

Esprit

A Publication of the Episcopal Diocese of Dallas

Summer 2014

Growing with God's Grace

Growing in God's Grace

Page 1

Nourishment for Neighbors in Need

Page 2

On Our Way Rejoicing

Page 4

Episcopal Diocese of Dallas Map

Page 8

Bishop's Q&A

Page 10

Growing in Mission: Feeding the Hungry

Page 12

North to Alaska: A Mission Trip

Page 15

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EDITOR'S NOTE:

Greetings everyone. I'm Kimberly Durnan, the new communications director for the diocese. Welcome to the second edition of the newly revised magazine Esprit. For this issue we focused on stories about the robust health of the diocese to illustrate some of the good work that is being done here. Be sure to read about Bishop Paul Lambert's mission trip to Alaska and the story about the hunger initiative written by Dabney Dwyer, missionary for outreach.

We also have some exciting new changes coming up including a new website and branding initiative that will be unveiled at the end of the year.

Lastly, don't forget we have the 2014 diocesan convention coming up. It's scheduled for Nov. 1, at the Episcopal School of Dallas, 4100 Merrell Road, Dallas, 75229.

It is with great pleasure that I take on this new role, and I look forward to meeting the communication needs of the diocese. I may be reached by phone at 214-826-8310 or by email at kdurnan@edod.org.

Blessings,
Kimberly Durnan

Growing in God's Grace



Greetings in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ! This is the second edition of our new "Espirit" and I hope you will find it interesting and helpful. Our theme is "Growing in God's Grace" and it is my hope that it will capture some of the exciting things going on in the Diocese of Dallas. During the time of transition we want you to know that all is well and we continue to seek God's will for us and the work He calls us to.

As I write this column I am beginning my second month as your bishop Pro Tempore and I do so with great humility and a deep sense of the prayers of our people. I am so grateful for the work that you and your congregations have accomplished. Every place we look we see signs of growth and renewal. In the following pages you will see but a few examples of the exciting ministry we as a diocesan family are about.

One of the key ingredients to growth of any kind is intentionality. By this I mean we are to be intentional about our desire to grow. This is true in our own spiritual growth as well as in our various congregations and ministries. Growth just doesn't happen. We need to be keenly aware of our own desire to grow and have the will to put those desires to work for God's kingdom. As the Epistle of St. James reminds us, "We are to be doers of the word!"

As we move forward in the months ahead you can be assured of many new opportunities to grow. God is always challenging us and calling us into new ways of sharing the Good News of His kingdom. Let each of us be open to God's call to us and seek to serve Him. If we as a diocese can be of any assistance to you and your congregation, we stand ready to assist in anyway.

God bless and keep you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul E. Lambert". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "P" and "L".

Bp. Paul E. Lambert

"We need to be
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By Kimberly Duman

Nourishment for Neighbors in Need

“With such a large refugee population it’s a unique area with a great need. **This is an opportunity for them to get acclimated to America,** because when they first get here they are not all gainfully employed. This allows them to provide food to their family, while they are in transition. It’s a blessing for everybody.”

– **The Rev. Herbert Walker, the minister for Vickery Baptist Church**

As they shoveled dirt, a group of religious leaders, residents and volunteers began the gritty transformation of turning an unsightly parking lot into a bountiful community garden in one of Dallas’ most vulnerable neighborhoods.

Volunteers from more than 30 churches and 16 denominations united to help the community of Vickery Meadow, an enclave in central Dallas known mostly for its high number of refugees and immigrants. Vickery Meadow is considered the city’s most densely populated neighborhood with more than 100 apartment complexes that provide housing for a diverse refugee population from all corners of the world including high numbers from Mexico, Central America, Bosnia, Burma and Bhutan among others.

The garden was constructed behind the neighborhood’s only house of worship, Vickery Baptist Church, which also provides worship space for Iglesia del Maestro Baptiste Church and Myanmar Christian Church.

“With such a large refugee population it’s a unique area with a great need,” said The Rev. Herbert Walker, the minister for Vickery Baptist Church. “This is an opportunity for them to get acclimated to America, because when they first get here they are not all gainfully employed. This allows them to provide food to their family, while they are in transition. It’s a blessing for everybody.”

The Rev. Betsy Randall, Associate Priest at the Church of the Epiphany in Richardson said she felt a calling to the Vickery Meadow area for several years, but nothing ever manifested. Then one day she knocked on the door of Vickery Baptist Church and



Volunteers shovel soil to prepare garden beds for planting



Workers spread mulch



said, “I don’t know why I’m here.”

