Young Adults in the Church:
- Transitions after Graduation
- College Chaplaincy
- Episcopal Service Corps

Summer...
- In the Parish
- At Home
Church Communities Form Young Adult Leadership

As we were finishing up the Summer issue of Episcopal Teacher, we celebrated graduation at Virginia Theological Seminary. Students of all ages were honored as they received Master of Divinity, Master of Arts, and Doctorate of Ministry degrees.

As I look at the members of the Class of 2014, I am once again struck by their diversity, their tenaciousness, and the stories of their calls to ministry.

Some have early memories of Christmas pageants and Vacation Bible School in churches they still call home. Others talk about how they discovered a closer relationship to God among the bugs, and the games, and the lively worship at camps or in college.

Several served in Episcopal service corps in this country and across the globe. Some heard God’s call while they were in another vocation.

For the most part, their stories have one thing in common: their formation occurred within communities of believers—at churches and through programs designed to help people take a closer walk with God.

This issue explores ways in which parishes and the Church are reaching out to young adults, from rituals to mark high school graduation, to chaplains who meet young people where they are, to programs that give young adults a chance to serve others in many different situations.

This issue also has suggestions for ways parishes and families can use the quieter days of summer to encounter God in new ways. An intergeneration book club at a Richmond parish has become a staple of their programming each summer.

Check out free resources for women on page 14, including a daily blog that can be accessed through a downloadable app. On page 13 learn about a new children’s Bible in English and español that has sparked our interest.

Pictured below are Dorothy Linthicum, editor, and Kate Siberine, graphic designer, who bring you the wisdom of Christian formation experts from all over the country in these pages. If you have an idea you want to share, please contact me at dlinthicum@vts.edu. –DSL.

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By Sue Cromer

As those who joined us more recently have a real sense of identity as members of the congregation. Celebrating their time at St. Mary’s, no matter how long or short, is important for everyone in the community.

On the first Sunday in June, we thank and recognize all children and youth and the adults who mentor, teach, lead, and minister to our younger members. Youth Sunday is scheduled that day and the younger children serve as ushers and greeters at the 9 a.m. service.

At the 11:15 service, we recognize the youth leaders and the adults who work with the youth, and recognize young people graduating from high school. Someone in this group is invited to give the sermon at both services.

While many congregations give graduates a Book of Common Prayer, we decided to give each graduate Call on Me: A Prayer Book for Young People, compiled by Jenifer Gamber and Sharon Ely Pearson (Morehouse Publishing, 2012). The book draws on the Book of Common Prayer and the

“Honoring the achievements of graduating seniors and acknowledging this important transition in their lives is a small way we can continue to include young people in the lives of our congregations.”

Bible, while focusing on events that occur in the lives of young people. Divided into three parts—common prayer, types of prayer, and personal prayer—it includes prayers that celebrate personal achievements or address obstacles to grace and faith. The prayers from Call on Me can be used at youth events in a variety of settings.

Since I arrived at St. Mary’s during the 2012-2013 academic year, I knew some of the seniors, but certainly not all of them. I was surprised when almost all of them came to the Senior Recognition. The 20 seniors who participated in the program were visibly moved as their names were called and each was given the book.

It was important for them to know that the congregation’s support did not end with this celebration, but continued as they went in new directions. After the service was a lovely reception with time for congratulations and, of course, cake!

After graduation, we track our youth as they head to college, the work force, the military, a gap year, or whatever their next steps may be. We provide a list about what they are doing next for the congregation. For those leaving the area, we try to connect them to a campus ministry or congregation where they are working, in school or in the military.

To continue our connections with young people going to college, the youth in the congregation assemble care packages to send to alumni on a special occasion, such as Valentines Day. They report that the care packages are greatly appreciated, and how much it means to them that their home parish remembers and is thinking about them.

In the end, the actual gifts we give graduates do not matter as much as the gesture. It is a time that the congregation acknowledges the gift that they have been to the community.

The important gift they receive is in having been a full member of the congregation, the Body of Christ.

