BLESS
Share faith and unselfishly give and serve.

Freely you have received; freely give.
-Matthew 10:8

Jesus called His disciples to give, forgive, teach, and heal in His name. We are empowered by the Spirit to bless everyone we meet, practicing generosity and compassion, and proclaiming the Good News of God in Christ with hopeful words and selfless actions. We can share our stories of blessing and invite others to the Way of Love.
DEAR BROTHERS & SISTERS,

I write to invite you to support our Episcopal Church’s Annual Appeal. This Church-wide Appeal is one tangible way to support our ministry of and witness to the Way of Love that Jesus taught in our time and in the wider world. Let me show you what I mean.

In the first century, Jesus of Nazareth inspired a movement. It was a movement of people whose lives were centered on Jesus and who were committed to living His way, which is the way of the cross, the way of God’s unconditional, unselfish, sacrificial, and redemptive love.

Today our vocation is, I believe, to be that movement of Jesus, living and bearing witness to this Way of Love in our time. The Annual Appeal is one tangible way to support that witness to this Way of Love in the wider world.

For example, this Appeal helps us not only heed our collective call of continuing to ‘welcome the stranger’ through Episcopal Migration Ministries, it helps grow our newly-launched network called Partners in Welcome; brought together to build a community of support and solidarity for welcoming newcomers to our country, and led by two staff persons who assist in its discernment, development and ministry to the whole Church. In so doing, we witness to the Way of Love.

This Appeal helps lift up 37 Young Adult Service Corps members and other missionaries serving and witnessing to the Way of Love in 17 countries beyond the United States. The work is transformative for both the missionaries and the communities in which they serve.

The Appeal helps sustain the 110 federal chaplains who serve men and women in the military, reserves, auxiliaries (Civil Air Patrol and Coast Guard), Veterans Administration hospitals, and federal prisons. These chaplains provide spiritual and day-to-day support to service men and women on ships and land, veterans requiring medical services, and the incarcerated. Their witness to the Way of Love, as the way of Jesus, the way of the Christian, is a particular and important witness. And they are, literally, around the world.

The General Convention of our Church gave us a goal of raising $1 million over the 2019-2021 triennium, with every dollar going to support the collective ministries of a Church that is transformative for both the missionaries and the communities in which they serve.

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The General Convention of our Church gave us a goal of raising $1 million over the 2019-2021 triennium, with every dollar going to support the collective ministries of a Church that welcomes refugees around the United States, plants churches, evangelizes the Good News of Jesus Christ, proclaims the Way of Love to countless individuals, and does so much more.

Please join me in this effort. I ask on behalf of the thousands of men, women, and children who, through the practice of giving, are blessed by your love and care. I invite you to join me in making a gift of any amount, prayerfully considering that God is guiding your faith in our Church.

There are many ways you can participate, including returning the accompanying envelope, giving securely online at episcopalchurch.org/give/annual-appeal, or texting ‘APPEAL’ to 91999.

Thank you. The work that we join in together makes a difference — not only in our lives but in the lives of others across God’s world.

Your brother in Christ,

+ Michael B. Curry

The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry
Presiding Bishop and Primate

SANDRA T. MONTES, EdD

Share a little about yourself. How have you ministered in the Church?

I have been in The Episcopal Church since I was about 16. I was born into the Christian Missionary Alliance (CMA, evangelical) tradition. My dad was a CMA church planter and later an Episcopal priest. In the late ‘80s, my dad introduced us to The Episcopal Church. When I was about 30, I was invited to be part of the music team for the Episcopal Youth Event 2002, and because of that, I have had many opportunities to sing throughout The Episcopal Church. Later, I was invited to speak, be part of leadership teams, and write.

I have been able to minister through music, education, writings, social media and administrative tasks. I think everything we do can be a blessing – no matter how little or large it is. A big part of my ministry (and the least popular) is being brave and speaking out when there is lack of diversity and authenticity in our Church events, music, leadership. It is very scary and lonely, but I feel blessed when others thank me for speaking up when they don’t feel they can. I am blessing the Church by helping her be more aware and hopefully become wider.

How and where does Bless show up in your ministry?

