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## ON THE COVER

North Platte's identity as a frontier town has given Church of Our Savior several brushes with history, and attorney Steve Kay has recorded them with diligence (see "Material History," p. 10).

Don Milroy photo

# THE LIVING CHURCH

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### LIVING CHURCH Partners

We are grateful to the Cathedral Church of All Saints, Milwaukee [p. 25], and St. Martin's Episcopal Church, Houston [p. 27], whose generous support helped make this issue possible.



# Searching for Transparency

Questions are swirling about methods used for vetting bishop candidates in the wake of a fatal incident in Baltimore involving a newly consecrated bishop with a drunken-driving record.

But consultants who advise search committees remain confident in the processes that dioceses use to select top leaders. Risk-assessment protocols are robust, they said, and give committees the latitude they need to make wise, individual judgments.

Online conversation boards lit up soon after reports spread that the Rt. Rev. Heather Cook, Bishop Suffragan of Maryland, was driving a car that struck a bicyclist, who later died from injuries. Cook was charged January 9 with manslaughter, driving under the influence of alcohol and leaving the scene of a fatal accident.

She initially left the scene of the December 27 incident in Baltimore, according to the diocese, but then returned to accept responsibility. The Baltimore *Sun* reported on one bicyclist, Moncure Lyon, who followed Cook home to an apartment complex before she returned to the accident scene.

Some readers of *Episcopal Café* protested that Cook had been convicted of driving under the influence of alcohol, yet was nominated and elected to lead the diocese. In 2010, she pleaded guilty to DUI and received probation before judgment; charges of marijuana possession and possession of drug paraphernalia were dropped. Her ordination and consecration took place on September 6.

"This is a matter of moral character, and there seems to be a serious ethical failure in this instance," wrote the Rev. John Farrell, a retired priest in the Diocese of New York. "I was also shocked to learn she was charged in 2010 with DUI and pos-



Heather Cook

session of pot. Could someone tell me where the hell the Suffragan Search Committee was on this one?"

Members of the search committee declined to comment on their process because she is the subject of a disciplinary review, said Sharon Tillman, the diocese's director for communications. Cook is on administrative leave pending church and police investigations. The diocese issued a statement on December 30.

"As part of the search process, Bishop Cook fully disclosed the 2010 DUI for which charges were filed resulting in a 'probation before judgment,'" the statement said. "After extensive discussion and discernment about the incident, and after further investigation, including extensive background check and psychological investigation, it was determined that this one mistake should not bar her for consideration as a leader."

If convicted on all charges, Cook could face more than 20 years in prison. Prosecutors say her blood-alcohol level was nearly three times the legal limit and that she was distracted by text messages at the time of the crash, according to a Baltimore *Sun* report.

Some are now calling for close ex-

amination of processes used by search committees, not only in Maryland but in other dioceses as well. Among the issues is whether search committees are sufficiently equipped to assess risks posed by candidates who have experienced problems in their lives.

"I don't believe that 3 years is long enough sober after a DUI that the nominating committee should have allowed her name to go forward," the Rev. Bill Carroll, rector of Emmanuel Church in Shawnee, Oklahoma, wrote at *Episcopal Café*. "We need to think carefully about how candidates are vetted and how criminal convictions of any kind are handled."

Consultants to search committees are not convinced the Cook case has exposed a flawed system. They believe the processes, which vary somewhat from one diocese to the next, are rich with resources for assessing risk. The challenge lies in appointing committee members who will use those resources judiciously and block a nomination when necessary.

"We have a very good process of background checks and referencing," said the Very Rev. Ronald Clingenpeel of Louisiana, who has consulted with search committees for 17 years. "It requires, in terms of the referencing, that people be open and honest. ... How one assesses risk depends on the information one receives."

When seeking new bishops, every diocese conducts certain forms of due diligence. It considers criminal backgrounds and credit histories, physical and psychiatric examinations, civil court records, motor vehicle records, references from bishops in dioceses in which potential nominees have served, and self-disclosure questionnaires.

What happens with the gathered information, however, is at the dis-



## Updates from Baltimore

**Jan. 12:** District Court Judge Nicole Pastore Klein declined to reduce Cook's bail of \$2.5 million. Klein said the allegations against Cook show a "reckless and careless indifference to life."

**Jan. 14:** In a letter to his diocese, the Rt. Rev. Eugene Sutton, Bishop of Maryland, wrote of a fellow bishop telling him he was not to blame for the fatality involving Bishop Cook.

"I burst into tears," Bishop Sutton wrote. "Later, praying before the Icon of Christ the [Pantocrator], I gazed into those piercing eyes of our Lord, asking: What is Christ wanting to say to me? And what did I want to say to him? After what seemed like an eternity,

I was finally able to gaze into his eyes and say: 'Lord, it's not your fault.' And both of us cried."

**Jan. 15:** Mark H. Hansen, a deposed priest of the Diocese of Connecticut, posted bail for Cook. He is serving as lay pastor of St. Clement's Church in Massey, in the Diocese of Easton.

Cook alluded to Hansen in her profile as a nominee for Bishop Suffragan: "Supporting me in my vocation is my steady companion, Mark, a passionate Anglican. After having dated in our twenties, life took us different ways, but we found each other again two years ago, and it has been a great blessing."

Cook returned to a treatment program for addiction. Her trial was scheduled for February 6, which was likely to change.

cretion of the search committee, starting with the chair, Clingenpeel said. If the chair deems a misdemeanor to be insignificant decades later, or regards a settled lawsuit as non-germane, then the rest of the committee might never hear about those elements in a candidate's past. If the committee does discuss such issues, nothing in Episcopal Church canons says it has to share them with

the voting convention.

