

What do you hope the Episcopal Church will look like in 2050? Vestry Papers January/February 2023

Rock the Future for Jesus

By Stephanie Spellers

The Rev. Canon Stephanie Spellers, one of the Episcopal Church's leading thinkers and consultants for 21st century ministry and mission, admits that she thinks and dreams about the Church in 2050 all the time – the Church in 2030 and today, too. [In this video](#), she shares her expansive, lively and hopeful vision for the Church's future, one that is all about embracing the Incarnation at the heart of our theology and opening our eyes and hearts to what God is doing. Stephanie sees a future church that is colorful and diverse, one that looks like the communities in which we live and move and have our being. And she is convinced that in this time, so filled with challenge and change and surprises, God is beckoning us, and that the Episcopal Church in 2050, or even sooner, will be "a church that is humble and curious and full of love – love for our neighbors, love for God and love for ourselves."

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Resources:

- [Decolonizing Church Music](#) by Yuri Rodriguez, Vestry Papers, July 2021
- [Building a Diverse Vestry](#) by Anna Olson, Vestry Papers, January 2019
- [A Young Leader's Mission](#) by Montserrat Calvo Corella, Vestry Papers, November 2015
- [Whatever you do now will prepare you for what you can do in the future](#) by Audra Abt, an ECF Vital Practices blog, July 20, 2020

The Future Begins Today

By Catherine Caimano

I hope to see a lot from the church in 2050. By then, I really believe we will have broken out of our mid-20th century institutional mindset, embraced the way people engage their spiritual lives today and developed new models for innovative and sustainable religious practices and communities.

Ever since I began [Free Range Priest](#) in 2016, I have been inspired by the trailblazers finding new ways to bring God's love to more people. Recently, I've joined in partnership with Dr. Courtney Cowart to create [Hearts on Fire](#), an online platform of spiritual practices for ministry innovators.

Here's what I see now, and what I hope to see in the church of 2050.

The institutional structure will be a fraction of what it is today

There's no doubt in my mind. What is dying in the church today is its structure. We can't keep propping up this system of church that consists mainly of board meetings, committees, programs, paid staff and 'volunteers' – and we don't want to. And that is not to mention centralized denominational structures that are administration-heavy and spend way too much time bogged down in procedural activities (conventions and bylaws and required reports and gatherings).

This level of institutional expectation is too much to manage for most small churches (and most churches are small these days). We are already shaking it off and starting to focus more on giving pastoral and theological oversight in nimbler, more creative ways that let us focus more on spiritual practices and discipleship.

I look forward to this trend continuing and along with it the tearing down of denominational and congregational silos. Both can help us find ways to engage between and among different communities, including belonging to multiple congregations simultaneously as the norm for most people.

Spiritual practice will be more personal and more global

Something else that is already true is that people are seeking individualized spiritual experiences more than a set of religious tenets. They want to know how the story of God in the world relates to their own lives and what it means for their own challenges and celebrations. They are seeking spiritual teachers, spiritual engagement and spiritual partnership, and they are much less inclined to walk through the doors of a church. I already see those of us in ministry becoming more like 'faith practitioners', guiding those who seek a deeper knowledge of and relationship with God. A lot of this work happens online, and much of it is one on one.

At the same time, being Christian is all about community. And we're finding community in new ways. Another way that technology continues to change the church is by allowing us to form true communities of worship and prayer that span great distances. From geography to theology to demographic and political distance, we can now be in community with just about anyone, anywhere.

So we're both deeply personal and individual in our experience of church, and we're connected to others from a wider array of backgrounds than ever. I definitely see this trend continuing and continuing to change the church of the future.

Entrepreneurial ministry will find a place in our communities

The future of church depends on getting honest and real about the future of sustainability – and that includes paying ministers in new ways. Stewardship, fundraising and nonprofit giving are not embraced by younger generations like they have been in the past, a fact that is evident in today's church.

Along with that, older buildings need upkeep, and we no longer have enough people in our pews to sustain those buildings through traditional means of giving. Most congregations cannot afford full-time salary and benefits for clergy. The time has come to re-think money and ministry.

Already, we are seeing more entrepreneurial ministry – service-based spiritual care, education and faith practices like forgiveness, peaceful conversation and activism. Clergy and other ministers are working under task-based contracts with congregations rather than part-time service that seems more like full-time work with part-time pay. We're finding ways to serve in multiple places and ways and still be in ministry, instead of taking the 'bi-vocational' route, which often means needing a secular job to make ends meet.

I think we'll continue to see these trends, and we'll see ministries of all kinds become thriving businesses that help connect others to the love of God in new and more sustainable ways. Like at the gym, we may pay subscriptions to join a facility (community), online or in person, where we spiritually 'work out', taking classes, making appointments with specialists and engaging with each other.

Worship and prayer will be free and open to all. New resources will be needed to sustain the practices and study of the faith.

I hope to see many of these things in the church of 2050, because I see so many of them today. We're in the resurrection business after all, and this is just the beginning of the church being born again in the digital age. This is giving me hope as I meet more ministry innovators and hear the stories of those already engaged in the future of church.

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Cathie lives near Charlotte, North Carolina, with her husband and adorable great Dane. She gets all her best ideas while running.