Sue Cromer is the Youth Minister at St. Mary’s Episcopal Church in Arlington, Va. She is formerly the Associate/Canon for Youth, Campus, Young Adult Ministry, & Summer Camp in the Diocese of Chicago.

Ref. 1. http://www.churchpublishing.org

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Meeting College Students
One Step at a Time

By Jonathan Melton

“Start with the chapel steps.” That’s the advice my wife gave me when I told her about the invitation to write this article, a daunting request to describe St. Francis House, the Episcopal campus ministry at the University of Wisconsin, and how God is meeting students through the work of that ministry. “Start with the steps,” she said.

The chapel steps extend a short distance from the student center to University Avenue, the very heart of the campus. Thousands of students each day walk by our charming old building with poor signage.

The program itself is made up of a very small community of students, reemerging from two years off campus, owing to necessary construction work and a re-visioning of the site. The chapel steps are places of public encounter, mostly with strangers, because “Episcopal” is in no one’s vernacular.

The steps are where we position a wooden sandwich-board sign each day with a neon marker greeting, “The chapel steps extend a short distance from the student center to University Avenue, the very heart of the campus. Thousands of students each day walk by our charming old building with poor signage.”

I was terrified the first day I sat there. But soon a handful of students came up and asked for prayer. A couple of others braved eye contact and a smile. Surprisingly, a few folks without time or desire to pray stopped to thank me simply for being there. On these days I spend a couple of hours on the steps, saying a half dozen prayers with strangers. Not efficient, maybe, but easily a half-dozen more prayers than I would have prayed with strangers otherwise.

The Sunday before my first morning on the steps, I told the House community I was moving to the steps. “We’re called to give what we have for others,” I explained. “This is my hope for our community. I want to experience the things I hope for us. It occurs to me that prayer is something all of us can give.”

Seeing that some were impressed by my decision, I quickly added, “I only look comfortable. I’m not a live-for-others person by nature. But I want to become this kind of person, and I hope sitting on the steps will help. Please pray for me tomorrow morning.” This was a test of my desire to be vulnerable with others, learning the permission to seek God in uncomfortably honest places.

Some months later, on Ash Wednesday, when area clergy provided Ashes-to-Go in Madison, there was no doubt in my mind that St. Francis House needed to be on the steps. That was the easy part.

The harder part came in the community’s awareness that Ash Wednesday conversations on the steps should be shaped by the language we had learned from praying on the steps. Each time we said, “Friend, before sharing this sign of repentance with you, is there anything for which I need to ask your forgiveness?” To relentlessly seek and serve Christ in the other is the heart of what it is to be Christian. The day-to-day question is how to live out that heart in visible and meaningful ways, where meaningful doesn’t always result in a change in others.

St. Francis House strives to publicly witness the remarkable truth that God is present to and interested in students. To students - and one another - we are learning to say, “Believe it or not, you are interesting to God. God, show us how.” And God does - one step at a time.

Meet the new missioner for young adults.

I began my work as Missioner for Young Adult and Campus Ministry with the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of The Episcopal Church in mid-January. I couldn’t be more excited to start this work at this time in the life of the Church.

Across the country churches are paying more attention to people in their 20s and 30s. We are recognizing that early adulthood is an important period, a time when young adults ask big questions and make even bigger decisions about the kind of life they will lead.

We know that Jesus recruited James and John when they were still working for their father Zebedee, before they were old enough to strike out on their own. Jesus intentionally went around recruiting young adults to be his followers. He looked for young leaders to build his community of disciples, to share his vision, and to collaborate in the work of ministry.

What if we saw The Episcopal Church, at least partially, as a leadership institute for the Reign of God? What if we saw young adults, not as a challenge, but as a resource? What if we saw people in their 20s and 30s in and around the church as a source of potential leadership?

Some of our congregations and dioceses are beginning to ask these questions. They are working to build the capacity of parishes and networks to journey with young adults in their development as leaders.

We are all learning how to do ministry in a new generation. My experience as a campus missioner rebuilding a college ministry and as a priest at a downtown parish left me with more questions than answers. I am excited to work with you as we build the church’s capacity to listen to young adults and invite them into leadership.

