

Waking Up Christian

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by the Rev. Jeffrey Ross

For many, life in our country has become very complex and confusing to navigate. Fractures based upon partisanship and positions on social issues have deepened divisions within these United States. It is tempting to think that this is a unique experience and time, yet if we scratch beneath the surface of our national history, we find division and questions about equity and equality have been persistent since before the founding of our nation 250 years ago. Indeed, no nation is conflict free. It is easy to miss struggles when they do not impact us directly. Perhaps what is really going on is that we are collectively waking up to a deeper awareness. We are awakening to the need to put our faith in God above all else and to deepen our concern for our sisters and brothers who bear the Divine Image.

In every generation, the Church is asked — sometimes gently and sometimes with urgency — to remember who and whose we are. For Episcopalians, this question is not merely theological; it is profoundly practical. It touches how we vote, how we speak to neighbors, how we treat those with whom we disagree, and how we respond to the suffering we encounter in the world. At the heart of our identity stands a simple yet demanding truth: our primary allegiance is not to a nation, a political party, or an ideology, but to Jesus Christ.

This claim is not a rejection of civic life. Anglicans have long understood public engagement as part of faithful discipleship. We pray for the nation and its leaders. We give thanks for the freedoms we enjoy. Many serve honorably in public office, the military, education, and community leadership. Yet the Church has always insisted that love of country must never eclipse love of God. When loyalties compete, Christ must come first, beyond everything else!

Jesus himself makes this clear. When asked about ultimate allegiance, he redirects attention beyond earthly claims: “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mt. 22:21). The implication is unmistakable — everything ultimately belongs to God, including our hearts, our conscience, and our moral imagination. Nations rise and fall; parties shift and realign; but the reign of God endures forever. As followers of Christ, we are commissioned through our baptism to work for the expansion of God’s dominion.

Putting Christ before country does not diminish patriotism; rather, it purifies it. It frees us from confusing national success with the kingdom of God. History offers sobering reminders of the harm that comes when Christianity becomes fused with political power — when the cross is draped in a flag and faith is reduced to a tool of cultural dominance. The Church loses its prophetic voice whenever it becomes captive to partisan interests.

Our Anglican tradition offers a better way: a posture both rooted and spacious, committed yet humble. We are shaped not by ideological manifestos but by the rhythms of common prayer and sacramental life. Week after week, we gather at the Eucharistic table where every earthly distinction is relativized. Republicans and Democrats, independents and the politically disengaged — all kneel side by side, hands outstretched in the same posture of need. No party platform can grant what is given there: the grace of Christ's own life. This is why our Book of Common Prayer teaches us that the Eucharist is our central act of worship.

If the Eucharist reveals our unity, the Baptismal Covenant tells us how to live it. Whenever we reaffirm those promises, we are reminded that baptism is not a private spiritual milestone but an initiation into a way of life that has public consequences. The spiritual journey of life is one where we are constantly renewing our covenant and deepening our commitment to Christ.

Consider the vows we make.

We promise to “persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever [we] fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord.” This commitment requires moral clarity that transcends partisan talking points. Evil is not confined to one political camp; it appears wherever fear overrides compassion, wherever truth is distorted, wherever power is used to harm rather than to heal. Our baptism calls us to examine our own hearts before condemning others and to resist the temptation to baptize our preferred policies as if they were synonymous with God's will.

We promise to “proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ.” Notice that this proclamation is not limited to sermons or evangelistic programs. Our civic behavior is itself a form of witness. The tone of our public speech, our willingness to listen, our refusal to caricature those who differ from us — all of these testify to whether Christ truly governs our lives. In a culture often marked by outrage and contempt, Christians are called to demonstrate (as St. Paul said in 1 Cor 12:31), “a more excellent way.”

We promise to “seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving [our] neighbor as [ourselves].” Here the Covenant dismantles every attempt to rank human worth according to citizenship, economic productivity, ethnicity, or social status. If Christ is present in all persons, then the immigrant, the prisoner, the unhoused neighbor, the struggling parent, and the forgotten elder are not problems to be solved but sacraments of divine presence. To serve them is to serve as Christ would himself.

