



# Iowa Connections

WINTER 2023  
VOLUME 10, NUMBER 2



**GATHER AT  
THE RIVER**

**Young Adult Companions Pilgrimage 2023**



FROM BISHOP BETSEY MONNOT

# Together on This Transformative Journey



*From the Opening Eucharist of the 171th Annual Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Iowa, October 20, 2023 at St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral, Des Moines*

“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Today, this scripture, has been fulfilled in your hearing.

Because that is what we, each of us, gathered here this evening, are all about. We, the body of Christ, gathered here to worship God, to open our 171st Annual Diocesan Convention, to join in the celebration with the seven young people who come to be confirmed this evening, that is what we are all about. We are about what Jesus was about.

We, the members of the Body of Christ, the only body that Christ has in this world now, are called to do his work: to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. As Christ came into the world to fulfill this scripture, we have inherited that call as members of Christ's body.

Now, what exactly that looks like for each one of us as we live out our ministry in the world will vary considerably. As each one of us is given gifts, as Paul wrote to the Ephesians, we go about our ministry in the world as members of Christ's body, in various different ways, but always, always, on a journey to grow up, as Paul put it, to grow up into Christ. That growth, that maturing process, that journey of transformation is life long—and beyond this life—and none of us can claim to have arrived already.

And where did we begin this journey of transformation? We sometimes forget. But this evening, we have a reminder through Ezekiel's vision of the Valley of Dry Bones: we began this journey as dry bones ourselves. We began this journey, as we remember on Ash Wednesday, as dust, as completely without life, and all that we are, and all that we have, has been given to us through God's grace.

God brought Ezekiel to a valley that was full of bones, and they weren't just bones—Ezekiel says they were very dry. There was no hint or shadow of life left there,

even the scavengers and the insects were finished with these bones. And they were all jumbled up, not attached to each other, just a big pile of dry bones in the valley.

And God told Ezekiel what to do, and Ezekiel prophesied, and as he did, God's power caused those bones to re-form themselves into complete skeletons, and then while Ezekiel kept prophesying God's power caused muscles, and flesh, and skin to form over the bones, and so they were complete

bodies, but there was still no breath in them.

Now remember, throughout the Hebrew Bible, in order for there to be life, there has to be breath. So when Ezekiel says there was no breath in the bodies, it means there was no life—these were complete bodies, but they were not alive. And God tells Ezekiel

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“... the church is the place for us to support each other as we continue in this transformation, moving closer to the measure of the full stature of Christ. ”

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IOWA CONNECTIONS is a biannual publication of the Episcopal Diocese of Iowa.

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# Jesus: The Man, The Myth, The Person

by Amy Mellies



*EPIC Summer Camp 2023 Group Photo; Photo by: A. Mellies*

The week of EPIC, our diocesan summer youth camp, is a chance for our youth to leave their home lives behind and build community with others around the diocese. It's a chance for many to be who they truly are, authentically themselves, and be welcomed into a community of youth and adults who accepts them as they are. This is so important for many of the LGBTQIA+ youth in our state, now more than ever. We want to create a place for any youth who might not have a home church to find their community and feel like they belong. The youth of our diocese have so many good ideas, caring hearts and voices they want to use. It's up to the adults in their lives to walk with them on this journey of faith and help them use the gifts and talents each of them has, and we (camp staff) are grateful that for one week each summer we have that privilege.

This year our theme was "Jesus: The Man, The Myth, The Person," and we learned about who Jesus truly was. Did Jesus feel emotional and physical pain? How did Jesus process joy and grace? How did Jesus accept and love all people, just as they are? Our staff did a wonderful job of helping to answer these questions and give specific instances in scripture of how Jesus did all of the amazing things he did during his short life on Earth. The hope of the week was to show our youth that Jesus went through

many, if not all, of the same things they are experiencing. And yet he faced his fears and gave up his life for all of us.

As with most years at EPIC, we had a year of firsts. It was the first time for many staff and campers, the first time Bishop Monnot was able to join us, the first time our campers had a choreographed dance off with CCC (Christian Conference Center) staff, the first time we offered a quiet space, and the first time we offered a non-binary cabin for our campers. We are already looking forward to hopefully even more firsts next year.

*Ms. Amy Mellies serves as the diocesan Children and Youth Missioner..*





## Staff Reflections

This was my first experience ever to be at a camp. Yes, 65 years old and this is my first time as a camper. One of the things that I witnessed was the outpouring of support for the youth in our diocese. Everyone at camp supported each other and did their best to listen and to learn about each other, and the stories that they have experienced in their lives. We were blessed with some very fine leaders. We were also blessed with some really challenging air quality issues. It was beautiful to see so many of our campers, leaders, and staff be willing to be flexible.

The church services that we had outside were very spiritual. The music was outstanding. I just loved how the kids got involved and shared their love for each other. God is working very well in our youth. These outings that we have with our young people are their church. We need to foster, support, and encourage young folks and others to be a part of this beautiful congregation. Thank you for letting me be a part of this. And I pray that I can continue to be a part of this.

- Rev. Catherine Schroeder



This was my first year seeing EPIC through from start to finish. When did it start? December 2022 and probably earlier for our leaders Amy and Kristina. All my previous years I just showed up for staff training the days before and had no idea how much planning went into a week of EPIC. Many great people spent seven months of time committed to EPIC.

Camp came during a rough patch for me so I was a bit hesitant leading up to it. However, as campers began arriving on Monday afternoon, I knew I was in the right place. I knew I was called to be there to welcome campers, new and returners, with open arms. Camp provides an opportunity to come as your true, authentic self, which we don't most days [outside of camp]. This year we implemented both a non-binary cabin and a soft space campers could go to when feeling overwhelmed. This allowed even more of us to show up as our true selves. Even though EPIC isn't necessarily vacation it is my vacation, and that's how much I love it and value its worth.

- Tiffany Farrell

# Prophetic Witness and Voicing Our Values in Public Policy

by Wendy Abrahamson

Some wonder if it is appropriate for Christians to speak to public policy issues. We believe so. Over and over in scripture we are commanded to care for those in need, to tend those on the margins and the poor. Over and over Jesus steps across cultural lines of what is “appropriate” toward those who need care. He tells us explicitly to feed people; he tells us explicitly to be with those who are alone; he sends us to proclaim healing and release and good news. In our country and system of government, distribution of these good things (medical care, food, housing, safety, dignity) is significantly set in motion or inhibited by public policy legislation; this is why we must be there. In addition to Christians importantly supporting those in need with ministries such as food banks, through legislative witness we hope to be impactful at the distribution source. It is also a way to publicly witness and offer testimony to our faith—we lobby specifically, explicitly, as Christians.

In 2017 the Diocese of Iowa began our public policy ministry: Faith in Action. It started as a volunteer registered lobbyist to help inform Iowa Episcopalians about bills in the General Assembly, to lobby lawmakers on issues we care about as Christians, and to network with lobbyists of other faith groups (like the Roman Catholic Church, the Methodists, and Interfaith Alliance of Iowa). A registered lobbyist would be able to “declare” (the technical term) diocesan positions on bills in the Iowa Legislature Online Lobbyist System, which lawmakers, the public, and media access to see who officially supports or opposes a given bill. The inspiration for Faith in Action was the Episcopal Public Policy Network, which for decades has informed Episcopalians on federal issues and is part of The Episcopal Church Office of Government Relations.



*Gathering at the Statehouse for Episcopalians on the Hill 2023; Photo from W. Abrahamson*



At the outset the diocese consulted with our chancellor to ensure that if we established a registered lobbyist as a religious body, we would not violate federal restrictions; we learned that religious organizations are free to speak in the public square on issues, including by lobbying, and are only prohibited from endorsing candidates for office or working on political campaigns. We also comply with State of Iowa policy allowing for volunteer lobbyists whose time lobbying is not the majority of their job.

