

## **Episcopal Youth Community (EYC)**

The Episcopal Youth Community (EYC) has continued to meet regularly for fellowship, formation, and service throughout the pandemic and as we have recovered. EYC advisors Diana Smith, Drew Kirkland, Tammy Langley, Beth Hardin, and newcomer Samantha Haran have continued to provide leadership. Youth and their families have been outstanding in their commitment to EYC and to last and this years' confirmation processes. Highlights in the past year include confirmation of ten youth (and two adults), three participants in HUGS Camp, invaluable leadership of Vacation Bible School, and planning and participation in a Costa Rica pilgrimage in the summer of 2024. Youth have remained engaged in regular Sunday programming, including community learning (Loaves & Fishes, etc.), Compline and spiritual practices, and fellowship fun.

While our vision for youth programming is strong, there are challenges. Post-pandemic life has further separated many youth from the routines of worship and formation, as many community youth activities (sports, work, etc.) claim time and are scheduled on Sundays, including Sunday mornings. Directionally, formation has grown more important as the community's and world's challenges are more complex. There are real "learning gaps" accelerated by the pandemic. It is also important to find the "fit" for each youth, whether through active worship participation (as acolytes, lectors, or hosts), EYC, and/or confirmation. We also want 1-2 more youth advisors and a youth minister to join us.

Youth mental health is a global problem, and the Diocese of North Carolina responded to it through an August mental health summit for adult leaders (attended by Jessica Dunlap and Beth Hardin). We have responded with programming including a November 12 presentation by Kelly Little of The Dilworth Center and with a certification program for Mental Health First Aid for Youth on January 27, 2024. Research indicates that *active* involvement in religious organizations is beneficial.

Of note, advisor Beth Hardin also maintains a Google Group of Holy Comforter college-aged young adults. Often, EYC would prepare "college care packages" for these young adults and send as addresses could be gathered (not an easy task). Beginning in fall 2022, messages are sent about every 6 weeks, and the EYC prepared care packages that are in the process of distribution (contact information is a challenge).

## **HCBG: Holy Comforter Book Group**

The Holy Comforter Book Group (HCBG) was established in the summer of 2016, in response to the Chetty report (Dr. Raj Chetty - Harvard, Opportunity Insights) indicating that Charlotte was 50<sup>th</sup> out of the 50 largest US cities in socioeconomic mobility. Using a framework of "Know-Believe-Do" inspired by the story of the centurion (Matthew 9, Luke 7), the HCBG studies issues related to socioeconomic mobility, and, as race differences surface rapidly, racial reconciliation. The group includes more than 270 people, more than half of whom are not

members of Holy Comforter. It typically studies 1-3 books each summer and maintains contact during the academic year (occasionally conducting studies during that time).

In the summer of 2023, more than 30 people participated in a three-session study of Dr. Tehia Glass's *Teaching for Justice and Belonging*. More than 70 people (and lots of children) participated in a dinner presentation of Dr. Joseph Ewoodzie's *Getting Something to Eat in Jackson*. The HCBG is supported by grants from the John M. Belk Endowment. HCBG has deepened Holy Comforter's engagement in critical issues facing Charlotte, strengthening a network that includes Crisis Assistance Ministry, Roof Above, Loaves & Fishes, multiple foundations, and elected and community leaders.

### **Books+Beverages/First Tuesday Dinner**

Books+Beverages is a small but growing group focused on supporting adults in their 20s through the "Defining Decade," a term coined by author Dr. Meg Jay. The group emerged in December 2018 as those experienced in young adult transitions saw the need for continuous support in spaces less directly connected to "church". Throughout its first 18-24 months, the group shared dinner and discussed books relevant to adults in their 20s (including *The Defining Decade*). The group persisted through the pandemic, meeting outside at Holy Comforter and at advisor Karen Moseley's home. As conditions improved (and necessitated due to advisors' challenges), the group shifted to meeting at the Hardin-McLaughlin house near Mercy Hospital.

As pandemic effects waned, the group has grown to include 27 young adults (and a few older than 30). The group gathers for First Tuesday Dinner, healthy food and thoughtful conversation. It is supported by Diana Smith, Karen Moseley, Geoff McLaughlin, and Beth Hardin.

In my opinion, young adult ministry is the most challenging generation-specific ministry. Very large percentages of Generation Z (and the generation younger) have no religious formation and fall into the paradigm of "disbelief, distrust, and disinterest." Even those who have "grown up in the church" are challenged by time pressures as well as generation-specific financial pressures. They, too, often fall into the framework of "disbelief, distrust, and disinterest" or are otherwise not well served by many of the structures of religious life.

As young adult ministry grows in importance in an environment where nearly 40% of young adults (18-30) are religiously unaffiliated (in *any* religion) (and the same percentage or higher among Millennials), this small group can be learning experience for the (challenging) ministry to these adults.

### **Annual Report for 2023: Rev Cat Connolly, Associate Rector**

My first full year between Annual Meetings of being your Associate Rector, and it has been eventful! I cannot tell you how thankful I am to be part of this community which has poured love and blessings on me and my family this year.

Ministering among you continues to be a joy. Leading worship, celebrating at the altar, preaching, deaconing, taking part in and attending evensong and other evening services continues as the core of ministry.

This year I began leading the liturgy in Spanish at La Misa, and took the service (with preaching covered by a fluent speaker) several times before and during Fr Greg's time walking the Camino. While we have not had any weddings in the last year, we did have the joy of several baptisms, which I guide the preparations of. There were also funerals and interments, which are a very important part of our liturgical lives.

Before the summer, we were also continuing with regular Taize services and Cosy Compline, both of which I hope to resume. Another successful new thing of the last year was our wonderful Christingle service on Christmas Eve, made possible by a host of helpers who worked hard to construct the Christingles!

Attending Vestry meetings, the Finance, Liturgy, Pastoral Care, and Youth and Families Circle Groups have been important parts of ministry. During the last year I took on the supervision of Sarah Cavins, and since her departure the search for new Children and Youth ministers has also been a new experience for me, and I look forward to continuing with this process.

At a Diocesan level, I've attended Clergy Conference, Annual Convention, monthly Clericus meetings, and am continuing to attend the monthly Episcopal Start group.

In the last year I also attended the annual Episcopal Parish Network conference, this year held in Jacksonville, Florida, which was a very interesting opportunity to go to talks and seminars, as well as worshipping and connecting with fellow clergy from the Episcopal Church.

And, of course, this year I was unexpectedly away on medical & maternity leave for 5 months.

This was a time of both sorrow and joy as I navigated serious medical problems alongside welcoming our daughter, Heather, into the world. So many thanks are due to you, my HoCo family, for your unfailing support; to fellow clergy for stepping in to take services when I suddenly had to leave during Fr Greg's absence; to Joyce, our Senior Warden, for navigating the changes calmly and generously; to Greg for his kindness and graciousness; and many more.

Ministry is always mutual, but during this last year you have held me in love more than I could have hoped, and I have truly seen that Love Grows Here.

As I return to my role I pray that we all continue to encounter God as we walk together on this journey of life.