



# The Deaf Episcopalian

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## Board Member Highlight



**Cami Ouellette —**

### Member at Large 1

Camille (Cami) Ouellette was adopted from South Korea as an infant and grew up near Chicago. Now, she lives in Rochester, NY where she teaches biology and health sciences at RIT/NTID. Cami has bilateral cochlear implants and communicates in both ASL and spoken English. Her family attended an evangelical church before switching to an Episcopal church when she was in high school. Some of her favorite childhood memories are from church camp in Lake Geneva, WI. Cami's favorite parable is the prodigal son because she has always had an independent streak! Cami hopes to help ECD grow and expand, specifically focusing on young adults like her. In her free time, Cami likes to play video games, study the Bible, and spend time with her husband and two cats, Percy and Trixie.

## ECD Board Members

The ECD Board of Directors is elected from the membership of ECD Conventions.

Through your votes, we have a new 2021 ECD board! We have a mix of new and continuing faces. To contact any one of them, see their information below.

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Mahaffy

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# Letter from the President

Dear Beloved ECD friends,

In August 2021, we held our Episcopal Conference of the Deaf (ECD) triennial convention as a ‘webinar.’ The convention was successful, thanks to the wonderful ECD Convention Committee and the Diocese of Olympia. I was honored to be re-elected as President of the ECD at the convention. It really is a great honor to be your President.

I want to welcome our new Board members: Lee Holland, Vice President; Ron Selinger, Treasurer; Fran Ralston Croft, Secretary; Camille Ouellette, Member-at-Large; and Melissa Render, Member-at-Large. It is the first time for a long time that we have all Deaf Board members. The board selected the Rev. Dr. Cathy Deats to be its chaplain. We have a new “Chaplain’s Corner” section in this newsletter. We are very blessed to have Cathy working with our board. I am looking forward to working with these new ECD Board members, and with other volunteers and staff members, in the coming years.

Today, our ministry is very different from what it was 30 years ago. We have fewer Deaf priests and many Deaf churches have closed. We now have a different kind of ministry, which relies more and more on digital technologies such as Zoom, Webinar, Live streaming, YouTube, etc.

For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic last year and earlier this year, we had been hosting an “All-ECD Sunday Deaf Worship Together from East to West,” which included coffee hours, via Zoom. It was very successful because it allowed people to connect with each other and helped to spread the Good News to other Deaf people. Many Deaf people want to continue this Zoom worship service once or twice a month after our Deaf churches are re-opened. There are also few interpreted services in cities around the country.

We currently have six Deaf congregations in the United States: St. Ann’s Church of the Deaf in New York City; St. Thomas Deaf Church in St. Louis, Missouri; St. Barnabas’ Deaf Church in Gaithersburg, MD; St. James Church of the Deaf in Fremont, California; Holy Cruz Church in New York City; and St. Margaret of Scotland Episcopal Church in Sarasota, Florida. There are a total of four Deaf priests in this country – one is a supply priest, and the other two are currently not active. St. Thomas and St. Barnabas Deaf Churches recently lost priests for different reasons. Both churches want to stay independent of their host churches and continue with their own worship services. Both have provided morning services via Zoom. St. James provides services via Zoom, too.

Some congregations have asked me if our clergy members can celebrate the Eucharist via Zoom or live-stream the Eucharist, using consecrated reserved sacrament. Those congregations must check with their dioceses to find out what their Bishops allow. For example, one diocese which ECD and one Deaf congregation worked with, requires the clergy to be licensed in their diocese; the clergy need to contact the Canon of the Ordinary for an interview. The clergy also need to provide: 1) a letter from their current Bishop, stating they are priests in good standing in their current diocese; 2) evidence that they have received current safe church training and certification; 3) proof of a completed background check within the last three years.

The ECD will be happy to assist your congregation to work with their dioceses. Many bishops are aware that we have very few clergy engaged in Deaf ministry; they understand that it is virtually impossible to serve Deaf people who live in their diocese in person with so few clergy.

