently, for a fresh expression of church. I stepped out in faith, joining their ranks as a trainer and mission strategist and quickly found a home among these missional pilgrims seeking to plant churches for people who do not go to church.

It was like going back to a familiar mission of engaging people, interacting with them and participating in a life-on-life manner. Gathering with people around a common interest or a common geography and building relationships is what we see in the Book of Acts. Relationships are the currency in the Kingdom of God, and this is how the Good News of God in Christ is transmitted.

Third Places becoming Thin Places

Because of Fresh Expressions, I rediscovered a deeper understanding of the church's mission which I've come to express this way...

Ray Oldenburg, a sociologist, developed the concept of Third Place. There's the first place of home, the second place of work or school, and then there are third places, where people gather. They could be a gym, a park, a restaurant, or any place where people assemble around a common interest. In the 1990's, Starbucks used this idea for their marketing strategy. They wanted to be everyone's third place – home, work, Starbucks. For many it worked, and Starbucks became a place where people would meet with friends, hangout, grab some internet and even work.

In Celtic Spirituality there is the idea of the Thin Place, a place where the distance between heaven and earth, time and eternity, are reduced and even collide. I have been on some teaching missions in the Diocese of the Arctic in the Anglican Church in Canada. In Yellowknife, the capital of the Northwest Territory, I witnessed the Northern Lights. The night sky was ablaze with greens and blues. For me it was a thin place, showing the heavens declaring God's glory. I felt the weight of the Lord's presence. I have felt that before on mountaintops, at beaches, in cathedrals and more.

So here is a modern day understanding of the mission of the church. We enter Third Places of culture, where people gather, and by the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through us, they become Thin Places of encounter. Redemption, reconciliation, salvation, repentance and faith are mediated in these places and moments, lives are changed and faith communities are formed. Peter, Paul and the saints of old entered the third places of their culture with the Gospel. We should too.

What does this look like?

At Christ Episcopal Church in Cedar Key, Florida, where I serve as a part-time vicar, I brought with me some of the Fresh Expression missiology. We have begun a Dinner Church/Community Dinner. We invite our neighbors, friends – in reality the whole community – to an evening meal. We gather around table, engage and connect. There is a short telling of a gospel story, followed by some discussion, prayers are offered and we close with a blessing. A community is forming, conversations are continuing and one day

we see it as an *ecclesia*; an assembly of people, anchored in faith, growing in the Lord. The table, the meal are a Third Place becoming a Thin Place.

I am a cradle Episcopalian; I love the Book of Common Prayer. Liturgy, the church calendar, sacramental elements and other treasures in the Anglican tradition set a needed cadence in my life. We do not need to abandon these things, but we must find a way for them to be translated for a culture that does not speak this language. Isn't this what Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer did during the English Reformation when he crafted the first Book of Common Prayer? He took the worship of the church – prayer, litanies and liturgies that were in a foreign language – and put them in the vernacular of the English people.

That is our task today, to understand the context of the world in which people live and to find ways to connect and engage people with the Good News of God in Christ. The attractional model of coming to church is disappearing, and maybe that is a good thing. In the Great Commission we are encouraged to go as a sent people into a dark and dying world bearing the light and life of the Gospel. More than anything, I want others to know the joy of being reconciled to Almighty God, and I see that happening when I enter those third places where people congregate authentically with compassion, kindness and understanding, and whereby prayer and the Holy Spirit, Jesus is made known.

The Rev. Jon Davis, PhD, is an Episcopal priest and a recognized leader with expertise in youth ministry, worship, liturgy, church growth and planting, missions, leadership and more. He is on staff with Fresh Expressions as a mission strategist. He also serves as the part-time vicar of Christ Episcopal Church in Cedar Key, Florida. He is an engaging speaker, writer, musician and professor. He and his wife Beth live on a little farm in Oviedo, Florida, with a menagerie of horses, cats, chickens, English Bulldogs and other critters.

Resources:

- [Surfing and Spirituality](#) by Scott Claassen, Vestry Papers, March 2020
- [Holy Hikes and Thin Spaces](#) by Haley Bankey, Vestry Papers, March 2022
- [Formation Moves into the Neighborhood](#) by Greg Syler, an ECF Vital Practices blog, April 4, 2019
- [Witnessing Faithfully Beyond the Walls](#), an ECF Vital Practices webinar presented by Audra Abt, September 27, 2016

Bridges to the Future: Addressing the Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic on Faith Communities

By ECF Staff

How is your faith community meeting the hardships and opportunities of the pandemic? As we emerge from the pandemic, how can you address your contextual needs? While some congregations and dioceses were more impacted than others, all experienced financial, physical and emotional pressures. The Episcopal Church Foundation (ECF) was fortunate to receive additional funds from the Lilly Endowment to support the economic and financial sustainability of local faith communities. ECF's grant, *Bridges to the Future: Positioning Local Faith Communities for a Post-Pandemic Church*, is designed to provide "bridge" funding for participating dioceses and their congregations to help them move from a state of economic uncertainty to a more sustainable and effective ministry model. These funds are specifically targeted to dioceses with underrepresented and underserved communities most impacted by COVID-19, i.e., predominately Black, Latino/Hispanic, Indigenous, multi-cultural and rural.

This article shares how some dioceses are meeting the need for change and adaptation with new ministry models to ensure the sustainability and vitality of these communities over the long-term.