Perhaps most challenging of all, we vow to “strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.” This is not a suggestion; it is a baptismal obligation. Justice, in the biblical sense, is not merely fairness but the restoration of right relationship — shalom, the flourishing God desires for creation. Peace is not the absence of conflict but the commitment to struggle together and work for reconciliation.

These promises awaken us to the needs of the powerless and marginalized because they train us to see the world through the eyes of Jesus. Repeatedly in the Gospels, Christ moves toward those pushed to the edges: lepers, tax collectors, women dismissed by society, the poor, the sick, the sinner. He does not wait for them to become respectable; he meets them in their vulnerability. If we place Christ before every other allegiance, we will inevitably find ourselves drawn in the same direction.

This does not mean that faithful Christians will always agree about policy solutions. The Church is not called to unanimity of opinion but to unity of love. Reasonable people, profoundly committed to the Gospel, may differ on the best ways to address complex social realities. Yet our disagreements must never erode our recognition that each person is beloved of God and that Jesus calls us to work toward unity (John 17:20-21).

What distinguishes Christian engagement is therefore less the specific position we hold and more the spirit in which we hold it. Are we motivated by fear or by hope? By tribal loyalty or by compassion? Are we seeking victory over opponents, or the common good of all?

When Christ stands at the center, we are liberated from the anxiety that so often distorts political life. We remember that no election can fully inaugurate the kingdom of God, and no defeat can thwart it. This freedom allows us to participate in civic life with both seriousness and serenity — to advocate passionately without despair, to work for change without demonizing others.

The Church's vocation is ultimately prophetic rather than partisan. Like the prophets of Israel, we are called to speak truth even when it unsettles our preferred alliances. Sometimes this will mean affirming what is good in our national life; at other times it will mean challenging policies or cultural patterns that wound God's children. Either way, our credibility depends on our willingness to be guided by the Gospel rather than by political expediency.

Putting Christ before country and party also reshapes our imagination of power. In the world's calculus, power is often measured by control, influence, and dominance. But the power revealed in Jesus is cruciform — self-giving, sacrificial, poured out for the life of the world. When the Church aligns itself with this kind of power, it becomes a community where the overlooked are honored and the voiceless are heard. We must eschew those whose goal is the denigration and dehumanization of others, whose only pursuit is personal power and privilege. We are commissioned to advocate for those who are marginalized by the selfish pursuits of others. As people of faith, as people who walk in the ways of justice and mercy, we are to advocate for their dignity and protect them from the abuses of political power.

The Baptismal Covenant does more than instruct; it sends us. Having been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever, we are commissioned to embody God's reconciling love wherever we are planted. Some will live this calling through advocacy,

others through quiet acts of mercy, still others through the steady work of building communities where dignity is upheld. None of these ministries is small in the eyes of God. We are all ambassadors of Christ, who work together to make God's compassion tangible and real to a fractured and hurting world (2 Cor. 5:16-20).

In a polarized age, the Episcopal Church has a particular gift to offer: a witness that faith can be both deeply rooted and generously open, morally serious yet gracious in tone. By placing Christ before every lesser loyalty, we become a people capable of bridging divides rather than deepening them.

Each time we renew our baptismal promises, we answer, "I will, with God's help." Those words matter! They remind us that this way of life is not sustained by our own virtue but by grace. We will falter; we will sometimes confuse the kingdom of God with the kingdoms of this world. Yet God remains faithful, continually drawing us back to the waters of baptism, where our truest citizenship is revealed.

For our citizenship, as St. Paul writes to the Philippians (3:20), "is in heaven." From that identity flows our mission on earth: to love without boundary, to serve without calculation, and to walk humbly with our God. When Christ comes before country and party, the Church becomes what it was always meant to be — a sign of God's hope for a fractured world, and a living invitation to the justice, mercy, and peace that lie at the heart of the Gospel.