She began to develop relationships with the pastors of the church and researched more about the community and its needs. “I started learning about the agrarian background of many of these refugees,” she said. “We prayed and started to look at properties for a garden.”

The Rev. Juan Pablo Herrera, minister for Iglesia del Maestro Baptiste Church, said the garden is important to the community because it allows refugees to leave their apartments and put their hands in the soil, develop relationships with other neighbors and have access to affordable, fresh food.



Volunteers take a break from building the community garden

After several negotiations fell through, the group began to focus on how to efficiently and cheaply remove the asphalt parking lot behind the church. That’s when the landscaper for Epiphany, John Wingfield, volunteered to do the work for free.

“We couldn’t have done it without him,” Mother Randall said. “It’s really expensive, hard work to remove a parking lot. He was such a blessing. The project was born out of prayer and relationship.”

Churches who volunteered for the cause contributed \$500 each to buy the materials needed for a garden, and have named their work Victory Garden.

Volunteers were then organized to construct beds, add soil, spread mulch, develop an irrigation system and plant carrots, tomatoes, beets, lettuce, collard greens, peppers, pumpkins, cucumbers, squash and cilantro among other items.

The Rev. Sang Puia, pastor for Myanmar Christian Church said most of the gardeners were from his congregation. “We will have more than enough food,” he said. “We plan to invite other refugees, Christians and non-Christians to come to the garden. We will share our food with them.”

The vegetables from the garden will help make the cultural transition a lot easier for those new to American life. “This is not just a social project,” Mother Randall said. “It’s God’s work.” ❖

“The garden is important to the community because it allows refugees to leave their apartments and put their hands in the soil, develop relationships with other neighbors and have access to affordable, fresh food.”

– **The Rev. Juan Pablo Herrera,**
the minister for Iglesia del
Maestro Baptiste Church



By Kimberly Duman

On Our Way Rejoicing

“We don’t have room to start another Sunday school class. People keep coming and we don’t have the space. We had to build. **We want to fulfill the mission of the church to worship God in the great tradition, make disciples, serve the poor and raise up leaders....**”

– **Bishop Tony Burton**

If with honest hearted love for God and man,
Day by day Thou find us doing all we can,
Thou who givest the seed time, will give large increase,
Crown the head with blessings, fill the heart with peace,

– **Parish Hymnal, 1873**

Whether reciting the liturgy in Igbo, sharing the chalice with the homeless or discovering the Canterbury Trail, all illustrate the rich vibrancy of the Dallas diocese where 11,300 believers sit in the pews each Sunday to worship.

Church planting, urban renewal, population growth and renewed excitement toward all things Anglican have buoyed the 69 congregations in the diocese and kept parishes and missions growing or stable. This is an important feat, particularly during a time of transition as leaders search to replace recently retired Bishop James M. Stanton.

While no one thing is credited with keeping the diocese robust, strategic church planting is its lifeblood. New churches are being created in rural outposts, the inner city, and in the suburbs.

“Culture changes, neighborhoods change and so there is always a need for new church plants,” said The Rev. Brendan Kimbrough, who is launching a new church in Collin County. “If we want to reach people for Christ, the most effective way is through church planting.”

Father Kimbrough speaks from experience. He began sowing the seeds of St. Timothy’s nearly two years ago in effort to make an Episcopal Church accessible to residents in the towns of Murphy, Wylie and Sachse.

After two years of meeting residents and holding Bible study in his home, Father Kimbrough is officially launching St. Timothy’s in August in the Murphy Activity Center. “It’s a perfect space, and will allow us to have full worship, a nursery, children’s Sunday school, a hospitality area and plenty of parking.”

Establishing new churches isn’t easy and requires substantial support from the diocese in both funding and management, said Canon Victoria Heard, missionary for church planting.



Father Joe Hermerding stands near the construction site that when complete will double the footprint of Incarnation.

Starting from scratch is hard work for the priest who has to parachute into a new community with little more than a dream and a prayer. Canon Heard points to Father Michael Gilton, as a successful planter who started St. Paul's in Prosper, which now has 130 in average Sunday attendance.

"Father Gilton did most things right," Heard said. "He moved to Prosper, where his first act was to become a crossing guard at a school, which helped get him connected to the community. Then he joined the Rotary Club. You really have to be visible as a church planter because you don't have a pretty building. You just have yourself, Jesus Christ and a vision of what could be."

While many new congregations are built chasing suburban growth, inner city growth is more complex. In Dallas, the diocese' largest parish is undergoing a massive construction project, while just a few miles away, a parish for the homeless continues to grow in both membership and mission. And in the Oak Cliff neighborhood, urban renewal has inspired the reconfiguration of three parishes.