Some in the Diocese of Maryland have complained that the electing convention was not told about Cook's DUI conviction. Sources interviewed for this story would not comment on the Maryland process leading to her election.

As a general rule, search committees need to be selective about what they disclose from a candidate's

background, even if it means withholding information that the committee has weighed and discussed in depth, said the Rt. Rev. Edward Salmon, dean and president of Nashotah House Theological Seminary and a past consultant on bishop- and rector-search committees. Sometimes relevant issues are of a per-

(Continued on next page)

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## Searching for Transparency

(Continued from previous page)

sonal nature and must be handled with care.

"The question is how to deal with private issues in a person's life without making that public information, which is not helpful," Bishop Salmon said.

Standing committees, which appoint search committees and receive their nominee slates, ultimately decide what in a candidate's background is shared with the electorate.

"Anything that a standing committee wishes to share with the electorate is certainly up to them," Clingenpeel said. "And they have to make some pastoral decisions around that also."

When problems in a person's background come before the search committee, the panel considers its options and next steps. They frequently seek guidance from consultants and from the Rt. Rev. Clayton Matthews of the Episcopal Church's Office of Pastoral Development.

"What's incumbent on a search committee," Salmon said, "is to investigate, to see that the person has dealt with [the problem] and can give you certifiable evidence that professional people believe that it's not an issue." In the case of an alcoholic in recovery, he said, a committee should secure a written reference from the candidate's substance-abuse counselor.

Few church canons apply to the bishop-search process, which is largely left to each diocese to structure and administer. Only a few codes apply: a candidate must be at least 30 years of age, for instance, and must receive consent from a majority of the church's bishops and diocesan standing committees. Otherwise, clear rules are largely nonexistent, unless a diocese has developed them.

Thus a candidate is not automatically disqualified for having a criminal background or an episode of substance abuse within the past couple of years. In general, committees need not rely on rigid formulas for dis-



qualifying candidates, Salmon said, because each case is different.

“If we got rid of every alcoholic, we’d get rid of some people who have been able to lick that by the grace of God and have been some of our finest leaders,” Salmon said. Whether a candidate has been sober long enough to become a bishop is a judgment best made with counsel from professionals who have worked with the individual, he said.

In the absence of hard-and-fast disqualifiers, committees may take into account what a candidate has done to overcome setbacks or manage challenges. It’s important for them to consider factors such as the candidate’s degree of self-awareness and ability to use effective compensating strategies, according to Suzanne Foucault, a San Diego-based consultant to bishop search committees.

General Convention could potentially vote to create new rules that would bind all search committees and make risk assessment more consistent. But Episcopalians have long been content to leave most vetting to local committees representing unique diocesan cultures.

“I don’t think there’s any way to take the risk out of something,” Salmon said. “The best we can do is put competent people in place to work for the Church.”

*G. Jeffrey MacDonald*

## Invite the Poor

On the day after Thanksgiving, New York City lawyer Hunter Carter paid \$1,000 to do something he had never done before: share a meal with a group of homeless people.

The opportunity came via Fare Share Friday, a first-time fundraiser at his church, St. Bartholomew’s in midtown Manhattan. He was among the 167 New Yorkers who paid \$100 per plate to have a fine dining experience side-by-side with 257 of their most vulnerable neighbors. For one night, rich and poor engaged each other as equals and savored the experience.

“Nothing I’ve ever done or experi-

enced as a Christian compares to what I felt sitting there at Fare Share Friday,” Carter said a few weeks later. “If I ever thought Jesus could walk in and be among us, it was there.”

By all accounts, the evening had the air of a special night. Tables had white tablecloths. Servers brought salmon and other gourmet dishes donated by the Waldorf Astoria and Palace hotels. Homeless guests spiffed up for the oc-

casional and donors wore come-as-you-are casual, to the point that one could hardly tell who was homeless and who wasn’t. They passed bowls and serving plates around family style. It all happened just a few steps from the altar.

Table conversation was awkward at first, but soon people were sharing stories. Carter’s mother broke the ice by asking guests directly: “How did

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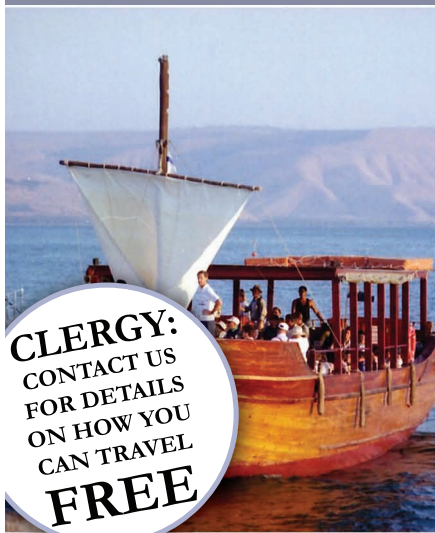
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## Invite the Poor

(Continued from previous page)

you become homeless?" One young man explained that he had come from a Southern state to find work in New York. When his dream did not pan out, he could not afford to return home. An older man summed up his story: many years of homelessness had stigmatized him. Now no one wants to hire him, so he's stuck.

Carter choked back tears when he told about the man at the table who did not dare dine.

"Rather than eat with us, he put all his food in a to-go box and looked nervously around, like, *When can I leave?*" Carter recalled. "He was telling us how he couldn't remember the last time he'd eaten a Thanksgiving meal and how good it was. He just didn't want it to pass. He wanted to hold on to it. He was afraid that it would run out, or that he wouldn't be able to enjoy it."