As the baptized, we are all called to bear the hope we have been given through the love of Christ. Hope that orients us to humility and service of others rather than division and domination. Hope that is grounded in moral action with mercy, not fear. Hope that makes a place for justice and peace at the heart of our common life together. Hope that insists that suffering, solidarity, and love of others, including our enemies, belong in our witness and spiritual practices of our daily lives. If we cannot begin to create this in our own behavior, then we will not be able to make it real for others and be the people Christ hoped for and for whom he died. We must wake up to the reality of what it means to be followers of Jesus.

The Rev. Jeffrey Ross has served as rector at St. Peter's Church in Lewes, Delaware since 2005. Prior to his ordination in 1998, he worked as a family therapist as well as on Bishop's staff for Christian Formation. Jeff is a graduate of the General Theological Seminary and also holds a Master of Science degree in Pastoral Counseling from Neumann University. His hobbies include photography and playing the penny whistle, along with loving movies, books, and theater.

While it is Still Dark

 delaware.church/while-it-is-still-dark/

 *Trigger Warning: This article discusses suicide.*

If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. You are not alone. Call or text 988 anytime in the United States and Canada to reach the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Within Delaware, you can dial 211 to be connected to the 24/7 Crisis Intervention line. To support an organization that is doing work in this area, visit stopsoldiersuicide.org.

by Jordan E. Kinsey

To fallen soldiers let us sing
Where no rockets fly, nor bullets wing
Our broken brothers let us bring
To the Mansions of the Lord

No more bleeding, no more fight
No prayers pleading through the night
Just divine embrace, eternal light
In the Mansions of the Lord

— “The Mansions of the Lord”
from the film *We Were Soldiers*, 2002

Yet even now, says the Lord,
return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
rend your hearts and not your clothing.

— Joel 2:12-13

Joel’s admonition, familiar to all Episcopalians during the season of Lent, is no problem for me. In my work as a death care professional for the Department of Defense and as an intern at a funeral home in Wilmington, I live with a seemingly permanent broken heart. My heart is soft and malleable. Tears come to my eyes readily these days. This has not always been the case, and I am deeply grateful for it.

I am deeply grateful because, for one, my mental health is stronger than it has ever been. I am also closer to God than I’ve ever been, because I meet him face to face on a nearly daily basis.

When people hear of my work, they often assume that business must be pretty slow these days, since the U.S. military isn't currently engaged in active conflict anywhere in the world. Combat, however, has not been the leading cause of death in the military since we began keeping records in 1980. From 1980 until 2014, the leading cause was accidents — both training accidents and, more commonly, vehicle and motorcycle accidents. In 2014, the military crossed a dangerous Rubicon from which we have not been able to recover. That year, suicides — or, as we call them, “self-inflicted deaths” — became the leading cause of death in the military, and they have remained so ever since.

Suicides in the military have increased every year since 1980, and we now have more than 44% more than we did then. Today, a servicemember is nine times more likely to die by suicide than in combat. A servicemember is 17.86 times more likely to die by suicide than a civilian. (Approximately 0.14 Americans out of every thousand die by suicide each year, but in the military it is 2.5 per thousand.)

As someone who does this work every day, however, I can tell you: the statistics don't matter. They are just numbers. When I am sitting with a family who has lost a son, or brother, or father just hours before — over 90% of military suicides are male — they do not care to hear about the numbers.

No two situations are alike, because no two families are alike. But there is one common denominator. There is one thing that occurs every single time, without exception.

They always ask why.

And I never have an answer.

After a few years of doing this work, I have come to the conclusion that the reason there is no satisfactory answer is because it is the wrong question.

Perhaps a better question — or at least the only one I have found that provides any comfort at all — is: “Where is God now?” In my experience, asking this question opens a door to exploring our fears. It also provides an opportunity to describe God's presence in the midst of our pain.

It is a bit of a theological paradox for me — and one that I plan to ask God about directly as soon as I get to the other side — but it has been my experience that God's presence is somehow most palpable in situations of profound grief, indescribable loss, and unspeakable pain. I sometimes find myself almost feeling sorry for people who have never had the opportunity to sit with a family in one of these sacred spaces, because in those rooms you experience God in a way I have never experienced anywhere else. God is always there. You can feel God's presence in a physical, almost tactile way.

