

Transforming Church

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Transforming Church to be a Radical Alternative to the Status Quo

by Mary Grace Puszka

I grew up with a mom who knew everyone at our Roman Catholic church. Every Sunday morning, my sister and I would wear matching dresses as we sat between my parents in the second pew on the right side at the 10:30 mass. Mom would linger for an hour afterwards (much to Dad's dismay) to catch up with her friends while my sister and I ran wild with ours in the church hall. At Thanksgiving, Mom would know which families in our parish couldn't afford a full Thanksgiving meal, and she would covertly organize a collection of money for frozen turkeys and spend her free time dropping them off to our neighbors' homes to ensure no one went without. At Christmas, the same routine would be repeated. There was never a public mention of a "fundraiser" or "toy drive," but Mom and a few of her church lady friends would organize themselves to ensure that all the families had turkeys on Thanksgiving and age-appropriate presents under the tree for a magical Christmas morning.

As I grew up and studied religion and politics more seriously in college, the charity-in-the-moment networks that weren't backed by an effort to grapple with or dismantle the unjust systems that kept people needing this charity left me disillusioned. A disconnect emerged between how I was learning to read the Gospels – through the lens of Liberation Theology and Catholic Social Teaching – and what I was hearing from the pulpit each week. This rift led to an overwhelming isolation and frustration whenever I returned to the church that was my social center as a child. Showing up in the second pew felt performative, so I stopped showing up.

My experience of disconnect and isolation is far from unique. Leaving the church due to its lack of a firm stance on injustice isn't solely a modern problem for today's young people. In his "[Letter from Birmingham Jail](#)," The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King reflects,

The contemporary church is so often a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. It is so often the arch supporter of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's often vocal sanction of things as they are.

But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before. *If the church of today does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authentic ring, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the*

twentieth century. I meet young people every day whose disappointment with the church has risen to outright disgust.[1]

Today's church is now living the consequences of King's prediction from 1963.

Where are those loyal millions now? What I have been pleasantly surprised to find is that there are whole movements of believers who feel isolated by the faith of their childhoods who are cultivating fulfilling spiritual companionship with each other. The rise of religious “nones” in the United States should not trick us into thinking that a lack of religiosity equates to a lack of interest in complex questions, spiritual connection, or desire for community. But if churches don't offer space for people to explore their souls in compassionate community with others, people will not turn to churches to have these seemingly innate desires met.

But if people won't seek community in church, what happens to the invisible, inherently good, and sorely needed community networks that my mom and countless others forged across the pews? And what would the church have to *do* to offer a radical alternative to “the status quo”? How can a church community offer their neighbors a vision that could both bring new energy to our faith and neighborhoods while simultaneously building networks that both address immediate needs and dismantle injustice?

Robin Wall Kimmerer, Potawatomi botanist, author, and professor, offers specific, adaptable guidance in her book, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*. Simply put: refuse to participate in systems that exploit others and the earth. A noble, albeit increasingly complex, pursuit in a society deeply dependent on child labor and exploitation, the destruction of the earth for energy, the military industrial complex, and deeply engrained, unjust racial and gender hierarchies.

Perhaps Kimmerer's recommendation feels daunting for clergy and church staff who are already stretched thin managing a plethora of urgent responsibilities. However, I would argue that deprioritizing work that isn't truly important in the long term and incrementally investing focused energy into revitalizing your church and community is worth consideration and investment.[2]

The following is a far from comprehensive list of examples to catalyze your thinking and, hopefully, your incremental action to transform your church into the radical alternative to the status quo that Christ's example calls us to be:

- If your church can't support a ministry of its own, organize a regular volunteer schedule where parishioners can support local organizations on a routine basis – food pantries, community gardens, after-school programs, and more are almost always searching for reliable volunteers. If your church can support a ministry, access the needs and skills of your community, and start that ministry.

