



### The Diocese of East Carolina

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### DIOCESAN DIGEST

**WINTER 2023** 

Welcome to our Winter issue! After our 140th Annual Diocesan Convention, we were moved to pursue a Digest issue that shares and celebrates the new wine we are seeing in our diocese. Seeing God at work in our midst is inspiring, and I hope you will enjoy this shorter edition of the Diocesan Digest. May the Spirit bless us and inspire us here in the Diocese of East Carolina to continue creating new wine, while also helping us to honor the richness of our older wine. Happy reading!

> In Christ, Sara



Sharing our stories, Sharing our life in Christ.



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## 1 4 0 T H A N N U A L C O N V E N T I O N O V E R V I E W

Our 140th Convention took place February 10-11, and what a joyous occasion it was to gather together in Greenville! This year, we held four workshops, all well-attended and all fruitful. From small church concerns and empowerment, formation as a means of making disciples, seeing creation care taking place through the Sound to Sea program at Trinity Center, and finding avenues for creating meaningful digital ministry efforts, there was a lot to talk about during and after workshops.

At our Opening Worship, we enjoyed a banner procession, and seeing our congregations represented with their colorful banners was glorious and sparked conversations. At worship, we renewed our baptismal vows as a diocese, leading to our being empowered by the Holy Spirit to enter into the legislative work of our Saturday meeting. At our legislative session, we heard presentations that shared about "New Wine" in our diocese: work that God is doing within our midst. Our time together was productive and focused, as we worked to observe and celebrate new wine in our diocese stemming from the implementation of our mission priorities.

### CONVENTION OVERVIEW

Our Opening Eucharist service, held at the Greenville Convention Center, can be viewed here; we thank all of the people who made this time of worship possible. A transcript of Bishop Skirving's sermon, for those who prefer to read, is here. The video of the Bishop's Address from the legislative session is available here in both video and transcript form. The video recordings and textual synopses of the New Wine Presentations may be found here, and for materials from and details about our workshops, see here.

Also at our Convention, we held elections for the committees, commissions, ministries, and appointments of our diocese. We elected those nominated by the bishop, their deanery, or by nomination of the diocese to serve in leadership positions. You can find the election results here. Our 2023 budget was adopted, which you can view here, along with other supporting materials from our treasurer, Tess Judge.

All of the materials mentioned in this overview can be found in one central location: our Convention Recap Page. We have a bit more to add to the page, so stay tuned.

May God's Holy Spirit empower us to move forward and create new wine and wineskins, as we do the work of ministry that the legislative work of Convention supports and directs.