Throughout the Gospels, a few themes develop about who Jesus is and what he came to do — or perhaps better said, who Jesus is not and what he did not come to do. From the beginning of Christ's life on this earth to the end, he proves over and over again that he is not the Messiah the world was looking for.

In Christ's temptations in the wilderness, he was offered the opportunity to solve all the world's problems. He turned it down.

He was not the Messiah they were looking for. They were looking for someone to reclaim Jerusalem from Rome. They were looking for the glory of their nation. They were looking for economic recovery.

What he offered — what Christ still offers — is compassion. What he offers is hope. What he offers is salvation.

Where is God now? It is a holy question.

Where is God when we are anxious? Where is God when we are oppressed? Where is God when we are experiencing grief or loss?

I was probably six or seven years old, in Baptist Sunday School, when I learned that the longest verse in the English Bible is Esther 8:9 and the shortest verse in the Bible is John 11:35: "Jesus wept."

I find meaning in that.

I am aware that the entire concept of verses was not introduced into Scripture until the 16th century, but I also know that those early church fathers could have attached those two words to the preceding verse or the following one. It seems to me that the choice to set them apart and make them stand out as the shortest verse in the Bible was intentional. I believe those two words communicate everything we need to know about Jesus. Christ's very essence is found in the moment when he wept.

That verse, of course, comes from the passage about Lazarus. Jesus is weeping at the tomb of his friend Lazarus. The curious thing to me has always been: why? Not five minutes later, Jesus was to raise Lazarus, and he had to have known this. So why is he weeping?

I do not believe Jesus is weeping for Lazarus. Jesus is weeping because he saw Lazarus's friends weeping. He is weeping out of compassion for them — compassion for the human experience of grief and loss. He is weeping tears every bit as salty as our own, and he still does.

Beloved in Delaware, where is God now? Where is God when we are weeping? He is as close to us as he has ever been. He draws closest to us when we are hurting. He is as near to us as the catch in your throat when you are sobbing. And this love-soaked grief of ours is

holy to God.

John's account of Jesus' own death and resurrection includes a line not found in the other Gospels, and it has always seemed meaningful to me. John writes, "While it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed."

"While it was still dark." Those words quite aptly describe the days and months — and sometimes even years — after a tragedy. It is still dark.

I do not know why, but it seems to me that in God's economy, his most wondrous work is done while it is still dark. While we are still in despair. While we are still grieving. While we are still sinners. While we are sure that nothing good will ever come. When we are certain our hearts will never know joy again. When we come face to face with death — that is when we are closest to resurrection.

There are facets of life that can only be seen clearly through the prism of grief. In the days and weeks after a tragedy, you will detect this. You might even want to look away, but I encourage you to resist that urge. You are seeing life as it truly is.

Later in that same passage from John, the two angels in the tomb ask Mary, "Woman, why are you weeping?" Then Jesus himself appears and asks her the same question again: "Woman, why are you weeping?"

I was taught to read this passage as an accusation — as an "O ye of little faith" moment. Almost as if Christ were saying, "How dare you be crying? Didn't I teach you anything?" I was taught to hear this question as Christ and the angels telling Mary that she was overreacting — as if they were rebuking her for her tears and for her grief.

But then I remember that Christ himself wept at the tomb of his friend Lazarus. After experiencing a few losses in my own life, I have come to hear this question not as an accusation but as an invitation. I hear it as an honest question. I hear Christ inviting me — and all of us — to tell him: "Why are you crying? Tell me what it is about this loss that hurts. Tell me what it is about this person that meant so much to you. Tell me how you saw God's face in this person. Tell me."

Where is God now?

While it may still be dark, God is here. And while it may still be dark, the light is breaking through. And the darkness cannot, will not, shall not overcome it.

