Practicing the Way of Love:
In This Season of Giving

Photo Credit: Meredith Roller
In this issue of Practicing the Way of Love we asked people from around the country why they give to The Episcopal Church Annual Appeal.

We invite you to hear in their own voices faithful and diverse answers, such as “Giving makes our hearts more generous,” “I give because I’m called as a Christian to respond to God’s great love,” and “I give to give back to the church that has done so much for me.”

As you read these stories of giving we hope you will join this community of generosity by lending your support to the important work that can only happen at a church-wide level.

The Rt. Rev. Anne Hodges-Copple

Anne Hodges-Copple is Bishop Suffragan of The Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina.

I was baptized, confirmed, and married in my hometown Episcopal church. I joined the junior choir at age eight and the EYC as a teen. It wasn’t until my transient young adult years that I began to appreciate how being an Episcopalian made me part of something bigger: part of the larger household of God connected by the Book of Common Prayer. From Dallas to Durham and Boston to Berkeley, I could also always find a worship home away from home.

Not only did I find liturgical embassies of the Kingdom of Heaven everywhere I moved, but I also discovered a vast expanse of Episcopal community engagement that radically broadened my horizon for seeing the Gospel at work in the world. In 1981, I attended the opening of The Parsonage in the Castro area of San Francisco, an outreach ministry of the Diocese of California to the LGBT community. More recently, I joined a group of Episcopalians and friends as we crossed from Brownsville, Texas into Matamoros, Mexico to break bread with asylum-seekers camping along the Rio Grande. At times, our bonds of affection feel strained to the point of breaking, yet we continue to find that the Way of Love is stronger than all else.

As a bishop, I have opportunities to travel around our own province of The Episcopal Church and even across the world. More than ever, I have a visceral sense of being the Body of Christ. Some are the hands and some the feet and some are the circulatory system, moving around the Body receiving blessings in one place and taking those same blessings to be multiplied in other places. We are a Church on the move – the Jesus Movement – exchanging ideas, sharing resources, refreshing and being refreshed by the rest of the Body. The Church’s Annual Appeal is one of the ways of getting those resources where they are most needed.

My personal theology of giving pretty simple: Look for ways to give away as much as you can! Giving is investing in the well-being of others. That’s not to say that I’m imprudent and don’t take care of my needs and my family’s. I haven’t taken a vow of poverty, but I believe that you multiply your blessings not by holding on to them, but by sharing them. When I find myself blessed with a gift, the first thing I ask myself is, How can I turn around and share it with someone else? Giving for me is life-giving – it truly gives me life, as I hope my gifts are blessings for the lives of others. After all, anything and everything I have is by the grace of God. That is the first and only gift that really matters.

Dr. Philip Lewis

Philip Lewis, who lives in Newtown, Pennsylvania, has practiced and taught medicine for more than 20 years.

I am a lifelong Episcopalian and currently attend church at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Trenton, New Jersey. I also work on congregational development in the Diocese of New Jersey as a volunteer and teach Environmental Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. For me The Episcopal Church is one tradition within the larger universal Church.

I have personally contributed to The Episcopal Church Annual Appeal and also to the Absalom Jones Fund for Episcopal Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). I graduated from Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in the 1970s and was one of only 12 African-American students in my class. I appreciate how important HBCUs are today as educational environments where students of color don’t have to think about their race or where they come from, but can just focus on learning and being excellent.

I think one of the biggest challenges of Christian life is that people can think that, once they’re baptized and confirmed, they’re done – “Now I’m a fully formed Christian.” But we all have farther to go. I consider giving as one of the ways that I grow as a Christian; it’s a discipline, just like reading Scripture and commentaries and talking to other people about following Christ. For me, giving is sort of like going to the gym and lifting weights – it hurts in the beginning, but over time, you just get stronger. I give because everything I have belongs to God – money is a tool God has given me that has no value on its own unless I use it to help build something.
Canon Dr. Steven Nishibayashi

Steven Nishibayashi is a retired pediatrician from Glendale, California. He has been attending the same church in downtown Los Angeles, St. Mary’s (Mariposa), for more than 65 years. His daughter is the fourth generation of his family to attend St. Mary’s.

My life has been filled with multiple blessings, too many to count. Among the greatest of these blessings are the many different people with whom I have been privileged to share my path – people who have inspired me and guided me through the seasons of my life.

The Episcopal Church was part of a transformational event for me when I was a young adult. As a freshman in college, I was selected to be a Youth Delegate to General Convention. This experience excited and empowered me. I felt engaged, encouraged, connected, and entrusted with contributing to the future of the Church. Nobody could have envisioned that sending this young college student to General Convention would have had this impact. I owe the people who believed in that young man great thanks. And I feel that it is my job to help others to also have this kind of experience. I was recently involved in helping to support a young woman who wanted to attend Evento de Jóvenes Episcopales, a gathering of Episcopal youth in Panama. I told her, “I hope this changes your life.”

Our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry has said that love is not a sentiment, it’s a commitment. Yes, we all need to feel love, but we need to show love, too. I give to The Episcopal Church Annual Appeal because I support the exciting programs and initiatives that the Church has set and I understand that it takes all of our commitments beyond our pledge to our local parish to make this important work happen.