**CELEBRATING** 

NEW





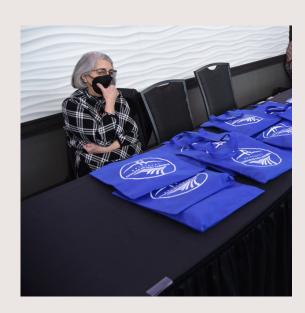
at our 140th Convention













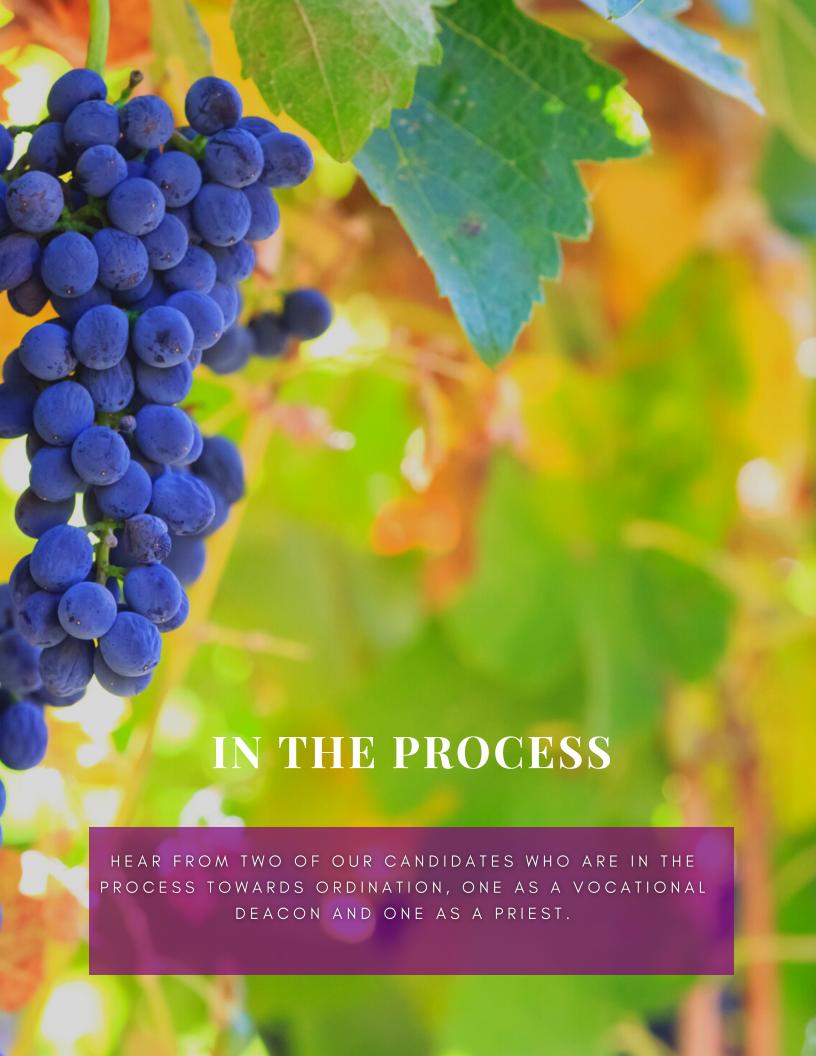












## IN THE PROCESS: VOCATIONAL DEACON

By Dr. Robin Smith

On a Sunday morning more than five years ago, I asked my home parish, St. Francis by the Sea in Salter Path, to participate in a project related to some local needy students. When several people said to me that day, "You should think about becoming a deacon," I was more than surprised. I was not quite sure what being a deacon entailed, but I was fairly certain that it did not have much to do with me. While I knew that God called imperfect people to serve, I assumed the called ones must be somehow on a different moral plane, one I could not hope to approach. Yet, here I am a few years and many experiences later, about to be ordained as a vocational deacon, humbled by the prospect, but ready to follow where I am led.



The journey toward ordination is years long and involved, and rightly so. I began by discussing this novel idea of becoming a deacon with my priest, Rev. Everett Thomas, who read my spiritual autobiography, prayed with me, and encouraged me. His loving guidance has been invaluable throughout the process, and he has given me many opportunities to develop my skills in preaching, leading different kinds of services, and facilitating ministry projects. He encouraged me to continue with a discernment committee that met with me over the course of several months for intense discussion.

When I received their endorsement to continue, as well as approval by the Vestry, my application and much supporting documentation went to the Bishop to nominate me as a Postulant. I met with Bishop Skirving, who sent my application to the Commission on Ministry. At an overnight retreat with other nominees, I met with the Commission on Ministry (COM) for further discernment. After the COM encouraged me to continue, I received the Bishop's permission to enroll in the seminary program as a Postulant and was assigned a COM Partner to mentor me.

With generous support from the Diocese of East Carolina, I attended the hybrid ACTS program (Alternative Clergy Training at Sewanee) for two years, studying with future priests and deacons from many other states. I took eight classes with terrific professors, meeting online and for two weeks each semester on the beautiful campus of the Seminary at Sewanee, led and participated in worship there, and formed friendships that will last for years to come.

Our Diocese also prepares Postulants through regular meetings of the School for Ministry, led by Canon Mollie Roberts and the School for Ministry Council. In these sessions, we address practical topics, such as the canons, stewardship, special services, parochial reports, and teaching practices. We also engage in theological reflection activities and peer review. Along with my Sewanee classes, these sessions have served to challenge and refine my beliefs, to help me build a knowledge base for ministry, and to facilitate my personal and spiritual growth. Of course, there is much more to learn, but I am glad to have a support network of clergy, wise teachers and friends, and helpful mentors to guide me.



I spent most of my career as a college professor and administrator, and many of the skills I developed have helped prepare me for this journey. My skills in teaching, writing, and time management have been important. The organizational and leadership skills I honed as an administrator have helped me facilitate a number of ministry projects at St. Francis, including my ongoing work in food security, community wellness, and literacy development.