***Shaped by Faith* encourages collaboration and partnerships**

The Episcopal Diocese of Central Pennsylvania launched their *Shaped by Faith* initiative in 2019. Bishop Scanlan invited parish teams to meet in regional cohorts and begin strategizing “right-shaped” models of leadership that address the present challenges of parochial ministry. From the beginning of this work, particular need was identified in the Northern Tier region of the Diocese, a largely rural area which has experienced marked decline in membership, operating income and clergy availability. Additionally, the long distances between Episcopal neighbors in this area has led to a cultural disconnect with each other and the wider Diocese.

Funds from the *Bridges* grant will help resource collaborative models designed to break down this sense of siloed ministry. The newly implemented role of a regional missionary has already increased the collaborative spirit of the region and worked to deepen missional partnerships. An exciting and emerging opportunity involves the repurposing of a dormant parish house with the capacity to draw members from across the Diocese. Moreover, Northern Tier residents will have access to formation and spiritual development opportunities and exposure to other members of their diocesan family that will help combat the isolation in this region.

Congregations in Detroit Church Partnership find fresh hope for the future

A new ministry in **the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan** is the Detroit Church Partnership. In a time when mainline protestant congregations, including the Episcopal Church, are losing members and congregations of color are finding themselves particularly hard hit, the Detroit Church Partnership offers a creative way to address these issues. Three congregations, including The Cathedral Church of St. Paul, have joined together, to share a full-time priest, who will serve as rector of two of the congregations and as an Urban Missioner at the Cathedral.

This arrangement allows these three congregations to share resources, create joint ministries, and explore new configurations for compelling, dynamic projects that transcend congregational boundaries. Lay leaders report that having a gifted clergyperson dedicated to the growth and development of their congregation has renewed their hope for a compelling Gospel-driven future. This venture is funded by the individual congregations, the Diocese of Michigan and ECF’s Lilly Endowment grant.

Essential support for a new vision for native ministry in Minnesota

The Episcopal Church in Minnesota will focus on convening key leaders to discern what’s next for native ministry in Minnesota. As the congregations are led primarily by unpaid lay leaders, the ECF grant will add essential resources to jumpstart the vision that is emerging in these faithful communities. The Diocese anticipates hiring a priest, in partnership with the Northwest Minnesota Synod of the ELCA, to explore the possibility of a joint Lutheran-Episcopal ministry in the Ojibwe congregations of Northwest Minnesota.

The goal of the project is to use local, diocesan and wider Church resources to ensure the financial sustainability of whatever shape emerges during 2022. The hope is to cultivate, once again, a strong

network of leaders to partner together in supporting one another's ministry and to create a vibrant community that spans geography.

During this 2022 *Bridges* grant period, each bishop and diocesan staff member is experimenting with innovative models and providing missional, strategic, administrative and financial support for these new ventures. By partnering with both clergy and lay leadership, the dioceses' faith communities are feeling empowered, challenged and supported in their emerging ministries.

Compiled by ECF staff in collaboration with Diocesan teams.

Resources:

- [Hybrid Church - A Way Forward for Church Leaders](#) by ECFVP Team, Vestry Papers, January 2022
- [A Pandemic Church Plant Inspires Joy](#) by Beth Wyndham, Vestry Papers, November 2021
- [Tension and Release in the Church](#) by Robert Leopold, Vestry Papers, May 2021
- [Pandemic Learnings](#) by Audra Abt, Vestry Papers, May 2021

TikTok and Real Ministry

By Ben Maddison

TikTok. You've probably heard about it only because it was going to be "banned" several times in 2020. As St. Paul rightly points out, "the Law increases the trespass." The platform has expanded exponentially since to the pandemic began. From teens dancing and viral memes to a guy drinking grape juice while riding a skateboard and lip-syncing a Fleetwood Mac song, TikTok is the social media platform of choice for Gen Z, aging millennials and reluctant Xers.

Surprising things happen on TikTok

My foray into the weird, wonderful world of TikTok came at the start of the pandemic when my wife and I were looking for just about anything to keep us busy, laughing and connected to our congregation. What started as a few Holy Week videos turned into a surprisingly fruitful ministry where real formation happened. (I know, I am just as surprised as you are).

I remember meeting with my youth group, who had been following our church account (@holytrinitywenonah) on TikTok, and they excitedly said, "Fr. Ben! You have so many followers. You have enough to go live!" I said, "What!" And they said, "Go live!" When I asked for more information, they struggled to explain the purpose or point of "going live" – essentially livestreaming through the TikTok platform, which is limited by follower count. To them, it was a big deal.

In no time I, too, would discover that "going live" was a big deal. We began streaming the daily office and compline on the platform. Then in the evenings, after the kids were asleep, my wife would get ready to moderate the live feed from her phones, I would boot up *Red Dead Redemption 2* on the Xbox One, and we would go live – chat, answer questions and engage with anyone who stopped by.

We had no idea what we were doing. There are *lots* of Christian content creators, and there are other fantastic Episcopal TikTokers (@davidwpeters of Hot Priest Summer fame; @joshbarrett0, who makes

very wholesome content; and the hilarious @motherpeaches, to name a few of my favorites). But there's always room for more.

People are looking for answers, help and support

However, what became abundantly clear early on was that people are starved for Good News. Much of the Christian content on TikTok comes from a world that has a difficult time offering Good News generally and certainly isn't good news for everyone. There are a lot of other progressive Christians, but they often (admittedly) stand outside the historic, creedal traditions of the church. What does this mean? There is a unique niche that Episcopalians of an "inclusively orthodox" ilk can bring to TikTok. We were early contributors to the #progressivechristian and #progressiveclergy communities, that now have almost a quarter of a billion views (when we started there were a few million).