Fare Share Friday was the idea of the Rev. Edward Sunderland, associate rector at St. Bartholomew's. He's also executive director of Crossroads Community Services, a soup kitchen, food pantry, and shelter founded by St. Bart's.

He had sensed an opportunity as Thanksgiving approached. Staff at neighboring hotels, which regularly donate food to Crossroads, asked how they might do something special for the homeless. Sunderland suggested a special meal be served on a day when people in need often feel forgotten: the day *after* Thanksgiving. And why not invite people of means to join them?

"The Church can be a place where businesses can come together with people who are interested in solving the problems of hunger and homelessness, along with the people who are living the problems of hunger and homelessness," Sunderland said. "What an amazing benefit that is — not only for the world, but also for the Church."

Fare Share Friday was the first fundraising event for Crossroads, and it proved a smashing success. Plate receipts generated \$16,700.

More than \$70,000 poured in from donors who did not dine but wanted to support the event. After expenses, net proceeds from the night came to \$70,000. That's enough to cover about 18 percent of the Crossroads budget for the year.

Sunderland plans to offer Fare Share Friday again in the week of Thanksgiving next year. He hopes to publish a kit to help other congregations follow the model and stage their own Fare Share Friday events.

"We're hoping that next year we'll be able to get some buzz going about this," Sunderland said, "and really take more ground in terms of changing the place that our church, soup kitchen, shelter, and food pantry have in the national dialogue about this by trying to replicate this across the country."

*G. Jeffrey MacDonald*



Katherine Ragsdale

## Dean Ragsdale Leaving EDS

The Very Rev. Katherine Hancock Ragsdale has announced her resignation as dean and president of Episcopal Divinity School.

"I have informed EDS's board of trustees of my intent not to request a renewal of my contract when it expires at the end of June 2015," the dean wrote on January 5. "Further, I have asked them, if possible, to expedite the process of naming a successor so that I may explore new opportunities. Of course I will do everything



I can to insure a smooth transition.”

The seminary’s board of trustees thanked Dean Ragsdale for her service:

“Since her appointment over five years ago, President Ragsdale has served EDS with vigor and a commitment to excellence. President Ragsdale undertook a deep and real challenge when she began her tenure at the helm of EDS, including arriving at a difficult time in the wake of the sale of iconic property to secure the institution’s financial future, and during a time of challenge in the broader field of theological education.”

The full text of both letters is available via [livingchurch.org](http://livingchurch.org).

## Order Elects New Visitor

The Rt. Rev. R. William Franklin, Bishop of Western New York, is the new episcopal visitor to the Companions of St. Luke–OSB. Members of the order elected Franklin to succeed the Rt. Rev. Dean Wolfe, Bishop of Kansas, as their visitor.

The Episcopal Church requires religious communities and orders that operate independently from normal diocesan structures to elect a bishop visitor to assure that they have ecclesiastical support and oversight.

Early in his career, Bishop Franklin taught courses on monastic history at the Benedictine St. John’s University in Collegeville, Minnesota. While at St. John’s he taught at several Benedictine Experiences at the Episcopal House of Prayer.

The bishop has been married since 1971 to Carmela Vircillo Franklin, a scholar in medieval studies at Columbia University.

The Companions of St. Luke is a dispersed Benedictine community with members in 20 states, the District of Columbia, and England. CSL began in the Diocese of Chicago in June 1992 and is a recognized Christian community of the Episcopal Church. The community is an active member of the National Association of Episcopal Christian Communities.

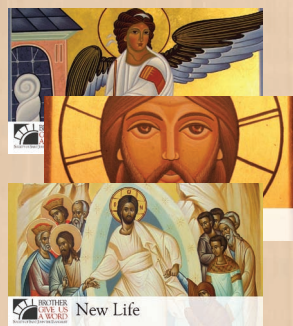
The questions for the season of a grown-up Lent are not, “What will you give up for Lent?” or even “What will you do for Lent?” but rather

*“Who will you be in Lent?”*

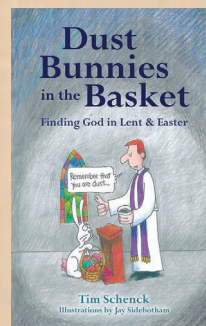
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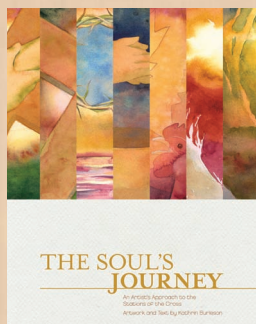
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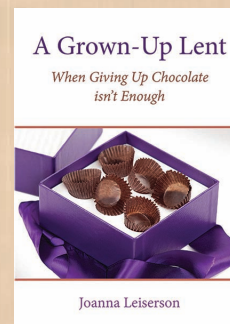
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Easter Day, 1897

# Material History

From Buffalo Bill to Fr. Kano  
at Church of Our Savior in North Platte, Nebraska

**W**hen the city of North Platte, Nebraska, celebrates its 150th anniversary next year, the Church of Our Savior will have much to contribute. North Platte exists today because in 1866 the Union Pacific Railroad extended its line to that point along the North Platte River.

North Platte's identity as a frontier town — a way station between railroads and covered wagons moving further west — has given Church of Our Savior several brushes with history, and attorney Steve Kay has recorded them with diligence.

Much of the parish history is evident in everyday surroundings. A wood altar and reredos in St. George's Chapel are the handiwork of the Rev. Charles F. Chapman, the parish's rector from 1905 to 1913. The wood came from two saloons, including

"Guy's Place," which benefited from the business of Col. William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody.

Kay cites the late historian Nellie Snyder Yost on the importance of Guy's Place in Cody's life.