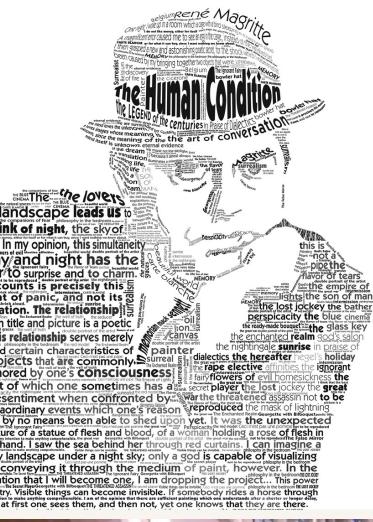
I am happy to be engaged in a field experience at St. Andrew's in Morehead City, where the Rev. John Pollock and Deacon Carol Eaton provide excellent support as I learn the practical skills of being a deacon.

The St. Andrew's parish has welcomed me warmly and responded in an amazing way to my first sermon there, when I shared that our local food bank, Martha's Mission, was in need of two kinds of items: boxes of Hamburger Helper and Sloppy Joe mix to help families make meals from ground beef, as well as fruit cups and applesauce. The good folks at St. Andrews have been generous in their donations, and we have surpassed our collection goal.

Throughout this journey, I am lucky to have had ongoing support from my children and my extended family, and especially from my husband, Terry, who has always been my cheerleader, my partner in all things, and my sounding board. My home parish, St. Francis by the Sea, has supported me in every way with their prayers, gifts, and encouragement.

Five years ago, I had only a faint notion of how a deacon might serve. Now, I am confident that God does indeed use us imperfect people, and I am excited about the possibilities ahead. Thanks to the experiences I have been blessed to have, and the people who continue to support me with their prayers and guidance, I look forward to ministering as our Archdeacon, Janet Rodman, has taught us: to bring the church to the world and the world to the church.







# IN THE PROCESS: PRIESTHOOD

By Tara Bartal

How does someone go from doing graphic design work to finding themselves in a process toward ordination to the priesthood? Discernment. Before I started the discernment process with my local parish, I went back to school to complete a bachelor's degree. I have an associate degree in Commercial Art and Advertising Design. Graphic design is a field that does not require a bachelor's degree to find gainful employment. As you gain work experience and have a good portfolio, you can develop a lifelong career; however, I had to finish a bachelor's degree to transition to seminary.

For 15 years, I designed logos, created layouts, and edited text for yellow page advertising. The advances of the internet with blogging and social media changed the advertising world, and the times of mass paper printing began to fade. During the economic downturn of 2007 to 2009, the company I worked for filed a Chapter 11 bankruptcy, and shortly after, I and over 100 other graphic designers were laid-off. I moved from Florida back to North Carolina to start over. In North Carolina, I found work with a printing company and worked as a manager for a little over seven years.

I went from being an Atheist to a Christian through these life transitions. I was on a journey to discover Christianity, and I stepped into spaces that made me question things. From childhood, I traveled from Southern Baptist to Roman Catholic, left the church, and walked away from God altogether. As I grew older, life changed, and through crossroads, curves, and twists, I came back to church: I came back to Jesus, traveling from submersion in a Pentecostal bath, exploring non-Denominational spaces, to a place by way of a road sign and found a home in a book called, *The Book of Common Prayer*.

Many people have asked me, "When did you receive your call?" The answer is not straightforward, instantaneous, or even specific. I experienced many discerning moments over time. I also pushed those moments into a recessive corner until someone asked me, "Tara, when are you going to become a priest?" Someone spoke the thing I was pushing away. It sent a shockwave through me. It has been a long road of exploring questions about myself and my path and not having a clear map to show me, "Where will I fall when I finally jump?"

The discernment process may be crystal clear for some, but, for me, it took time for the boundaries of my faith to be stretched and pulled open so that a more visceral response could take the place of intellectualist doubt. My first advice to anyone wondering if that "still small voice" is authentic is to get a spiritual director and start talking about it! I had many questions, and when my priest guided me to speak with a spiritual director, a door opened that led me into a space where I could be vulnerable and talk about what I was thinking, feeling, and experiencing. Being vulnerable and trusting the Holy Spirit to guide two strangers into what God was calling me to served as a liberating experience. Spiritual direction is centered around sharing, listening, and being guided for you to discern your call, not someone telling you whether it is a yes or no answer. I found that part of my process most beneficial. It was through my spiritual director that I discovered that my call was around me before I ever left Florida.

Being "in the process" is transformative through steps that sometimes seem fast and furious and then, sometimes, filled with stillness in liminal space that will test one's patience. I stopped fearing the blatant yes or no answer and instead practiced viewing it as an adventure to see where I would be led next. I kept praying, walking Holy Trinity's labyrinth in Fayetteville, allowing those meditative paths to carry me through the tensions of uncertainty.