At the Church of the Incarnation, in Dallas' Uptown neighborhood, members raised \$26 million for a construction project that will double the church's footprint, and better meet the needs of a rapidly growing congregation that already numbers 1,225.

"We have been forced into it," Bishop Tony Burton said. "We don't have room to start another Sunday school class. People keep coming and we don't have the space. We had to build. We want to fulfill the mission of the church to worship God in the great tradition, make disciples, serve the poor and raise up leaders...."

The construction is expected to be completed next year, and will include a new worship space for the contemporary service, a new welcome center and two new educational buildings.

The growth is in part due to more families moving to the Uptown area, and the easy access provided by Interstate 75 that makes the location convenient for those outside the immediate neighborhood, Bishop Burton said.

A few miles away, an outdoor church servicing the homeless continues to flourish and expand its mission of serving

“They like that **we**
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They have **more**
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They came from the
Catholic Church
where they felt like
spectators, but here
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and participate.”

– **Rev. Tony Munoz**

others. The Gathering, which provides an extended Eucharist with lunch in a downtown park, was started in 2012 and averages 100 worshippers on Sunday.

“It’s a parish community without walls,” said Tom Hauser, executive director of The Gathering. “We have liturgy, we have communion, and we have a proper sermon with the appropriate liturgical colors. We are proclaiming the same gospel as the Church of the Incarnation, but at the same time we are less formal. We have to be, some of our people don’t have shoes.”

Homeless members of the parish have gone on three mission trips – twice to Oklahoma to help rebuild homes that were destroyed in tornadoes and once to Camp All Saints to help get the grounds ready for summer campers.

In Oklahoma, “it was the homeless helping the homeless,” said The Rev. Charlie Keen. “They worked their butts off. On the way home they talked about what a blessed experience it was and then when we got back into town, instead of taking them home I dropped them off at a park -- they don’t have homes.”

While The Gathering offers access to urban ministry, so do the changing demographics of older neighborhoods such as Oak Cliff. Recently, three parishes with dwindling congregations united into one parish in a neighborhood that is experiencing urban renewal.

The congregations of Epiphany, St. George and St. Paul merged to form St. Augustine’s. The new parish meets in the former St. Paul church and has a new rector, the Rev. Paul Wheatley. Because all of the parishes wanted to merge, the congregation has deeper roots than a new church that may have popped up a year ago, he said.

“St. Paul’s, Epiphany and St. George’s all experienced demographic shifts in their neighborhoods over the last few decades and the congregations declined as the neighborhoods around them changed.” said Father Wheatley. “Our opportunity is reaching out and connecting them to the wonderful resources we have such as history, maturity and diversity.”



Parishioners partake in Communion during a worship service at The Gathering

Photo Courtesy of The Dallas Morning News



Father Daniel Ofoegbu gives a service in the Nigerian language of Igbo at St. Luke's in Dallas

The merge created a 90-member congregation that represents the neighborhoods surrounding the church, which is diverse in age and race, and thereby attracts new members. "They show up and we have great-grandparents, grandparents, Latinos, Anglos and African Americans," Father Wheatley said. "Our local churches are at their best when they represent the diversity of the neighborhoods around them."

Diversity is not only a growing theme in Oak Cliff but in other areas of the diocese where services are held in a variety of languages. Congregations include Latin American, Nigerian, Kenyan, Bhutanese, and Korean.

"On any given Sunday we have services in seven languages," Canon Heard said. Currently I'm looking for a priest who speaks Swahili."

One such service at Emmanuel Anglican Church is in the Igbo language, one of the three major languages of Nigeria. The mission meets at St. Luke's in Dallas and has an average of 115 worshippers on Sunday, said The Rev. Daniel Ofoegbu.

The mission competes with evangelical churches for newly transplanted Nigerians. "One of the challenges is that in Africa, the Episcopal Church is known as the Anglican Church, so it does not translate for them when they come to America and they end up at an evangelical church," Father Ofoegbu said.

Services in Spanish are also increasing in the diocese due to Dallas' growing Hispanic population. About 90 percent come from the Roman Catholic Church and the other 10 percent come from an evangelical church, speculated The Rev. Tony Munoz.

The main draw for Hispanics to the Episcopal Church is the liturgy, he said. "They like that we are a welcoming church, it makes them feel like they are home. They have more accessible priests, and they get excited when they find the sacrament is still here," Father Munoz said. "They came from the Catholic Church where they felt like spectators, but here they get to be part of the liturgy and participate."