"In time Guy Laing's saloon, across the street from the depot, came to be the favorite with Cody and the general run of cowboys," Yost wrote in *The Call of the Range: The Story of the Nebraska Stock Growers Association* (Sage Books, 1966).

Yost wrote 13 years later: "If half the stories told of Buffalo Bill and his drinking are true, he must have patronized all of them, although only a few are mentioned with any frequency by those who knew him. One belonged to Guy Laing, his rancher friend; it was a highly popular Front Street place, directly across from the depot" (*Buffalo Bill: His Family, Friends,*





Above: Our Savior's second church building. Middle: The Rev. Francis J. Pryor III noted in his journal notes in 1942 that women from the church were on duty every Saturday at the North Platte Canteen to bring gifts to the soldiers. Far right: North side of the church, 1910.



*Fame, Failures, and Fortunes*; Swallow Press).

William and Louisa M. Frederici Cody donated a stained-glass window to the church to honor the memory of two of their children, Kit Carson Cody and Orra Maude Cody. Kit contracted scarlet fever and died on April 20, 1876, at age 5. Orra died in North Platte on October 24, 1883, at age 10. Another Cody daughter, Arta, lived longer and was the parish's organist in 1885.

The Rt. Rev. Daniel Tuttle, first Bishop of Utah, slept on the floor of the Union Pacific Hotel before traveling further west. He visited North Platte again in 1921.

Of more recent memory is the Rev. Hiram Hisanori Kano, who was imprisoned with fellow Japanese immigrants during World War II. Kano, who earned a master's degree in agricultural economics at the University of Nebraska, became a missionary to fellow Japanese immigrants in 1925, at the urging of the Rt. Rev. George Allen Beecher, Bishop of the Missionary Diocese of Western Nebraska, as it was known then.

Fr. Kano was arrested immediately after the Pearl Harbor attack. During his imprisonment he taught his fellow captives about nature in the swamps of Louisiana. He was a beloved figure, including among those who oversaw the internment camp.

The 77th General Convention in Indianapolis took a preliminary step toward adding Fr. Kano to *Holy Women, Holy Men: Celebrating the Saints*. In 2012 Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman designated July 29 as Father Hiram Hisanori Kano Day.

Two rectors of Church of Our

Savior became Nebraska bishops: Beecher, and James Edward Krotz (bishop in 1990-2003).

And future *Tonight Show* host Johnny Carson knelt in the parish with Joan Morrill Wolcott when they were married in 1949. They remained married until 1963 — a longevity surpassed only by Carson's fourth marriage, to Alexis Maas, which ended with his death in 2005.

Steve Kay believes that "every parish probably has an interesting history," if only someone will take the time to search through library records, archives, and the web.

"The church has been such a part of my life, and it has done so much for me," said Kay, author of *Episcopal Church of Our Savior: Our Second Century of Service*, published by the parish in 2014. "The Episcopal Church is a wonderful church, and I wanted to give back."

*Douglas LeBlanc*



The altar and reredos in St. George's Chapel were built using wood from two of "Buffalo Bill" Cody's favorite saloons.



The Cody Family Memorial Window

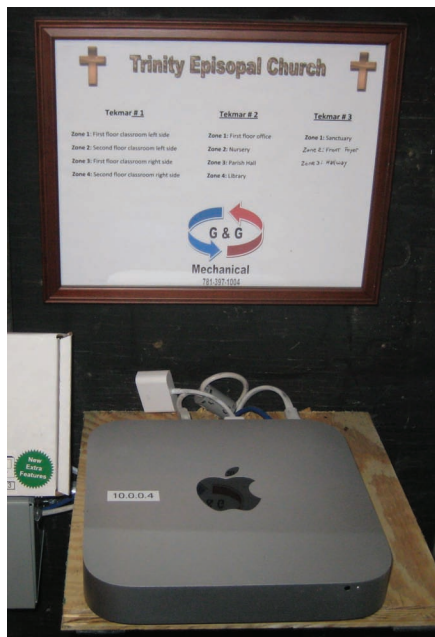
Don Milroy photos





Trinity Church, Topsfield, Massachusetts

# Heat Turns Green



Computer controls allow the heat system at Trinity to be controlled from a home.

## Topsfield, Massachusetts

Ten years ago, Trinity Church was spending upward of \$20,000 on heat for one winter. Members worried their old cast-iron gas boiler did not have long to live.

But by 2012-13, the heating bill had dropped to less than \$7,000, carbon emissions were less than half what they had been, and preschool teachers were no longer opening second-floor windows on cold days to stay comfortable.

A few strategic moves between 2005 and 2012 made the facility much more energy efficient, said Bruce Gaboriault, Trinity's assistant treasurer, who served on the boiler replacement committee. Upgrades included:

- Reconfigured heat distribution from four zones to 11 for precision heating



- New thermostats that make setting temperatures simple for anyone

- Installation of a second pane of glass on as many as 44 windows in the preschool

- Replacing a 50-year-old, one-million BTU boiler with two, high-efficiency boilers at 600,000 BTUs each

Total costs for all improvements came to about \$150,000. An architect earned about \$10,000, Gaboriault said, by drafting project specifications, helping to evaluate bids, and overseeing project execution.

“The architect was calmly leading us through and making sure we weren’t making costly mistakes,” Gaboriault said.



The complete heating system at Trinity Church



New boilers at St. Andrew's, Wellesley



## Wellesley, Massachusetts

In 2007, St. Andrew's Church found its budget and environmental stewardship goals hampered by a steam heating system. Steam leaks, coupled with three sprawling heating zones, were pushing costs for the oil-fired system through the roof.