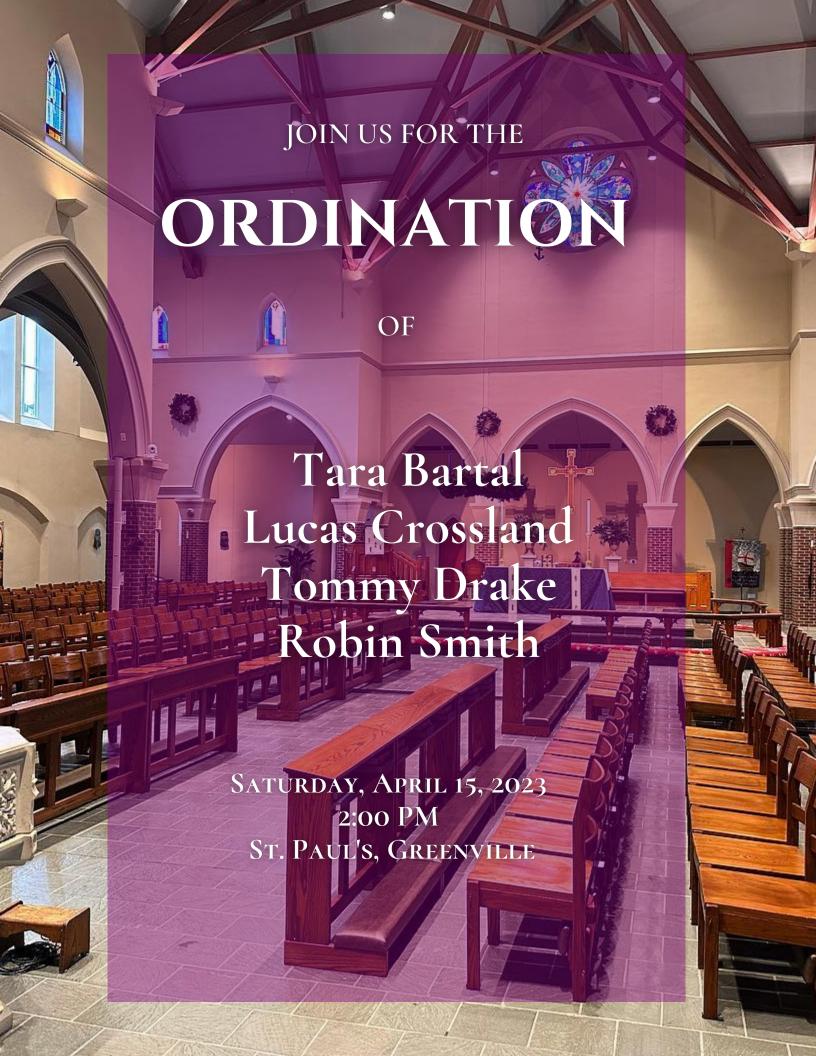
I read a book called, *Dancing with God* by Jay Emerson Johnson which helped me understand more about my faith tradition and the wisdom that "Christian faith demands a great deal of courage (Johnson 39)." In the process of discernment, which we are constantly traveling, whether conscious of it or not, I found that experiences are initially defined by their context or in that moment; however, the fruit of wisdom birthed out of those experiences comes later. When I look back to painful past experiences with the knowledge I have now, I see them from a revised perspective. Time itself is not the healer of wounds; instead, gaining wisdom of the human condition in the process provides understanding; it gives insight; therefore, it allows us to choose to remove the band-aid and let the wounds breathe to advance the process of healing.



Transitioning from a full-time job to being a full-time seminarian came with a storm of changes, which included a global pandemic. There were times I wondered if it was ever going to happen, yet, step by step, I found myself driving a U-Haul to seminary at the University of the South School of Theology in Sewanee, Tennessee. Seminary has been its unique experience of learning and growing, but that's for my journal and perhaps a few sermons down the road.

As I prepare for another transition, I am again nervous about the change, except this time, I have faith that God will take care of the people I serve and me. God's presence is always there. Then there's the question, do I miss my former career? Actually, no, because I will utilize the skill sets I obtained in my former career toward ministry. I can't think of a better way to carry my past life experiences forward than serving others to God's glory.





### YOUTH AT CONVENTION



We had such a great group of young people serving as Pages, Youth Representatives, and Delegates at the Diocese of East Carolina's 140th Annual Convention.