Diane Pollard

Diane Pollard (second from left) has attended 14 General Conventions as a lay deputy from the Diocese of New York and has been a leading voice for the rights of women and minorities in her many positions in The Episcopal Church. She was honored for her decades of leadership by the Union of Black Episcopalians and was awarded the House of Deputies Medal by its President, the Rev. Gay Clark Jennings.

Andrea McKellar

Andrea McKellar is Ministry Developer for The Episcopal Church in South Carolina.

My current role encompasses transition ministry, Christian formation, youth, and leadership development in my diocese. I especially love working with congregations to find a new clergyperson and creative ways to be church in the 21st century. I have previously served in a parish as Director of Christian Formation and began finding my way in ministry in high school, serving as a Sunday School teacher and on the Diocese of Virginia’s Parish Youth Ministries board.

I experience great hope when small churches find a connection to their community through a new outreach program that reinvigorates them, or when churches in transition take the step of being ready to embrace change for the future. Presiding Bishop Michael Curry’s unbridled joy and love of Jesus also give me hope! He is truly preaching what is in his heart, and the authenticity of that message resonates with so many people in and outside of our churches.

There are small moments in church life that are especially meaningful to me, particularly baptisms. I love when we all take responsibility to help individuals grow in their faith, and I get emotional when I hear the words, “We receive you into the household of God.” And there are also the big moments that move me, like the Episcopal Youth Event where hundreds of people are together proclaiming our faith in and love of Jesus.

For me, giving a blessing to someone else is a particularly fulfilling experience. It affirms my ministry and that I am called to be in this place and time, serving the people of coastal South Carolina.

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I contribute something to one organization, it means that I'm not going to support another.” That's a scarcity mentality, but I'm proud of that. Racial reconciliation is also very important to me. Here in the Diocese of New York, we resolved to begin a three-year process of examination and reparation for the sin of slavery that was visited upon countless people within our diocese for more than 200 years. 2018 was our Year of Lamentations, and 2019 is our Year of Apology. For me, making reparations is not just about money; it's about truly understanding what happened historically, acknowledging our complicity, and discussing how we are going to change and do better as we continue our journey, working to repair the breach.

Why do I give to the Annual Appeal? I believe in the spiritual practice of tithing (giving 10 percent of my income) to support the Church. I think there's a fear some people have about giving that, “If I contribute something to one organization, it means that I'm not going to support another.” That's a scarcity mentality, but I've found that giving begets giving. The very act of giving opens our hearts and makes us more generous people. Another organization I support, for example, is St. Mary's Center, one of the first residential health care facilities established in Harlem for people with HIV/AIDS. I also support Episcopal Relief & Development and my local Episcopal Charities in the Diocese of New York. I don't think we have to feel that supporting one organization or aspect of the work of the Church precludes us from supporting others.

President Gay Clark Jennings
The Rev. Gay Clark Jennings is President of The Episcopal Church’s House of Deputies.

The first time I went to an Episcopal church, I was about seven years old visiting my grandparents in Oyster Bay, New York. I attended the Easter service with my family at my grandparents’ church and allegedly I turned to my mother and said “Now, this is church.”

That was the beginning of my life-long journey: I continued to attend various parishes in my youth, became a religion major in college, and was confirmed in the Episcopal Church as a young adult while attending seminary at Episcopal Divinity School. My mother, who was a devout Episcopalian, was also a big influence on me. She had wanted to become a deaconess, but at the time, in the 1940's, deaconesses were not allowed to be married, and she wanted to marry my father. I’m glad she did!

When I started a trial year at seminary in 1974, a brave group of women called the Philadelphia 11 had just been ordained, despite the fact that The Episcopal Church did not yet permit the ordination of women to the priesthood. Two years later, at the beginning of my senior year in seminary, General Convention voted to make a canonical change that opened the priesthood and the episcopate to women. I was there to witness the vote, which gave me new hope for the future and inclusiveness of The Episcopal Church.

In 2015, I experienced that same sense of hope at General Convention when I was privileged to preside over the House of Deputies’ vote for marriage equality in The Episcopal Church. I am proud that our church is committed to justice and liberation of all people, and that we offer a way of being Christian that is focused on Jesus’ command to care for the poor and the marginalized. As I travel across the church, I see this commitment being made real in many ways in many places, just as I see it at home in Ohio, where my small parish is striving to be the hands, feet, and heart of Jesus in the world.

At the churchwide level, The Episcopal Church is called to provide tools and resources to help every Episcopalian witness and advocate for the dignity of all of God’s children. The reason I give to the Annual Appeal is that it can help make our prayers real as we take action to dismantle systemic racism and misogyny; as we advocate for sensible gun safety legislation, and as we demand the humane treatment of everyone who seeks refuge in this country.

By supporting initiatives that provide hope, I give back to God a portion of the abundance I’ve received. I’ve been truly blessed by The Episcopal Church, and I want to be a blessing in return. That’s why I support the Annual Appeal.

How To Give

In this season of giving and generosity, 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:

By Mail
Return the accompanying envelope with your credit card gift or check made payable to ‘The Episcopal Church,’ with ‘Annual Appeal’ in the memo.

Online
Give securely 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 your gifts that do so much!
Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

2 Corinthians 9:7-8