Guidelines were established: bill declarations must align with General Convention and Diocese of Iowa Convention actions, and if unsure the lobbyist consults with the bishop and/or The Episcopal Church Office of Government Relations; activities must be communicated to the diocese at large about declarations, subcommittee hearings, and rallies at the Capitol; and prior to the start of the legislative session the lobbyist must consult with the bishop to consider issues to track. And as a ministry sometimes addressing sensitive issues, Faith in Action must keep the bishop up-to-date and aware of its legislative activities.

The Rev. Wendy Abrahamson (St. Paul's, Grinnell) suggested this ministry in 2016 to then Bishop Alan Scarfe who approved, and Abrahamson became the first registered lobbyist. She attended a convention in Washington, D.C. in 2017, Ecumenical Advocacy Days, that included training and hands-on practice lobbying lawmakers with other Christians. After a couple years, the Rev. Marcus Haack (Trinity, Iowa City) joined and served as a second registered lobbyist until he retired last year. The Rev. Lizzie Gillman (St. Andrew's, Des Moines) joined not as a lobbyist, but as a networker to community organizations. Now, under the episcopacy of Bishop Betsey Monnot, Faith in Action continues to be wonderfully supported by the bishop of Iowa.

A Facebook group was established for Faith in Action to communicate quickly; members can follow it as well as post. Like the lobbyist, the page has participation guidelines such as no endorsement of candidates or political parties, no memes or uncivil conversation, et cetera. Ms. Traci Ruhland Petty administers the group for the diocese and there are three moderators: Mr. Vince Preston, the Rev. Alice Haugen and the Rev. Diana



*Faith leaders meeting with legislators at Clergy Day on the Hill 2023; Photo by T. Ruhland Petty*

Wright. In the 6ish years of the Facebook group there have been very few instances where moderators have needed to step in — a wonderful testimony to the spirit held by the group — which currently has 450 members. A more recent technological support was created by Traci Ruhland Petty: a page on the Diocese of Iowa website that provides access to Iowa legislative information and areas we focus on.

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From the beginning Faith in Action has hosted an annual gathering during the legislative session called "Episcopalians on the Hill," which we encourage everyone to attend. This is an opportunity to visit our beautiful statehouse, learn about bills under consideration by the legislature, and watch debate in the Iowa Senate or House of Representatives (if debate coincides with the visit). It is also an opportunity to hear from Episcopal lawmakers and friends like Representative Ross Wilburn (St. John's, Ames), Representative Bob Kressig (St. Luke's, Cedar Falls), Senator (retired) Rob Hogg (Christ Church, Cedar Rapids), Senator Sarah Trone-Garriott (Lutheran pastor and honorary Episcopalian), and Ms. Connie Ryan, Executive Director of Interfaith Alliance of Iowa. Attendees also meet and lobby their own Iowa lawmakers if they are available. Episcopalians on the Hill has been well attended from the start and is a great way to get to know other Episcopalians interested in and/or involved in advocacy and justice work.

Last year the Rev. Stephen Benitz (St. John's, Mason City) inspired Faith in Action to host a weekly statehouse gathering of Episcopalians during the session

called "Cassocks at the Capitol." Meeting on Mondays for an early lunch at Tasty Tacos by the statehouse, the group would then attend Interfaith Alliance's Moral Mondays at the statehouse and then go to the rotunda to lobby. Lay and clergy were encouraged to attend, and clergy encouraged to wear cassocks. This visual, public witness as Christians definitely increased our presence, and Cassocks at the Capitol will be a feature of Faith in Action as we continue.

It is not likely our lobbying has changed the course of any bill, which may be another reason to wonder why we do it. Last year a small group helped with brainstorming about Faith in Action, and where it is now that it is about six years old. What emerged was the insight that while hope is always there to have a gospel effect on public policy, equally important is public Christian witness. For example, students and media regularly contact our lobbyist during a session with questions on why the diocese declared a particular way on a particular bill. They are interested to know that The Episcopal Church in Iowa has beliefs and speaks up. The brainstorming group also had insight that perhaps most important may be the witness and support Faith in Action gives our own dear siblings in our pews and communities: to LGBTQ+ Episcopalians so they know their church not only stands alongside them, but that the Episcopal Diocese of Iowa advocates for them in the statehouse where bills supporting or hurting LGBTQ+ people are generated; to those new to America, for them to know The Episcopal Church in Iowa not only stands alongside them, but advocates for them in the halls of government where the response to those from other nations may be supportive or hurtful; to those among us who are in need, so they will know that not only will we literally provide food, we speak to legislation that is impactful on how it is shared and who is fed. This ministry of Faith in Action is a tangible way we live out our faith — a way of being Christ's feet and hands in the world, called to show up and stand with the oppressed and share God's hope and never-ending love with each other.

*The Rev. Wendy Abrahamson serves as rector St. Paul's, Grinnell and as a registered lobbyist for the diocese.*

Scan to read more about Faith in Action, featured in this 2020 Episcopal News Service article



## PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCACY

### HOW-TO & TIPS

### CONTACTING LEGISLATORS

#### TIPS

- Let them know who you are and where you're from
- Keep it short, to the point, and personal
- See if you can get insight into how they make their decisions
- You can refer to how our diocese/denomination has registered on the bill or views a topic

#### YOUR LEGISLATORS

- House Representative
- Senator
- <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/find>

#### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- For a particular bill, reach out to members of the subcommittee and full committee
- <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/committees>

### WAYS TO CONNECT

#### IN PERSON

- Visit the Capitol when in-session
- Public entrances: ground floor, on the south and west sides of the building
- From ground level, go up 2 floors to the legislative chambers
- Fill out a note requesting to see a legislator, hand it to a page
- If the legislator is in and available they'll come out to meet with you

#### EMAIL & PHONE

- See tips above
- Leave your contact information so they can get back in touch with you

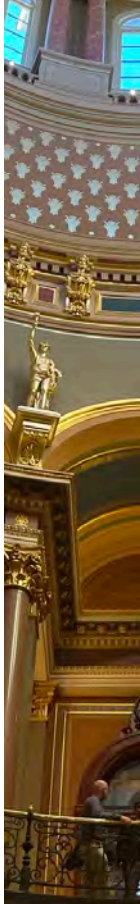
#### SUBCOMMITTEE HEARINGS

- Members of the public can speak at subcommittee hearings, either in-person or online via Zoom
- See agenda for Zoom details

### REFERENCE

- See how the diocese has registered on a bill
- We're always in line with The Episcopal Church
- Search "Client": Episcopal Diocese of Iowa
- <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/lobbyist/reports/declarations>

FAITH IN ACTION







***Faith in Action:**  
a diocesan advocacy & public  
policy ministry that strives to  
strengthen and deepen discipleship  
by maintaining a spiritual voice and  
forum for active Christians to speak  
out about the problems Iowans face.*

A



B

(A) Iowa State Capitol; Photo by T. Rubland Petty. (B) Episcopalians gathered for the Peoples' Prayer Breakfast 2023; Photo from B. Monnot

**CONNECT WITH US & LEARN MORE:**



*Scan the QR code  
to learn more*



**BISHOP KEMPER  
SCHOOL FOR MINISTRY**

*Theological Education for All People*

From Bishop Bestey Monnot:

I am very enthusiastic about our new partnership with the Bishop Kemper School for Ministry. As a sponsoring diocese, we will be able to influence the course offerings of the school and have a flexible partner in creating curricula that meet the needs for formation that we discern for all orders of ministry. They offer tracks for both ordination and lay leadership, or you can take a class simply for personal enrichment. Our students will have access to financial assistance reserved for students from sponsoring dioceses and will be formed in cohorts with students from nearby dioceses with similar ministry needs. I am especially excited about the comprehensive diaconal studies track and the four tracks designed for lay ministers preparing for licensing as preachers, evangelists, catechists, or pastoral leaders. I encourage you to learn more about their offerings and I look forward to our continued partnership.