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The Sacred Overlap: A Season of Shared Unity

 delaware.church/the-sacred-overlap-a-season-of-shared-unity/

by the Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Kaeton, Irfan Patel, Ormand L. O’Neal, Sr., and Rabbi Michael Beals

Editors note: The introductory reflection (“Into the Woods”) was written by the Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Kaeton specifically for the Delaware Communion. The essay that follows was written collaboratively by all four authors and was originally submitted as a letter to the editor to newspapers across Delaware, where it was published in several outlets.

I’ll begin with a Hasidic tale as told by Rabbi Geoffrey A. Mitelman.

There was once a young boy who would wander in the woods. His father became concerned as he went deeper and deeper into the forest each time. One day he said to him, “I notice that every day you walk into the woods. Why do you go there?”

The boy replied, “I go there to find God.”

“That’s wonderful,” the father said. “But don’t you know that God is the same everywhere?”

“Yes,” the boy answered, “but I am not.”

Into the Woods — and Together

Every year, I enter the wilderness of Lent, as I have for as long as I can remember. As a child, I would piously give up penny candy, which felt like a huge sacrifice to my young mind. I had earned the money for that candy from my paper route. It was hard work.

It wasn’t until I was much older that I realized the resentment I harbored likely negated any spiritual benefit from my Lenten discipline. A serious child, steeped in the simple transactional logic of substitutionary atonement, I worried that my resentment might have caused Jesus to reconsider the sacrifice he had made for my seemingly unredeemable soul.

As a young adult, I began to trade the transactional nature of sacrifice for the transformation promised in a holy Lent. I experimented with the latest au courant theology of “taking on” instead of “giving up.” I gleefully took on ballroom dancing, horseback riding, and swimming lessons. Those practices worked for a while, but something still felt unsettled and unsatisfying.

There was an inexplicable yearning in me, an indescribable longing for something less tangible — a desire for the mysterious. Slowly, I discovered the invitation to be made more whole and holy by entering the risks of sacrifice held in the wilderness, letting go of my

expectations for outcomes.

Like the little boy in the Hasidic tale, I still walk into the woods of Lent to find God. But now I listen for what the modern mystic Howard Thurman called “the sound of the genuine” — the authentic, essential self within each person, a divine still small voice that exists beneath the noise of societal pressures, ambitions, and fears. Thurman taught that listening for this voice can lead to the discovery of one’s unique purpose and true calling.

For me, making the sacrifice of stillness — risking being fully present in the unknown terrain of the woods — and allowing what needs to die within me to die, leads toward transformation. It leads toward resurrection. It opens into the unspeakable, mysterious joy of Easter first known by the apostles.

The Lenten woods are the same. I am not the same. I am becoming more fully who I am, so that I can become more deeply part of the whole of creation. I am less concerned about how my sacrifice benefits me and more passionate about the well-being of my neighbor — about working to end oppression and to foster greater peace and justice in the world.

This year, because of a remarkable convergence of calendars and the varied ways our traditions mark sacred time, I have found others waiting at the entrance to these woods.

The Sacred Overlap

As the winter chill softens into the first hints of a Delaware spring, four of the world’s ancient spiritual rhythms beat in unison. The Christian season of Lent (February 18 – April 2), the Islamic holy month of Ramadan (began on February 18th), the Baha’i 19-Day Fast (March 1 – March 19), and the Jewish holiday of Purim (begins Monday night, March 2 and continues through Tuesday, March 3) will overlap in a rare and powerful convergence.

To the casual observer, this may seem like coincidence. But for those of us who lead faith communities in the First State, it feels like invitation.

At a time when national discourse is often fractured, the 2026 calendar offers both a physical and spiritual blueprint for how Delawareans might move toward one another.

The Common Ground of Sacrifice

While our traditions differ, fasting and reflection form a shared language. Whether it is the forty-day Lenten journey, the daily fast from sunrise to sunset during Ramadan, or the Baha’i period of spiritual recuperation from March 1 to March 20, the intent is similar — prioritizing the soul over the ego.