Resources:

- [Get there faster? \(or back to a slow decline?\)](#) by Greg Syler, an ECF Vital Practices blog, March 9, 2021
- [Church By The Pond](#) by Nancy Jacobs, Vestry Papers, May 2022
- [Our Spiritual Evolution](#) by Matthew Cobb, Vestry Papers, November 2020
- [Bi-Vocational?](#) by Lisa G. Fischbeck, an ECF Vital Practices blog, July 19, 2018

Discipleship or Bust

By Scott Gunn

When asked to speculate about what the church will look like in 2050, the prudent answer is, "Only God knows." But that's no fun.

Some folks have looked at recent trends in church attendance and opined that the church will disappear in a few decades. But I don't think the church in 2050 will be gone. Why? Because the Bible tells us so. Jesus commissioned Peter to lead the church, and he said, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."

This is good news. We don't have to worry about the destruction of the church, because Jesus says the church will endure. Isn't that a relief? We don't have to save the church, because Jesus is our savior.

Change is coming

But let's be clear. The church may not look much like the church as we know it now. In prosperous western nations, establishment churches will probably continue to lose prestige. Massive national church institutions may recede in favor of a renewed focus on local congregations.

I'm not suggesting we won't have denominations in 2050, but we might not have denominational office buildings.

While the Episcopal Church is now a fraction of its size in the 1970s, our spending on and commitment to governance has blossomed in recent decades. Do we need more committees than we had when we were double our current size? Perhaps. But maybe there are more effective ways of carrying out work at the churchwide level. There are probably new ways to ensure that our church is governed and led by lay people, bishops, priests and deacons without expensive gatherings and the proliferation of committees.

So, to cut to the chase, what will churches look like in 2050?

A Church that is transforming lives by making disciples

I imagine that among local congregations, there will be large, well-resourced congregations that are providing support to smaller churches. And there will be smaller churches, perhaps meeting in homes or shared spaces rather than in buildings which are used fully only a couple of hours a week.

The congregations that survive until 2050 will be places where discipleship is the focus of congregational life. There are plenty of outlets now for community connection, for social justice work and for making appearances. But the church is the place where the sacraments are administered, where the word is proclaimed, where people are steeped in prayer and where we focus on meeting Jesus Christ.

Through the Christendom era of the 1950s, people joined churches for good appearances, to make friends and to do good works. But with the collapse of Christendom, there's no social capital or prestige in joining a church. If I want to build houses or feed people, there are nonprofit organizations that do that really well with high efficiency. So I might not join a church for that reason. Instead, I probably join a church because I want to encounter Jesus Christ in word and sacrament, and I want to live a transformed life.

To be clear, I'm not for a second suggesting that social justice work is inappropriate for churches! I hope every Christian is involved in transforming our world one life at a time. I hope every church encourages its members to serve the poor, the outcast, the marginalized and the lost. It's just that our identity, especially if you fast forward 25 years, must be first as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Increasing diversity among members and all aspects of congregational life

In addition to the identity of churches, I think the demographics will necessarily change. For that, I am grateful.

At present, mainline churches in the affluent west are primarily filled with aging white people. There's nothing wrong with aging white people! But if we were succeeding at making disciples, our congregations' demographics would match that of our communities.

The church will become more diverse in coming decades. We'll see multiple generations meeting Jesus together. We'll see people of all races and gender identities. We'll see rich and poor together. Congregations which cannot adapt to that reality will not survive.

In 2050, the church will need to spend more time shaping our lives and our ministries outside the church. We'll need to equip people for study and prayer and service at home. We'll need to teach the reality that everyone has a vocation, not just clergy. God calls some to be pastors, some to be teachers, some to be doctors, some to be food service workers, some to be drivers, some to be mechanics, and on and on.

Right now, the church is built on the Christendom-era worldview that allows many of us subsume the radical commitment to following Jesus under the convenience of a comfortable consumer lifestyle. In the 2050 church, we'll need to teach that we are followers of Jesus every moment of every day. Every dollar that we spend is a reflection of our faith. Every hour of our day is a reflection of our faith. Every moment is an opportunity to glorify God.

Just as I think congregations will be sorted into two kinds – large, well-resourced alongside much smaller communities – I think our worship services will move toward one end or another. On one side, we'll see transcendent liturgy rooted in ancient tradition. On the other, we'll see less formal, immanent gatherings, also expressing the church's traditions. Think of High Mass in a Gothic cathedral versus a loaf of bread broken in someone's living room. Both liturgies are amazing in their own ways, and the church of 2050 will realize this and prioritize both.

Christ's body in 2050

Jesus told us we cannot serve two masters. The church cannot be both the body of Christ and the embodiment of consumerism. The church, now and in 2050, is called to focus its gaze solely on God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

It might be helpful to remember two scriptures. The church and its work are neatly described in two important places. One key perspective on the church can be found in Hebrews 10:23-25.

“Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

That's it. The church exists so that we can provoke one another to love and good deeds. Provoking one another is very different from the nice-fest that we sometimes see in today's church. The 2050 church that survives will have recovered the provocation and encouragement that's envisioned in Hebrews.

Another place we read about the church has more to do with its purpose. Sometimes we might wonder about the church's mission. It seems to me that Jesus was pretty clear about that. In Matthew 28:19-20, we read Jesus' instruction,

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Our task is to make disciples of everyone. We can't make disciples of everyone if we exclude or discriminate. We can't make disciples of everyone if we don't proclaim the good news of God in Jesus Christ. We can't make disciples of everyone if we are focused on our comfort over God's transforming grace and mercy.