# A Pilgrimage Along Iowa's Underground Railroad

by Ellen Bruckner

A pilgrimage to Underground Railroad sites today offers opportunities to explore Iowa's history as well as one's own history and landscape in the context of seeking freedom. In June, a small group of ten Iowa pilgrims did just that.

An introductory meeting on Zoom organized the journey. A week later pilgrims gathered in person at St. John's in Glenwood ready to explore sites along the route toward freedom. Our trip included sites in Southwest Iowa known to be stops along the Underground Railroad. Although there is not much recorded history of the Underground Railroad because of the dangers not only to freedom seekers but also to those who helped the enslaved journey toward freedom, we got a glimpse into their journey and experiences.

The Underground Railroad in Iowa operated in the mid-1800s with stations along an east-west line spanning the state. Missouri identified as a slave state and Iowa as a free state so for many enslaved persons in Missouri the border offered a desperate dream of hope for freedom. Stories tell us that folks left their enslavers with no possessions – no maps, often only vague directions based on landmarks. When they finally reached a station, they would then be conducted to the next station. For those crossing Iowa the goal was Chicago or Detroit and then Canada. Completion of the journey on the Underground Railroad depended on those along the route who believed freedom was the preferred way of life. Freedom seekers, often hunted from the moment they first ran, put their lives into the hands of these station masters and conductors. It's hard for us to imagine the depth of fear that went along with the hopes.

I'm still haunted remembering the terror I felt while in the secret room hidden behind the Hitchcocks' basement cupboard. Looking up through the gaps in the slats of the dining room floor, I imagined the freedom seekers' hearts beating out of their chests while earnestly praying that the bounty

hunters wouldn't be able to hear the pounding of the fugitives' hearts. And what if someone in hiding sneezed or coughed or a baby cried? All of their bravery and energy expended to overcome challenges on the Underground Railroad would evaporate in a split second! And to think that they were only doing what comes naturally to humans.

- Stacey G., pilgrim

Iowa during this time was a mixture of vast grasslands and forested rolling hills. The ups and downs of the Loess Hills are a clear picture of how arduous the travel on foot must have been. Pilgrim Ruth R. shared her reflection on this, saying:

Seeing the Todd and Hitchcock houses helped me realize how isolated these havens were in a landscape with very few settlements and roads. I gained appreciation for what an arduous, often lonely, and always dangerous journey freedom seekers experienced as they fled from slavery in Missouri and Kansas. The "conductors" who aided them also risked imprisonment, fines, and violence from enslavers and even from fellow Iowans. I came away from the pilgrimage marveling at how determined and courageous the freedom seekers and those who aided them were!

Our first stop was the John Todd House in Tabor, IA. Todd and his wife lived their faith and their belief in freedom for all. It was here we heard the story of a young woman who knocked on the front door of Todd's house late one night seeking shelter. As pilgrim Karen M. shared,

My mind kept focusing on the phrase 'a knock on the door' and the fear that must have engulfed that slave. And the question about what we would have done had we been there to answer.

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All of us have  
been changed  
in some way...

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*Group photo of the pilgrims, 2023; Photo from E. Bruckner*

Our travels continued to a secluded cemetery near Percival, Iowa. While recognizing how important honoring our loved ones with marked graves is to most of us, I also recognize how many do not have a marked grave where family come to remember the love passed from generation to generation. How sad to not know what happened to a family member when they fled for their life.

Driving the back roads offered the opportunity to reflect on the depth of the hope for freedom of those who attempted a journey with only stars and some cryptic directions as guides. Maybe we all have experienced some of the uncertainties and fears in our lives today as we seek freedom from any kind of oppressive system.

The next day, after worship at St. John's in Shenandoah, we headed north to the small town of Lewis, IA. "Reverend Hitchcock used his home to assist in the safe passage of fugitive slaves (or Freedom Seekers) through southwestern Iowa on their way east and north to freedom during the mid-19th century," (Hitchcock House website). Once again, we heard about a courageous family living their faith and beliefs.

Not until this morning did I really begin to process my feelings. I did not realize how emotionally exhausted I was. This pilgrimage has left me humbled at what human beings had to tolerate in order to live. What they had to tolerate in order to be free. How the "conductors, etc." and their families lived in order to

live their beliefs. Following the footsteps, footsteps that thousands of people have walked, fugitive and free, was gut wrenching. Yes, we pointed out articles in the homes that we had seen before but the "spirits" of the homes seeped into my body and thoughts. What to do now? For me personally, educate myself on opportunities no matter how small.

- Donna M., pilgrim

Concluding this trip did not mean the pilgrimage actually ended. All of us have been changed in some way because of these stories and because we opened ourselves to the Spirit and allowed that transformation. We parted from each other pondering this transformation and what responses might be in front of us.

... opening many doors for me to deepen my understanding of the devastation of slavery and how it continues today. And now I want to continue the journey looking behind those doors learning and listening to whatever I might be called to do. I continue to think about the woman in Tabor knocking at the Todd door and hope I am always ready to respond to anyone who may knock at my door.

- Judy S., pilgrim

*Ms. Ellen Bruckner is a member of the Diocese of Iowa.*

*This pilgrimage was sponsored by the Beloved Community Initiative.*



## From Bishop Betsey Monnot, *continued from pg. 2*

to prophesy to the breath so that they may live. And Ezekiel prophesies to the breath, and the breath comes into them, and then they are alive, standing on their feet.

And here is something else important when we are reading the Hebrew Bible and talking about breath. The word for “breath” in Hebrew is ruach. So when Ezekiel is prophesying to the breath, he is prophesying to the ruach. And when the breath comes into the bodies and brings them to life, it is the ruach that comes in to the bodies and brings them to life.

And in Hebrew, ruach doesn’t only mean “breath.” Ruach also means “spirit,” as in the Spirit of God that was at the beginning of all creation in the book of Genesis. That same word in Greek, pneuma, is the one that Jesus used in the gospel reading today when he read from Isaiah, “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me.”

So in order to be alive, in order for life to exist, there has to be ruach, spirit, breath. That was true for the dry bones in the valley that God showed Ezekiel. And it is true for us as well—we live because we have God’s breath, God’s spirit, giving us life, just like those dry bones. Without ruach, we are dry bones. Our lives are entirely dependent on the gift of ruach that God gives us so freely.

So, that’s where we started this journey of transformation—we started being called into life by God and being filled with God’s spirit as we breathe, every breath, ruach, filling us. And then we are called by God

to grow and to learn and to listen and to serve, as Paul told the Ephesians “until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.”

Well, I don’t know about you, but I think I’ve got a long way to go on this journey of transformation, of growing and learning and listening and serving. And if you feel the same way, then you’re in the right place, because the church, the disciples of Jesus gathered together in community, the church is the place for us to support each other as we continue in this transformation, moving closer to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

And today, we are celebrating a particular moment on the journey of transformation that we are all taking. Today, we have the privilege not only of worshiping together as a diocesan community, but of celebrating the confirmations of Harold, Juliann, Clio, Claire, Oliver, August, and Charleigh. These seven beloved children of God are choosing this evening to confirm the promises that they were too young to make for themselves when they were baptized. In Confirmation, they are renewing those baptismal promises and taking them on for themselves, choosing to continue on the path of transformation that was begun in them at their baptisms.

This is an important moment in the lives of these seven young people. And it is an important moment for this diocesan community, because the rest of us will be





promising to do all in our power to support them in their life in Christ. That's a big promise! That is what we promise at every baptism and every confirmation, reception, and reaffirmation of baptismal vows, to do all in our power to support them in their life in Christ.

And that also means that other people made that same promise when we were baptized and confirmed, or received, or reaffirmed our baptismal vows.