The power of this platform is that you'll find people – real people – struggling with the faith they were raised in *and* looking for answers. "Deconstruction" is a hot and oft-debated topic there. But people are looking for answers that speak to them where they are. They are looking for faithful, traditional, loving, compassionate, inclusive Christians to help and support them on their journey.

Real and authentic interactions take place and real ministry happens

TikTok – like no other platform I'm a part of – offers the opportunity for very real and significant interactions with followers and in a surprisingly authentic way. Look, I'm Episcopalian and I believe deeply in the Incarnation and the importance of embodiment and in-person relationships, but TikTok blurs that world in a distinctive way.

People come to TikTok with real questions. They come hurting, searching, broken and vulnerable – and they have so many options for answers. But the gracious and loving Gospel of Jesus Christ connects with people in a very real and significant way. The community of TikTok can be an amazing gift – like when we were worshiping with our Lutheran friend, @pastorjesseck, and the chat filled with hundreds of people with prayers for each other and the world and ended with us all exchanging a virtual peace. The exchanges can sometimes be breathtaking in their Spirit-drivenness.

In the years we have been on TikTok, here are a few examples of the (still very much to my surprise) *real ministry* we have done:

- We have sent five *Books of Common Prayer* to folks who wanted to follow along with Morning Prayer
- We have sent blessed chalk kits to Colorado, South Carolina and Tennessee
- We have had TikTok followers join us *weekly* for Bible study, our social justice book group and Sunday services
- We have helped young, lapsed Christians find their faith, take it seriously, get connected with a local parish and become active in helping other young people on TikTok find the answers (and the creators) who might answer their questions

- We have helped older adults – who joined TikTok to monitor their kids activity or kill time at work – rediscover the faith of their youth, take their families back to church and start reading their Bibles and praying again after years of spiritual drought
- We have connected innumerable people to local Episcopal Churches – sometimes even doing the vetting that they were afraid to do (asking if they were an openly affirming church, if they would accept trans persons, etc.)

What started out as a way to make people laugh and kill time has become a source of real ministry – and my follower count pales in comparison to so many other creators.

Thoughts for potential TikTok creators – and for the rest of us

So here's the thing: I want to offer two exhortations – one to anyone who might be reading this and thinking the last thing they have time to do is to join another social media platform and create content (trust me, I get it) – and another to folks who might want to explore what TikTok and it's weird algorithm and community have to offer.

For Potential Creators: If you love Jesus and you love the Church and you love the tradition, but you also did some serious work to get to the place where that was true. If you're not afraid of "deconstruction" within a framework of traditional belief and the Gospel. If you have a heart for people severely hurt and burned out by the church. If you are fully LGBTQ+ affirming. If you can make fun of yourself. If you have a weird amount of knowledge about a weird part of church. If you have a thickish skin. If you just want to try – for Jesus and for a broken world – do it! You totally can. There are some amazing groups of clergy/laypeople out there that we can connect you with to help support your ministry and work. The world needs you. TikTok needs you. "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few!" You might very well be the laborer being prepped to be sent into the harvest.

For Everyone Else: Okay, here's the truth – the more important work is ours. Not everyone is "called" to be a TikTok content creator. However, the work done on TikTok can't stop there. I know for a fact that all of the Episcopal clergy on TikTok are constantly helping connect people to local parishes. This means that we, the local parishes, need to be ready when these folks show up! And it can't just be *The Episcopal Church Welcomes You* type of greeting. It's way more than that – it needs to be real, vulnerable, hospitality. A hospitality that takes seriously where folks are coming from and what they need. Because here is what I have learned from TikTok:

- People don't want a watered down Gospel—they want one that speaks to the real hurt, burden and struggle they are facing in their lives. This means: strong preaching, excellent spiritual formation, teaching the Anglican/prayerbook tradition, Bible study.
- People need to know *explicitly* that your church is open and *affirming*. The time for general statements is past, because so many TikTokers have been badly burned by churches who told them that their very identity was a one-way ticket to damnation. There can be no "well it's complicated," no "let's get coffee," no obfuscation at all. If asked "does your church accept LGBTQ+ people," the answer needs to be emphatically, "Yes. LGBTQ+ people are included in the full sacramental life of the church."
 - Make it easier for folks who are looking and make it obvious on your church website. It doesn't have to be tacky. Just say it.

- Don't force traumatized people to risk being retraumatized because we're trying to walk some broad line.
- Also, I know not every church is here yet—but start having the conversation. Because the kids know the way we talk around affirming LGBTQ+ people. And they have no time for it.

• Lastly, just remember that there's grace in the whole thing. It'll be weird and awkward. You won't know what to say or how to make sense. You might worry what other folks will think. But if you love people – like Jesus loves us, with all of our own mess obviously on display – we can't go wrong.

Look, I still don't entirely get this. But I do love Jesus. I trust the Holy Spirit. And I assume most people are probably laughing at me already. That's what it takes to be on TikTok.

That, and a love for people, who are like “sheep without a shepherd.”

Point them to the Shepherd or open up the gate.