The church that survives through to 2050 will have re-focused on disciple-making. For that reason, I expect the 2050 church to be vibrant and growing. And I am heartened to remember that Jesus has promised to be with us always — now, in 2050 and forever.

Scott Gunn is an Episcopal priest, photographer, speaker and author. He serves as executive director of Forward Movement, a ministry of the Episcopal Church based in Cincinnati, Ohio. Before that he was a parish priest in Rhode Island. Prior to ordination, he worked in the tech industry at Education Development Center, The Atlantic Monthly, Fast Company, the MIT Media Lab and a short-lived dot-com. He's married to Sherilyn Pearce, and they share their home with a yellow lab named George. Scott is in regular demand as a speaker, retreat leader and preacher. His hobbies include photography, blogging and travel.

Resources:

- [Surfing and Spirituality](#) by Scott Claassen, Vestry Papers, March 2020
- [Not to Judge the World, but to Save It](#) by Greg Syler, an ECF Vital Practices blog, February 25, 2020
- [The Work of God](#) by Annette Buchanan, an ECF Vital Practices blog, February 18, 2020
- [Encountering Others](#) by Linda Buskirk, an ECF Vital Practices blog, April 24, 2019

Does the Future Have a Church?

By Ken Howard

Prediction is very difficult, especially if it's about the future! – Niels Bohr, Nobel laureate in Physics

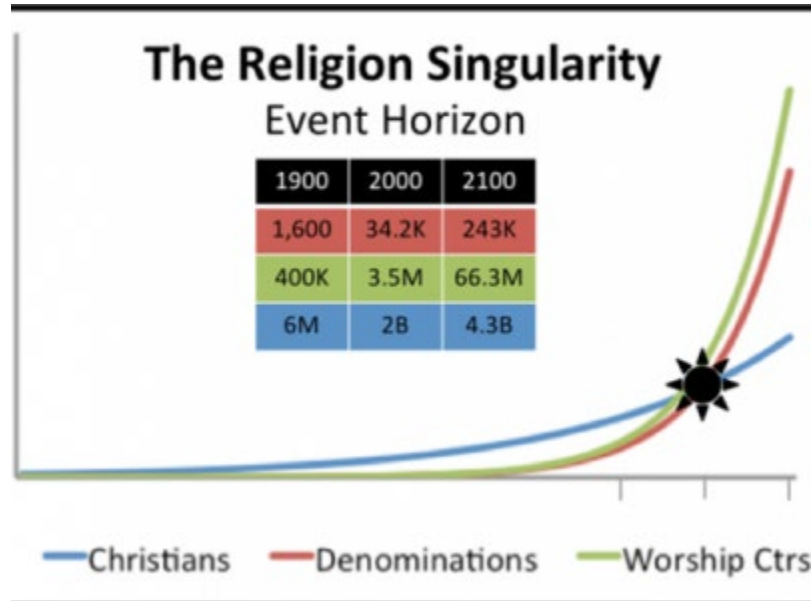
I've often said that asking, “Does the Church have a future?” is the wrong question and that the real question is, “Does the future have a Church? And if it does, in what form?”

Six years ago, I published a research paper entitled [“The Religion Singularity: A Demographic Crisis Destabilizing and Transforming Institutional Christianity”](#) in *The International Journal of Religion and*

Spirituality in Society. But I still prefer my working title, “Singularity: The Death of Religion and the Resurrection of Faith.”

If the term “Singularity” sounds kind of like SciFi or astrophysics to you, good! It’s supposed to. Because institutional Christianity is entering a kind of wormhole that will deliver us into a context so different that it might as well be an entirely new universe. And what we do now to prepare our congregations and judicatories will determine whether they will survive and thrive or be consigned to oblivion.

What is God doing?



The crux of the Religion Singularity is this: Christianity has become better at division than multiplication – we are producing new churches and denominations at an exponentially faster rate than new Christians. My 2017 projections indicated that by the end of this century there would be only 17,000 Christians per denomination and 67 Christians per worship center. And that’s *per not in*, which means that if you factor out the religiously unaffiliated (now running at 60 percent nationally), the average membership of those institutions could be significantly less than half that, which means that all of our ecclesiastical institutions – from congregations to judicatories to denominations – will have become unsustainable in their current forms.

And that was before Covid accelerated those trends, crushing our familiar paradigms about what Church was supposed to be. This year, for the first time in the history of the U.S., fewer than half the population “attends Church” in physical or virtual form.

I’ve always found it a great spiritual irony that Christianity has become so attached to and identified with the physical gathering places where we meet, when its original Greek name, *ekklesia*, literally means “called out.” Which brings us face-to-face with some challenging questions about what God is calling us out of. Do we love our neighbors enough to allow God to call us out of our beloved buildings, familiar liturgical traditions and self-assured theologies to meet them on their turf and not ours? Are we willing to leave behind what is dying to seek out and partake in what God is bringing to life?

Four essential conditions that can help our Church survive and thrive in the future

I do believe that the future will have a Church, but neither I nor anyone else has any idea what that Church will look like. Only that it will be changed for good, literally and figuratively. And while we cannot predict with any certainty what form the future church will take, I think that there are four conditions that will be essential for congregations who want to survive and thrive in the new context of the Post-Singularity era.