On Monday, March 3, our Jewish neighbors celebrate Purim, honoring the courage of Queen Esther. Like the other traditions observing sacred seasons, Purim — and the preparation for Passover that follows — reminds us that spiritual celebration is incomplete if it does not look outward to the needs of others.

The Root of Righteousness — Tsedaka and Sadaqah

Perhaps the most striking bridge among our traditions this season is the call to give.

In Judaism, Purim requires *matanot la'evyonim* — gifts to the poor. This spirit of righteous giving extends into Passover, ensuring that every family can gather at the Seder table.

There is a beautiful linguistic truth beneath this shared ethic: the Hebrew word for charity, *tsedaka*, and the Arabic word, *sadaqah*, share the same ancient Semitic root. Both speak not merely of voluntary charity, but of righteousness — of justice.

When the church, the mosque, the synagogue, and the Baha'i assembly are focused on the vulnerable at the same time, our capacity for impact multiplies. Our shared hunger and shared history call us to ensure that none of our neighbors in Wilmington, Dover, or Georgetown go without.

A Message of Solidarity

We invite our congregants — and all people of goodwill — to see this overlap not as a competition of faiths, but as a chorus of devotion.

Let us use this time to learn from one another. Let us stand in solidarity during the quiet reflections of Lent, share in the community spirit of an Iftar, embrace the Baha'i vision of a unified world, and celebrate the joy of Purim.

By practicing our faiths alongside one another, we discover that we are not so different. By giving together, we find that our hopes for peace and justice are shared.

This spring, may our shared sacrifice become the soil in which deeper understanding grows across the First State. And may we enter these woods not as we were, but as we are becoming.

The Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Kaeton is an Episcopal priest and scholar who has served various congregations throughout Sussex and Kent County. Elizabeth wrote the introduction to this piece.

Irfan Patel serves as leader and the interfaith chair for the Islamic Society of Delaware.

Ormand L. O'Neal, Sr. is a representative of the Baha'i Faith and an advocate for racial unity.

Rabbi Michael Beals is the leader of Temple Beth El in Newark, known for his civic leadership and commitment to interreligious cooperation.

Her Voice Still Echoes

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By Karen Kegelman

With additional reporting and reflection by Cynde A. Bimbi, pilgrim on the 2024 Ecumenical Civil Rights pilgrimage

In September 2024, pilgrims from across the Episcopal Church in Delaware and the New Castle Presbytery traveled to Selma and Montgomery, Alabama, as part of an Ecumenical Civil Rights pilgrimage. We walked sacred ground. We crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge. We prayed. We sang. We listened.

And we listened closely to a woman whose life embodied the very history we had come to remember — **Ms. Jo Ann Bland**.

We had the sacred privilege of talking with Jo Ann and listening to her testimony. One of our pilgrims, Karen Kegelman, wrote the following reflection for Women’s History Month in remembrance of her life and witness.

During our pilgrimage we toured sites central to the early Civil Rights Movement with Ms. Jo Ann Bland who died on February 19, 2026.

A native of Selma, Ms. Bland was a child when she joined friends and neighbors marching for voting rights. By age eleven, Ms. Bland had been arrested at least thirteen times for her participation in nonviolent demonstrations.

On March 7, 1965, young Jo Ann joined siblings, friends, and neighbors for a voting rights march from Selma to Montgomery. The march ended abruptly on the Edmund Pettus Bridge when Alabama State Troopers on horseback charged the 600 peaceful marchers, attacking with tear gas and beating them with clubs which resulted in serious injuries. Several marchers suffered broken bones and cracked skulls — the event is known as “Bloody Sunday.” The brutal violence that day, and the subsequent murder of Rev. James Reeb, a white Protestant minister who participated in the march, prompted Congress to finally pass the Voting Rights Act in August 1965.

While memories of discrimination, marches, arrests, violence, and fear were seared in Ms. Bland’s heart, so too were memories of Gospel hymns, love, family, friends, and her church community. She dedicated her life to educating the public about the Civil Rights Movement, and shared compelling first-hand accounts of events that do not appear in history books.