- Host a clothing or furniture swap to support parishioners in “shopping” second-hand first; partner this initiative with a sermon about how the fast-fashion industry both destroys our shared earth and fails to uphold the rights and dignity of children and workers.
- Organize parishioners to show up at community forums and local protests; let people know (with signage or verbally) that your *faith* is what compels you to speak up for the rights and dignity of all people.
- Host a community forum where local leaders can discuss solutions to community challenges; start and end each forum with a firm, hopeful reminder that while respectful debate is encouraged, all parties should approach disagreement with the assumption that each person wants what is best for their family, community, and the world.
- Cancel your church’s Amazon subscription and co-create a list with parishioners of local and/or sustainable businesses to ensure you can buy all of the essential items in a way that is aligned with your values.
- Divest endowments and other church investments from fossil fuel industries and weapons manufacturers; tell people on Sunday that you did so and why.
- Host a book club, documentary screening, or a live conversation with a local activist that provides an opportunity for members of your community to learn more about specific injustices (and perhaps even strategies for combatting them at the local level – which is where most sustainable change happens).
- Host evenings where community members can write letters to incarcerated people in your community, or even people on death row, keeping in mind Sister Helen Prejean’s reminder that “everyone is worth more than the worst thing they have done.”
- Organize carpools to help people get to the polls on Elections Day (for local, state, and federal elections).

Many of these options may strike parishioners as radical or too far of a departure from what church is “supposed” to be. Each action here is an opportunity to remind believers of the radical, revolutionary life and *love* of Christ – a man who overthrew the tables of injustice, who befriended and defended those society deemed unworthy, and who was mercilessly murdered by a corrupt state. “I hope the church as a whole will meet the challenge of this decisive hour.”

[1] Emphasis mine.

[2] See the Eisenhower Matrix for guidance on how to identify urgent versus important work.

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Mary Grace currently serves as Communications Manager for Episcopal Ministries of Long Island and supports the Office of Communication Ministry in the Episcopal Diocese of Long Island. She also consults with Red Letter Christians, a national movement at the intersection of Jesus and justice. She holds a B.A. in Political Science and Religious Studies from Stonehill College.

From training teams, developing campaigns, and executing wide-scale communication and development plans, Mary Grace's expertise and passion lies in developing and implementing efficient systems in spirit-filled organizations to bring forth Christ's Kingdom of justice and love – right here and right now.

Intersectional Environmentalism

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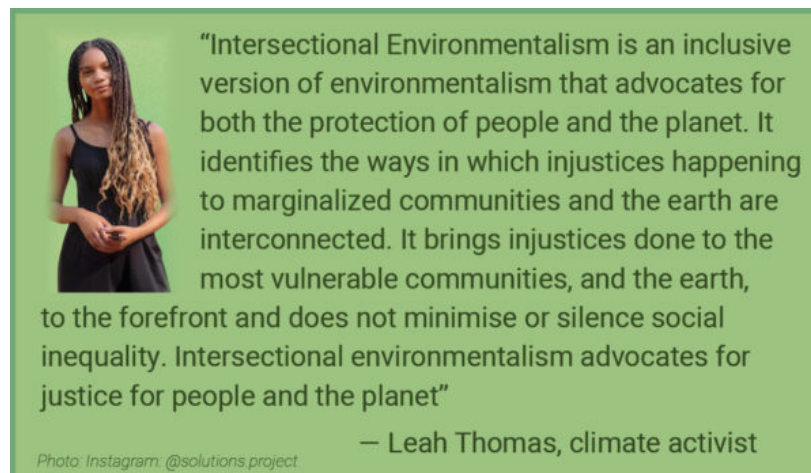
Intersectional Environmentalism: Recognizing Disproportional Impact

by Britta Cordrey

For decades scientists, government officials, activists, and a wide range of politicians have urged that climate change be addressed. However, tackling the issue can be an overwhelming task. With so many other pressing issues, it can be easy to push climate change to the back of our minds. The immediacy of our community's well-being, global poverty, war, and human hardship all vie for resources and attention.

In our own lives, we all have a long list of values we want to live by and ways we want to help, but there is never enough time in the day so we must make choices. We often have to wrestle with those choices and decide which is the "correct" answer. But as we know, there is rarely one easy, cut-and-dry, no-exceptions answer — perspective matters. The best we can do is find a way to live our values. When I look closely at my own values, I find many points of intersection. I wonder if the same is true for you. Looking at our "lists" more holistically might allow us to live more authentically and feel more confident in and proud of our choices.