- **A clear, transcendent and shared vision:** We need to dig beneath *what* we do and *how* we do it to discover *why* we exist. The unique charism and purpose that God planted in us and is calling out of us and is understood and shared by all in our congregation. I often call this finding our congregation's "Minimum Viable Belief" because it usually requires shedding everything non-essential.
- **A willingness to experiment in service of the vision:** I like to call this Rapid Iterative Prototyping because it spells R.I.P. and because it involves using our God-given imaginations, testing lots of ideas, finding out which of them don't work, letting them die and moving on – *and all without fearing failure.*
- **A willingness to have our eyes opened to our blind spots:** We have to find ways to see what we habitually block out about ourselves as congregations and the communities we hope to engage. The thing about blind spots and implicit biases is that we have no idea what they are, we cannot find them on our own and we must have help to see them.
- **An understanding that unity does not require uniformity:** This last one is much like the first. Unity based on uniformity of doctrine or practice defines a community by who's in and who's out and always leads to division. But unity based on Christ's love for us in all our diversity and imperfections defines a community by the One who lies at the center and makes us family.

Where does this leave the Episcopal Church in 2050?

I believe that the Episcopal Church is better suited than many to implement the four above conditions. Especially the fourth, as it is deeply rooted in in our denominational DNA since the time of Richard Hooker, one of the founders of our Church. He wrote that doctrine and praxis are not a sufficient basis for Christian community, but rather the logical consequents to understanding that the core of Christian community is Jesus Christ and his love for us.

The Rev. Ken Howard is the founder and executive director of [The FaithX Project](#). Its primary focus is helping congregations and the judicatories that support them survive and thrive in challenging times through data-grounded discernment. For more information, visit our website at www.faithx.net or email us at info@faithx.net.

Resources:

- [Is the Church Dying? Or Not? \(and the answer is...\)](#) by Ken Howard, an ECF Vital Practices blog, June 11, 2014
- [Hybrid Church - A Way Forward for Church Leaders](#) by Tim Schenck, an ECF Vital Practices tool
- [God is My Helper](#) by Catherine Thompson, an ECF Vital Practices blog, June 24, 2022

- [The Ultimate 'Online' Church](#) by Sean Steele, Vestry Papers, May 2022

Discipulado o reventar: La Iglesia en 2050

Por Scott Gunn

Cuando se nos pide que especulemos sobre cómo será la Iglesia en 2050, la respuesta prudente es: "Sólo Dios lo sabe". Pero eso no causa ninguna gracia.

Algunas personas observaron las tendencias recientes en la asistencia a la iglesia y opinaron que la iglesia desaparecerá en unas décadas. Pero yo no creo que la iglesia haya desaparecido en 2050. ¿Por qué? Porque la Biblia nos lo dice. Jesús encargó a Pedro que liderara la iglesia y le dijo: "Y yo te digo que tú eres Pedro y que en esta roca edificaré mi iglesia, que y las puertas del infierno no prevalecerán contra ella".

Estas son buenas noticias. No tenemos que preocuparnos por la destrucción de la iglesia, porque Jesús dice que la iglesia perdurará. ¿Acaso eso no es un alivio? No tenemos que salvar a la iglesia, porque Jesús es nuestro salvador.

Se avecinan cambios

Pero seamos claros. Puede ser que la iglesia no se parezca mucho a la iglesia como la conocemos ahora. Es probable que en los países occidentales prósperos, las iglesias establecidas sigan perdiendo prestigio y que las grandes instituciones eclesiásticas nacionales retrocedan en favor de un nuevo enfoque en las feligresías locales.

No estoy sugiriendo que no tendremos denominaciones en 2050, pero puede ser que no tengamos edificio denominacionales.

Aunque la Iglesia Episcopal es ahora una fracción del tamaño que tenía en la década de los 1970, nuestro gasto y compromiso con la gobernanza floreció en las últimas décadas. ¿Necesitamos más comités que cuando teníamos el doble de nuestro tamaño actual? Tal vez. Pero quizá haya maneras más eficaces de realizar el trabajo a nivel de toda la iglesia. Es probable que existan nuevas formas de garantizar que nuestra iglesia sea gobernada y liderada por laicos, obispos, sacerdotes y diáconos sin necesidad de celebrar reuniones costosas ni de la proliferación de comités.

Así que, yendo al grano, ¿qué aspecto tendrán las iglesias en 2050?

Una Iglesia que está transformando vidas haciendo discípulos

Imagino que, entre las feligresías locales, habrá feligresías grandes y con amplios recursos que prestarán apoyo a iglesias más pequeñas. Y habrá iglesias más pequeñas que tal vez se reúnan en casas o espacios compartidos en lugar de en edificios que solo se utilicen completamente un par de horas por semana.

Las feligresías que sobrevivan hasta 2050 serán lugares en los que el discipulado sea el centro de la vida de las feligresías. Ahora hay muchas maneras de conectarse con la comunidad, para el trabajo por la justicia social y para comparecer. Pero la iglesia es el lugar donde se administran los sacramentos, donde se proclama la palabra, donde la gente está inmersa en oración y donde nos centramos en encontrarnos con Jesucristo.