–Mike Angell, Missioner for Young Adult and Campus Ministries, The Episcopal Church
Episcopal Service Corps Helps Young Adults Face Life’s Questions

By Amity Carrubba

Summer is upon us which means, in part, that another class of college students has graduated and are wondering what it means to enter adulthood. Find a job? Move out of their parent’s house? Begin paying off student loans?

These are only some of the big questions, with many smaller choices and challenges along the way. The transition from school to occupation—or better yet, vocation—requires discernment and continued formation as an adult, as well as support from a community.

Traditionally, these have been gifts of the church, yet fewer and fewer young adults are connecting with a community of faith. So how can The Episcopal Church accompany and support from a community.

Episcopal communities have often struggled to incorporate single young adults into their congregations or to keep them engaged in the churches of their childhoods. Episcopal Service Corps programs are diverse in personality, size, and internships all centered around:

• Serving others in solidarity and promoting justice in community
• Deepening spiritual awareness and vocational discernment
• Living simply in intentional Christian community

ESC believes that how you spend your young adult years profoundly shapes the rest of your life, and that the church has valuable gifts to offer 20-somethings from all walks of life. Episcopal parishes are diverse in culture, piety, and gifts all centered around the Book of Common Prayer and the Eucharistic feast, Episcopal Service Corps programs are.

In Philadelphia, PA

• Living simply in intentional Christian community
• Deepening spiritual awareness and vocational discernment
• Serving others in solidarity and promoting justice in community

ESC programs span the country from Boston to Hawaii. The national network of 30 programs engages young adults as they transition into adulthood:

One way is through Episcopal Service Corps (ESC), an Episcopal non-profit that invites men and women in their 20s to live in intentional community while serving those in need for 9 to 12 months through an internship with a non-profit organization. The national network of 30 programs spans the country from Boston to Hawaii. Each program has its own charism that is informed by the local context, responding to the needs of a city, town, or neighborhood. This means that ESC members harvest organic celery in southern California, tutor kids in New York City, rebuild homes on Staten Island, and work with refugees in Chicago.

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Children are on a mission: God is working in, through and with them. What might be our role as parents—or caregivers in any capacity? How do we celebrate their noticings, attend when they are joyous or sorrowful, and offer creative paths from boredom into engagement?

Listening comes first: fully listening to the child—not distracted by our busy schedules and mobile devices. It helps for us to be thinking in terms of leading questions that engage, instead of just seeking the right answer. For example, “What do you think about that?”

Encouraging noticings.
The ride we regularly take in the car or on public transportation can become an opportunity for seeing new things or seeing things anew: I spy something red. How many red things can you find? (Might be a woman’s handbag. Could be the book that boy is carrying.) How many signs can we find that have a zero on them? How many dogs—or flowers, or black shoes—can we spot? Have an assortment of “What was the _____ thing that happened to you today?” (Fill in the blanks with: funniest, silliest, best, happiest, etc.) Invite each child to add what they have noticed.

Making up a story.
One person starts with something like: “Once upon a time there was a . . .” with each person adding their own ideas as the story unfolds. It probably won’t be the next great American novel, but the activity draws out creativity. No matter how silly the story becomes, it can make a long ride or hot afternoon more fun.

Singing our song.
Maybe it is “Thank you, God, for this fine day.” Pick a tune and together add more words. Or, agree on a tune from an advertisement you all know and make up new words to go with it. I know a family that sings to the tune of “Amazing Grace,” especially if things are a bit dicey (pouring rain, running late for an appointment, or hot tempers).

Staying with sadness.
Sad happens. Rushing on past it will not make it go away. The sadness may be huge—the death of someone we love. It might be something that is simply too big for the moment: a friend is leaving our circle, for whatever reason. Or just simply sad: I did not make the soccer team.

Staying with sadness—working through it—takes courage. Courage grows with affirmation: It is okay to be sad. Courage is shattered by shame so we need to be on guard to keep shame out of the work at hand.

We can also be attentive to any signals that God is bearing any of the fault. “No, God did not do this.” We can encourage the child to consider what God might be thinking about all this. Do we suppose God just might be sad, too?