When looking at my personal values as a whole, the framework that speaks to me most is Intersectional Environmentalism. This mindset highlights how



race, gender, socioeconomic status, and where people live affect how they interact with the environment and how they are affected by natural disasters and climate change.

Intersectional environmentalism recognizes that various forms of oppression, discrimination, and marginalization intersect — and compound — causing some communities to be

impacted disproportionately compared to others. This framework also highlights the importance of collaborating, and it calls for groups to align toward a common goal to strengthen their collective impact.

Environmental protection is high on my list of priorities in my day-to-day life. People hear that and usually have a mix of responses. Some people may be focused on other pressing social justice issues; or they believe that they can't make a difference, which can dampen their motivation. Still others want to do more, but don't know how. These are valid concerns, so I want to share some ideas and starting points for us to consider about our impact on the future of the environment and the shared life we live on this planet.

If you are focused on other pressing social justice issues...

Me too! All people deserve clean food, air, and water. Historically, marginalized communities, including people of color, indigenous peoples, low-income populations, and others are disproportionately affected by environmental harm. Pollution, toxic waste dumping, and climate change-induced disasters can disproportionately impact these communities that often lack the resources and political power to mitigate environmental burdens. A well-documented example is Hurricane Katrina. The majority of damage was predominantly in Black neighborhoods. Still, the relief for those hardest-hit communities was inadequate and slower than the relief given to predominantly white and higher-income neighborhoods. On a global scale, the countries with the smaller carbon footprint generally suffer the worst air, land, and water quality because other countries dump their waste in these locations.

Focusing on environmental issues does not mean you are neglecting people in need. Often these issues are closely linked.

If you feel like you can't make a difference... We are stronger together! We live in a capitalist society; our money speaks. What are you supporting and encouraging more production of with your purchases? What is your church supporting with their purchases? What waste is being produced that could be reduced? Take a few minutes to think about the following categories and how your church could make a difference:

- Create a Creation Care team at your church
 - Reduce greenhouse gas emissions by using less energy, adjusting the thermostat, turning off lights, unplugging appliances, carpooling, etc.
- Buy less; buy better
 - Less packaging, already used
 - Avoid single-use items
 - Start by simply evaluating the waste produced from coffee hour. How could you work to produce less waste?

- Plant more native plants



Oak trees support more species than any other tree in North America. 2,300 wildlife species depend on them.

Trees reduce greenhouse gases and support wildlife diversity.

- Remove invasive plants and trees

Corporations indeed need to own their share of the burden, and most are not doing so. That does not mean we are off the hook from doing our part. Together we can model and inspire other large organizations to make positive and lasting change.

If you want to do more but don't know where to start...

Don't feel like you have to do it all. I think the best place to start is by falling back in love with nature. It is hard to care for and about something removed from your everyday life. Maybe it can be as simple as spending more time in nature — picnics outside, growing a garden or new plant, visiting a new park, etc. Or, choose a medium you enjoy and commit to sprinkling in some nature-based episodes. My favorite books have been *Finding the Mother Tree*, *A Walk in The Woods*, and *Braiding Sweetgrass* (all available through the Delaware Libraries and on the Libby app). For documentaries, think anything with David Attenborough. After that, move into more in-depth climate change and environmental protection stories.

The next step is to just start taking notice. How much waste are you producing each day? Are you using resources (gas, electricity, etc.) unnecessarily? When something in your house or at church is running low, do some research to see if there is a more sustainable option. Start to learn about greenwashing and how to spot false environmentalism. Once you start to see ways to change, it will start to snowball into bigger and bigger changes.

As you move forward in your creation care journey, I encourage you to reflect on your values and think about how your priorities intersect. Think about what changes you will start making in your daily life and what changes you want to encourage your community to make. How can you help your church become more conscious of how our choices impact the community and the environment?

To learn more, you can sign up for the [Creation Care newsletter](#), but don't let your support end there. Individually and collectively we can make a difference, in ways both large and small, that will carry our impact far beyond our own communities.

Britta Cordrey lives in Sussex County with her husband and two kids. She has a master's degree in STEAM education and was a high school environmental science teacher for 10 years. Currently, she travels and coaches teachers on implementing new science and math curricula. At home, she spends most of her time instilling a love of nature in her two kids through hikes, beach trips, picnics, books and gardening.