While Spanish-language services are a draw for Hispanics, engaging the second generation is much more difficult. "The people we reach are the parents who speak Spanish. We are trying to reach the children who speak English," Father Munoz said. "Our challenge is to give them an English service with a Latino flavor."

Another stream of diocesan growth is a counterculture trend of Protestants coming into the Anglican faith, said The Rev. Joseph Hermerding, an associate rector at Incarnation.

"This movement is referred to as the Canterbury Trail. We are seeing young evangelicals looking for something more stable, more traditional, more relevant and transcendent than what they are used to," Father Hermerding said. "They don't want their pastor in jeans, sandals and a t-shirt."

Much of the attraction for the new converts is a rich, worship culture that is intellectual and takes the life of the mind very seriously, Father Hermerding noted. Part of the appeal is that the church is authentic and doesn't pander for membership, he added.

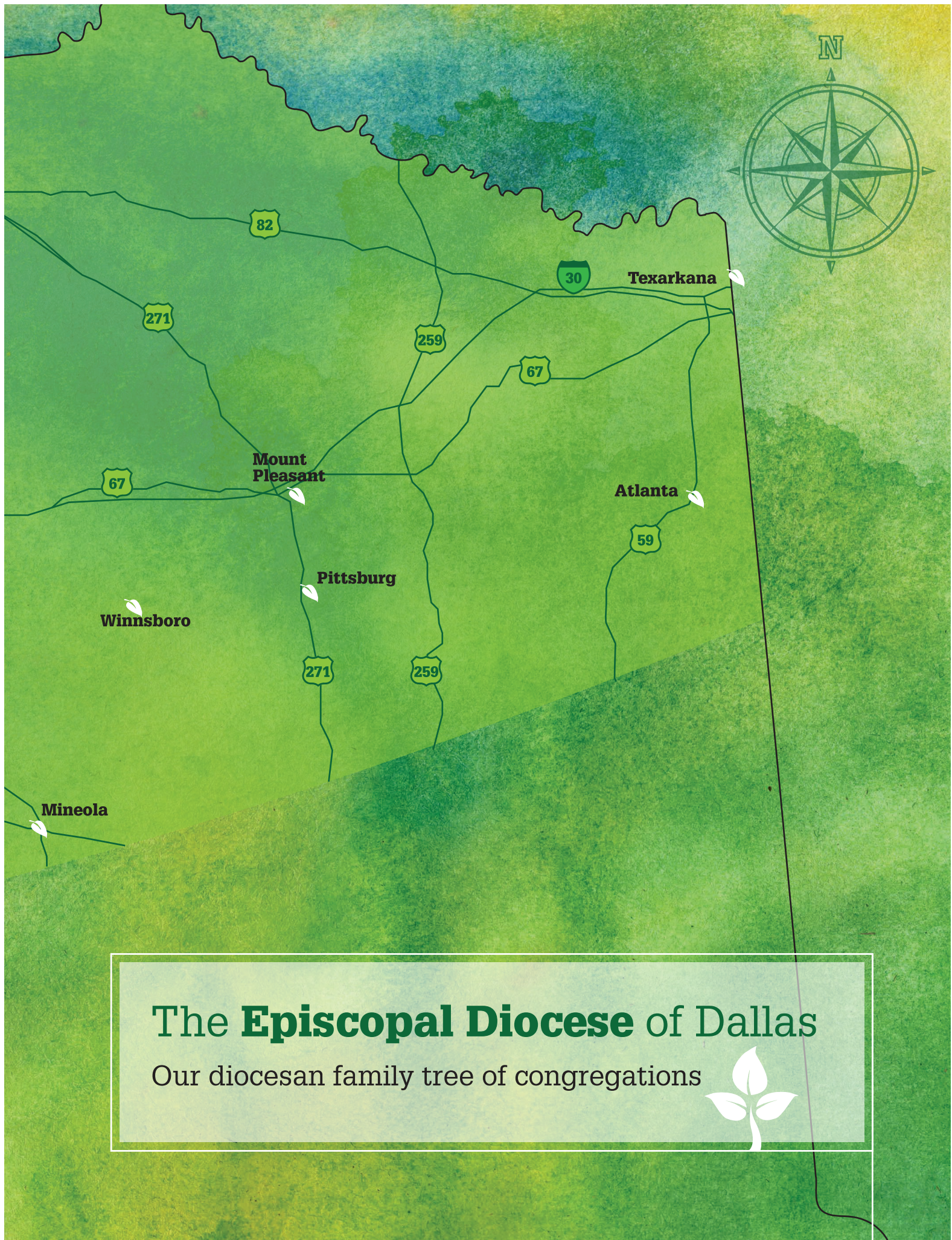
"We thought we would get all the yuppies from Uptown coming to our traditional service," Father Hermerding said. "We get some of those, but we were surprised to also get those with tattoos and dreadlocks to high mass. We are not marketing to them. We are not trying to please them. We are trying to worship God and they are attracted to an articulate, thoughtful Christian orthodox message."