The Rev. Ben Maddison is a South Jersey native and the Rector of Holy Trinity Episcopal Church in Wenonah, New Jersey. He believes deeply in the healing power of the Gospel, independent films and great meals at local restaurants. He is married to Ashley, a public interest attorney helping people in need avoid getting evicted, and is a foster parent (currently) to two amazing girls (3 -1/2 and 11 mo.) and a dog dad to two Great Danes – Rufio (12) and Blueberry (1.5). He is a contributor to Mbird.com, Earth & Altar, the Anglican Digest, and published in several magazines and devotionals. He also maintains a (slightly less) active TikTok presence at @holytrinitywenonah. To contact him, email info@holytrinitywenonah.org.

Resources:

- [The Ultimate 'Online' Church](#) by Sean Steele, Vestry Papers, May 2022
- [A Pandemic Church Plant Inspires Joy](#) by Beth Wyndham, Vestry Papers, November 2021
- [The Church Goes to Virtual Burning Man](#), by Brian Baker, Vestry Papers, March 2021
- [Annual Meetings Go Virtual](#), by Greg Syler, Vestry Papers, January 2021

How the Pandemic Cured my ASA Obsession

By Alissa Newton

This used to be my ritual every Sunday after worship: Finish chatting with congregants at coffee hour, walk back to the office, pick up the slip from the greeters with that service's attendance numbers and write that number in the red record book. I often had my own guess as to what the number would be. The little hit of adrenaline that came when it was larger than the week before always felt good. Of course the reverse was also true. On sparsely attended days, I hated writing down that number.

My name is Alissa, and I used to be obsessed with Average Sunday Attendance, or as we professional church nerds call it, ASA. I am a parish priest and congregational development consultant. Working with congregations is a passion of mine, one I live out through my work as Canon for Congregational Development in my diocese, through working with hundreds of congregations in my years of directing and training for the College for Congregational Development and through side gigs with individual congregations. “Numbers never tell the whole story,” I am fond of saying to my clients, CCD participants and my own Bishop’s Committee. “But they do tell part of it. The numbers aren’t nothing!” I am here to confess to you that before March of 2020, I lived like the numbers were everything.

Following the numbers

I have served as vicar of St. Columba’s in Kent, Washington for the past eight years. Prior to March 2020 I loved tracking my congregation’s attendance patterns so much that I kept my own spreadsheet. It included notes about how many kids were in attendance and how many newcomers had showed up. I scanned for patterns and compared Sundays year to year to discover trends. Over the years I felt as if my obsessive attention was rewarded. For the most part, before the pandemic, St. Columba’s numbers grew. Summers were always lighter, but every summer had higher attendance than the last.

There was the time it snowed on Christmas Eve and cut our numbers in half, but that was extraordinary. Anyway, I told myself, Christmas Eve isn’t a Sunday. About three years in, our ASA leveled off. I couldn’t sleep, sure that the dip in numbers meant all the energy, joy and vitality I cherished in my congregation was about to crash to an end. My mentor told me to relax. “Look,” she said, “sometimes a parish needs to spend a couple of months in their pajamas. It can’t be grow-grow-grow all the time.”

She was right. The numbers started going up again, my congregation kept being its lovely self, and I started sleeping through the night.

Then March 2020 hit. I remember the last week that people were in church. We had decided to get a jump on things, knowing that some of our folks were staying home. I had a parishioner streaming the service to Facebook, using my cell phone. Attendance was sparse – down by a third from where we’d been trending. Then the next week they were all gone.

We chose to livestream our Sunday service each week with a small and dedicated team. If you were to look at our record book you would see that for a long time I kept writing in numbers. Seven. Seven. Seven. I engaged in diocesan conversations with other clergy, trying to figure out what to track. Was it live views only? Clicks? Comments? That eyeball thing that comes up on Facebook when you are officially viewing?

None of it was the same. Sometime in the fall of 2020, we just stopped writing it down.

After the shock of preaching to a camera in a mostly empty room wore off, grief set in. It wasn’t all about the numbers. But I realized that the numbers had come to be the primary way in which I measured the vitality of my congregation. I knew that we were still a church, still vital, still connected and caring for each other, because the numbers went up. Parish ministry is charged with anxiety and

uncertainty in the best of times, and I have never had the experience of being a parish priest in the best of times. I came to rely on the numbers as an anchor in the choppy sea of pastoring during this weird and wild season in the mainline church. Without them I was adrift.

Lag and lead

In the world of congregational development there are lots of ways to measure development and growth. Some of these metrics are “lag” metrics and others are “lead” metrics.ⁱ Lag metrics are concrete measurements that show you something true about the past: How many people attended; what percentage of pledges were paid; how many years the HVAC system lasted before it busted and couldn’t be put back together again. Lead metrics are the things that you do to create the lag metrics, and they can be harder to figure out. The lead metric for a HVAC that lasts 35 years instead of 25 years might be professional maintenance, done regularly. The lead metrics on paid pledges might be a stewardship season that is firmly connected to spirituality, or instituting a culture of year round stewardship and financial transparency or simply introducing pledge cards for the first time.

When it comes to attendance the lead metrics seem to vary widely from congregation to congregation, depending on that particular faith community’s context, culture, history and countless other variables. You can generate basic questions like: *Is your building inviting? Do your congregants know how to talk about the transforming power of God they experience in church? Does your website accurately reflect the feel and ethos of your place?* The answers to these questions and others are the lead metrics that produce attendance, at least in part. But there are other, less controllable dynamics also at play – things like who is moving in and out of your neighborhood, or whether or not there is a global pandemic.