When I was considering whether or not to attend the first No Kings March in Philadelphia in June 2025, I feared the prospect of arrest. Then I remembered Jo Ann and her siblings, arrested multiple times as children, and the wall of mug shots I stood before at the Holt Street Baptist Church Museum — more than 90 photos of Black men and women of all ages who faced fear and protested anyway. Who was I to be afraid?

Jo Ann lived a remarkable life of integrity and courage. I am grateful we had the privilege to hear her testimony in person. The Bland family wrote, “She was humble, direct, and unwavering in her convictions. She would give the shirt off her back to anyone in need, yet she stood firmly for justice and truth. Her life embodied courage, faith, resilience, and love.”

In Jo Ann Bland we encountered the enduring power of moral courage rooted in faith, a child of God who bore witness to the Gospel through steadfast love of neighbor at great risk to her personal safety. May we continue to carry forward the responsibility to walk together toward justice with love, humility, and hope.

For those of us who made that pilgrimage, Jo Ann was not simply a historical figure. She was a living bridge between past and present — between “Bloody Sunday” and our own uncertain moment.

Born on July 29, 1953, in Selma, Alabama, Jo Ann Blackmon Bland began her activism at just eight years old. She attended meetings of the Dallas County Voters League with her grandmother, Sylvia Johnson, under the leadership of Amelia Boynton. She joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), becoming one of the many young foot soldiers whose courage reshaped the nation.

Remembering her walk across the Edmund Pettus Bridge on “Bloody Sunday”, she later recalled seeing a woman fall beneath a charging horse and hearing the sound of her head hitting the pavement. She fainted. When she regained consciousness, her sister’s blood was dripping onto her face. Her sister required 26 stitches.

For Jo Ann, the Civil Rights Movement was never an abstraction. It was childhood.

Yet her life was not defined by trauma. It was defined by purpose.

After attending the College of Staten Island and serving in the United States Army, she returned home to Selma. In 1989 she co-founded the National Voting Rights Museum and Institute. Later she founded Journeys for the Soul, guiding visitors from around the world through the living history of Selma.

Ms. Bland was, in the words of the 2024 Ecumenical Civil Rights Pilgrimage coordinator and a member of the Episcopal Church in Delaware, Sheridan Quarless Kingsberry, “a Christian, an advocate for social and racial justice, a mentor, a community organizer, a true womanist, a friend and so much more.”

She believed deeply that what happened in Selma was not simply Black history — it was American history.

In 2021, alongside Kimberly Smitherman, Jo Ann began purchasing parcels of land near the site where the Bloody Sunday march began. That land became Foot Soldiers Park — her vision to memorialize not only famous leaders, but the ordinary people, including children, who made history through their courage.

In her own words:

“My dream is that Selma will become a place of pilgrimage for all those who seek to right the wrongs of our society... My vision for preserving the hallowed ground where the Bloody Sunday march began and creating Foot Soldiers Park is to show every visitor, and especially every child, that they have the power to make great change in their community.”

When our Delaware pilgrims gathered at Foot Soldiers Park in September 2024, we stood on that sacred cement.

She often said that movements for social change are like jigsaw puzzles. Everyone is a unique and necessary piece. If your piece is missing, the picture is not complete — because you are the most important piece.

For Women’s History Month, we remember Jo Ann Bland not only as a child of the movement, but as a woman who shaped its memory, guarded its truth, and entrusted its future to the next generation.

She died peacefully in Selma on February 19, 2026, at the age of 72 — in the same city where she was born, marched, and built a legacy.

But her voice remains.

It echoes on the bridge.

It rises in the hymns she sang as a child.

It lives in the courage of pilgrims who return home changed.

And it asks us still:

What is your piece of the puzzle?

May we answer as she did — with faith, humility, and unwavering love of neighbor.

To learn more about Foot Soldiers Park and the life of Jo Ann Bland, visit footsoldierspark.org. To learn more about the 2024 Ecumenical Civil Rights pilgrimage, [click here](#). Portions of this additional reflection draw from Jo Ann Bland’s public writings and obituary.