Coping with anger.
Since punching an offender is not an acceptable option, we need to discover ways to process our anger. Someone cut us off in traffic, for example. Some possible responses: What might that person have been thinking? What was so dangerous about that person’s action? Where do we imagine that person is going in such a hurry? What could we think up to pray about for that person?

Maybe a child in our care is angry about something huge or manageable. Helping the child own the anger—What happened, How does it feel, What am I able to do—helps him or her let go of the anger.

Choosing forgiveness.
Some things that forgiveness is not:
• To forgive is not to say what happened is OK.
• To forgive does not mean the whole thing is forgotten.
• To forgive does not mean all the hurt has gone away.

Forgiveness is hard. But forgiving gets YOU unstuck. Forgiveness means making everything all right is not my job. How would you describe how it feels to be able to forgive someone?

Claiming an attitude of gratitude.
Our expressions of gratefulness from the little (“Yeah! the bus is on time!”) to bigger things (“The brakes held; I could stop in time! Thank you, God!”) enlarge our capacity to receive joy.

A gratitude circle can be staged anywhere: Each person simply names one thing she or he is grateful for. Helping children notice the things that make them want to say “Thank you, God!” may be the greatest gift we can give our children.

Helen Barron offers resources for families with young children through Candle Press.
“So, this week we read about Jacob. Who is Jacob?” asks the leader of the Good Book Club. Adam is in the fourth grade. He and his parents are in church every Sunday, and in the summer they come to the Good Book Club.

At a continental breakfast, Adam eats a luscious biscuit, fresh fruit, bagel, maybe more. He slumps in his chair, eats and plays mobile games. But don’t underestimate Adam or think he isn’t color and play. Adults are all ages, single, married, and often bringing a friend or grandparent. There is a core group every Sunday, but new people come and go. A nursery is available for babies and toddlers.

Prior to starting in the summer, we offer a class on choosing a Bible for adults or parents reading with children. Participants use a variety of Bibles, ranging from someone reading directly from the Greek to young children

“Why did he trick his brother, and how did the brother react?” Adam has an opinion. 

Rebecca. “Why did he trick his brother, and how did the brother react?” Adam sits up in his chair and answers

“I stuck to narrative-driven portions [of the Bible], and prepared the accompanying study guides with an eye towards multiple layers of inquiry and engagement. The discussion questions weren’t meant to be technical interpretations. Rather they were designed to encourage engagement with the stories that invited identifying with the characters; to draw out the spiritual and emotional circumstances depicted; and finally, to see if we (across the generational divide) could connect with what was happening.”

Currently, Good Book Club has three cycles. Year One is the Great Stories, including Creation, Noah, Moses, David, Jesus’ birth and baptism, and his parables. Year Two is reading portions on course: the Abrahamic cycle through Joseph; the Gospel of Mark; and portions of Acts including Paul’s travels. Year Three begins with Old Testament heroes (and goats): Joshua, Judges, and David (including portions from the Psalms); different portraits of Jesus from each of the four Gospels; and Paul, comparing accounts of his life (from Acts) with portions of his letters.

It works. It’s fun. It’s a simple premise with a profound end result. We meet new people, adults learn that children often know more than the adults do, children learn that adults will listen to them, we all learn to love the Bible even more, and everyone has a good time together.”

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participating—” or worse yet—doesn’t know his Bible stories.

Adam sits up in his chair and answers the question about Jacob. He doesn’t just say who Jacob is; he keeps going. Jacob is Isaac’s son, and he married Rebecca. “Why did he trick his brother, and how did the brother react?” Adam knows.

“Was God involved in this trickery, do you think?” Adam has an opinion. So does sixth-grader Steven whose

Good Book Club on Sunday morning. The Good Book Club was created by our staff four years ago, and was designed and written by the Rev. Michael Cadaret (YTS ’03). The intent is to have families (however a family may be configured) read, discuss, and reflect on the Bible across the generations.