The problem with lag metrics is that they can’t predict the future and rarely prepare you for it. The problem with lead metrics, at least for me, was that they didn’t feel concrete, at least until the pandemic took my favorite lag metric away.

The most important metric

As a bit of fun during the 2021 Epiphany season, St. Columba’s parishioners decided to “flamingo” each other. We bought four flocks of plastic pink flamingoes and stuck them in four different congregant’s lawns, with instructions to take pictures and then go secretly flamingo another parishioner. Unsuspecting members of our community would awaken or come home to bright pink birds in the midst of the dark grey Pacific Northwest winter. Folks loved it. Some created a flamingo box for apartment dwellers who didn’t have a lawn. Elders did it and took selfies, families with kids did it and posted videos. Many pets were roped in to pose for pictures. My congregation loved this way of having fun and staying connected while still safely distanced. It was a lead metric – an opportunity for fun and connection that was seized upon by the whole community.

I watched the selfies and sneak attack flamingo videos pour in and realized I’d been wrong about which metric mattered most. It wasn’t how many people watched online worship, or how many returned in person once that was possible again. It was never the number that got written down in the book. The most important metric was how my people loved each other.

Before the pandemic that love was most visible when we were together, a thing that happened most often on Sunday mornings. During the pandemic we found other ways to connect and love on each other – buddy groups that checked in regularly, zoom baby showers, younger parishioners taking over the food bank when it wasn't safe for retirees to do it, drive up radio church in the parking lot on Christmas Eve. And the flamingos, of course. These lead metrics, which had been so difficult for me to grasp and see before the pandemic were now all we had. It was more than enough.

We've been back to worshipping inside on Sunday mornings for almost a year now. I did start writing numbers in the book again. The numbers aren't nothing, but I am much more deeply aware that those numbers are a representation of the deep connection, love and hope that is birthed and renewed in my congregation. They are not the only representation, however. And it is the love, not the number, that needs to be nurtured.

The pandemic took so many things from me as a pastor and priest. I could list them, but if you're reading this, you are a congregational leader and you know. You took those hits, too. But here is the gift this awful time of loneliness and distance has given me: I can see past the numbers now. I'm free to see the people and the love: The Body of Christ in action.

¹ For a deeper discussion of this metric dynamic, see the book "Faithful Metrics" by Peggy Brooks.

The Reverend Canon Alissa Newton is the Vicar of St. Columba's Episcopal Church in Kent, Washington, Canon for Congregational Development in the Diocese of Olympia, and the co-author of Vital Christian Community: Twelve Characteristics of Healthy Congregations, set to be released by Church Publishing this fall.

Resources:

- [Beyond Average Sunday Attendance \(ASA\)](#), by Tim Schenck, an ECF Vital Practices blog, October 18, 2013
- [Beyond ASA](#), by Alan Bentrup, an ECF Vital Practices blog, February 26, 2019
- [Looking to the Future: Possible Trends that May Affect the Church](#), by Robert B. Townes, IV, an ECF Vital Practices blog, March 15, 2022
- [Hybrid Church - A Way Forward for Church Leaders](#), by Tim Schenck, Vestry Papers, January 2022

Church By The Pond

By Nancy Jacobs

In June 2011, Church By The Pond began its ministry to the people of Hartford, Connecticut, in Bushnell Park. An outgrowth of Christ Cathedral's Church Street Eats, a cooperative program that provides food and clothing to those in need, this congregation has gathered in the park to pray through heat, rain, snow and even a world-wide pandemic. Many in our congregation are uncomfortable with formal church settings. Some need a smaller community gathered in prayer. Quite a few of our lay leaders and steadiest congregants would be overwhelmed in a traditional church setting.

At Church By The Pond they experience the freedom to pray, to participate, to join others and hear God's word on their own terms. Over the years we have been blessed to be led by nearly 40 pastors, priests and bishops from churches nearby and from as far away as Aberdeen and Orkney, Scotland! Our congregants appreciate the respect and loving kindness they receive from both our infrequent and frequent clergy. One day a priest may welcome the congregation with "Oh Come All Ye Faithful," while another shares the Lord's Prayer in Spanish. The gospel reflections relate to those struggling in Hartford in this time.

Our congregants come from a wide array of situations. Some are unhoused, some have experienced homelessness, some have struggled with interpersonal relationships, some with domestic abuse and with substance abuse. We have many who spend too much time alone and cherish being part of a church community. Some of us are simply happy to participate in an extra day of prayer in a lovely park setting.

Throughout the years, we have heard personal stories of growth, forgiveness and struggle. We have been blessed many times with the good news that one of our unhoused congregants has found housing. It is a gift to know that they will not spend another night in danger and in the cold or heat. We invite them to return to us, as they are our congregation wherever they reside. Most often, if their housing is a bus ride away, they do return. We have also celebrated the unemployed who have found work. We have welcomed those released from prison. We have helped some connect with agencies that will better serve their needs. Once people are housed, we connect them with food pantries in their town or city.

Our congregants join together in good times and bad. We have celebrated their milestones in sobriety, and we have attended memorial services and shared prayers for those we have lost. Several stay in the local loop and offer information about special dinners, free bicycle events, clothing giveaways, and other events that serve our community.

When a young woman, struggling early in her pregnancy and harassed by her abusive ex-husband joined us, we prayed with her and helped her make the decision to leave Connecticut. She returned home, where she was welcomed by her mother. Although we miss her, we continue to pray for her and her daughter. On another occasion, a congregant had an urgent request for a train to take him to an approved placement in a rehab facility. The cathedral's dean, Miguelina Howell, provided the train ticket, and he is on the road toward healthy living.