General Convention

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General Convention: and its role in the life of The Episcopal Church

by Melodie Woerman

The Episcopal Church's General Convention will meet for the 81st time June 23 – 28 in Louisville, Kentucky, at the Kentucky International Convention Center. If you're asking, "So, what is this exactly, and what does it have to do with me?", you're not alone. General Convention can feel as far removed from people in local churches as Congress does from everyday life. But the role it plays impacts a lot of what Episcopalians see and do in their local churches.

Let's look at three questions:

1. What is General Convention?
2. What does it do?
3. Why does it matter?

What is General Convention?

General Convention is the highest authority in The Episcopal Church. Normally it meets every three years, but because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting that was to have taken place in 2021 was moved to 2022 and was shortened to four legislative days. In 2024, it will meet for six legislative days, although other activities take place before the convention officially gets underway.

It's been around for a long time, dating back to the period when The Episcopal Church was getting formed just two years after the end of the American War of Independence. In 1785, laymen and clergy from six states (Delaware, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Virginia) gathered as the first General Convention to start forming an Anglican church for the new United States, naming it the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. The new U.S. church had only one bishop, Samuel Seabury, so they couldn't form a House of Bishops until two other bishops were consecrated in 1787. In that year, General Convention adopted the structure of the church that we have today, and they approved the first Book of Common Prayer for the entire church.

It has two houses, like Congress – the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops – and members of both houses are elected by their diocesan conventions. Not every denomination elects the people who serve at the highest legislative level, but The Episcopal Church does.

Each house meets separately and has its own officers, and legislation must pass both houses with the same language for it to take effect.

It's big. The House of Deputies includes four lay people and four clergy from each of the 108 dioceses. So, its membership exceeds 900 people with alternates – and yes, it takes a really big room to accommodate everyone! It also will include 18 young people who make up the Official Youth Presence. They have seat and voice, but they cannot vote. Nevertheless, they play an important role in sharing ideas with deputies.

The House of Bishops is made up of all active and retired bishops, although many retired bishops don't attend – those who regularly participate currently are about 200 bishops.

But General Convention is more than just legislation. It also includes official worship services, a large exhibit hall where groups around the church can show people who they are and offer items for sale, and a special day camp for children. Other groups around the church – like organizations and seminaries – have their own events, and it often feels like a big reunion.

A revival is scheduled to take place the night before the convention officially begins at the KFC YUM! Center, usually the site of concerts, ice shows and athletic events, including games of the men's and women's basketball teams of the University of Louisville.

In addition, the Episcopal Church Women hold their Triennial meeting concurrently with General Convention, and this year will mark the organization's 150th anniversary as a ministry within The Episcopal Church.

What does General Convention do?

Its purpose is to pass legislation that affects the church – everything from stating the church's position on things like immigration and the death penalty, to changing canons on clergy conduct and what Bible translations are authorized for use in public worship. Proposed legislation, called resolutions, can come from bishops, deputies, diocesan conventions or from the task forces and commissions that meet between conventions.

All resolutions are referred to one of the convention legislative committees. Deputies and bishops have their own committees on various topics but meet together. Again this year, legislative committees have been meeting online before the start of General Convention to consider proposed resolutions. Committees are required to conduct an open hearing on every resolution assigned to them. People can sign up to speak on those topics, and the public is welcome to be present.

After being considered by a committee, every resolution then starts in one of the two houses where it is voted on, either individually or, in the case of resolutions that appear to be non-controversial, grouped into a consent calendar. If a resolution passes both houses with the same language, it then takes effect.

Why does it matter?

Some crucial elements of the life of The Episcopal Church and Episcopalians come from actions of General Convention. This year there is a major one – the election of a new presiding bishop. Presiding Bishop Michael Curry concludes his nine-year term this year, and his successor will be chosen from among the list of nominees. The House of Bishops will meet at Christ Church Cathedral on June 26 at 11 a.m. to elect the next presiding bishop, and then it is up to the House of Deputies to confirm (or decline) that election.

The House of Deputies also will elect its president, to serve for the next three years.