Our delegates included: **Tayleigh** (Christ Church, New Bern), **Daniel** (St. Stephen's, Goldsboro), and **Morgan** (St. Mary's, Kinston).

Our representatives were **Alison** (Christ Church, New Bern), **Madi** (St. Mary's, Kinston), **Piper** (St. James, Belhaven), **Lillian** (St. Andrew's on the Sound, Wilmington), **Bryson** (St. Paul's, Edenton), and **Bennett** (St. Andrew's, Morehead City).

Our pages were **Holden** (St. Paul's, Edenton), **Baker** (Christ Church, New Bern), and **Lauren** (Christ Church, New Bern).

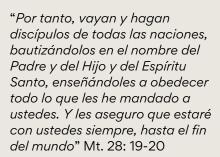
Young People are very welcome and encouraged to be part of this important event in the life of our Diocese. Inviting and including young people in the full life of the Diocese of East Carolina engages them in leadership of the Church now and compels them to remain in leadership in the future. Thank you to our wonderful young people who served at our 140th Convention!





## REFLEXIONES DE UN RECIÉN LLEGADO

Por Jovany Hernandez



La convención número 140 de nuestra Diócesis de Carolina del Este, pudo dejarme claro este principio evangélico, mientras se dialogaba sobre aspectos importantes y relevantes en torno el cuidado de la creación, el discipulado, la misión y el ministerio digital.

Me llamo Giovanni Hernández y llegué con mi familia a los Estados Unidos en agosto del año inmediatamente anterior. Ávido de espiritualidad por mi formación iniciada en Colombia desde la niñez, donde Dios está en el centro de la persona y de la familia, de la creación y de los proyectos y, solos, en un país desconocido y diferente para mí en muchos de sus principios y costumbres, tuve la oportunidad de acercarme a saludar al sacerdote de la Iglesia de San Pablo, el Reverendo Padre Eric Grubb.

Al inicio simplemente fue un intento de comunicación a través de gestos y un poco del traductor ofrecido por el celular, pero él en su bondad característica y amor por sus feligreses, decidió comunicarse con el Reverendo Padre Fred Clarkson quien con su excelente español sirvió de puente para iniciar una comunicación más fluida. Fue tan característico el gesto de amor primero de ambos sacerdotes y su reflejo de la persona de Cristo buen Pastor, que al ir participando poco a poco de la Santa Misa cada ocho días, iba nuevamente reanimando en mí el deseo por la evangelización y el ardor de la vida comunitaria.

Unos días después tuve otro acercamiento con el Padre Eric quien haciendo un gesto con el que me comunicaba que lo esperara, sacó de su oficina un libro de oración común editado en español para mí, el cual utilizo diariamente. Así mismo el Padre Fred se comunicó conmigo y pude tener un acercamiento con la parroquia de la sagrada familia, siendo una de las celebraciones eucarísticas nuestra oportunidad para dar inicio a una amistad y su posterior invitación a participar activamente mediante temas de formación humano cristiana y catequesis.





"Estudiando de manera personal un poco más profundo los pilares de la espiritualidad y los principios de comunión dentro de la Iglesia Episcopal, no he podido dejar de enamorarme y reconocer que es justo aquí donde estoy viviendo la cita bíblica con la que abrí este escrito y lo vivo de tal manera que en sus gestos de amor y cercanía me anuncian el evangelio de salvación y me hacen partícipes de una comunidad de vida y amor que se preocupa no solo por la evangelización, sino también por la persona humana en todas sus dimensiones.

Fui invitado por el Padre Fred a formar parte de la comisión de lengua española, en la cual me siento feliz y dispuesto a poner todo mi amor y empeño en los trabajos y tareas asignadas. También tuve la oportunidad por gracia de Dios de ser invitado a la convención y estar en la mesa de la comisión de lengua española, donde pude interactuar con miembros de la Iglesia y conocer también de cerca el trabajo de otras comisiones en el ministerio.

Observar la gracia con la que Dios actúa en cada uno de nosotros, aún en medio de las diferencias, no deja lugar a pensar algo diferente a que su Espíritu nos acompaña cada día y nos muestra el camino para ser una Iglesia que sale en posición de misión.

Contar mi experiencia como hijo aceptado en la Iglesia Episcopal, es algo que me llena de emoción en estos momentos en los que todo aquello que intelectualmente pude haber aprendido como hijo amado de Dios a lo largo de la vida, hoy lo puedo experimentar en comunidades llenas de vida, donde el Evangelio se promulga con la palabra, la cercanía y sobre todo con mostrar la imagen de un Cristo vivo, esperanzador y salvador.