And yet, in the midst of such hardships, we have heard from those who are struggling to pray – not for themselves, but for victims of hurricanes, of gun violence, of war. We have given thanks for improved health, for jobs, for new homes, for friends and families, for reconciliation with loved ones, and we have prayed for the families of those we have lost.

I began praying steadily and serving as a lay leader at Church By The Pond in 2014. Drawn in by a sense of peace in the midst of chaos in the busy park, by the fellowship amongst the congregants and the ministry of priests from throughout the state, I quickly saw that this community was special. I have always felt blessed to serve in this ministry.

That blessing was multiplied as COVID altered our way of life and our way of sharing prayer. With serious precautions we were able to safely gather with God's people in beautiful Bushnell Park. As time went on, we transitioned from a brief prayer before lunch to a lengthier service of prayer without Holy

Communion. Throughout the pandemic we prayed for our frontline workers, particularly in the health care fields.

As 2021 began, we celebrated the improvements in our way of life and shared our vaccine status. We were able to connect or schedule members of our group to vaccine clinics in Hartford and frequently celebrated those who had received the vaccine. Efforts throughout our state have helped lead to our full celebration of Holy Eucharist at this point in time. At a time when most church doors remained closed, Church By The Pond's lack of doors has proved to be a true blessing.

***Nancy Jacobs** is a life-long Episcopalian and member of Christ Church Cathedral in Hartford, Connecticut, where she was baptized and participated in Sunday school and youth groups. After completing college, she taught junior high school and high school social studies in New Hampshire for 12 years, returning to Connecticut to work alongside her parents in a family-owned retail and contracting paint business. When the business closed in 2007, she retired and has since served as a volunteer at Christ Church Cathedral, Hands On Hartford, The Bushnell Center for Performing Arts, Literacy Volunteers of Greater Hartford and Trinity Academy, Hartford. During the pandemic she has also supported nonpartisan voting rights and various political candidates. She enjoys reading, tennis and the theater, as well as traveling with friends, which she hopes to resume as soon as possible.*

Resources:

- [Neighbor to Neighbor](#), by Margaret Tjimos Goldberg, Bobbi Eggers and Sue Bodson, Vestry Papers, March 2020
- [What could being church look like, post COVID-19?](#), by Chantal McKinney, Vestry Papers, March 2020
- [Jesus Was Right There, in the Bounce House](#), by Bob Leopold, ECF Vital Practices blog, October 3, 2013
- [Surfing and Spirituality](#), by Scott Claassen, Vestry Papers, March 2020

Church by the Pond – Iglesia Junto a la Laguna

Por Nancy Jacobs

En junio de 2011, Church By The Pond comenzó su ministerio para la gente de Hartford, Connecticut, en Bushnell Park. Esta feligresía, que es una consecuencia de Church Street Eats de la Catedral de Cristo, un programa cooperativo que proporciona alimentos y ropa a los necesitados, se ha reunido en el parque para rezar independientemente del calor, la lluvia, la nieve e incluso una pandemia mundial. Muchos en nuestra feligresía se sienten incómodos con los entornos eclesiásticos formales. Algunos necesitan una comunidad más pequeña reunida en oración. Muchos de nuestros líderes laicos y feligreses más estables se sentirían abrumados en un entorno eclesiástico tradicional.

En Church By The Pond experimentan la libertad de rezar, de participar, de unirse a otros y de oír la palabra de Dios en sus propios términos. A lo largo de los años hemos tenido la bendición de ser

dirigidos por casi 40 pastores, sacerdotes y obispos de iglesias cercanas y de lugares tan lejanos como Aberdeen y Orkney, Escocia. Nuestros feligreses aprecian el respeto y la amabilidad que reciben tanto de nuestro clero infrecuente como del frecuente. Un día un sacerdote puede dar la bienvenida a la feligresía con "Oh Come All Ye Faithful (Oh, venid todos los fieles)", mientras que otro comparte el Padrenuestro en español. Las reflexiones del Evangelio se refieren a los que luchan en Hartford en estos tiempos.

Nuestros feligreses proceden de una gran variedad de situaciones. Algunos están sin techo, otros han experimentado la falta de hogar, otros han luchado con relaciones interpersonales, otros con el maltrato intrafamiliar y con el abuso de sustancias. Tenemos muchos que pasan demasiado tiempo solos y aprecian formar parte de una comunidad eclesial. Algunos simplemente se alegran de participar en un día más de oración en medio de un parque hermoso.

A lo largo de los años, hemos oído historias personales de crecimiento, perdón y lucha. Hemos sido bendecidos muchas veces con la buena nueva de que uno de nuestros feligreses sin vivienda encontró una. Es un don saber que no pasarán otra noche en peligro y con frío o calor. Les invitamos a que vuelvan con nosotros, ya que son nuestra feligresía dondequiera que residan. La mayoría de las veces, si su vivienda está a un viaje en autobús, regresan. También hemos celebrado a los desempleados que encontraron trabajo. Acogimos a los que salieron de la cárcel. Ayudamos a algunos a ponerse en contacto con las agencias que mejor atenderán sus necesidades. Una vez que las personas están alojadas, las ponemos en contacto con las despensas de alimentos de su pueblo o ciudad.