It means that, if we take these promises seriously, we are really all connected with each other in a beautiful web of mutual promises and support. It means that we take our own journey of Christian discipleship seriously and we also take each other's journeys seriously. And that is a lifelong commitment, to our own journey of transformation and each other's journeys, and to the journeys of these seven who are being confirmed this evening.

It's never complete, you know, this journey of transformation. It's ongoing, no matter how old we are. And no matter what, the transformative journey of Christian discipleship never ends.

And one of the many challenges of being Christian is being called to do things that you don't know if you can do. Like, say, to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

That's big stuff. Hard stuff. And it is work that won't be complete any time soon. But right now, at this moment



in history, at this time of war and oppression and fear and climate crisis and millions of people all over the globe not having access to the things they need to live, like food and water and shelter, right now, this is what Jesus calls us to, as the Body of Christ, doing Christ's work in the world. We all follow that call in our own unique way, with our own unique gifts, all as part of our own unique journey.

Jesus said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the lord's favor."

Today, this scripture has been fulfilled, in your hearing.

*pg. 12 & 13: Confirmands with Bishop Monnot; Photos by T. Rubland Petty*



The diocese is arranged into 10 mission chapters, with every congregation being part of a chapter. We meet twice yearly in a joint chapter meeting online via Zoom, usually in the spring and fall.

All chapters meet together in the first part of the meeting where information shared from designated speakers, and the second part of the meeting is when individual chapters meet in breakout rooms for more localized discussion.

Not sure what chapter you're in? Visit: [iowaepiscopal.org/governance/#Chapters](http://iowaepiscopal.org/governance/#Chapters)



# Gather at the River: A Young Adult Companions Pilgrimage

by Traci Ruhland Petty & Amy Mellies



This past August, we had the privilege and pleasure of hosting young adults, coordinators, and bishops from the dioceses of Eswatini (formerly Swaziland, in southern Africa), Brechin (in Scotland) and Iowa for a ten-day pilgrimage filled with relationship building, learning, and having fun together. This was not the first time people from these dioceses have gotten together. Our three dioceses have had a companion relationship which has included praying for, learning from, and visiting each other for over thirty years; and young adults and their bishops had taken part in previous pilgrimages to Swaziland in 2014 and Brechin in 2016. Originally Iowa was going to host the third leg of the pilgrimage in 2020, which we obviously postponed due to the pandemic, and thankfully we were able to bring the pilgrimage to fruition this year.

We (Amy & Traci) served as the Iowa coordinators for the pilgrimage. We worked with coordinators from the other dioceses, all of our bishops, and consulted with various other partners throughout the planning. The biggest challenge we faced as coordinators was what to include in our time together. How do we narrow down the many potential activities and experiences? What things will people from three different countries find value in doing together? What do we want to learn and share that we can bring back to our home dioceses and communities?

A way to frame our time together was gifted to us the year before, when all three bishops were able to meet at the 2022 Lambeth Conference (an international gathering of Anglican bishops to discuss church and worldwide affairs). Coming out of the Lambeth Conference were specific mission themes or “calls” to help guide bishops’ time and work together during and after the conference, and these calls gave us the guide we were looking for to tie our time together.

The calls we used as the framework for our young adult pilgrimage to guide our learning activities and group discussions were: Anglican Identity, Evangelism, Creation Care (Environment and Sustainable Development), and Reconciliation and Beloved Community. For Anglican Identity, we worshiped together at Christ Church in Cedar Rapids, St. Paul’s Cathedral in Des Moines, Prairiewoods Retreat Center in Hiawatha, and our hotel in West Des Moines; we talked about what it means to us to be Anglican - whether it was something we’d thought about or been really aware of previously, how we were seeing our shared identity play out in our pilgrimage together; and we shared what the church being “alive” means to us.

For Evangelism, we discussed what the word “evangelism” means to us individually and in our home contexts; we





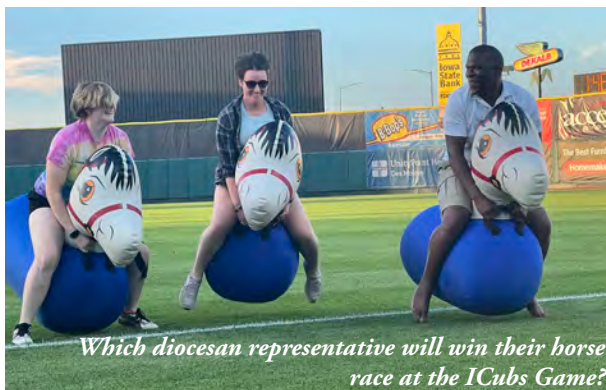
*Getting ready to visit the Meskwaki Powwow*



*Tree Planting at Christ Church, Cedar Rapids*



*Fun at Smash Park*



*Which diocesan representative will win their horse race at the ICubs Game?*

learned what it looks like (or doesn't look like) in each of our dioceses; and we even got a little bit of practice in, as our large group was often asked where we were from and how we knew each other, sometimes leading into longer conversations about why we came together for this trip.

For Creation Care, we learned about eco-friendly and sustainable practices at Prairiewoods where we stayed for part of the trip; we toured the World Food Prize Hall in Des Moines which showcases agricultural and humanitarian pioneers; we discussed creation care in our communities and imagined together what a "better world" might look like; and we planted a tree together in recognition of and continuing commitment to creation care, our companion relationships, and the global Anglican Communion Forest initiative.

For Reconciliation, we visited Old Brick in Iowa City and learned about how Agape Café partners with the university's nursing students and other local organizations to provide a sit-down weekly meal; also at Old Brick we visited the Beloved Community Initiative, learning about the history of racism in the United States and Iowa in particular, and how people are taking active roles in reconciliation efforts and dismantling the harmful ideas and prejudices that keep us from being in beloved community with each other; we toured the Jordan House in West Des Moines and learned about the Underground Railroad and how individuals and groups combated racism and oppression; we visited the Meskwaki Annual Powwow and experienced the celebration of community and our differences; and we discussed what reconciliation and justice mean to us and how we can hold both our differences and our unity. As we discussed these calls and what things look like in our own contexts, we recognized that government and laws have an effect at our local and diocesan levels; with this in mind, we also toured the Iowa State Capitol, learning about how our government works and how we can be involved.

We balanced our learning and discussion time with some "typical American" fun experiences, including going to the Iowa State Fair, an I-Cubs baseball game, an American diner, and playing mini golf, foosball, arcade and other games, all of which were great fun! It was especially enjoyable getting to experience these with some who had never done them before - it was another great reminder about pausing to be grateful and to find the joy in an activity that you may be accustomed to.

Throughout this experience, we were reminded that we're part of this bigger world-wide community. Our pilgrimage time taught us that we could celebrate our differences and learn from each other while at the same



time find and take joy in the commonalities we share as Christians and as humans. These young adult companions' pilgrimages help us grow our three-way companion relationship, fostering greater connection not only with our companions but with the Anglican Communion global community as a whole, and we hope to continue these connections moving forward. We're excited to see what the future holds both for this group and our companion relationship, and we're incredibly thankful to everyone who made this pilgrimage possible.

*Ms. Traci Rubland Petty serves as the diocesan Missioner for Communications & GILEAD and Ms. Amy Mellies serves as the diocesan Missioner for Children & Youth.*



Scan to watch a video about the pilgrimage and hear from the pilgrims themselves about their experience





# Rebirth and Renewal: A Team's Experience of Genesis II

by the team at St. Peter's, Bettendorf

The Genesis II team members at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Bettendorf agree that Genesis II has been instrumental in deepening understanding of what it might mean to "do church" in a world that often does not embrace organized religion. Genesis II is a process that helps congregations re-vision, try on new behaviors, and connect in new ways to their neighborhoods. The cohort facilitators have provided many ideas, in a wide variety of formats, to stimulate and challenge our thinking.