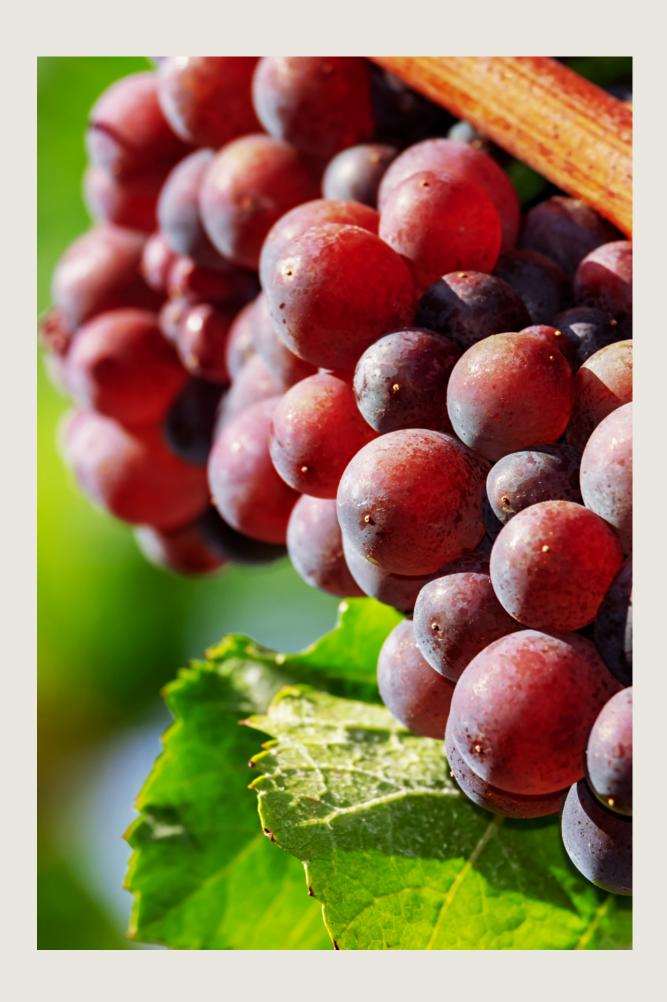
Allí en la mesa, mientras presentábamos "Latino" nuestro programa y página a los asistentes, podría descubrir rostros y sonrisas transparentes, manos que se tienden para seguir haciendo crecer el reinado de nuestro Dios hasta los confines de la tierra. Hoy se hace urgente una unidad en los criterios que nos envían a la evangelización; mostrar a la persona de Cristo tiene que estar encarnada en un evangelio que se sostiene por la vida sacramental y que se ampara en la tradición de la comunidad.

Agradezco a Dios y a ustedes mis hermanos en Cristo Jesús, la oportunidad de vivir de cerca cada una de las palabras anunciadas en el Kerigma, el reconocimiento del Señorío de Jesús sobre mi vida y la de mi familia y sobre todo la invitación a seguir respondiendo de manera sincera e idónea al llamado que Dios me hizo un día desde el vientre materno.

Hay muchas cosas que en estos momentos se quedan sobre el tintero, porque como dijo alguna vez mi escritor favorito de lengua hispana, Julio Cortázar "las palabras nunca alcanzan, cuando lo que hay que decir, desborda el alma".

Hoy me siento así, pero también al igual que mi esposa y mi hija, llenos de alegría y entusiasmo para seguir anunciando la presencia de un Dios que restaura, nos salva y una Iglesia que es vida, que es comunidad, que es familia.

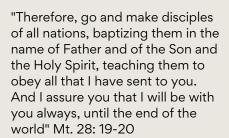






## REFLECTIONS OF A NEWCOMER

By Jovany Hernandez



The 140th convention of our Diocese of East Carolina clarified this evangelical principle while discussing important and relevant aspects of caring for creation, discipleship, mission, and digital ministry.

My name is Giovanni Hernández, and I go by Jovany. I am from Colombia, where my spirituality grew from childhood, in a country where God is central to the person, family, creation, and all undertakings. I came to the United States with my family in August last year. We were alone, in an unknown country, that is different in many ways, from principles to customs. I had the opportunity to visit and say hello to the priest of St. Paul's Church, Reverend Eric Grubb. At first, it was simply an attempt to communicate through gestures and a bit of translation on our cell phones.