But General Convention is responsible for many other actions that affect all Episcopalians. Here are some major ones:

- Deciding the text of the *Book of Common Prayer*, as well as supplemental liturgical materials, like the *Book of Occasional Services*. It also decides what goes into *The Hymnal*, as well as what other musical resources are authorized.
- Setting the calendar of saints, currently called *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*. This year, bishops and deputies will vote on adding feast days for Harriet Tubman and the Consecration of Barbara Harris, among others.
- Creating the process for being ordained a deacon, priest, or bishop. In 1976 General Convention recognized that women could be ordained, and the first openly gay bishop was welcomed in 2003.
- Providing parameters for marriage in the church, which now require all dioceses to make provision for marriage of same-sex couples.
- Deciding the process for identifying and dealing with clergy misconduct and protecting all church members through required Safe Church training.
- Defining the physical boundaries of every diocese and setting up mechanisms for a diocese to split or merge with another. It also decides what dioceses are part of The Episcopal Church. This year it will vote on the juncture of the Dioceses of Eastern Michigan and Western Michigan into the Diocese of the Great Lakes, as well as the reunion of the three dioceses in Wisconsin (Milwaukee, Fond du Lac and Eau Claire) into one Diocese of Wisconsin.
- Declaring when The Episcopal Church is in full communion with another Christian body. The Episcopal Church currently is in full communion with seven other churches, and this year, a resolution proposes establishing full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria.

Want to be part of this year's General Convention?

If you want to follow along closely, sessions of General Convention will be livestreamed, with links available closer to its start in late June.

In addition, anyone can serve as one of the many volunteers that help General Convention run smoothly. Volunteers may serve for as little as a half a day or for multiple shifts over many days.

Melodie Woerman is a freelance reporter for the Episcopal News Service and the former director communications for the Episcopal Diocese of Kansas. She has worked in church communications for 30 years at the diocesan and church-wide level. She has won multiple writing awards and is a fervent champion for communicators and their work. She has one adult son and two large cats, Harry and Hermione. In her spare time she likes to read biographies and works about history, do cross-stitch and crochet, and having watched HGTV for years would be happy to give advice about home renovations.

Old Swedes: 325 Years of Faith and Service

 delaware.church/old-swedes-325/

by Michael Redmond

The official seal of Trinity Episcopal Parish bears the emblem of a tree. It represents a verse from holy scripture: “(the righteous) are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper” (Ps. 1:3, NRSV). Those righteous were the hardy Swedes who founded the Colony of New Sweden in 1638; the tree was their church, *Helga Trefaldighet Kyrka* (Holy Trinity Church), and the “streams of water” was the river close by, which they had named for their queen, Christina. Their settlement was also named for the queen, too: Fort Christina. This was the foundation of the city that would eventually be known as Wilmington.

In time, the small community of colonists — adherents of the Church of Sweden (Lutheran) — outgrew the log cabin chapels in which they worshipped, and aspired to build a larger, stone-built edifice. The inspiration and the energy for this project largely came from a new arrival from Sweden, the Rev. Erik Björk (1668 – 1740), missionary priest, who disembarked in June 1697 and had the new church up, finished, and ready for consecration on Trinity Sunday, June 4, 1699. Joining him on that eventful day were two of the missionary colleagues with whom he made the voyage to North America, the Rev. Jonas Aureen and the Rev. Anders Rudman.

Fort Christina had long had a burial ground to its north, and it was felt that the new church location should incorporate the burial ground. Parishioner John Stalcop donated land to make this a reality, and he also agreed to sell about 500 acres to the congregation. Mr. Stalcop’s parcel to the church’s north (228 acres, equivalent to 173 football fields) includes today’s central Wilmington. The “Delaware Blue” granite used to build the church was quarried from the property of another parishioner, Ashmund Stidham. The church’s black walnut pulpit — one of the oldest known pulpits in the United States — was built with wood donated by the earliest parishioners.

From its beginning, the Colony of New Sweden was beset by difficulties. No more than two dozen people — Swedes, Finns, Dutch, and one African slave named Antonius (Antoni Swart, “Black Anthony”), a sailor — formed the original settlement, and although the colony grew in size and population, New Sweden always remained small compared to the Dutch or English colonies in North America.