“Although the steam boiler at St. Andrew's was only ten years old, over a two year period, leaks in the ancient steam distribution system had recently cost the church over \$60,000,” said Jim Blackwell, a St. Andrew's member who led efforts to make the parish more energy-efficient.

A multifaceted project, deployed across two years,

took a giant bite out of the \$33,000 heating bills of winters past. By 2009-10, St. Andrew's was paying just \$11,100 for heating fuel. And carbon emissions dropped 60 percent, the equivalent of taking 15 cars off the road each year.

Upgrades included three, high-efficiency condensing mode hydronic boilers. They run on natural gas and send hot water through new pipes across 22 heating zones. Contractors also installed High E windows, programmable thermostats, and an indirect storage system for hot water, which utilizes heat generated by the boilers.

Improvements cost \$813,000, in part because so much new piping and insulation were required. But the congregation has no regrets.

“All projects were completed on time and under budget,” Blackwell said.

*G. Jeffrey MacDonald*



Stained glass in St. Augustine's nave, representing the baptism of our Lord

# Practicing the Presence of Place

Most people now are looking for “a better place,” which means that a lot of them will end up in a worse one. ... There is no “better place” than this, not in *this* world. And it is by the place we’ve got, and our love for it and our keeping of it, that this world is joined to Heaven.

—Wendell Berry, *Hannah Coulter*

By Paul Wheatley

**O**n Pentecost 2014, I began at a new church in the Oak Cliff neighborhood of Dallas. This ethnically, socially, and economically diverse area functions more like a *neighborhood* than anywhere I’ve lived since childhood. Many of the people who eat, work, and play locally within this little corner just southeast of downtown Dallas also want to worship locally. This has led to the launch of several new churches, as well as the revitalization of a few more established congregations in recent years.

St. Augustine’s Oak Cliff, of which I am vicar, is a mix between the former and the latter. Three established Episcopal churches in Oak Cliff approached the diocese late in 2013 about the possibility of merging, as the number of young adults moving into this revitalizing neighborhood provided opportunity for new congregational growth. We’re a hybrid: a merged congregation, meeting in one of the original church’s buildings but operating under a new name, as a new church with new vision and scope; as we say, “A New Church with Deep Roots.”

While the challenges to a model of this sort are manifold (and my learning curve has been steep), the commitment of the wardens and members of each of the churches, the new members and visitors, and especially the diocese’s



commitment to this congregation's growth and establishment have all contributed to its early success, along with generous helpings of "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit."

All of which evokes a theme that Wendell Berry explores in his Port William series of novels, specifically *Hannah Coulter*: the significance of place in the formation of people's lives and souls.

Berry writes from the perspectives of different people living in the fictional Kentucky farming community of Port William during the 20th and early 21st centuries. In *Hannah Coulter*, Berry writes from the perspective of the title character, a woman twice widowed; stories, musings, and character descriptions from throughout her life accumulate into a loose narrative arc. The action is in the relationships, and the substance is in the characters and their interactions with one another and with the forces of change in the world outside of Port William, which influence the people within Hannah's orbit. This narrative approach produces significant emotional gravity, and it provides a fitting Trojan horse for Berry's agrarian idealism to influence the reader in a less direct fashion.

As I read the book this fall, many of the neighborhood personalities I have come to know in the last six months expressed their love for, or interest in, Berry and his works. This initially came as a surprise to me in a neighborhood that lies in the shadow of the inimitable Dallas skyline. Upon further reflection, though, the coherence of Berry's ideas with this revitalizing yet still small community came into greater focus.

In Oak Cliff one runs almost inevitably into any number of locals at the coffee shop, bookstore/reading room, pie shop, or local watering hole. People move here because they want to live in proximity to others and to experience togetherness in an integrity of community and place that deepens the quality of life for those involved. Despite the typical urban, post-Christendom milieu, neighborhood churches have purchase in the community.

This is also true of St. Augustine's. For new members, most of whom are in their 20s and 30s, to worship in a congregation with people in their 60s, 70s, and 80s has been a draw — an invitation to rootedness that is difficult to achieve in a fast-paced, wired world. To be in a church that reflects not just recently arrived entrepreneurs but also ethnically and economically diverse, long-standing members of the community provides a helpful corrective to the insulating and insensitive forces of gentrification that easily creep into old neighborhoods.

Hannah Coulter's narrative voice has beckoned me,



St. Augustine's Oak Cliff, from Kiest Boulevard



Paul Wheatley photos

The church's sanctuary and reredos were updated with the crucifix and cathedra from St. George's Church, which merged with St. Paul's and Epiphany, Dallas, to form St. Augustine's.

as pastor of this community, beyond my millennial meandering to appreciate the sacredness of the peculiarity all around. The people old and new, the Church cultures that are merging to form the flavor of St. Augustine's, and the new members and their children who portend to us that there will be a future for the congregation, all constitute the catholicity of this place — the body of Christ that speaks each Sunday in the collective *Amen* at the close of the eucharistic prayers. My role is to bear witness, to make friends, to be a neighbor; to let my feet stay put long enough for the roots to break through the bottom of my shoes into the ground below: into the place where we gather, where God's "Word and Holy Spirit . . . vouchsafe to bless and sanctify" this gathering, this people, this bread and this wine: fruits of the earth in which "this world is joined to heaven."