Bless shows up daily in my ministry as a musician, writer, consultant, digital evangelist, and educator. I am blessed by working with incredible people around the Church. My biggest ministry, though, is being mom to a man who is a blessing to me. He is very involved in the Church also, and that is a blessing I have helped give our Church.

How did it feel to give Blessing?

I am blessed by being a blessing. When people tell me that a song, an article, a post was a blessing, they bless me. I pray before most everything I do and pray all the time, and I pray I am a blessing, not a stumbling block.

What gives you hope about the future of your ministry?

I pray that God continues to allow me to bless and be blessed through music, writings, and my life. I have amazing parents in their 70s who are still blessing others, so I am hopeful I will continue being a blessing until I die.

The Way of Love is the Presiding Bishop’s vision for The Episcopal Church. What about the Presiding Bishop gives you hope?

The Presiding Bishop’s message of love is what gives me hope. It was such a blessing that he would be the first black presiding bishop and had such an inclusive message of love for all.

Are there any other thoughts on the practice of Bless you’d like to share?

I hope we are all open to seeing Bless all around us. We can bless with a smile, a word, silence, prayer. We can be blessed by being open to others and whatever they bring – because it is God coming near us.

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THE REV. CANON WINFRED (FRED) B. VERGARA, DMin, DD
Missioner for Episcopal Asiamerica Ministries

Share a little about yourself. How have you ministered in the Church?
I’m the missioner for Episcopal Asiamerica Ministries (EAM) in The Episcopal Church. Our network consists of churches from seven Ethnic Convocations: Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, South Asian, Southeast Asian, and Pacific Islander. There are over 50 such congregations all over the country. I am an American citizen of Filipino ancestry.

I have lived, been educated, and served in three countries: Philippines, Singapore, and the United States. I have served as staff for three presiding bishops: + Frank Griswold, + Katharine Jefferts Schori, and now + Michael Bruce Curry.

How and where does Bless show up in your ministry?
As Asiamerica missioner, I assist the church in evangelism, church planting, congregational development, and leadership training, especially for Asiamerican Episcopalians. One of the flagship ministries in EAM is ANDREWS (Asiacomeric Network of Disciples, Revivalists, Evangelists, Witnesses and Saints). Our goal for this triennium is to develop at least 70 well-trained, well-equipped, and well-empowered mentors (clergy and lay leaders) who will disciple at least two younger leaders.

What gives you hope about the future of your ministry?
I believe God orders the steps of my life. I believe “where God guides, God provides.” I have experienced these blessings as I rely on God’s grace. In all the blessings, I give God the glory. I have high hopes for my ministry in Christ and for the future of The Episcopal Church, which I love.

The Way of Love is the Presiding Bishop’s vision for The Episcopal Church. What about the Presiding Bishop gives you hope?
Among the presiding bishops, both living and dead, Bishop Michael Curry is probably the most visible and prominent in public life. His Way of Love theology sets a high standard that will probably color our common life and aspirations for decades. He is both a prophet and an evangelist. I think in times like these when Americans are polarized politically, socioreconomically, and religiously, Bishop Curry will stand out as an Episcopal leader with a uniting voice of reason and authenticity.

Are there any other thoughts on the practice of Bless you’d like to share?
The Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement rocks!

THE REV. CHANDLER WHITMAN IRWIN, CRMD
Division Officer, USS GEORGE WASHINGTON (CVN 73) LTJG (Lieutenant Junior Grade), Chaplain Corps, U.S. Navy

What is your relationship with the Church? Share a little about yourself. How have you ministered in the Church?
Raised a Roman Catholic, I began attending The Episcopal Church in Memphis, Tennessee, upon an invitation from my best friend. Becoming very involved as a youth, I fell in love with the Church whose liturgy was familiar and welcoming along with a vibrant youth program. While ministering to the Church as a layperson, I discerned a call to the priesthood.

In September 2018, with the ecclesiastical endorsement of Bishop Carl Weight, I was commissioned as a Lieutenant Junior Grade in the U.S. Navy.

How and where does Bless show up in your ministry?
In the traditional ministry setting, blessing looked very sacramental to me.