The short-lived colony was diverse from the start. In addition to the Swedes, Finns, and Dutch, the early decades of white settlement included Belgians and Germans. The land had once been inhabited by the Native American Siconese Lenape, whose presence was much diminished by disease, famine, and warfare. Old Swedes records show that adults and

children variously described as “Negro,” “mulatto,” “Free Negro,” “black people,” and “Indian” were baptized in the church as early as 1715. The records also show that persons described as “colored” were married there. It is assumed that people of color, both free and enslaved, were interred in the burial ground. No record has been found that burials were ever segregated, a common practice at the time.

The history of slavery in Delaware began with the Colony of New Sweden and despite attempts to ban it, continued until the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in December 1865. By 1810, however, according to the U.S. Census, three-quarters of all Black Delawareans were free.

It has been estimated that the Old Swedes burial ground — some three acres in extent — could be the final resting place of as many as 15,000 people. Among them are 44 Revolutionary War veterans; Richard Bayard (1796 – 1868), first mayor of Wilmington; three U.S. senators; a U.S. Army general who served during the Civil War; and the Rt. Rev. Alfred Lee (1807 – 1887), first bishop of the Episcopal Church in Delaware, later 10th presiding bishop of The Episcopal Church. Also noteworthy is Florence Bayard Hilles (1866 – 1954), an important figure in the national movement for women’s suffrage.

By the tenure of the sixth rector, the Rev. Peter Tranberg (1716 – 1748), Delaware had been British for nearly 80 years, and the Swedish language had “very much fallen out of use.” Due to his high proficiency in English, the Rev. Tranberg offered both English and Swedish services, attracting Wilmington’s growing Anglican community, who lacked a local church. Old Swedes’ records show that many early baptisms, weddings, and funerals were performed for families who were not members of the congregation.

Out of necessity, the crossing of denominational lines was not uncommon among Protestants in early America. There was ample precedent. The Rev. Björk had preached on occasion to Anglican congregations in New Castle and Chester, Pennsylvania. He wrote regarding this: “We have always been counseled and instructed from Sweden to maintain friendship and unity with the English, so that we and the English Church shall not reckon each other as dissenters ... but as sister Churches.”

The Old Swedes congregation grew. By the 1770s the church required more seating. Renovations were made, and a gallery was built along the west wall. Then came the American Revolution. In 1777 services were discontinued while two companies of British and Hessian soldiers were quartered in the church.

By the end of the Revolutionary War and the establishment of the United States of America, the Swedes among the congregation had become fully assimilated into American culture, including the complete loss of “knowledge of the Swedish language.” In 1782 The Church of Sweden began withdrawing from its missionary work in the new American republic; the last Swedish pastor of Old Swedes, the Rev. Lars Girelius, was eventually recalled.

In October 1786 the third General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States was held in Wilmington; the convention's worship took place in Old Swedes. The parish formally became Episcopal in 1791. Ever since, nonetheless, Holy Trinity Episcopal Parish has acknowledged the Swedish settlers as its founders and recognized 1699 as its foundation.

The 19th century brought sweeping growth and change, including the industrialization of the riverfront. The City of Wilmington was expanding westward. Having outgrown Old Swedes, the Trinity congregation built a new sanctuary uptown at Fifth and King streets. In 1847 regular worship was being conducted at both locations. In 1882 the parish moved again — farther uptown, to a small chapel it had built at North Adams Street and Delaware Avenue to serve the congregation while the construction of the present Trinity Church was completed. Designed by Philadelphia architect Theophilus P. Chandler Jr. in the English Gothic style, the new Holy Trinity Church was consecrated on May 15, 1906. Worship at Old Swedes continued as before — one parish, two congregations, two locations.

But the story of a parish is more than marble and mortar.

In 1948 the former vicarage at Old Swedes was renovated and expanded to form the Christiana Community Center, the site of a wide range of programs serving Wilmington's East Side neighborhood. Among the offerings were sports, arts and crafts, club rooms, a library and reading room, a music room, and a recreation hall. Services included health clinics and vocational, educational, and employment counseling. Today's Trinity Parish is keeping a close eye on plans to revitalize the East Side and is seeking to envision how the Old Swedes Historic Site might support that effort.

In 1947 the independent, not-for-profit Old Swedes Foundation was established to preserve and promote the Old Swedes Church and burial ground as an educational and cultural resource. In 1959 the stone Hendrickson House, a farmhouse built around 1622 and moved from a site in Delaware County, Pennsylvania, was reconstructed as a museum at the west side of the burial ground.