*The Rev. Paul Wheatley is a graduate of Wycliffe College and a priest of the Diocese of Dallas. This article is adapted from a post on Covenant, the weblog of TLC.*





## CULTURES

# Earthly Saints

**St. Vincent**

Directed by Theodore Melfi

The Weinstein Company



Review by Hannah Ruth Earl

There's a stirring scene in *St. Vincent*, a modern model of pastoral care unlike anything I have seen on film. The humility of a pair of clergy during counseling proves aspirational to ordained and lay leaders alike. Filmic depictions of clergy activity are scarce; more infrequent still are these scenes helmed by such a remarkable talent as Theodore Melfi.

The narrative is uncomplicated. A

recently separated mother Maggie (Melissa McCarthy) moves to Brooklyn with her young son Oliver (Jaeden Lieberher). She enrolls him in the local parochial school, where he is exposed, seemingly for the first time, to religious precepts. In need of after-school childcare, Maggie reluctantly turns to next-door neighbor Vincent (Bill Murray, positively sterling). Yet Maggie soon comes to question Vincent's crotchety, unruly influence on Oliver, as well as Vincent's relationship with

the enigmatic Daka (Naomi Watts). As Oliver learns of Vincent's life and past, he understands Vincent anew.

Melfi's skill lies in combining a bracing intelligence with a pathos that is sneaking. The film's simple structure allows for an uncommon depth in this genre. Details are its gems, and benefit from more than a single viewing. *St. Vincent* has earned nominations from the Screen Actors Guild and the Hollywood Foreign Press Association. Beautifully shot and thoughtfully directed, *St.*





©2014 The Weinstein Company / Atsushi Nishijima photos

*Vincent* marries offbeat originality to a widely appealing plot. This itself is a feat, but Melfi makes it all look seamless.

*St. Vincent* is the rare film — a comedy, no less — that bristles with theological robustness. Part of its setting reflects what early Christian education should strive to be: an environment of grace born from right conviction. It's telling that this educational foundation executes the film's climax and theme. The sincerity of religious authorities in the film is thoroughly admirable. *St. Vincent* quite simply understands these functions of the Church.

Much has been said about the dearth of commitment in North American culture, but few films have addressed the problem with real nuance. *St. Vincent* refreshingly rejects the Church as social club; mercifully, we do not choose our pewmates. In this way the film forces realistic reflection on the nature of our ties: our obligations, our chosen communities, our unchosen bonds. Even more astutely, the film questions our motivations for and methods of loving. Against contemporary sensibilities, *St. Vincent*

frowns on autonomy as well as isolation. Truly, one is not saintly alone.

As the title suggests, the film offers its most direct theological contribution on the subject of sainthood. *St. Vincent's* vision is more at home with the Church Fathers than the saccharine version of sainthood peddled in pop culture. The film teaches that the path to embodied

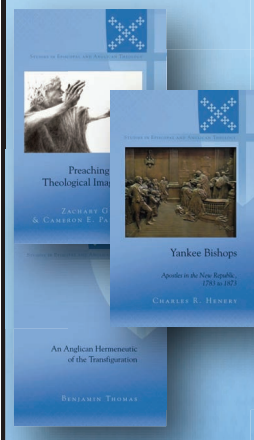
holiness is arduous, and that saints are distinguished by their difference in devotion, not their perfection. Saints are earthly.

Cheers for *St. Vincent's* quiet offering of neighborly redemption.

*Hannah Ruth Earl, a recent graduate of Yale Divinity School, lives in Los Angeles and works in independent film.*

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## Taming the Bureaucratic

# BEAST

By Steven R. Ford

**A** now-dead former actor and U.S. president was once accused of conflating real life and cinema, and on occasion he undoubtedly did. But there's nothing wrong with that. Good movies are meant to examine some aspect of life and reality, and fudging a little on what's being examined can sometimes produce valuable insights.

On my way to Hanoi, where I'm writing these words, I managed to look around Tokyo during a 12-hour layover. I was awed by the incredible rebuilding that has taken place since the rampage of Godzilla. Despite the claim in a current film that the rampage never took place, it was in fact captured on black-and-white footage

in 1954 and shown in theaters throughout Japan and America.

The original Godzilla, one might recall, was brought to Earth's surface by massive displays of power in the South Pacific. He knocked down Tokyo buildings with his huge reptilian torso and destroyed entire neighborhoods with his fiery breath. Apparently by grassroots consensus, most new buildings appear to be Godzilla-proof. It's reminiscent of New York City, where without any official edict high-rises constructed since 1933 have been non-scalable by oversized apes. Local problems spur local solutions; communities seem to know instinctively how to build themselves up from near ruin by unwieldy giants.

If Hanoi's destruction came from a

huge creature, it was called bureaucracy, and its work was slow and insidious. Occasional American bombing raids targeted mostly industrial areas and the Long Bien Rail Bridge, and isolated, privileged national leadership left rebuilding from collateral damage to local residents. The central committee drained financial and human resources to fight increasingly nasty battles in the South. Money was lost to constructive use, and human casualties never came home. At the same time, a growing power elite was siphoning away even more money for administration and economic planning, which usually bore no fruit at all. It simply wasted resources. By the end of the Vietnam War, per capita annual income was in the neighborhood of \$300.



Hanoi today remains a very poor city, at least on paper. Per capita income is a dismal \$1,500, yet economic vibrancy is obvious almost everywhere and people are moving in from the countryside in ever-increasing numbers. The secret, apparently, is that leadership has pretty much given up on social and economic planning, aware since the 1990s that such things do not work in multicultural societies. Neither do huge bureaucracies work well anywhere. Most economic activity is cash only, and most workers are paid under the table. Few records are kept and very little in tax money is collected. Now there's very little money to support an increasingly irrelevant regime. Small businesses thrive, neighborhoods have upgraded themselves, and public services are provided locally. Slow, steady crumbling has been replaced by community-based restoration and renewal.