Bishop Cabell Tennis A Remembrance

 delaware.church/bishop-cabell-tennis-a-remembrance/

by the Rt. Rev. Wayne P. Wright

On an unseasonably warm, muggy day 27 years ago, more than a thousand Episcopalians gathered under a big white tent set up on the great lawn in front of St. Andrew's School. I was about to become Delaware's new bishop. There is one moment that stands out among many on my first official day as bishop. A central symbolic action of the bishop's ordination service is the presentation of the staff, or crozier as it is sometimes called. The intricately carved, antique wooden staff used by Delaware's bishops is almost 150 years old. It symbolizes the bishop's ministry as chief pastor and shepherd of the diocesan congregations, laity, and clergy. Cabby Tennis presented the staff to me that day. As he placed it in my hands, he concluded eleven years of faithful, devoted service to the Episcopal Church in Delaware.

I always felt honored to follow in Cabby Tennis' footsteps. He was known as an able and effective leader. But to me he was also a good friend. Cabby and I first met at St. George's College, Jerusalem, almost 50 years ago. He was the Dean of St. Mark's Cathedral, Seattle, and already recognized as a senior church leader. I was a young seminarian from Virginia. Even so, he befriended me, and I have happy memories of our weeks in the Holy Land. Later, after becoming bishop, Cabby twice nominated me for parish ministries in Delaware. Once I declined to accept the call, and later a parish chose another priest. It never occurred to me that I might one day be his successor!

As a bishop, Cabby Tennis took a visible public role in Delaware and in the wider Episcopal Church. He was a confident advocate and steady voice for a more just and inclusive church and society. He led by his words and example. He advocated for immigrants' and workers' rights in Delaware. He played a key role in establishing and raising funds for the Sussex County Mission. Much of that work continues to this day in the medical clinic, childcare center, and immigration services begun in that era. With his support, the Cathedral Choir School (now referred to as the Choir School of Delaware) expanded its work mentoring and tutoring children in Wilmington. At a time when leadership opportunities were not broadly available, Cabby was a leader, recruiting and deploying ordained women for ministries in Delaware. In the House of Bishops, Cabby was a respected leader. He was an elected member of the national Executive Council. Presiding Bishop Edmund Browning accepted Cabby's invitation on behalf of the diocese to host the famous "Righter Trial" at the cathedral in Wilmington.

Cabby Tennis was also a visionary. He foresaw the social and economic changes that would shape church life in the coming years. He encouraged the formation of team ministries and fostered lay ministry development. These and other creative strategies were ahead of their time but would become important resources for ministry, especially in small congregations. Drawing upon his background as an attorney, Cabby was an effective administrator. He strengthened the foundation for diocesan ministry, hired able staff in the bishop's office, and made sure that diocesan finances were stable and in good order. The longer that I served as bishop, the more I came to appreciate all that he had done for the diocese.

And of course, Cabby and Hyde were extraordinary hosts. They were always such good company. My wife Holly and I remember well our first supper with Cabby and Hyde at Bishopstead and how welcome we felt. Over the years, I often met folks who would share their own stories about the warmth of Cabby and Hyde's hospitality.

After leaving Delaware, Cabby and Hyde retired back to Seattle. They had a home in the city and a small cabin in the Cascade Mountains. We would talk from time to time. I would catch him up on Delaware. He would tell me about the joys of family and the extra time to enjoy the beauty of the Pacific Northwest. Invariably, he would give me a word of encouragement and then end by saying, "If you have to be a bishop, Delaware is the best place to be one." He was right. I will always be grateful for his friendship and ministry, and will always feel honored to have followed in his footsteps.

The Rt. Rev. Wayne P. Wright was elected tenth bishop of Delaware at Part II-B of the 212th Annual Convention, held at the Cathedral Church of St. John, Wilmington, on February 28, 1998. He was consecrated June 20, 1998 in an outdoor service at St. Andrew's School in Middletown and installed June 21, 1998 at the Cathedral Church of St. John, Wilmington. He retired on February 28, 2017.