Nuestros feligreses se unen en los buenos y en los malos momentos. Hemos celebrado sus hitos de sobriedad y asistido a servicios funerarios, y hemos compartido oraciones por aquellos que hemos perdido. Varios permanecen en el circuito local y ofrecen información sobre cenas especiales, eventos de bicicletas gratuitas, regalos de ropa y otros eventos que sirven a nuestra comunidad.

Cuando una mujer joven, con problemas al principio de su embarazo y acosada por su ex marido que la maltrataba se unió a nosotros, rezamos con ella y la ayudamos a tomar la decisión de irse de Connecticut. Regresó a su casa, donde fue acogida por su madre. Aunque la echamos de menos, seguimos rezando por ella y por su hija. En otra ocasión, un feligrés tenía una petición urgente de un tren que lo llevara a un centro de rehabilitación aprobado. La decana de la catedral, Miguelina Howell, le proporcionó el billete de tren, y ya está en el camino hacia una vida sana.

Y sin embargo, en medio de tales dificultades, hemos oído a quienes se esfuerzan por rezar, no por ellos mismos, sino por las víctimas de los huracanes, de la violencia armada, de la guerra. Hemos dado gracias por la mejora de la salud, por los puestos de trabajo, por los nuevos hogares, por los amigos y las familias, por la reconciliación con los seres queridos, y hemos rezado por las familias de los que hemos perdido.

Empecé a rezar de forma constante y a servir como líder laica en Church By The Pond en 2014. Atraída por una sensación de paz en medio del caos del parque muy concurrido, por el compañerismo entre los feligreses y por el ministerio de los sacerdotes de todo el estado, rápidamente vi que esta comunidad era especial. Siempre me he sentido bendecida por servir en este ministerio.

Esa bendición se multiplicó cuando la COVID alteró nuestra forma de vida y nuestra manera de compartir la oración. Con serias precauciones pudimos reunirnos de forma segura con el pueblo de Dios en el hermoso parque Bushnell. Con el paso del tiempo, pasamos de una breve oración antes de la comida a un servicio más largo de oración sin la Sagrada Comunión. A lo largo de la pandemia, rezamos por nuestros trabajadores de primera línea, especialmente en el ámbito de la atención sanitaria.

Al comenzar el año 2021, celebramos las mejoras en nuestro modo de vida y compartimos nuestro estado de vacunación. Pudimos conectar o programar a los miembros de nuestro grupo a las clínicas de vacunación en Hartford y celebramos con frecuencia a los que habían recibido la vacuna. Los esfuerzos realizados en todo nuestro estado han contribuido a que celebremos plenamente la Santa Eucaristía en este momento. En una época en la que la mayoría de las puertas de las iglesias permanecían cerradas, la falta de puertas de Church By The Pond demostró ser una verdadera bendición.

***Nancy Jacobs** ha sido episcopal de toda su vida y miembro de la Catedral de la Iglesia de Cristo en Hartford, Connecticut, donde fue bautizada y participó en la escuela dominical y en los grupos de jóvenes. Después de terminar la universidad, fue profesora de estudios sociales de secundaria en New Hampshire durante 12 años y regresó a Connecticut para trabajar junto a sus padres en un negocio familiar de venta de pinturas al por menor y de contratación. Cuando el negocio cerró en 2007, se jubiló y desde entonces ha trabajado como voluntaria en la Catedral de la Iglesia de Cristo, en Hands On Hartford, en el Centro Bushnell de Artes Dramáticas, en los Voluntarios de Alfabetización del Gran Hartford y en la Academia Trinity de Hartford. Durante la pandemia también apoyó el derecho al voto no partidista y a varios candidatos políticos. Disfrutó de la lectura, el tenis y el teatro, así como de los viajes con amigos, que espera retomar lo antes posible.*

Recursos:

- [El amor incondicional de Dios](#), por Alex Montes-Vela, Vestry Papers, julio de 2015
- [En la Calle con el Gran Jesús](#), por Anna Olson, un blog de ECF Vital Practices, 1 octubre 2013
- [Oración y acción en una pandemia](#), por Yesenia (Jessie) Alejandro, Vestry Papers, septiembre de 2020

Church Without Walls

By Janet Waggoner

“Church without walls” isn’t a theoretical discussion in our diocese. It’s our reality.

In my mind, the notion of “church without walls” has two meanings. The first, and most important, is that of a church where all are welcome, where there is no impediment to the full participation of any/all people. The second meaning is a church that is not hemmed in by any preconceived notions about what church “is” or what church “should be.”

Over the past 12 years, only three of the congregations of the Episcopal Church in North Texas (formerly the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth) have continuously had possession of and worshipped in a church building. All the other congregations of our diocese have been dispossessed of land, buildings and funds. And while these congregations' worship spaces might have changed, they missed not a beat in their outreach and mission work.

Here's what happened. In November 2008, the then bishop and many diocesan leaders left the Episcopal Church but claimed Episcopal Church property – more than \$100 million worth of property. In early 2009, a lawsuit was filed to regain Episcopal Church property, litigation that stretched out for 12 long years.

At that time, Episcopalians from 14 congregations were forced out of their church homes and had to find new places to worship. Over time, all found new places to worship – some rented space, others bought or built a building.

As the Episcopal remnant regathered itself, elected a bishop and began rebuilding the diocese, a collective decision soon emerged to focus on God's love and welcome for all. A determination to thrive, not just survive, and to focus on what we had to give to others, rather than dwell on what we had lost, was given birth by increasingly confident lay leaders and then nurtured by clergy and a succession of provisional bishops.