It's no secret that mainline Christianity is suffering destruction and rapid decline. I'm not convinced that God is through with us yet. Instead, we're gradually crumbling for a variety of reasons, many of our very own making. Certainly cultural change is leading many people of faith to find spiritual fulfillment in contexts other than churches.

In the Episcopal Church's case, millions upon millions of dollars are being wasted to fight increasingly nasty culture wars in secular courts; this is money lost forever to mission and ministry. Court battles, moreover, produce casualties who will never come home. National and diocesan bureaucracies and expenses seem never to mirror numerically declining constituencies. Instead, they keep on growing, which is the nature of all unharnessed bureaucracies. And they increasingly make decisions (e.g., clergy placement, how money will be spent, etc.) for communities about which they

know little or nothing.

Perhaps Hanoi's grassroots revival might provide insights for reimagining the Episcopal Church. What if we suddenly stopped paying for continuous court battles, retired litigation debt, and (as the House of Deputies voted to do in 2012) sold the Church Center? What if we reduced diocesan funding and staff to reflect the actual canonical functions of dioceses, which are really pretty minimal? And what if the national bureaucracy were radically reduced to reflect that the Episcopal Church is now the same size as it was in the 1930s? Suddenly considerable resources would be available for congregations to serve their local communities. Residents of affected neighborhoods might actually become involved in the life of the local church. And giv-

ing might well increase as parishioners could see the tangible results of their stewardship of time and talent and treasure.

We might think about reimagining the church to be bureaucracy-proof. Perhaps the steady decline of neighborhood churches can be reversed by taming the destructive beast and redirecting resources to the ministries of local congregations. The slow crumbling of parishes and missions is a largely local problem. By keeping sufficient resources for ministry, their members are undoubtedly quite capable of developing effective local solutions.

*The Rev. Steven R. Ford assists at St. James the Apostle in Tempe, Arizona.*

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## PEOPLE & PLACES

### Deaths

The Rev. Deacon **Nancy Ida Conley**, who founded the Diocese of Hawaii's first chapter of the Order of St. Luke, died Nov. 23. She was 78.

A native of Detroit, Conley moved to the islands in 1970. She was ordained to the diaconate in 1991, and served at St. George's, Pearl Harbor; Waikiki Episcopal Chapel; and St. Timothy's, Aiea. She was a chaplain at Hawaii State Hospital and director of the Spiritual Life Center. She served the hungry and homeless in Waiānae, and provided care and spiritual guidance to Down syndrome, autistic, imprisoned, and hospice patients.

She is survived by sons Kevin and Darren Conley; a daughter, Kim Zimmerman; four grandchildren; and brothers Gordon, Richard, and Jerry Eminger.

The Rev. **James P. Crosby**, who served as a chaplain to the FBI, the Florida Highway Patrol, and the Jacksonville (FL) Sheriff's Office, died Dec. 8. He was 82.

A native of Queens, NY, he was a graduate of Adelphi College and Yale Divinity School. He was ordained deacon and priest in 1957 and served churches in Florida, Montana, and New York. As a chaplain, Fr. Crosby was a regular visitor at the FBI National Academy in Quantico, VA.

Fr. Crosby's first wife, Marion Elizabeth, preceded him in death. He is survived by his wife, Marian; a sister, Margaret Crosby Stotz; sons James W., Kenneth B., and Christopher P. Crosby; daughters Judith C. Crosby and Elizabeth C. Reeves; and nine grandchildren.

The Rev. **Jonathan Currier**, who established the Spiritual Center of St. Thomas in Lancaster, PA, died Dec. 10. He was 57, and had been in intensive care since a biking accident in November.

A native of Braintree, MA, he was a graduate of Harvard University and Union Theological Seminary. He was ordained deacon in 1989 and priest in 1990, and served churches in Maryland, New York, and Virginia before becoming rector of St. Thomas Church, Lancaster.

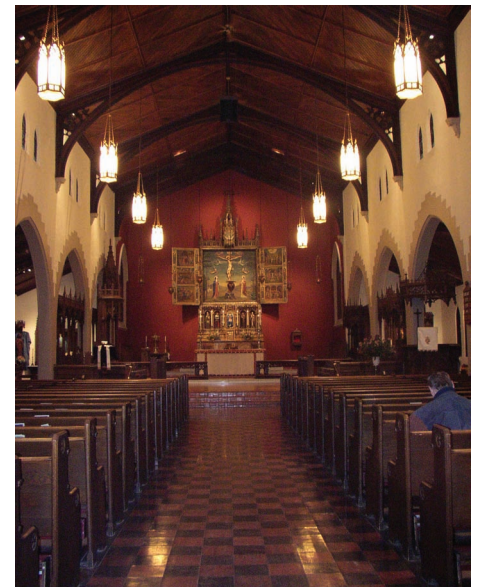
The Spiritual Center at St. Thomas is home to many diocesan events and retreats of the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania. Fr. Currier was an adjunct staff member at the diocese's Bishop Dean T. Stevenson School for Ministry, teaching Anglican Spirituality.

Fr. Currier is survived by his wife, Ann Wheaton; sons Alex and Michael; and his father, Terrence.

The Rev. **John Joseph Negrotto**, who in retirement served as chaplain, firefighter, and boat pilot in the Lanoka Harbor (NJ) Fire Company, died Dec. 13 of an apparent heart attack. He was 71.

Born in Paterson, NJ, he was a graduate of Seton Hall University and Darlington Seminary. He was ordained priest as a Roman Catholic and received into the Episcopal Church in 1972 after completing an MDiv at General Theological Seminary. He served several parishes in the dioceses of Newark and New Jersey. He was priest associate at the Community of St. John Baptist in Mendham, NJ.