St. Peter's team members describe Genesis II as an endeavor that:

- helps us deepen our faith, build and sustain relationships among us and prepares us with skills to serve our neighbors and build relationships with them.
- is a rebirth of our potential, redefining our abilities and looking at future goals.
- is a way of finding God within us and discovering how we can spread the word.
- gives us language that fosters renewal in the ways we think about ourselves, our church and our community; has two components that are equal in importance and emphasis: building relationships, and acquiring skills and tools for renewal.

The team at St. Peter's found the spiritual autobiography activity particularly useful and meaningful. Four of the five team members shared their autobiographies with the group. This proved to be a profound experience, and one that strengthened the relationships among group members.

While the facilitators have offered many activities and approaches, they have also encouraged us to tailor Genesis II to the needs of our congregation. St. Peter's is a moderate sized congregation in an urban area. All team members are also on the vestry. The most challenging aspect of our work has been engaging the congregation as a whole. We expect that our efforts over the next six months will focus on bringing the whole community of St. Peter's along on this pilgrimage, and we hope to continue deepening our faith and relationships as we journey through this process together.



## GENESIS II

Re-Vision and Renew

*The Genesis II team at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Bettendorf is comprised of Carolyn Krenos-Bodnar, who is the team leader; Rector Elaine Caldbeck; Ghada Hamdan-Allen; Jane Heesch; and Robert Petrie.*

### PRAY FOR OUR COHORT OF PRACTICING CONGREGATIONS:

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St. Peter's, Bettendorf

St. Paul's Cathedral, Des Moines

St. John's, Glenwood

St. Stephen's, Newton

St. Martin's, Perry

St. Timothy's, West Des Moines



# Episcopal Youth Gather from Across the Church

by Amy Mellies

This past July I was able to attend the Episcopal Youth Event 2023 (EYE23) with seven youth from the diocese and chaperone Jeff Cornforth. We flew to Washington, D.C. on July 4th. Yes, you read that right, July 4th, Independence Day. A day when everyone wants to be in our nation's capital to celebrate our independence, right? Since we were heading to the University of Maryland, College Park, we missed most of the hustle and bustle, but could see some of the fireworks from campus later that evening.

The theme for the event was Regreso a Casa, which means "returning home." After missing out on EYE 2020, this was a restart to the world-wide event! It





*Left: Iowa youth delegation and chaperones; Below: Youth dancing during EYE23; Photos by A. Mellies. Bottom pgs. 18 & 19: EYE23 group photo; Photo from B. Monnot*



also is where our diocesan Youth Ministry Team was able to find our theme for the year: “You were made for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14). We had a lot of fun, learned some things, met a lot of new people, and collected stickers from all over the church. It was really amazing to see so many youth in one place, singing, laughing, worshiping and learning together as one body of Christ.

I have heard that several of our youth have been inspired to do more in their churches and communities since then. If you are one of the lucky congregations who had youth attend EYE23, please stop and ask them some Sunday about their experience. Maybe they can share a presentation on it! Our diocese is blessed to have so many amazing young people who are gearing up to make changes in our communities. Why? Because they were made for such a time as this, and so are we.

*Ms. Amy Mellies serves as the diocesan Children and Youth Missioner..*





# Exploring Faith and Building Community at Simpson Youth Academy

by Eric Rucker

The Simpson Youth Academy (SYA) is an ecumenical ministry for Iowa high school youth. SYA helps young people prepare for college, explore faith, social justice and vocation, and build community with adult mentors and peers as they develop leadership skills. SYA is directed by Episcopal priest Rev. Eric Rucker, and has received GILEAD Grants the past three years to support student scholarships. SYA brings youth to live and learn on Simpson College's campus for ten days each summer and then provides retreats and local mentoring for the cohort throughout the academic year.

Iowa Episcopal youth compose part of the SYA cohort each year. We sat down to talk with Brian, a high school youth who attends St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral in Des Moines, and who is currently part of SYA. Read on for his thoughts!



Additionally, please consider nominating current 10th-12th graders in your church or community for SYA next year. To explore making a nomination, contact Rev. Eric Rucker at [eric.rucker@simpson.edu](mailto:eric.rucker@simpson.edu).

*The Rev. Eric Rucker serves as an assistant priest at St. Andrew's, Des Moines and as director at Simpson Youth Academy.*



*Above: Simpson Youth Academy 2023; pg. 17: Brian, currently part of SYA; Photos by E. Rucker.*







*How has SYA been for you so far? What are some of your favorite things about this community?*

SYA was a lot of fun, I'm definitely going to the retreats and events for the rest of the year when I can. My favorite things about this community would be that it is friendly, relatable (for the most part), accepting, and understanding.

*What was the most important thing that happened to you during the summer residency?*

I learned how to understand the Bible better.

*SYA discusses a lot of stories from the Bible and concepts about faith and leadership. What were some of the biggest things you learned about faith and leadership at SYA?*

I learned that leadership is told and practiced in the Bible by example: Jesus and his followers are a good example of leadership.

*SYA also explores social injustice and issues. What justice issues are you passionate about and why? Are there issues SYA helped you develop passion and awareness around?*

I'm passionate about accessibility for people with disabilities, as I have been around disabled people all my life. I have developed more awareness on the issue of climate change as well.

*There is a lot of conversation happening about what "the future church" will look like, and how to get "young people" back into church. What advice would you give churches for how to welcome and support high school youth in their faith journeys?*

The best advice I can give is to accept young people, to look past their problems and mistakes. If a church can't look past a person's mistakes or their problems then the church probably has issues. Another piece of advice would be to adapt, not compete, and look past disagreements.

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# "Every Step is Home" Book Review

by Mel Schlachter

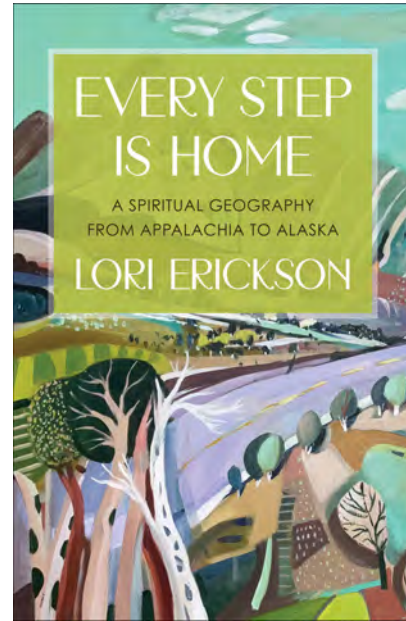
Aficionados of Lori Erickson's book series on the theme of her blog "The Spiritual Traveler" will find her new book "Every Step is Home: A Spiritual Geography from Appalachia to Alaska," expanding the ground for her spiritual encounters. She trusts, of course, that it will expand our ground too.

Erickson's earlier book "Holy Rover" took us to remarkable holy sites around the world. This new book starts out pursuing "the sacred in America" by visiting special places deemed holy, presently or historically. Then her "sacred scan" looks to the four elements of earth, air, fire and water; expands further with animals and lights in the heavens; then picks up the sacred in relationships, a theme she explored in depth earlier in "The Soul of the Family Tree." Is there anything left to be sanctified?

Erickson reports that some impetus for this book came from the COVID pandemic, plus death of family members. Her wanderlust needed to avoid virus-laden plane flights as much as possible, so she and her husband Bob Sessions (who contributes some fine photographs to the enterprise) set off around this country to new places and a few familiars.

She stays focused on the sacred as it is present at each site. Her visit to Tennessee's Dunbar Cave suggests that spiritual experiences have "a physical trigger" for her, which indicates to her the place is sacred. What makes a site holy? Is it because many people will have a unitive, healing or transformative experience there? And thinking of Moses and the burning bush, can one person find any ground, anywhere, imbued with sacred energy? Could Erickson find a comparable experience in the heart of a major city?