As I transition into this new calling of military chaplaincy, I am quickly experiencing blessing in a much broader sense. While I see blessing show up in the Christmas Eve service as we sing Silent Night alongside those who are on duty and unable to be with their families that night, I also see it as I facilitate for those whose faith differs from my own and care for all sailors who are seeking a safe space for counseling.

While serving sailors does not fall into one of the seven sacraments, the holy nature of the work, which is for all of the people whom I serve alongside, is making it sacramental for me.

How did it feel to give Blessing?
It feels abundant and holy. What I mean is, that giving blessing to others in my context never feels limited or as if there is only so much to give. I currently serve over 2,500 sailors assigned to USS GEORGE WASHINGTON, and I have the ability to be a blessing to each of them, when they need it. Even though I am endorsed by The Episcopal Church, my ministry goes far beyond those who share their faith with me to all those who share the uniform.

What gives you hope about the future of your ministry?
I work alongside other ministers, other chaplains in the Navy – right now it happens to be a Church of God minister, an imam, and a Southern Baptist pastor. Serving alongside others whose beliefs differ from mine, and yet we are all called to serve our fellow sailors, seems pretty hopeful to me for making the way for love.

The Way of Love is the Presiding Bishop’s vision for The Episcopal Church. What about the Presiding Bishop gives you hope?
The excitement that Bishop Curry has about God’s vision, as well has his ability to hone and craft that vision, is what gives me hope. It gives Episcopalians the language to talk about what we have always believed, while reinvigorating the excitement behind Jesus. Love has always been at the center of my experience with The Episcopal Church, and I am thankful for him giving language and space for people to live into that Love.
A member of the Navajo Nation and a recent graduate of Virginia Theological Seminary, I live and work in Farmington, New Mexico, where I also enjoy spending time tending sheep.

My ministry in The Episcopal Church evolved through the worship practices of my elders. Both my Mom and my Dad were active in the Church. I was raised all my life with the stories of people of faith and their journeys. I decided to pursue ordination to help my people continue to connect to those stories and to see how a relationship with Jesus Christ can help our communities heal and thrive.

Bless – this is an important word in my culture. The Navajo word hózhó means the "Blessing Way," which is a prayer for peace, harmony, and balance. In my ministry, I help people to share our stories as Diné, to support one another on our journeys, and to be in relationship with Creation and with God.

For me, both the giving away of good things and the receiving of good things put us in a place of growth and humility. Giving and receiving is what binds us together – and that is truly a blessing from God.

There is hope in the work our Church is doing to promote healing and reconciliation. There is hope in sharing our stories and building connections that bring us together as part of God’s beloved community. The Way of Love is the Presiding Bishop’s vision for The Episcopal Church.

When I heard Presiding Bishop Michael Curry preach about the Balm of Gilead, I thought about my ministry here among my people, the Diné, and how we are working together as a community to find our way back to our center, to our wholeness, which has been broken apart by the traumas of the past. I think the Presiding Bishop is telling us a story in the Way of Love about coming to faith, harmony, peace, and being one with God.
THE REV. MAURICE ANDREW DYER II
Diocese of El Camino Real
Senior at Virginia Theological Seminary

What is your relationship with the Church?
I came into The Episcopal Church at 19. I was an undergrad in Monterey, California, and I went to this Buddhist group for meditation. There was an Episcopal priest sitting in this circle. I ended up meeting with the priest for about a year before I went to my first sermon.

Who have you ministered in the Church?
I entered Young Adults Service Corp (YASC) and went to South Africa and the Holy Cross monastery. I worked with the school they have there and loved it. I extended my time there and moved to Cape Town and worked with the reconciliation commission coming out of apartheid. I came back and moved to Virginia to start seminary. It’s a couple of miles away from DC and it was like a whole new world for me. My diocese was mostly homogenous, and I didn’t have a sense of community – the black Episcopal community or of the history.

Two events happened for me: I went to my first Seminarians of Color Conference and my first Union of Black Episcopalians (UBE) conference. There was a sense that when I got plugged into this, “wow, I found my people.” I belonged.

How and where does Bless show up in your ministry?