Still, in his characteristic kindness and love for his parishioners, he decided to communicate with Reverend Fred Clarkson, who, with his excellent Spanish, served as a bridge to start a more fluid communication.

The first gesture of love of both priests and their reflection of the person of Christ the Good Shepherd, coupled with participating in Holy Mass every eight days, revived in me the desire for evangelization and the ardor of community life. A few days later, Father Eric approached me with a gesture to wait for him, and he took a book for me from his office: The Book of Common Prayer translated into Spanish, which I use daily.

In addition, Father Fred contacted me, and I got to know the Parish of La Sagrada Familia; those Eucharistic celebrations served as an opportunity to start a friendship and a subsequent invitation to participate in the work of Christian formation and catechesis actively. This work has allowed me to personally study the pillars of spirituality and principles of communion within The Episcopal Church a little deeper. I have not stopped falling in love with The Episcopal Church and recognized that this is where I am living the biblical quote with which I opened this writing.





I live it in such a way that its gestures of love and closeness announce to me the Gospel of salvation and make me a partaker of a community of life and love concerned not only with evangelization but also for the human person in all dimensions.

Father Fred invited me to be part of the Spanish Language Commission, in which I feel happy and willing to put all my love and effort into the assignments and tasks. I also had the opportunity by the grace of God to be invited to the Convention and be at the table of the Spanish Language Commission, where I was able to interact with members of the Church and get to know the work of other commissions in the ministry.

Observe the grace with which God acts in each of us, even amid the differences: it leaves no room to think something other than that his Spirit given to us accompanies us every day and shows us the way to be a Church that goes forth in mission.

Telling about my experience as a son accepted into The Episcopal Church is something that is very emotional in these moments in which everything that intellectually I could have learned as a beloved child of God throughout life, today I can experience in communities full of life, promulgating the Gospel with the word, the closeness, and above all revealing the image of a living Christ, hopeful and salvific.

There at the table, while we presented L.A.T.I.N.O., our program and page to those in attendance, I could discover authentic faces and smiles, hands that tend to continue making the reign of our God grow to the ends of the earth. Today there is an urgent need for unity in order for us to go out to evangelize, to show the person of Christ incarnate in the tradition of the community, which stewards the Gospel that the sacramental life sustains.

I thank God and you, my siblings in Christ Jesus, for the opportunity to live closely with each of the words announced in the Kerygma, the recognition of the Lordship of Jesus over my life and that of my family, and above all, the invitation to continue responding sincerely and appropriately to the call that God made me one day from the beginning.

Many things remain on the inkwell, because my favorite Spanish-language writer, Julio Cortázar, once said, "Words are never enough when what needs to be said overwhelms the soul."

Today I feel that way, but also like my wife and daughter, full of joy and enthusiasm to continue announcing the presence of a God who restores and saves us, as well as a Church that is life, a community, and that is family.



### MAKING CONNECTIONS



BY REV. RICHARD ELLIOT

Our Ecumenical and Interreligious Officer shares his experience of his first year in this role for our diocese.

The National Ecumenical folks are recommending a change from "Interfaith" to "Interreligious." Many of the 'World Religions' are based more on practice than belief.

As the Ecumenical and Interreligious Officer of the Diocese of East Carolina, I am a member of two organizations: the Governing Board of the North Carolina Council of Churches, and the Episcopal Ecumenical Officers group, E.D.E.I.O. (Episcopal Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers).

The North Carolina Council of Churches (NCCC) was founded in 1935 to address issues of racial inequality. Members come from 26 judicatories of 18 denominations and seven individual congregations. They represent some 6,200 congregations with about 1.5 million congregants.

Representation comes from across the state.