Durante la era de la Cristiandad de los 1950, la gente se unía a las iglesias para asistir luciendo bien, forjar amistades y realizar buenas obras. Pero con el colapso de la Cristiandad, no hay capital social ni prestigio en unirse a una iglesia. Si quiero construir casas o alimentar a la gente, hay organizaciones sin ánimo de lucro que lo hacen muy bien y con gran eficacia. Así que tal vez no me una a una iglesia por esos motivos. En cambio, puede ser que me una a una iglesia porque quiero encontrarme con Jesucristo en palabra y sacramento, y quiero vivir una vida transformada.

Para dejar las cosas claras, ¡no estoy sugiriendo ni por un segundo que el trabajo por la justicia social sea inapropiado para las iglesias! Espero que todo cristiano participe en la transformación de nuestro mundo vida a vida. Espero que todas las iglesias animen a sus miembros a servir a los pobres, los marginados y los perdidos. Es que nuestra identidad, especialmente si avanzamos 25 años, debe ser ante todo una identidad de discípulos de Jesucristo.

Aumentar la diversidad entre los miembros y en todos los aspectos de la vida de la feligresía

Además de la identidad de las iglesias, creo que la demografía cambiará. Por ello, estoy agradecido.

En la actualidad, las iglesias pudientes establecidas del oeste están llenas principalmente de ancianos blancos. No hay nada malo en que haya ancianos blancos, pero si tuviéramos éxito en hacer discípulos, la demografía de nuestras feligresías coincidiría con la de nuestras comunidades.

La iglesia será más diversa en las próximas décadas. Veremos múltiples generaciones encontrándose juntas con Jesús. Veremos a personas de todas las razas e identidades de género. Veremos juntos a ricos y pobres. Las feligresías que no puedan adaptarse a esa realidad no sobrevivirán.

En 2050, la iglesia tendrá que dedicar más tiempo moldeando nuestras vidas y nuestros ministerios fuera de la iglesia. Necesitaremos equipar a la gente para el estudio, la oración y el servicio religioso en sus hogares. Necesitaremos enseñar la realidad de que todos tenemos una vocación, no solo el clero. Dios llama a algunos a ser pastores, a otros a ser maestros, a otros a ser médicos, a otros a ser trabajadores del servicio de comidas, a otros a ser choferes, a otros a ser mecánicos, y así sucesivamente.

Ahora, la iglesia está construida en base a la cosmovisión de la era cristina que permite a muchos de nosotros subsumir el compromiso radical de seguir a Jesús bajo la conveniencia de un cómodo estilo de vida consumista. En la iglesia de 2050, tendremos que enseñar que somos seguidores de Jesús en todos los momentos de todos los días. Cada dólar que gastamos es un reflejo de nuestra fe. Cada hora de nuestro día es un reflejo de nuestra fe. Cada momento es una oportunidad para glorificar a Dios.

Al pensar en que creo que las feligresías se clasificarán en dos tipos -grandes y con amplios recursos junto a comunidades mucho más pequeñas-, creo que nuestros servicios de culto se moverán hacia un extremo u otro. Por un lado, veremos una liturgia trascendente enraizada en la tradición antigua. Por el otro, veremos reuniones menos formales, inmanentes, que también expresan las tradiciones de la iglesia. Piense en la misa mayor en una catedral gótica frente a una hogaza de pan cortada en la sala de la casa de alguien. Ambas liturgias son asombrosas a su manera, y la iglesia de 2050 estará consciente de ello y dará prioridad a ambas.

El cuerpo de Cristo en 2050

Jesús nos dijo que no podemos servir a dos amos. La iglesia no puede ser a la vez el cuerpo de Cristo y la encarnación del consumismo. La iglesia, ahora y en 2050, está llamada a centrar su mirada únicamente en Dios Padre, Dios Hijo y Dios Espíritu Santo.

Puede ser útil recordar dos escrituras. La iglesia y su labor se describen claramente en dos lugares importantes. Una perspectiva clave sobre la iglesia se encuentra en Hebreos 10:23-25.

“Mantengamos firme, sin fluctuar, la profesión de nuestra esperanza, porque fiel es el que prometió. Y considerémonos unos a otros para estimularnos al amor y a las buenas obras; no dejando de congregarnos, como algunos tienen por costumbre, sino exhortándonos; y tanto más, cuanto veis que aquel Día se acerca”.

Eso es todo. La iglesia existe para que nos provoquemos unos a otros al amor y a las buenas obras. Provocarnos unos a otros es muy diferente de la fiesta de amabilidad que a veces vemos en la iglesia actual. La iglesia de 2050 que sobreviva habrá recuperado la provocación y el estímulo que se vislumbra en Hebreos.

Otro lugar en el que leemos sobre la iglesia tiene más que ver con su propósito. A veces podemos preguntarnos sobre la misión de la iglesia. Creo que Jesús fue bastante claro al respecto. En Mateo 28:19-20, leemos la instrucción de Jesús,

"Id, pues, y haced discípulos a todas las naciones, bautizándolos en el nombre del Padre y del Hijo y del Espíritu Santo, y enseñándoles a obedecer todo lo que os he mandado. Y recordad que yo estoy con vosotros todos los días, hasta el fin del mundo".