In designing the curriculum, Michael said, “It’s a simple premise with a profound end result. We meet new people, adults learn that children often know more than the adults do, children learn that adults will listen to them, we all learn to love the Bible even more, and everyone has a good time together.”
Resources for Women at Church Or at Home

A rich trove of resources for women is available through the Women of the ELCA website (womenoftheelca.org). “Lutheran women,” it notes, “have a long history of Bible study, discipleship, and desire to deepen their spiritual life and learn about issues.”

The mission statement of the women’s organization is: “As a community of women created in the image of God, called to discipleship in Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to grow in faith, affirm our gifts, support one another in our callings, engage in ministry and action, and promote healing and wholeness in the church, the society, and the world.”

To explore the website, dip into Daily Grace, a daily blog written by Lutheran women available in several formats. Readers can sign up for daily emails, download the free app from iTunes or Google Play, or access it through Facebook.

The resource tab on the website offers 47 different resources for individual or group study, single or multiple sessions, or retreats. The resources are free, downloadable, and in English and Spanish, designed to help women grow in faith and engage in ministry and action. They are listed both alphabetically and by Church season.

A good example of the quality of these resources is the six-session guide to discernment called “Listening to God.” The study is written by Debra Farrington, former publisher of Morehouse Publishing and author of Hearing with the Heart: A Gentle Guide to Discerning God’s Will for Your Life, and other books and articles about Christian spirituality.

The study consists of six flexible hour-long sessions exploring what it means for an individual to discern God’s hopes and desires for her life and what it means for a group to discern their God-given gifts for ministry. It could be used by small groups in either a retreat or workshop setting.

The study is scripturally based and the sessions are well-paced with an emphasis on prayer and small-group discussion. Outside materials consist of paper, pens, old magazines, easily obtained objects from nature, and a flip chart.

While there is no cost for the resources, Women of the ELCA requests donations to continue this work. Materials may be reproduced for use in conferences and women’s organizations, provided each copy is reproduced in its entirety and carries a copyright notice.

Can I Ask That?
A Sticky Faith Curriculum
By Jim Candy, Brad M. Griffin, Kara Powell
Fuller Youth Institute, 2014
fulleryouthinstitute.org

The authors of Can I Ask That? address the questions that adolescents often pose as they explore a deeper faith in God. Fuller Youth Institute, publisher of this curriculum, has been talking to teens about their faith for almost a decade. They have concluded that “it's not doubt or hard questions that are toxic to faith. It's silence.”

Their research through the “Sticky Faith” Curriculum initiative has found that adolescents “are tired of vague, superficial, or nonexistent answers to their tough questions about God, the Bible, and Christianity. Just when they’re capable of diving into the deep end of their faith, all too often the church keeps them splashing around in shallow waters.”

The institute discovered that young people weren’t leaving churches because of stances those churches took with such issues as the reliability of the biblical text, sexuality, or evolution and creation. “They left because the churches failed to address them at all,” or in vague and superficial ways.

Jim Candy, Brad M. Griffin and Kara Powell, authors of Can I Ask That? have used this research to create a tool to help youth ministers and leaders start conversations around the hard questions. In going deeper, they believe young people will encounter God in new ways.

The eight issues explored in this book follow a specific format. A story is used to introduce the issue, followed by initial questions to help youth express their views. This is followed by background material with different viewpoints, relevant scripture passages, and additional questions. The final section has fictional conversations to illustrate the complexity of the issue and opinions surrounding it.

The curriculum does a good job of defining terms and suggesting that leaders and participants look for additional information within their own denomination, church, or other organization. Tips are also provided to help leaders avoid problems and misunderstandings.

From my perspective the weakest part of the materials for each of the eight questions is the background information. In the question about sexuality, for example, only one resource is cited, which substantiates only one viewpoint.

The expert (from a quick Google search) is an ordained Baptist minister, conference speaker and adjunct professor of New Testament/Biblical Studies at Tyndale Seminary. I would have liked to have read other viewpoints, and at a minimum, I expected a well-rounded bibliography for each issue. None is provided. Leaders who use this curriculum will have to carefully assess the background information provided and then do their own research into the topic.

The curriculum has both a leader guide (for about $11.50) and a student book (about $6). Both can be purchased through Amazon.com or other outlets. –DSL.