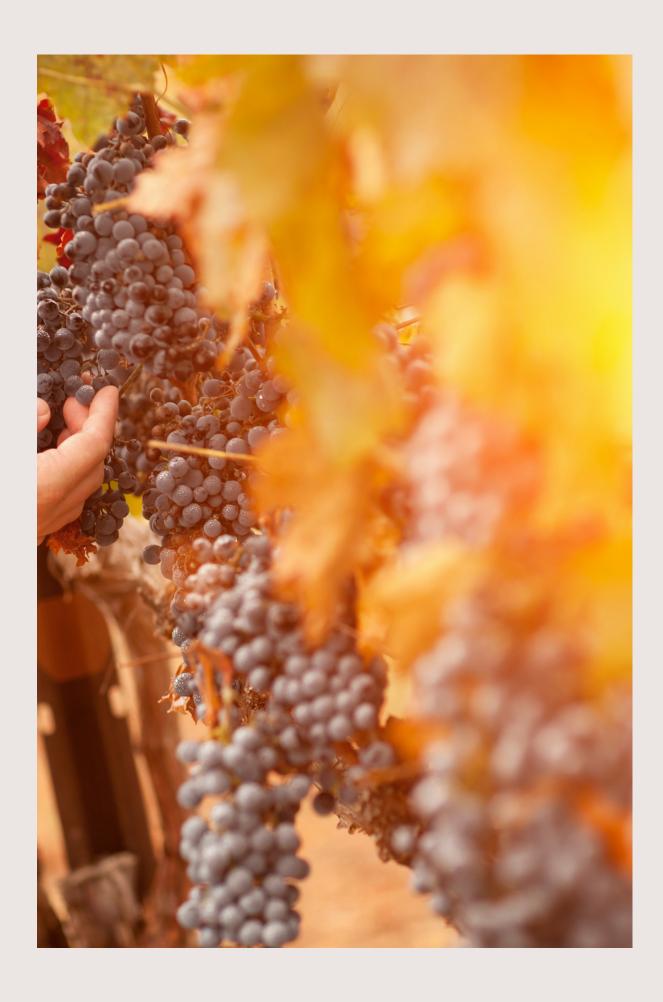
The original mission has expanded to include education and advocacy around gun violence prevention, public education, raising wages, overdose, HIV, mental health, death penalty abolition, cash bail reform, and immigrants' rights. With offices in Raleigh, the NCCC regularly interacts with members of the legislature.

I began my first term on the board with a meeting a week before COVID closed everything down, but we met regularly by Zoom during the lockdown, and have continued with blended meetings after. I have attended as many meetings in person as possible. It is so much easier to build and maintain relationships face-to-face.

I have come to know church leaders from many denominations, but the greatest privilege for me has been building friendships and working relationships with leaders from traditionally African American Churches: Missionary Baptist AME, AME Zion, and Church of God (Anderson, Indiana).

In my time on the Board, I have served on the Personnel Committee, the Racial Equity Committee, and have just accepted appointment to chair the Peace Committee. I represented the Committee at a March in Elizabeth City with the Rev. Dr. William Barber following the shooting of Andrew Brown, Jr. (one week after marching and praying there with Bishop Skirving and diocesan clergy). I also participated in a press conference calling for cash bail reform at the Courthouse in Wilmington.

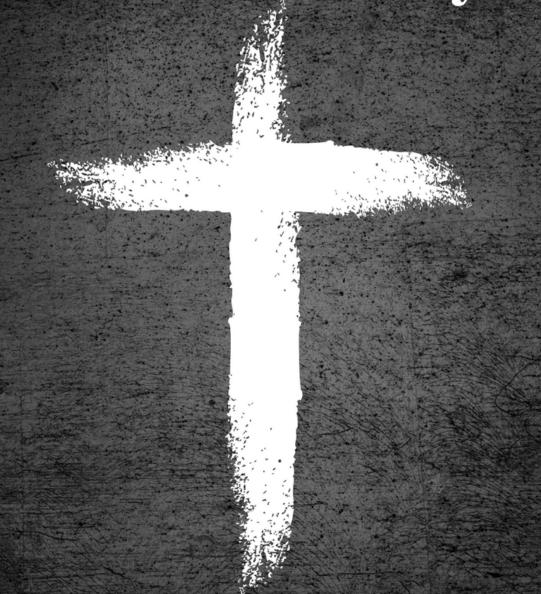
I am inspired by the commitment of the NCCC to bring the Gospel concern for the 'least of these' among us to the fore.





## Holy & Faithful:

Uncovering saints who sought and served Christ in different ways



A FIVE WEEK SERIES FOR ADULTS
TUESDAYS IN LENT | 7:30 PM | ZOOM



Participants are welcome to Join in After the class Has started. Registration is required to Join the zoom and receive Class Materials.

## Save the Date

First Annual Jazz and Race Symposium

September. 16. 2023

look for more details in News & Notes



S. A. S. S.



The Episcopal Diocese of East Carolina's

## YOUTH COUNCIL

APPLICATIONS OPEN IN MARCH



Participants: 6-8 graders and their Adult Leaders

Event Team: 8 graders who have been at least once to New Beginnings, 9-12 graders, and Adult Leaders



## SHARING OUR STORIES, SHARING OUR LIFE IN CHRIST.



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