Nuestra tarea es hacer discípulos de todos. No podemos hacer discípulos de todos si excluimos o discriminamos. No podemos hacer discípulos de todos si no proclamamos las buenas nuevas de Dios en Jesucristo. No podemos hacer discípulos de todos si nos centramos en nuestra comodidad por encima de la gracia transformadora y la misericordia de Dios.

La iglesia que sobreviva hasta 2050 se habrá vuelto a centrar en hacer discípulos. Por ese motivo, espero que la iglesia de 2050 sea vibrante y creciente. Y me anima recordar que Jesús prometió estar siempre con nosotros: ahora, en 2050 y para siempre.

Scott Gunn es sacerdote episcopal, fotógrafo, conferenciante y autor. Es director ejecutivo de Forward Movement, un ministerio de la Iglesia Episcopal con sede en Cincinnati, Ohio. Anteriormente fue párroco en Rhode Island. Antes de ordenarse, trabajó en la industria tecnológica en Education Development Center, The Atlantic Monthly, Fast Company, el MIT Media Lab y brevemente en punto-com. Está casado con Sherilyn Pearce y comparten su hogar con un golden retriever llamado George. A Scott lo solicitan regularmente como conferenciante, líder de retiros y predicador. Sus pasatiempos son la fotografía, bloguear y viajar.

Recursos:

- [Liderazgo multilingüe y feligresías multiculturales](#) por Sandra Montes, Vestry Papers, julio 2015

- [7 pasos hacia un discipulado intergeneracional](#) por Eduardo Solomón Rivera, Vestry Papers, marzo 2019
- [El Ministerio con trabajadores agrícolas – el Discipulado en acción](#) por Juan Carabaña, Vestry Papers, mayo 2017
- [Alianza de Mujeres con Amor](#) por Daniel Vélez Rivera, Vestry Papers, julio 2022

How to See the Church of the Future Today

By Lorenzo Lebrija

Ever wish you could see into the future? Curious about what the Episcopal Church will look like in a decade – or two or three? [In this brief video](#), the Rev. Lorenzo Lebrija, Executive Director of [TryTank Experimental Lab](#) and Chief Innovation Officer at Virginia Theological Seminary, offers insights that can help us spot clues to the future that are present today. He explains drivers of change and signals of change and encourages us to be on the lookout for them. Seeing the future today can help us find positive ways to work creatively with the changes that are coming, to see new possibilities for growth and grounds for hope for the Episcopal Church in the world.

*The Rev. **Lorenzo Lebrija**, is a known expert in the innovation field and the chief innovation officer of Virginia Theological Seminary (VTS), as well as executive director of TryTank Experimental Lab, a joint project of VTS and the General Theological Seminary (GTS). He has a Master of Divinity degree from GTS and is currently completing the doctoral program at VTS.*

Lorenzo was the Chief Development Officer for the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles prior to launching TryTank. Before entering seminary, he was president and CEO of Seraphic Fire & Firebird Chamber Orchestra, Miami's professional choral and orchestral ensemble, and also Miami Program Director for the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. He is a certified Foresight Practitioner from the Institute for the Future in Palo Alto, California, and has a certificate in Design Thinking from IDEO, also in Palo Alto.

Resources:

- [Clinging to Old Paradigms Can Be Fatal](#) by Ken Howard, an ECF Vital Practices blog, April 13, 2020
- [Bearing gifts, hosting parties](#) by Richelle Thompson, an ECF Vital Practices blog, January 11, 2017
- [New Leadership for a Changing Church](#) by Donald V. Romanik, Vestry Papers, January 2017
- [Through All Kinds of Weather](#) an ECF Vital Practices webinar presented by Anne Vickers, May 23, 2019

God is doing a New Thing

By Alicia Hager

At first glance, hope seems to be in short supply. Just turn on the evening news and stories of natural and manmade disasters, wars, people held prisoner and those who left with no choice but to leave home will fill the screen. It's easy to see how more of us are anxious now than previously, especially since we've been through a worldwide pandemic and still have so much residual fear and loss.

In the church too, it can seem like the sky is falling. Giving is down, people have not come back, kids have been left behind – and not on purpose, but because they could not abide one more Zoom class and slowly disconnected from their church communities. The church many of us remember, with packed Sunday School classrooms, abundant choirs and potlucks that go on for miles are gone, and we may feel like we're left holding the bag. Our volunteers are stretched thin and so are we, as we work to keep the lights on and souls fed.

Hope in the wilderness

That is not, however, the end of the story unless we allow it to be. The truth is that usually in the wilderness God is hard at work. In the waste, the wreckage, the is-this-all-there-is, God is creating and God's soft voice is calling us into a new way of envisioning the church, into a new way of reconciling all of God's creation.

I serve a small parish in Western Michigan. We've taken the re-opening process at a pretty conservative pace and only now are working to tell the bones of previous ministries to stand up on their feet once more. We hosted an acolyte training several weeks ago, and it was overwhelming to see who showed up. Parents and their kids who will serve in teams, single folks, grown and young, too. At the end of the day, 14 new people were trained to carry the cross and bear the torches – and just this week a new schedule came out filled with people who are ready to serve in the liturgy.

This is hope.

The Gathering of Leaders, an Episcopal organization dedicated to literally "gathering the leaders" of the church, launched pilot weekend gatherings last summer and fall, one for bi-vocational church leaders and lay church leaders. Both of those weekends were packed with people who are passionate about the church and passionate about their ministries. Alongside their clergy counterparts, all of these leaders are really excited about the church and the future.