The Canterbury Trail is led by the millennial generation but is becoming a much broader movement, said The Rev. Steven Peay, Associate dean at Nashotah House Theological Seminary. "It's the new monasticism. They are looking for intentional community, they want depth, and they want something that makes a difference. People are not interested in the shallow spirituality that we've shoved out for years and years. They are looking to go deep."

Father Wheatley agreed that the Episcopal Church's historical identity and doctrine is a strong catalyst for diocese growth and stability.

"One of the strengths we have as a diocese is that Anglicanism has Catholic and Evangelical streams in it," he said. "We have a faith that is old as the apostles and we serve a risen Lord whose Holy Spirit is always bringing renewal and life." ❖





The **Episcopal Diocese** of Dallas

Our diocesan family tree of congregations



Bishop's Q&A

“I would say it's diversity; it is a real strength that we often overlook... We need to figure out how to focus that diversity into an energy that will transform lives in the name of Jesus Christ.”

TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF.

I like to think of myself as very practical and down-to-earth. When it comes to problem solving I will always seek the simplest and most effective solution possible. “What you see is what you get” as I try to live as unpretentious life possible. This probably has to do with my being raised in Nevada on a ranch in my early years.

I love and adore my beloved Sally, wife of nearly forty years. We have three married adult daughters and five beautiful grandchildren that we do not see as often as we would like. Hopefully, retirement, when that comes, will remedy that!

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE COLOR?

Blue

WHY DID YOU BECOME A PRIEST?

I believe I was called by God, and the people of God, to become a priest -- one call reaffirmed the other as it were. I have always had a gift to develop and maintain relationships and I believe God uses this gift through my ministry. After all He is a personal God, the Incarnation and Crucifixion attest to that!

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE CHILDHOOD MEMORY?

Hitting my first home run in Little League baseball. That was the best!

WHAT ARE YOUR HOBBIES?

Reading, gardening, carpentry, and cooking.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE BIBLE VERSE?

John 14:18- “I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you.”

WHAT IS YOUR BEST DISH TO COOK?

This is not a fair question, as I love cooking many things in many forms. But if I had to choose I would say roasted leg of lamb with all the trimmings.



WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT BEING ECCLESIASTICAL AUTHORITY DURING OUR TRANSITION?

I am humbled by the confidence the Standing Committee has placed in my ability as a leader and I hope that I am able to serve the Diocese faithfully and with its best interest in mind and heart.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR WIFE SALLY.

There is not enough space to tell you about Sally, she is my touchstone in life. Faithful in her vocation as a wife and mother, faithful in her service to our Lord and his Church (she is a cradle Episcopalian), and a dedicated teacher as a Nurse Educator in Community Health at TWU. Anyone who can put up with me for nearly 40 years will certainly have a place in heaven when the time comes.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE BEST ABOUT THE DIOCESE

I would say its diversity; it is a real strength that we often overlook. It is diverse in its membership, its ethnic communities, and its geography. We need to figure out how to focus that diversity into an energy that will transform lives in the name of Jesus Christ. We have to become intentional about doing so because there is a real brokenness out there in the world that needs that witness and message of hope the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

WHAT IS YOUR BEST ADVICE ON HOW TO BECOME CLOSER TO GOD?

Have a Rule of Life. It is a spiritual road map that will lead you deeper into your relationship with God in Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Cursillo is a great place to learn this and, to experience its truth. My football coach in high school had a saying: "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail!" That's true for a lot of things in this life and it's certainly true in our relationship with God.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE MISSION TRIP?

It's always the last one I went on!

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE MOVIE?

Any movie where right overcomes wrong! I would say "Sounder."

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE RESTAURANT?

My house! Actually, Flotts, on the Rue de Cambon, Paris, France

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU READ THE BIBLE?

I have never finished it! If you get my drift!

WHY DID YOU WANT TO BECOME A BISHOP?

I didn't! I always place myself in the hands of God and do my best to serve when and how He calls me to serve. Being a Bishop in the one, holy, catholic and Apostolic Church is where he calls me now. I hope I can honor God in my service and uphold his people.