In February 2021, the Supreme Court of the United States declined to hear our appeal, which meant the decision of the Texas Supreme Court became final. The resources of the diocese and the congregations were awarded to the deposed Episcopal bishop and his followers in the Anglican Church of North America.

This meant six more of our congregations were newly dispossessed of their buildings, funds and possessions.

These new losses have been exceedingly difficult. But what faithful Episcopalians learned in 2008 and relearned in 2021 is saving us once again – the best way to deal with such enormous losses is to turn toward love and away from anger and loss, to turn toward our neighbors, our communities and focus on what we have, not the material things we have lost.

Make no mistake, buildings can be useful. (When the Texas sun brings the temperature to 95 degrees before 10:00 am Sunday worship, it's helpful to have air conditioning, too!) And I understand the passionate connection many of us have to our church buildings. Friends and family members – sometimes multiple generations of family members – have been baptized, confirmed, married and buried, surrounded by stone and wood and stained glass. In our experience of these sacraments, time and place become interwoven with eternity. Every time we set foot in the place where transformation happened, we feel transformed again. Our senses come alive, responding to memory and anticipating possibility.

The buildings which have housed our congregations did not come with a sense of the sacred built in. What sanctifies any space is regular encounter with the presence and power of our loving, liberating, life-giving God.

Being forced out of their buildings has given congregations the opportunity to discern what kind of buildings they need *now* for the ministries to which they are currently called. Some congregations have built or purchased a church building that looks quite traditional and is used primarily for worship. Other congregations are worshipping in a store-front, college classroom or school chapel. Still other congregations are nesting in with a congregation of another denomination, using their facilities on a temporary or more permanent basis. And in every case, the worship itself – no matter what building it takes place in – forms and feeds the love out of which their successful and varied outreach ministries grow.

Our congregations have continued the mission and ministries to which they are called without missing a beat. The 4Saints Episcopal Food Pantry, a joint ministry of five of our congregations, continued serving clients in the neighborhood without missing a day of service. All Saints', Fort Worth, shifted the site of their Sunday worship services to a local Episcopal school without missing a Sunday. St. Christopher, Fort Worth, ramped up their ongoing Laundry Love ministry, and St. Mary's, Hillsboro, did the same with their food ministry to local schools.

New people continue to find us, drawn by the consistent message of unconditional love – a very countercultural message in this part of the world, dominated by messages of judgment and exclusion.

This, then, is what has allowed the congregations and ministries of the Episcopal Church in North Texas to thrive in spite of the loss of beloved buildings – an understanding that the church is primarily constructed of relationships, not bricks and mortar, that *the church is the people*.

When the Spirit of God is at work among us and God's people are present, we have everything we need: we *are* the Church.

The Rev. Dr. Janet Waggoner is Canon to the Ordinary in the Episcopal Church in North Texas. She served on the Task Force for Church Planting and Congregational Redevelopment from 2015-2018 and as its Chair from 2018-2021. She enjoys quilting, hiking, writing and photography; she is the mother of two teenagers.

Resources:

- [The Art of Organizing](#), by Francisco Garcia, Vestry Papers, March 2020
- [The Church Goes to Virtual Burning Man](#), by Brian Baker, Vestry Papers, March 2021
- [A New Gathering for Asian Pacific American Spirituality](#), by Yein Kim, Vestry Papers, March 2021
- [Bible & Brew](#), by Landon Moore, Vestry Papers, March 2021

The Ultimate 'Online' Church

By Sean Steele

At the end of February, a group of 23 people, lay and ordained, gathered together for what was perhaps the first ever Anglican liturgy inside the Metaverse. A collaboration between [TryTank](#) and [St. Isidore Episcopal Church](#) in Spring, Texas, this missional community, named Web3 Abbey, met for five consecutive Mondays. Its carefully curated online liturgy included music, prayer, scripture reading and discussion, a confession and benediction.

The community then gathered to learn, share stories and refine the communal experience. In the vlog below, the Rev. Sean Steele takes us on a guided tour of Web3 Abbey's online worship experience and shares insight into the benefits and the challenges of building a community in a virtual world.

Web3 Abbey begins gathering again on a regular basis starting this month. If you are interested in learning more or participating in Web3 Abbey, please send an email to web3abbey@gmail.com.

[Watch the vlog here.](#)

***The Rev. Sean Steele** is Vicar and founding Church Planter of St. Isidore Episcopal, a 5-year-old community in Spring, Texas. Sean is always on the lookout for people left out by how we traditionally gather as Church. He received a BBA-Finance from the University of Texas (2001), an MA in Theology from Creighton University (2005), an MDiv from The Seminary of the Southwest (2012), and is a fully trained Mediator (2007), Licensed Daring Way Facilitator (2014) and ICF Coach (2018). Sean and his wife Rebecca have been together for almost 20 years, and they have three children – Margo, Sebastian, and Eleanor – and a Labradoodle named Indiana Jones. Sean loves all things related to athletics, particularly basketball, and is an avid Longhorn fan.*

Resources:

- [The Church Goes to Virtual Burning Man](#), by Brian Baker, Vestry Papers, March 2021
- [Annual Meetings Go Virtual](#), by Greg Syler, Vestry Papers, January 2021
- [Hybrid Church - A Way Forward for Church Leaders](#), by Tim Schenck, Vestry Papers, January 2022
- [Pandemic Learnings](#), by Audra Abt, Vestry Papers, May 2021