This, too, is hope.

Choices to make

As we emerge from – or rather, adapt to live with – an endemic virus, we as the church have choices to make. We are on the precipice of something, but none of us quite know what that something is. As we start up old ministries and launch new ones, we have the opportunity to re-think the ways that these things were before, who they served, what they served and more. We can re-tool completely or just make modest edits here and there.

How can we make choir practice more attractive to new choristers? Could a solution be to offer a simple family style supper beforehand and a comfortable place for kids to play while their parents sing? Could it be robing up some of the kiddos and allowing them to process and sit with the choir, even if they can't quite sing the music?

Another parish in my diocese started a Gay-Straight Alliance Youth Group, open to all in the area, focused on acts of service and building a supportive community. That group has been more successful than any youth group the church has hosted in the last several years. It draws in kids of all ages, adults and allies who desire so deeply to be part of something that is meaningful.

Be part of the new thing God is doing

Every day church leaders, lay and ordained, are popping in and out of virtual and in person meetings and they are visioning the future of the church. They want to stop playing defense, stop running to catch up. They want to create a solid, sustainable, theologically sound idea of what the church can be and then go and make it happen. I know these meetings happen because I get to be part of many of them.

There are certainly many people who are wringing their hands over the decline of the church, and my gentle suggestion to them is to look forward, to look up, and to ask how they can help. This necessarily means letting go of many old structures and laying down ministries that don't work anymore, so we can take up new ones. It is difficult work, and like Moses, we probably won't get to enter the Promised Land of the revitalized Episcopal Church. But also like Moses, we are called to lead the people in the directions we believe God is indicating, always listening for the voice from the bush on fire and willing to obey it.

"I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."

The deserts and the wildernesses we find ourselves in are places of deep possibility and abundant hope. There God is doing a new thing. God is calling new acolytes to serve at my parish. God is showing us where we can make changes that have been a long time coming.

Last month on Christmas Eve, when our church doors opened again and the peal of our bells filled our neighborhoods, when our windows shone out, I hope you saw and heard this hope for yourself. It was there in the pews. The hope is us. This is the joy that God created us for, if we will only be brave enough to get to work.

Mother Alicia Hager serves as the Assisting Clergy at Grace Episcopal Church in Holland, Michigan, and as the Community and Communications Curator for the Gathering of Leaders. Alicia lives with her family in Western Michigan, has too many cats, and enjoys reading and writing in her spare time.

Resources:

- [Seeking Refugia: Hope for a World in Climate Crisis](#) by Josh Anderson, Vestry Papers, March 2022
- [A Message to Leaders in the Church](#) by Donald Romanik, an ECF Vital Practices blog, January 4, 2021
- [Let's Remember Hope...](#) by Amanda Nickles, an ECF Vital Practices blog, July 9, 2020
- [Uncomfortable Realities and Hope](#) by Jeremiah Sierra, an ECF Vital Practices blog, November 30, 2015

Embodying Hope

By Ranjit K. Mathews

One word –*embodiment*– expresses my hope for the Episcopal Church in 2050. It would be a place for misfits and truth tellers, for people in all kinds of wear – and most importantly, people who are

authentically following Jesus in the world. In 2050, the Episcopal Church would be known as a place where people can be their whole selves, where *vulnerability* and *connectedness* are manifest.

Status and the who-you-know thinking would be things of the past. The incarnation, bandied about in rarified spaces in the Church in previous decades, would be made real in embodiment. There would be a radical understanding around connectedness. The professionalization of being an Episcopalian would not exist. Being a Christian would be more connected, more real and not just in the space of a 9 to 5 reality.

Embodied Christianity, lived out in the world

In 2023 it was easier to create resolutions at diocesan and general conventions, but embodiment was much harder. In 2050, my hope is that the Church would be more real. The way we talk about Jesus would be seen in the lived encounter and people in the public square would find Christians protesting injustice because it was what Jesus of Nazareth would have done. Christianity wouldn't be performative: it would be a lifestyle, a way of living, not a religion. When News reporters asked these Episcopalians why they were protesting, they wouldn't hear that it was because of some secular understanding of justice or just "the right thing to do." They'd hear, "we are following Jesus, trying to imitate him."

The Episcopal Church in 2050 would be a space where politics is preached from the pulpit – not partisan politics, but the truth of Jesus made contextually real out in the world. It would be *lex orandi, lex credendi* in incarnational form. The beauty of Episcopal worship, the weight of the words that were said for decades, if not centuries, would be embodied.

Parishioners, old and new, would remember the stinging rebuke of younger Episcopalians or secular activists and see how the words of our beautiful Cranmer were more often than not passed over. They would remember that suited, booted and tied, we'd been professional Christians, but those radical words were not embodied by us. Back in the day, Episcopalians were too scared by politics, too afraid of

crossing the vaunted Church and state rubbish. Episcopalians in 2050 would live and breathe politics, the politics of Jesus, not of partisan groups – but a rooted politics, firmly articulated through the beautiful conversation between scripture, reason and tradition.