Our author is less interested in these questions than she is establishing the credentials for a given place or an element of nature. She does it well. The dirt of El Santuario de Chimayo in New Mexico literally grounds us in the experience. Some places may have a familiar ring for us—California redwoods, Hawaiian volcanos, northern lights—others like Chaco Canyon, the mound builders of Ohio, and the hot springs of Oregon, not so much. We receive her experience, and also rich background information for every subject. Erickson has done her homework, making the mystical elements of her quest anchored, like Chimayo, in context and history



as well as her "physical triggers." In the latter she teaches the reader one path into apprehension of the holy.

My favorite chapter in "Every Step is Home" is "Mounds: The Ancient Ohio Trail." I visited one of those mounds a long time ago, when kids could still play games on them and the anthropologists had not yet exerted good control and information boards. In recent times I have visited many mounds along river bluffs in Iowa. They can give a visitor a strong sense of presence, of an awesome purpose that may remain unknown to us even if we can share its effects as a gift from spirit ancestors. Erickson gets it.

And she wants the readers to get it, to immerse themselves in holy places, holy pilgrimages bringing one's own yearnings. Nothing aloof or cult-like here. Lori Erickson is an Episcopal deacon, and one imagines fulfilling her vocation by encouraging others in the path she has found so rich and life-giving.

*The Rev. Mel Schlachter is a retired Episcopal priest and pastoral counselor residing Iowa City.*

# Dancing on the Water

by Betsey Monnot

*Bishop's Address from the 171st Annual Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Iowa on October 21, 2023*

Dear friends, I am absolutely delighted to address you at this, my second Diocesan Convention as your bishop. This past year has been a year of being "Drenched in the Spirit," and now we are "Dancing on the Water."

A year ago, I introduced three priorities for our work together as a diocese: strengthening congregations, supporting clergy and lay leadership, and deepening our connection to God. We have spent the last year focused



on these priorities, and, as a diocese, we are stronger because of it. Collectively, we have been learning some new habits and taking some risks, trying some new things and learning from experiments.

Within the priority of strengthening congregations, some of our congregations have been working with the churchwide opportunity Genesis II, learning new habits and ways they might move outside the walls of their buildings and learn more about what God is already up to in their neighborhoods.

Also, at almost every visitation I make, I present a workshop from the College for Congregational Development called "The Purpose and Work of Any Congregation." Each time, we have the opportunity to look at the congregation through a new lens, and consider how they are going about the essential work of gathering the people who God is calling to join them,

offering opportunities for the Holy Spirit to transform the lives of those who gather, and prepare them to be sent out to be Christ's body in the world. Those are the three movements: Gather-Transform-Send.

The College for Congregational Development and its work was also the focus of our 2023 Clergy Conference. Together, the clergy learned, and thought about how to apply their learning to their own congregational contexts. I want to take this opportunity to tell you that the clergy of this diocese are an absolutely remarkable group of people, and it is a joy and a privilege for me to work with them. Please join me in showing your appreciation for the amazing clergy of the Diocese of Iowa.



Within the priority of supporting clergy and lay leadership, we began this year with an opportunity for many clergy to be trained as coaches. Some of those who attended have been continuing the coaching relationships they developed at that time, and it is my hope to offer more training in the year to come.

Some of the best support for leaders comes when they gather together and share their experiences. I know that there are many groups in this diocese that gather regularly to share support, including the Small Church Zoom call on Monday mornings, the Clergy Text Study Zoom call on Thursdays, and the Companions in Ministry



group for clergy who are newly ordained or new to their positions. If you don't have a group of leader colleagues to gather with, please create one—you will find that it enriches your ministry and expands your capacity to do the work that God is calling you to do. If you need the support of the diocesan office in creating your group, please reach out.

A year ago, I created the positions of canon to the ordinary and archdeacon, and the Rev. Canon Meg Wagner and the Venerable Judith Crosssett have been continuing their



work supporting clergy and lay leadership throughout the diocese in many ways. Please join me in thanking them for their hard work and support throughout the year.

Within the priority of deepening our connection to God, we have had the wonderful opportunity this past year to work closely with Brother James Dowd, prior of Incarnation Monastery and The Benedictine Way in Omaha, NE. You may remember Br. James from last year's convention, when he gave the keynote address. In the past year, Br. James has offered four contemplative prayer workshops throughout the diocese, and just last month he led our 2023 Clergy Retreat. I look forward to continuing to work with Br. James in the future as we continue with this priority of deepening our connection to God.

Of course, at its best, everything that we do as congregations and as a diocese has some role in deepening our connection to God. That is, after all, what church is all about. So it is appropriate to remember that everything we do as a diocese takes place set within the cycle of the liturgical year, as we move from Advent's preparation to the celebrations of Christmas and Epiphany, through the penitential and reflective season of Lent to the great celebration of Easter and its fifty days, with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and then the long green season leading back to Advent.

Worshiping together, moving through these seasons and celebrations as a community, helps all of us deepen our connection to God.

In addition to work on our priorities, there are a few more things from this past year that I want to mention. As we have moved through the liturgical seasons and celebrations, I have continued on my first round of formal visitations. As of today, the Episcopal Diocese of Iowa has 54 active congregations. I have been physically present with all but six, whether for a visitation or for some other occasion. Of those last six, I will visit three still in this calendar year, and the remaining three soon in the new year. So if you haven't seen me at your church yet, you will soon!

One of the congregations that I visited in this past year was All Saints in Indianola, which later made the decision to close. I also had the opportunity to visit The Way Station, a diocesan ministry, in Spencer, which has also made the decision to close. Both All Saints and The Way Station had wonderful times of ministry and sharing the gospel, and each of their legacies will live on in the lives of the people they impacted. We are a resurrection people, and death, even death of a beloved church or ministry, never has the last word.

Speaking of words, there are a lot of words in the Iowa State Legislature, and I spent some time this year adding to them. I joined other Episcopalians on several occasions at the Capitol to lobby legislators on proposed legislation that impacted some of our deepest held beliefs as Christians. Jesus calls us to love God and to love our neighbor, and in our baptismal covenant we promise to strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being. Love of neighbor, justice, and the dignity of every human being were all at risk in the Iowa legislature this year, and I felt called as a Christian leader in Iowa to take my part in the legislative process. I personally spoke with legislators about proposed legislation affecting the LGBTQ+ community, reproductive healthcare, and the



death penalty. You have heard from me already about some of these issues, and I expect this work will continue next year.

I also want to share with you some of the deep joys of the past summer. I spent almost twenty-four hours at EPIC camp, our diocesan youth summer camp. I also attended the Episcopal Youth Event (EYE) in Maryland, along with our diocesan delegation. After EYE was The Episcopal Church "Revival," and to cap off my summer I joined the "Companion Dioceses Young Adult Pilgrimage" with young people from the dioceses of Eswatini, Brechin, and Iowa. I want to tell you very clearly: The Episcopal Church is very much alive, here in the Diocese of Iowa and in the broader national and international Episcopal Anglican community. The young people I was with this summer are today's church, and it was energizing and exhilarating to be with them.

Another joy of this past year is the work of the new Leadership Council and the group that we have been calling the Expanded Leadership Council. The Leadership Council consists of the bishop, the canon to the ordinary, the president of the Standing Committee, and the vice president of the board of directors: myself, Meg Wagner, Elizabeth Duff Popplewell, and Paula Sanchini. This group has been gathering on Zoom about once a month since the beginning of this year, considering questions of discernment, vision, and strategy for the diocese, and how we might design a process for the entire diocese to be involved in listening for God's call to us at this time.

The members of the Leadership Council decided to expand our circle. This group has been asking questions about who we are and where God is calling us as a diocese, the purpose of church and the purpose of a diocese, and how we might open up these conversations further. Some of the work of the Expanded Leadership Council is reflected in the agenda of today's Convention, and I hope you will enjoy the opportunity to join these conversations. This work is ongoing, and you will hear more about it in the year to come.