Later additions, created by Trinity Parish volunteers, include an outdoor amphitheater and a 42-foot labyrinth.

Old Swedes Church was designated a Registered National Historic Landmark in 1961. Old Swedes Church and Burial Ground was designated a unit of First State National Historical Park in 2015.


Noteworthy visitors to Old Swedes include President Franklin D. Roosevelt, in 1938; Lyndon B. Johnson, in 1963, then vice president of the United States; and Their Majesties King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia of Sweden, during a state visit in 2013.

The Old Swedes neighborhood is changing. The City of Wilmington is changing. Trinity Episcopal Parish is dedicated to changing along with them. While rooted in tradition, Trinity Parish is eager to engage with the new.

Acknowledgments: * Betsy V. Christopher, *Images of America: Old Swedes Church and Historic Site* (Arcadia Publishing, 2023, ISBN 9781-4671-6044-5) * *A Historic Saga of Settlement and Nation Building: First State National Historical Park: Historic Site Resource Study*. Prepared by Paula S. Reed & Associates for the National Park Service, 2019. * Charles A. Silliman, *The Episcopal Church in Delaware, 1785-1954* (Diocese of Delaware, 1982) * *C.A. Weslager, New Sweden on the Delaware: 1638-1655* (The Middle Atlantic Press, 1988) * Angela Sutton, Ph.D., *The Slave Trade and Its Legacy in the New World*, Vanderbilt University, 2021.

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Bishop's Message: People are Wonderful

 delaware.church/bishops-message-people-are-wonderful/

Dear Beloved in Christ,

It has been two and a half years now since the news of Archbishop Desmond Tutu's death interrupted the Christmas season with a sharp pang of sadness. At the time, it was well known that he had been ill. Still, when a light as brilliant as his passes into glory, we mourn our loss even as we celebrate the promises and the power of God that he proclaimed for decades.

I did not know him personally, but I did speak with him and shook his hand. It was one of the great honors of my life.

In September of 2005, the then-retired archbishop visited the General Theological Seminary in New York City where I was a student. He came to mark the opening of a new peace and reconciliation center in his name. My wife, daughters, and I waited our turn to greet an icon of the twentieth century and a towering witness to the good news of Jesus Christ. In our briefexchange, I was struck by his humility, joy, and the fullness of his presence with the seminary community that evening. My wife will tell you she remembers these things, too, as well as his huge smile.

Here was a man whose renown and impact were global, who was admired on every continent, and who was known the world over by a single name: Tutu. By the time I met him, he was a counsellor to presidents and prime ministers and a trusted voice in global affairs. Archbishop Tutu did not seek any grandeur or prestige for himself. When he shook our hands, it was not as a great man looking down but as a fellow child of God reaching across. He said, "God bless you," and I indeed felt blessed.

Intrigued and inspired, I learned of the profound challenges that had shaped him. He nearly died at birth. He contracted childhood polio and then tuberculosis in his teens. Like all Black men in his native South Africa, he was attacked and repressed by racism enshrined into law. As a priest and later as a bishop, he fought relentlessly against apartheid and was attacked mercilessly for his efforts. Some thought him too revolutionary; others were outraged by his insistence on non-violent means. For years he received hate mail, death threats, and obscene calls. It is all too easy to reduce his life to "winner of the Nobel Peace Prize." For as lofty of an achievement as that is, it does not come close to recognizing the heartbreak and pain he endured or how close to death his work took him.

I saw a quote some time ago from Archbishop Tutu that read, "Many people ask me what I have learned from all the experiences in my life, and I say unhesitatingly: People are wonderful. It is true. People really are wonderful." This is a stunning statement from a man

that many people tried to silence or kill. Yet I do not doubt for a second he meant that all people, in God's light, are wonderful and worthy of respect. Desmond Tutu embodied God's love for everyone, and that incarnated love became a potent force that reshaped world history.

During yet another fractious election year in our own country, I am heartened to remember that, indeed, people really are wonderful. Life is a gift, God is good, and the light of Jesus Christ shines as brightly and true as ever.

Blessings,

The Rt. Rev. Kevin S. Brown