A way of life that is holy and whole

My hope for the Episcopal Church in 2050 is that it would be a place where wholeness in Christ is celebrated. Purity culture and an anti-body understanding would be anathema, and Episcopalians would feel the deep connection between the body, mind and spirit. They would understand all the messiness of humanity and its giftedness. In 2050, people would see and understand this Church as *re-ligio*, “knitting things together.” Back in the day, people looked at religion, and in particular mainstream denominations, as spaces that were judgmental and hypocritical, but in 2050 they will see the Body of Christ, committed to a way of life that is holy and whole, beautiful and radical and counter-cultural.

My hope for the Episcopal Church in 2050 is that when people who are not connected to religion were asked about the Episcopal Church, their first thought would be, *Oh, that’s the Church that is about love, that cares for all who are marginalized, that stands with the broken-hearted and left behind, that isn’t afraid of being more loving, that practices the way of Jesus.*

My hope for the Episcopal Church is that it would live more fully into its unique calling to be counter-cultural and own its vocation, to step boldly into who God has called it to be in the world. People would know palpably that Episcopalians are Christians, because there is something about Jesus living within us.

A beacon of love and truth and justice, fully alive and at work in the world

My hope for the Episcopal Church is that we would claim our high moral calling to be a beacon of love and truth and justice and especially of grace in this world. In a world that is so often riven by a lack of civility and harshness, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ would permeate all that we do. In 2050, people

would encounter and experience the grace of Jesus and it would touch their hearts, mind and souls and transform them.

The Episcopal Church would not be 95 percent white, as it was in 2020, but would be polyphonic, multi-lingual and multi-ethnic in dynamic ways. White supremacy would no longer be our drum beat, because integrated and in touch with our bodies, minds and spirits, we would be more able to confront the systems of our time. My hope for the Episcopal Church in 2050, is that it wouldn't be beholden to the market and its every whim, but driven, compelled and set on fire by the gospel of Jesus. We wouldn't be scared of saying something deep and powerful about the realities of the world.

Rectors or priests in charge, deacons, lay folks, church leaders in 2050 wouldn't be beholden to the market or the whims of capitalism. Back in 2023, more often than not, a preacher would preach from Luke on a Sunday morning and then move to Robert's rules at a Tuesday evening vestry meeting. In 2050, this wouldn't be the case. Episcopal clergy would preach the whole Gospel without fear of people withholding their pledges because they didn't like what the preacher said. My hope is that the Episcopal Church in 2050 would be an institution that is fully alive, as Irenaeus of Lyon imagined, "the glory of God is a human being fully alive."

*The Rev. **Ranjit K. Mathews** serves as the Canon for Mission Advocacy, Racial Justice and Reconciliation in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut, working with parish and diocesan leadership to make real God's realm of justice, love and peace.*

A graduate of George Washington University and Union Theological Seminary, Ranjit was recently appointed the secretary of the Social Justice and International Policy Legislative Committee for the House of Deputies and is Chair of the interim Task Force of Dialogue with South Sudanese Anglicans living in the diaspora. He is also a board member for the Episcopal Evangelism Society and elected to serve as the Episcopal Church's clergy representative to the Anglican Consultative Council. Previously, he served as Partnership Officer for Africa on the Presiding Bishop's staff.

Ranjit lives with his spouse Johanna, their two boys Dhruv and Kabir, and their dog Samara in Rocky Hill, Connecticut. He grew up in the Boston area and considers New England home. Ranjit loves national and local politics, pop culture, hip-hop, sports and being out in creation.

Resources:

- [Triple Threat](#) by Adialyn Milien, Vital Practices, July 2020
- [An Evening with The Rev. Canon Stephanie Spellers](#), an ECF Vital Practices webinar, May 6, 2021
- [Respectful Practices for Approaching Multicultural Resources](#) by Ellis Reyes Montes, Vestry Papers, November 2022
- [Whatever you do now will prepare you for what you can do in the future](#) by Audra Abt, an ECF Vital Practices blog, July 20, 2020

The Church in 2050

By Jay Sidebotham

So many questions, so many perspectives in what some call the “motley crew of the Church.” With characteristic wit and accuracy, cartoonist and priest Jay Sidebotham helps us see that when it comes to the future, we’re not a lot different from that first motley crew following Jesus. They, too, had lots of questions and no idea of what was coming.



These days, the Rev. **Jay Sidebotham** divides his time between New York City and Wilmington, North Carolina. In New York, he serves as Associate for Formation at St. James' Church on the Upper East Side. In North Carolina, he continues work with RenewalWorks, a ministry of Forward Movement. Ordained to the priesthood in 1991, Jay has served parishes in Rhode Island, Washington, DC, Durham, North Carolina, New York City and Lake Forest, Illinois.

Jay attended Union Seminary in New York. Prior to that course of study, he worked in illustration, graphic design and advertising in Manhattan. (Some might say he still works in advertising.) He also worked as an animator for Schoolhouse Rock. He is married to Frances Murchison, who grew up in Wilmington. They have two adult children, each married, and two quite splendid grandchildren.

Resources:

- [Flight Adjustments in a Changing Church](#) by Jesse Zink, Vestry Papers, July 2022
- [The Ultimate 'Online' Church](#) by Sean Steele, Vestry Papers, May 2022
- [Center for Chinese Congregations in LA and Beyond](#) by Thomas Ni, Vestry Papers, July 2022
- [Part Time ≠ Less Than](#) by Cathie Caimano, Vestry Papers, May 2016