How did it feel to give Blessing?
It’s like a Holy Spirit moment. When I’m preaching, looking out at people, and we’re on the same wavelength, the spirit is really palpable and it’s kind of like we’re floating together and being cradled in the Spirit’s hands, and I think the same is true when I’m offering a blessing. It’s that Holy Spirit; we are connected, and we’re doing something right.

What gives you hope about the future of your ministry?
I believe that there’s still more work to do. Just keep pushing, and the hope is that I won’t be pushing alone. I’m about community building, and the hope is that the community will continue to grow and the Holy Spirit’s inspiration will continue to drive us forward.

The Way of Love is the Presiding Bishop’s vision for The Episcopal Church. What about the Presiding Bishop gives you hope?
Mentorship had always been so important for me, and I’m trying to find my own preaching voice. For me, seeing this vibrant and dynamic Presiding Bishop preaching with no notes from the center aisle gave me permission to speak in my own voice.
ALLISON DUVALL
Manager for Church Relations and Engagement, Episcopal Migration Ministries

What is your relationship with the Church?
I’m a lifelong Episcopalian. I often trace my journey of lay ministry in the Church back to my teenage years, when I began volunteering for a ministry in the Diocese of Lexington called Reading Camp. After I graduated from college, I became the executive director. I loved the work and truly felt it was my calling to serve the Church by being part of ministries that are the hands and feet of the Church, and indeed of Jesus, in the world.

In 2012–13, I began to feel that God might be calling me to align my love of working for the Church in ministries that reach outside and beyond our Church.

How and where does Bless show up in your ministry?
Blessing shows up every day, in all sorts of ways. In the past two years, as the refugee resettlement system has been challenged by sweeping and drastic policy changes from this administration, blessing has shown up in the courage, bravery, and commitment of my colleagues at Episcopal Migration Ministries and our local affiliate offices and supporters across the country. In the face of challenge, turbulence, adversity, deep sadness, and mourning, my colleagues show up. And by showing up, they bless the lives of the refugees we are able to resettle and, however indirectly, the lives of millions around the world still seeking safety and the humanitarian workers who struggle to protect and serve them.

How did it feel to give Blessing?
I can only hope that I have given blessing! My colleagues and partners in this work and ministry bless me, buoy me up, give me courage to keep going, and give me joy for the road ahead. I hope that through conversation, laughter, holding space that I have passed the blessing along.

What gives you hope about the future of your ministry?
What gives me hope is that there is an awakening going on in The Episcopal Church and across the country right now about the importance of not just passively “being OK” with refugee resettlement and immigration, but actively taking a stand and claiming a role in being part of the welcoming movement. The vitality and vibrancy of our country, the flourishing of our Church, I firmly believe, will depend on our ability to embrace the talents, strengths, assets, and gifts of all members of our communities—most especially newcomers, refugees, and immigrants. And there’s a growing movement of people who believe that, too, and who are taking their own place in this work. That gives me great hope.

The Way of Love is the Presiding Bishop’s vision for The Episcopal Church. What about the Presiding Bishop gives you hope?
Love is at the root of all we do, all we are. The Presiding Bishop’s message is galvanizing, but it’s also deeply pastoral. He reminds us of what we’re all about, and gives me strength for the journey. Blessing takes intention, time, and creating space for it to dwell. I think we could all benefit from a regular little Holy Spirit nudge to slow down; breathe; and open our eyes, ears, and hearts for the blessings that are all around us.

HOW TO GIVE

The blessings that we find for ourselves in The Episcopal Church, we long to provide for others. Please make a gift and support the many ways in which we, together as The Episcopal Church, witness to the loving, liberating, and life-giving way of Jesus Christ.

There are many ways you can participate:
• Return the accompanying envelope with your credit card gift or check made payable to ‘The Episcopal Church,’ with ‘Annual Appeal’ in the memo.
• Give securely online at episcopalchurch.org/give/annual-appeal.
• Text ‘APPEAL’ to 91999 (standard messaging and data rates apply).
• Call (800) 334-7626 ext. 6002 to make your pledge or gift over the phone.

Thank you, in advance, for gifts that do so much!

For information about the work of the Office of Development, or for other ways to make your gift through stocks or securities, contact T.J. Houlihan, Development Officer, at 212.716.6271 or thoulihan@episcopalchurch.org.