Growing in Mission: Feeding the Hungry

“If among you,
one of your brothers
should become poor,
in any of your towns
within your land that
the Lord your God is
giving you, **you shall
not harden your
heart** or shut your
hand against your
poor brother”

– Deuteronomy 15:7

HUNGER HAS BEEN ON MY MIND...

I was driving home one day recently and saw two young adults on the street corner with signs, asking for help. This is a normal occurrence in Dallas. But what struck me about this particular time, was that it was a young couple together on the street corner, both holding signs. They could not be more than 20 years of age. As I drove home, I was wondering if I should do anything, and if I did, what would it be? It seems that most of us distrust panhandlers. Always wondering if they really need the money, or will use the cash for alcohol, maybe drugs. I also began the thought process of wondering what got them to this point. What chain of events caused these young people to become homeless, to be panhandling for money or food?

TEXAS HUNGER INITIATIVE

Several years ago, I was invited to a “Hunger Summit” located at the Farmers Market in downtown Dallas. This was the first summit in Dallas that brought people from all over the country to share knowledge about hunger and food insecurity. We heard from program representatives from U.S. Department of Agriculture, North Texas Food Bank, No Kid Hungry and many others who are passionate about hunger in this country.

One such speaker was Jeremy Everett, Director of the Texas Hunger Initiative (THI). Jeremy received his Masters of Divinity at Baylor and founded THI as a collaborative, capacity-building project within Baylor University School of Social Work. This initiative develops strategies to alleviate hunger through research, policy, education, community organizing, and community development.

What I learned from Jeremy and others was that about 15 percent of the country’s population is food insecure. Yet, the U.S. produces enough food to feed every man, woman and child three balanced meals per day, and that there are resources to help. Money is not a barrier to solving the problem of hunger.

I also learned that the Texas Hunger Initiative was launching “Food Planning Associations” in major cities in Texas in order to bring people from all sectors of business, nonprofits and faith organizations together to work on a plan for mitigating hunger. I had to get involved. Since that time, the Dallas Coalition for Hunger

Solutions (DCHS) was formed as the Dallas arm of the Texas Hunger Initiative. The mission of DCHS is simple: To empower residents in Dallas County to gain equal access to healthy food.

Now, two years later, DCHS has funding and staff to oversee the work of the Coalition and many volunteers working on various teams to increase food security for all in Dallas County. On behalf of the diocese, I currently serve on the Coalition's leadership team and Co-chair the faith-based action team.

OUR CALL TO ADDRESS POVERTY AND HUNGER

As Christians, Jesus made it clear about our call to serve those less fortunate; those who live on the margins of society; those who are poor and hungry. While there are over 100 scripture verses that call us to serve the poor and hungry, we often think of Matthew 25, particularly verse 35:

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me...

This verse is poignant specifically because Christ identifies particularly with those who are poor in the land. And when we fail to reach out to others in need; when we do not share our food, our water or clothes ...then we are denying Christ himself.

HUNGER HURTS

Hunger is synonymous with poverty. Those living in poverty live day-to-day wondering where the next meal is coming from. Many children come to school without a nourishing breakfast and cannot concentrate on schoolwork due to hunger. The elderly who are home-bound and without family support often become under-nourished, frail and ill. Single

mothers wanting to attend school or seek employment are trapped in the cycle of securing food week to week. Working families find themselves suddenly not able to put food on the table due to loss of a job, a sudden illness or a natural disaster. Hurricane Katrina alone launched thousands of people into homelessness and poverty, many who had never known loss before.

A young mother whose name is, Freedom, grew up in poverty with a father who was an addict and abusive to her mother. She has known what it is like to be hungry most of her childhood and into her teens. A loving and caring church helped Freedom escape from having to live house to house to just get by. She was eventually able to go to Texas College in a program for single moms and now, is completing her final coursework for a Masters of Divinity program at Southern Methodist University.

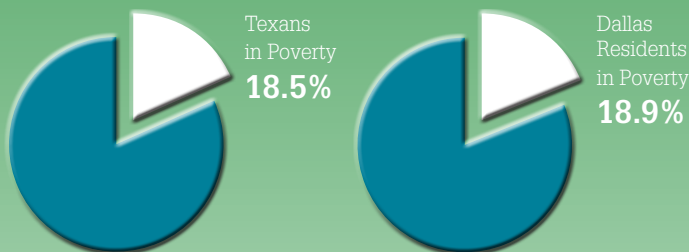
"I would have had a difficult time trying to feed my family while going to school if it had not been for SNAP, (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program formerly known as food stamps)," Freedom said. "The \$324 per month is not much to feed three mouths, but it helps and I don't worry about my children being hungry. I also am able to supplement our food with fresh produce from SMU's community garden."