Fr. Negrotto is survived by Susan, his wife of 42 years; a daughter, Kristen Weber; a son, John Negrotto; and grandson, Dylan Negrotto.



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At 7 p.m. on Thursdays during Lent, the cathedral will webcast a teaching series on the passion narratives of the four gospels, by the Rt. Rev. Steven Miller, Bishop of Milwaukee.

The cathedral congregation extends service to the community through cooking and serving meals to the homeless and inner-city residents, and through underwriting feeding ministries with funds raised at the annual Hunger Book Sale, which this year generated \$20,000.

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“If I preach the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting” (1 Cor. 9:16). Who am I? I did not make the gospel. Rather, “an obligation is laid on me and woe to me if I do not proclaim it!” I take it to the Jews, and to those outside the law, and to the weak; and since Jew and Gentile are equally weak, I mean to say that I take the gospel “to all people” (1 Cor. 9:22). The gospel is Jesus Christ our Lord, and I am determined to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2), and raised, and ascended, and poured out in Spirit and fire. Who is he? Whom do I proclaim? A voice speaks: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him not one thing came into being” (John 1:1-3).

He is the Ancient of Days, a very old Jesus. “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether throne or dominions or rulers or powers — all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:15-17). And yet it may seem — no, it is clear — that all things fall apart. Nature trembles and humans fall; nature strikes and human depravity grows. Thus an old Jesus keeps working: “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:19-20). He, through whom all things were made, has come to glue the broken pieces with the paste of his blood.

I did not make the gospel. “I am entrusted with a commission,” and that commission includes announcing that there was never a time when the Son *was not*. So, I see Jesus everywhere,

hear him, touch him, and know him in the fabric of what he has made. “It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, ... who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, like a tent to live in; ... ‘Lift up your eyes on high and see!’” (Isa. 40:22-26). The Word dots the firmament and names the hosts. And yet, in pure love, this same Word comes to the faint, the powerless, and the exhausted (Isa. 40:29-31). He comes, it seems, down to the circle of Earth, but assuredly he comes into human lives. He takes up the weak, and makes them “mount up with wings like eagles” (Isa. 40:31). They run and do not fall, walk and do not faint. They are filled with the fullness of grace upon grace.

I have been asked to tell you how the mighty God comes down. “He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up” (Mark 1:31). *He* — that is, Jesus. Having healed Simon’s mother-in-law, he took the balm of his goodness to the whole city, healing every disease, casting out every demon (Mark 1:32-34). His work, however, is largely hidden. He hears in secret. He works in secret. “His understanding is unsearchable” (Isa. 40:28). Thus, for now and until the close of the age, God will be God in those who as yet are weak and frail. Jesus is and will be resurrection not after our death but *in our death*.

### Look It Up

Read Ps. 147:3-4.

### Think About It

High and low.



## Only and Everything

While going from Gilgal to Bethel, Elijah says to Elisha, "Stay here; for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel" (2 Kgs. 2:2). Elisha pledges his devotion: "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." The dialogue is repeated at Jericho and the Jordan. Gilgal, the prophetic school where Elisha learns under the tutelage of Elijah, is but one of many places where prophets prophesy. Coming from Bethel and then Jericho, a prophetic chorus sings: "Do you not know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?" (2 Kgs. 2:3,5).

As Elijah and Elisha approach the Jordan River, 50 prophets pursue them in silence. A cloud, rising winds, swirling dust, a chariot of fire, and horses of fire: in the confusion Elisha and Elijah lose sight of each other. Indeed, Elijah is gone. Rising to the heavens, Elijah drops his mantle, drops a double portion of power. In grief Elisha "grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces" (2 Kgs. 2:12). But through the ripped cloth a new light enters: the light of Elijah, the light of a double power, the light of the only Light there is. The light of the knowledge of the glory of God comes in, and though the story predates Christmas, this light is "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). The God of the Old Testament is the God of the New.

For a moment Elisha stands alone, but in solitude he remains a compilation of people and places; he stands most significantly as heir to a prophetic school. Jesus was often alone, but his solitude was a recapitulation, a gathering up not only of people and places and experiences in the days of his Galilean walk, but also of human nature, what we are, what we have been, even what we have yet to experience. Alone, he has the whole world in his hand. "Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by

themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ... And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus" (Mark 9:2-4). Prophecy + law = Truth. And the greatest of these is Truth. "Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus" (Mark 9:8). Only Jesus!

Do we know that *only* is also *everything*? "When I am lifted up, I will draw everyone [and everything] to myself" (John 12:32). Copyists have likely corrected the well-attested *panta* (everything) to avoid Gnostic overtones, but there it stands in credible manuscripts. For centuries it was preserved in the Vulgate: *Omnia traham ad me ipsum* (I will drag everything to myself). Looking at Jesus, therefore, is to see more, not less, of what is true and good and beautiful. He reveals the "innermost being of God" (*Dei Verbum* 4, Second Vatican Council; see also John 1:18). "In giving us his only Son, His only Word, He spoke everything to us at once in his unique Word — and he has no more to say" (John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, cap. 22). Leading us into all truth, the Father is always saying what he has said: "This is my beloved Son; listen to him" (Mark 9:7).

In doubt? Listen to Mavis Staples sing "That's Enough" with Billy Preston on organ. Her aging voice tells it, grinds out in pain the truth we too often are too timid to say. "I've got Jesus, and that's enough" (*I Believe to My Soul*, Rhino Records, 2005).

### Look It Up

Read Ps. 50. All excellent greatness = Jesus!

### Think About It

*Only* never runs dry.



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