Of course, everything that we do as Christians is grounded in the call to ministry that each one of us has as a baptized member of Christ's body. This call is rooted in our baptismal covenant—baptismal ministry is everything that you are called to do because you are a Christian, whether that is



*EPIC Youth Summer Camp*



*Episcopal Youth Event (EYE23)*



*Young Adult Companions Pilgrimage*



serving in your local congregation or on a diocesan body, or the way you do your work in the world, or your prayer life: all of it is your baptismal ministry. Part of the job of the church is to support each person in their baptismal ministry.

The joy of baptismal ministry, joy in following God's call, joy in living together as Christ's body, in God's love made manifest in the person of Jesus, that joy is part of this year's theme, "Dancing on the Water." Throughout this year, we will be listening for Jesus' call to us to step out of the boat onto the water, trusting in him to keep us safe as we follow his call.

Now, stepping out of a perfectly good boat feels like a big risk. We have never walked on the water before, let alone danced on it. Why take this risk?

Well, it turns out that maybe the boat isn't quite as watertight as it used to be. Our world is changing rapidly. Five years ago, we could not have predicted what today's world looks like. We cannot predict the world five years from now: we only know that it will be different from today. The church needs to learn to be flexible and agile, to respond to the changes in our world as they come, to structure ourselves for the church that is emerging, not the church of the past. All of this will be part of the diocesan-wide discernment process as we look for God's vision for us and listen for God's call to us.

It also turns out that our existing structures are telling us that it is time for change. As you may have heard earlier this year if you have been part of the Joint Chapter Meetings, or if you attended one of the pre-Convention budget hearings, the budget that will be presented to you today is unprecedented. It reflects where we find ourselves as a diocese, that is, in a time of transition and discernment. We are learning what it means to take the risk of stepping out of the boat to follow the call of Jesus. You will hear more about the budget later in this convention, and I urge you to vote to pass it when the time comes.

As we reflect on change and on the passage of time, it is natural to feel a sense of grief. We may grieve our own personal losses. We may grieve lost abilities as we age and our bodies change with time. We may grieve for the state of the world and of all creation, as we seem to be moving farther and farther from God's vision.

We may grieve for the changes in our communities and churches, as our congregations shrink and our average age rises, as we remember fuller pews and more young people in church, and as we find ourselves needing to let

go of some of the ministries that served our communities and God's people. As things change, grief is natural.

And so I invite you in a moment to turn to someone near you, maybe someone you haven't spent much time with yet today, and share some of your grief with that person. Part of what we do as Christians is to bear one another's burdens. Share the grief that is in your heart, whatever that is. Each person will have one and a half minutes to share, and we have a timer on the screens. Go ahead and share your grief.

(the people spent time sharing)

Thank you. As we share our grief, as we bear one another's burdens, our own burdens ease and we may feel lighter. In the middle of even the darkest grief, we may also find moments of joy. After all, we are resurrection people, and we know that resurrection always follows death.

Earlier in this address I shared some of my recent joys with you. It is a joy to work alongside of the remarkable clergy of this diocese. It was a joy this past summer to spend time with young people from this diocese, from across The Episcopal Church, and from our companion dioceses in the Anglican Communion. It is a joy to worship together with you in your own congregations, as I make my visitations throughout the diocese. I know that you hold many joys in your hearts, and as you have just shared grief with someone near you, I invite you to turn to that same person and share joy. Again, each person will have one and a half minutes to share.

(the people spent time sharing)

Thank you, and if you will indulge me just a little longer, I want to share one more joy with you. This is your diocesan staff, on Star Wars Day this year. It is an absolute joy for me to work with these outstanding human beings: Anne Wagner, Traci Ruhland Petty, Julianne Allaway, Tina Austin, Amy Mellies, Meg Wagner, John Doherty, and Elizabeth Adams. They are an incredible team, and



*Diocesan staff on  
Star Wars Day*

they work very, very hard on behalf of this diocese. Please join me in thanking them for all they do.

We are moving forward into the future with joy, dancing on the water, even as we acknowledge our grief and recognize the risks we are taking in stepping out of the boat to follow Jesus. The thing about the risk, though, is that the real risk is in refusing to follow Jesus' call to step out of the boat. The real risk is in staying a boat that is not suited to the conditions that we are facing in this changing world. The boat we are in might be sinking slowly, but it is sinking, and even though it feels scary, stepping out of the boat and following Jesus' call to walk on the water is the safest thing we can do now.

In the coming year, we will continue with our three diocesan priorities: strengthening congregations, supporting clergy and lay leadership, and deepening our connection to God. As we do, we will also be discerning, as a diocese, God's call to us. This discernment will lead to a renewed vision for the diocese, and will inform our future strategy and structure. Through all of this we will be developing new habits as a diocese, that will support us as we move into the future.

You see, the changes we are facing in the church are not the same as problems that can be solved so we can go back to the way we were before. The church is never going to return to some golden age, no matter what techniques or solutions we use. It's not like we broke our wrist and need a splint until the bone heals and we can get back to normal.

Instead, what the church is facing is a new chronic condition. As with a chronic health condition, the church's condition can be managed for the greatest health and vitality by learning new habits, new behaviors, and by adjusting our expectations. We will never return to the past, but our future can be bright and exciting.

In the future, we as a church will need the habit of prioritizing our spiritual life, our connection to God, both as individuals and as congregations. There is no reason for a church to exist if it is not rooted firmly in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and in the praise and worship of the Trinity.

In the future, we as a church will need the habit of meeting our neighbors, so that we are more able to love them, as Jesus commanded us to do.

In the future, we as a church will need the habit of developing smaller new Christian communities, supported by clergy but led primarily by lay leaders. We will need many of these small—even tiny—communities, that may gather on days other than Sunday and in places other than churches, to worship together and to do the work that God calls them to do. We as a church will need the habit of supporting these new communities, and they in turn will need habits of their own in prioritizing their spiritual life, reaching out to their neighbors, and supporting other new Christian communities.

In the future, we as a church will need the habit of taking measured risks and doing experiments that might make us feel uncomfortable. We will need the habit of learning from those experiments and continuing to try new things as we reach for the Kingdom of God.

In the future, we as a church will need the habit of listening, deep, deep listening, to each other, to the community around us, and to God, as we continue to discern what God is calling us to do.

Finally, in the future, we as a church will need the habit of courage, courage to step out of the boat and into the future that God calls us to, confident that if Jesus is really calling, we can not only walk on the water but we can dance.

We are the Episcopal Diocese of Iowa: one church, one body, united in Christ's love, dancing on the water.

*Diocesan* PRAYER

Holy God of abundance and life, we thank you for the gift of the Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Iowa in which we live out your call. Stretch our minds and the capacity of our hearts as we learn and grow into the community of disciples that you dream of. Send your Holy Spirit to guide us as we seek your plan for the future of this diocese. Enliven our faith as we learn to take risks in following Jesus. Strengthen us as one church, one diocese, united in Christ's love, and bring us in joy to the day when we step out of the boat and dance on the water, in the name of Jesus who calls us.

Amen.