THE POVERTY AND HUNGER LANDSCAPE

Poverty may be defined by an income threshold based on the number of persons in a household. So, for example, a family of four having a combined household income below \$23,624 is considered living in poverty according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

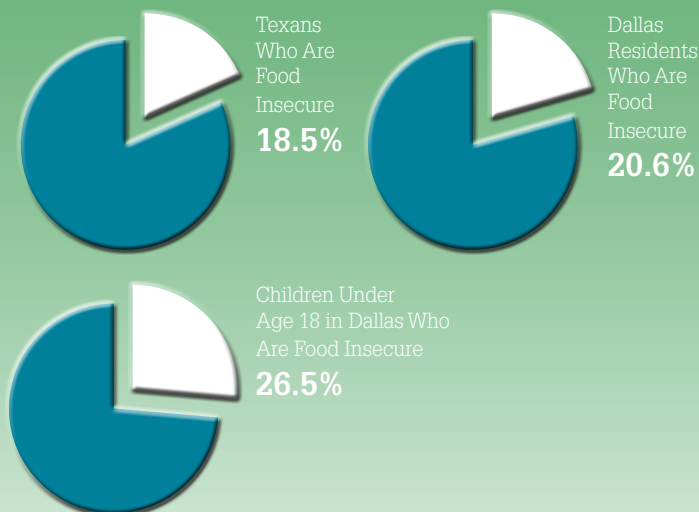
More than 18 percent of Texans live in poverty and the same percentage are "food insecure" which is defined as a lack of resources to consistently have access to adequate

POVERTY AND HUNGER LANDSCAPE



Poverty Threshold (Family of 4) = \$23,624

RANK OF TEXAS AMONG THE NATION FOR PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY



food. In Dallas County, food insecurity continues to be prevalent. In particular, nearly 27% of all children under 18 years old are at risk of not receiving adequate food and nutrition on a daily basis.

SOLUTIONS FOR HEALING HUNGER

As Christians, we have an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of those who are less fortunate. Jesus was out in the world doing just that...making a difference. Not only preaching the Good News, but also demonstrating good deeds. Time after time, Jesus is reaching out to the lost, the lonely and the forgotten.

Churches in our diocese are having an impact on hunger. Many are feeding the hungry through food pantries, backpack food programs, community gardens, providing summer meals, volunteering with Meals on Wheels and more.

Most recently the Dallas Coalition for Hunger Solutions produced a Hunger Solutions Guide for the faith community. This guide has six tested, effective solutions to the problem of hunger that congregations can implement. These solutions take advantage of existing programs and resources in the community. But, they generally require limited financial commitment, are relational and can make a substantial impact on hunger.

Please take a look and go to www.dallashungerinitiative.org to download your free copy of the guide.

After asking God if I should do something, anything to help the couple on the street corner, I decided to act, and quickly got into my car and headed to Ascension, my home parish, to prepare a food bag of non-perishable items from our food pantry. I went back to the intersection, but found that the couple had left. I drove south and before long saw them walking, and was able to get their attention. They were scared.

I visited with them briefly and found out that they were homeless--- he had lost a job doing offshore drilling. I suggested some places for them to go but heard only excuses. I finally got the food bag out of my car and their eyes lit up. They were extremely grateful. My last effort was to mention The Gathering, the Eucharist service on Sundays at 1p.m. in Dallas' Thanksgiving Square, for the homeless living in downtown Dallas.

God willing, maybe they will go there and find a community of love and hope. ❖

– Dabney Dwyer
Missioner for Outreach
Missional Church Commission

North to Alaska: A Mission Trip

Editor's Note: Bishop Paul Lambert traveled to Eagle, Alaska with a team of eight volunteers to rebuild St. John's Episcopal Church that had been destroyed in a flood.

I have come to realize that on such a "mission" trip, waiting is not necessarily a bad thing. In this instance our waiting bore fruit as our mission team began to form our community of service by moving the logs for the church from their "drop zone" to where we could easily access them for construction. This laborious work took the better part of the day as we awaited the completion of our pad site. We were also able to get to know our hosts -- the gracious Native Americans of

the Athabaskan Tribe, whose ancestral land spans much of central Alaska and Canada's Yukon Territory. These People of the Water are born with dual citizenship.