Please stand in body or in spirit and join me in prayer. Joining our voices together we pray:



## MORE PHOTOS FROM DIOCESAN CONVENTION



*(A) Gathering to learn about youth ministry; (B) Procession from the Marriott to St. Paul's Cathedral downtown Des Moines; (C) Group discussion during breakouts around proposed topics; (D) New clergy with Bishop Monnot - C. Schroeder, C. Potter, B. Monnot, J. Harrison, B. Gross, P. Gennett; Photos by T. Rubland Petty*

### CONVENTION KEYNOTE

**“All the Trees of the Field Shall Clap  
Their Hands: Cultivating a Diverse  
Church Ecology for  
God’s Emerging Future”**

*The Rt. Rev. Craig Loya  
Bishop of the Episcopal  
Church in Minnesota*



# AROUND THE DIOCESE WITH BISHOP MONNOT



CHURCH OF THE SAVIOR, ORANGE CITY



ST. ALBAN'S, SPIRIT LAKE



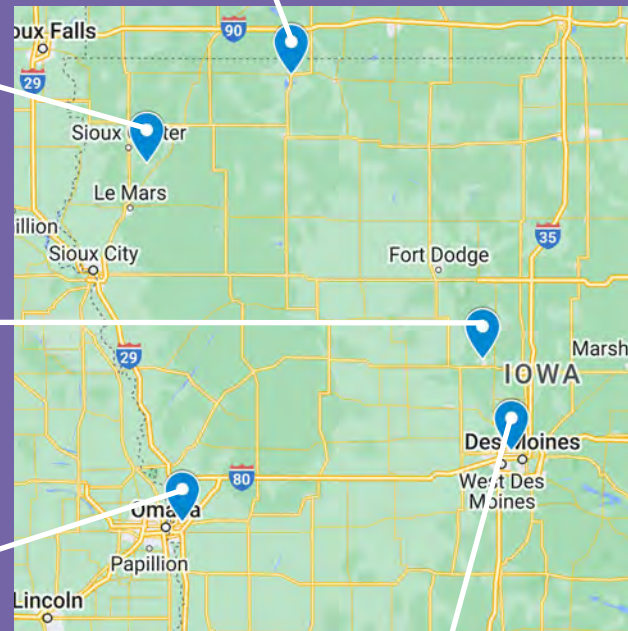
GRACE CHURCH, BOONE



ST. PAUL'S, COUNCIL BLUFFS



TRINITY CUSH, DES MOINES





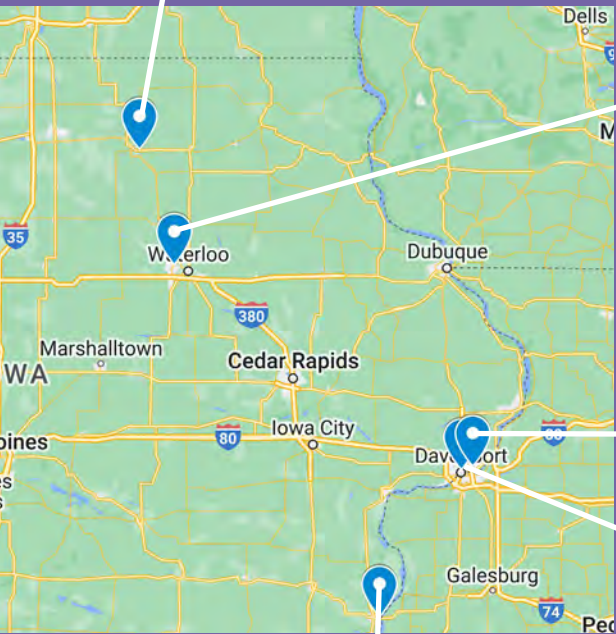
*Visitations since the summer 2023 issue of this magazine was published*



GRACE CHURCH, CHARLES CITY



ST. LUKE'S, CEDAR FALLS



ST. PETER'S, BETTENDORF



CHRIST CHURCH, BURLINGTON



TRINITY CATHEDRAL, DAVENPORT

# DIOCESAN CALENDAR

## BISHOP VISITATIONS

- December 3 St. Thomas' Church, Algona
- December 10 St. Andrew's Church, Des Moines
- December 17 St. Luke's Church, Des Moines
  
- 2024
- January 7 St. John's Church, Glenwood
- February 4 St. James' Church, Independence
- February 11 St. Mark's Church, Fort Dodge
- March 10 St. Alban's Church, Davenport
- March 24 St. Paul's Church, Harlan (Palm Sunday)
- March 30 St. Paul's Cathedral, Des Moines (Easter Vigil)
- March 31 Trinity Cathedral, Davenport (Easter Sunday)
- April 7 St. Stephen's Church, Newton
- April 14 St. Paul's Cathedral, Des Moines
- April 21 St. Thomas' Church, Sioux City
- April 28 St. Timothy's Church, West Des Moines
- May 19 St. Paul's Cathedral, Des Moines (Pentecost)

### GET CONNECTED

#### Episcopal Diocese of Iowa

225 37th Street  
 Des Moines, IA 50312  
 (515) 277-6165  
[diocese@iowaepiscopal.org](mailto:diocese@iowaepiscopal.org)

**eNewsletter:**  
 Comes out monthly



**This magazine:**  
 Comes out summer  
 & winter



*L to R: Visitations with Trinity  
 Cush, Des Moines; Christ Church,  
 Burlington; St. Peter's Bettendorf;  
 Photos from B. Monnot*



# HIGHLIGHTS



## STAY CONNECTED



For the most up-to-date information, including the bishop's visitation schedule, upcoming events, resources, and more, visit our website.

## UPCOMING

Loneliness Workshop Series December 9  
 Diocesan Office Closed December 25-  
 January 1

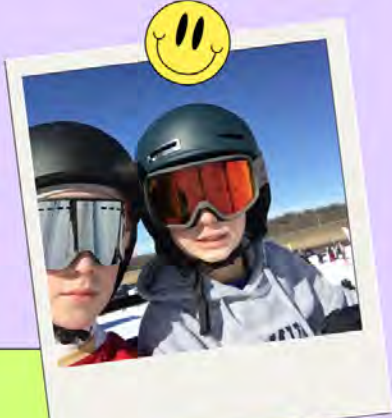
### 2024

Youth Ski Trip February 2-4  
 Youth High School Event February 17-19  
 Iowa Episcopal Clergy Conference March 11-13  
 Spring Joint Chapter Meeting April 6  
 New Beginnings Youth Event April 12-14  
 GILEAD Grant Applications Open May 15-July 15  
 Summer Ministry School & Retreat June 14-16  
 EPIC Youth Summer Camp June 17-21  
 General Convention of The Episcopal Church June 23-28  
 Church Audits Due September 1  
 Iowa Episcopal Clergy Retreat September 12-14  
 Diocesan Annual Convention October 26-27

# YOUTH 2024 EVENTS

## SAVE THE DATES

FEB 02-04	<b>SKI TRIP</b> <b>4TH-12TH GRADE</b> SEVEN OAKS, BOONE & ST. JOHN'S, AMES
FEB 17-19	<b>TBD HIGH SCHOOL EVENT</b> <b>9TH-12TH GRADE</b>
APRIL 12-14	<b>NEW BEGINNINGS</b> <b>6TH-9TH GRADE</b> ST. TIMOTHY'S, WEST DES MOINES
JUNE 14-16	<b>SUMMER MINISTRY SCHOOL &amp; RETREAT</b> GRINNELL
JUNE 17-21	<b>EPIC SUMMER CAMP</b> <b>4TH-12TH GRADE</b> CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE CENTER, NEWTON
JUNE 23-28	<b>GENERAL CONVENTION OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH</b> <b>9TH-12TH GRADE</b> LOUISVILLE, KY



**"YOU WERE MADE FOR SUCH A TIME  
AS THIS." ESTHER 4:14**



FOLLOW US TO  
KEEP UP TO DATE







*Above: EPIC 2023 Summer Camp Worship. Photo by A. Mellies*

REGISTER BY  
JANUARY 26

**YOUTH SKI TRIP**

FEBRUARY 2-4, 2024  
SEVEN OAKS, BOONE & ST. JOHNS, AMES  
GRADES 4TH-12TH



[HTTPS://WWW.IOWAEPISCOPAL.ORG/CHILDREN-YOUTH](https://www.iowaepiscopal.org/children-youth)



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# MERRY CHRISTMAS

*and Happy Holidays*



*from diocesan staff*