It occurred to me that as I watched with interest the gravel being hauled and leveled (a word I use loosely) that it was only fitting we would be using gravel from millions of years of glacial activity as the foundation for this church. Nothing could be more fitting for a church that has been the



By the Grace of God a building for His church

Esker: (noun) A serpentine ridge of gravel and sandy drift believed to have been formed by streams under or in glacial ice. And so we began our project to rebuild a church for the Athabaskan tribe in Eagle, Alaska that had been destroyed by a flooding Yukon River in 2009. We waited for the foundation of gravel to be delivered. This phase would eat into our precious time as we had anticipated the foundation being completed by the time we arrived. This would not be the first of many surprises to come our way during our six-day sojourn. So we waited.



A plaque honoring former Dallas diocese dean, Hudson Stuck, displayed at St. Matthew's Church in Fairbanks, Alaska.

spiritual home to several generations of God's children, to rest upon the "ground" of their ancestors. As the esker of the glaciers layered upon one another to form a foundation for the church that would be spiritually connected with the eskers of the people who have come and will come to worship in this place. This indeed is holy ground.

Once the foundation was laid we began constructing the structure. Finally, we get to build something. The only problem, or surprise this time, was there was no plan! Apparently it had been misplaced or lost. So there we were with the materials but with no idea where to begin. (Sounds like a sermon to me!) SO we did what any 21st Century person would do, we went to the one computer in the village and got online! We found a few good sites to help us with a plan but did not have enough bandwidth to download. Not to worry, we contacted the supplier of our "kit" and he faxed us drawings (such as they were) to get us started. Fortunately, Tim the Public Safety Officer arrived in due course with the experience needed to get us going. He had actually built a log cabin and this knowledge was key to our success.

The team worked twelve to fourteen hours a day getting the foundation, floors, and walls up. These long days were enhanced by the simple food provided for us by our hosts from their personal stock. For the most part we were treated to caribou in a variety of ways including caribou liver and onions for breakfast one morning! Believe me, there were no complaints from us as we were always hungry and always satisfied with their offering. We slept on the floor of the Community Center, retiring around 10 p.m. to well-lit skies, because the sun sets in that corner of the world around 1:30 a.m. Then it was back to the project site by 7 a.m. to another day of construction surprises and caribou nourishment.

Unfortunately, we didn't go sight seeing as we were committed to getting as much done as we possibly could in limited time we had. Some of our frustration



Surveying a job well done

was the lack of construction supplies and having to fly them in from Fairbanks on the “next plane” or scavenge them from other projects. But in the end we had what we needed to accomplish our goals. As we looked at the completed walls we did so with a sense of humility knowing that we had brought a gift to these humble people. As we celebrated the Holy Eucharist on the site that Sunday morning the sense of hope was palpable among the people of Eagle Village. For the first time in five years they would have a church in which to worship, albeit without a roof!

I really had not thought about that day much. But you could see in the eyes of the people of Eagle that their hope

had been taken away by the devastating flood. Yes, federal and state organizations came to their aid to rebuild homes, and did so very well. But the church is and was the center of their communal life, and had been since the early 1900's. It symbolized to them their rootedness in God and his never failing love for them. It was a place where they heard the message of hope of the Good News of Jesus Christ, and the promise that he is with them always.

We take our churches for granted, those places where we can gather with friends and kin to be nourished by Word and Sacrament, so much so that they cease to be central to our lives. Seeing the Athabaskan people and experiencing their hope, renewed in me that sense of our neediness for one another and for our community of faith. We need those “holy places” where we reconnect with God and with one another as we make our way through this life. In the midst of this ever-changing world we all need a place where we can “place our foot” and be connected to God.

Our mission trip to Eagle, Alaska was a worthwhile one to be sure. We made a difference in the lives of the people of God. It also brought new insight to the need for ministry in and among the Native American people of our land. The ministry of Bishop Mark Lattime, Bishop of Alaska, is a challenging one. The vast expanse of his diocese alone has challenges enough. But added to that is the rampant alcoholism and domestic violence that devastates his villages. The need for missionary priests and deacons to care for his people in these remote areas is ever present. As he struggles daily with limited resources I know our time with him was greatly appreciated and encouraging. Hopefully, we will return!

Our mission team arrived in Texas safe and sound. George Jones and his two sons, George and Daniel from The Cathedral of St. Matthew, Garrett Mack also from St. Matthew, Paul Freeman from Good Shepherd, Terrell, Mike Hume, from St. David's, Gilmer, my brother Chuck Lambert from Port Orchard, WA, and Jack Calhoun from Washington, D.C. Each and every one of these men worked from their heart and left it among the eskers of the people of Eagle. Our lives were touched and changed by this experience and we too had hope restored in many ways. Thanks be to God. ❖

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