The invention of digital technologies like Zoom and live-streaming has been a HUGE gift and blessing to the Deaf community. It provides meaningful worship experiences for Deaf people spread over large areas. Also it really helps people to connect each other and to spread the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Continued on page 4

*Continued from page 3*

Bishop Michael Klusmeyer of West Virginia, who is our liaison to the Episcopal Church and assists us with the passing of resolutions at the General Convention, and I are working on making the discernment process for Deaf people seeking ordination easier. The ECD wants to be involved in the discernment process. Bishop Klusmeyer suggests a resolution to General Convention, outlining the special needs of Deaf Ministry. He is working with other Bishops on this issue. He has been very helpful to us, and we are so grateful for his assistance. Hopefully, we will have more Deaf clergy in the near future!

Wishing you Happy Holidays. Give thanks and bless the Lord for all things. Wait with hope and expectation, even in our troubled times. God will not forsake us. May God's Light shine upon you. May you show God's Light to other people and to the whole world, which needs HOPE, PEACE and LOVE so desperately.

In Christ,

Dick+

## Community News

### **ELM Pentecost:**

This year was the first Deaf ELM Pentecost service! The prerecorded service included members from the Episcopal, Lutheran, and Methodist Deaf churches. This is hopefully the first of many partnerships in the future! Check out the Pentecost video at: <https://youtu.be/WLqllCL4VnA>

### **St. Barnabas News:**

Mo. Libby Bagioni's last service at St. Barnabas was Sunday, June 20th. Mo. Libby has completed her Priest-in-Charge term at St. Barnabas Deaf Church, in Washington D.C. She has moved out of the state and is pursuing finishing her PhD. We wish her the best of the luck in her future endeavors and hopefully will see her around!

### **ECD from East to West:**

Churches may be opening up, but not all parishioners can go to church. Some of the churches are still closed. Some people live too far away. Some people are not ready to go back in person. And some people are unable to leave their residence for a variety of reasons. You are always welcome to attend a joint service throughout the ECD online. Worship together, take part in the service as much as you would like!

### **Summer news:**

The ECD Convention was held virtually August 11-14. Though there was some technological issues with the livestream, the ECD Convention videos should be up on the website. Check them out! Your votes helped bring about an all Deaf ECD board! Congratulations! The 75th Convention was a hit, with more people attending than in years past. We can't wait for the 76th Convention!

### **ECD Website:**

Go to [ecdeaf.org](http://ecdeaf.org) to check out the new look of the ECD website! The website is still being edited and we would love your input!

Let us know if you have any ideas for what you would like to see there!

# Transformation, Renewal, Hope in the time of COVID at Holyrood/Santa Cruz Deaf Ministry

Written by: Rev. María Isabel Santiviago

Sunday, March 15, the Third Sunday of Lent 2020, was a beautiful sunny day in Upper Manhattan, New York City. As with every Sabbath at Holyrood/Santa Cruz, preparations began early, around 8:30 AM, to open the building, check outside and inside, organize the last details, and have everything ready for our 10:00 AM English/ASL service and our Spanish service at noon. After the first service, our Deaf congregants gathered for socializing and exchanging the latest goings-on, as usual.

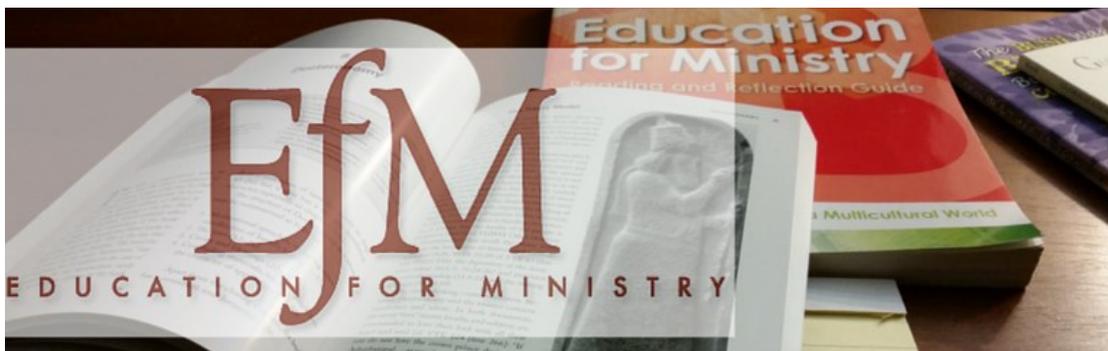
Then Monday the 16th came, and with it also the unexpected! COVID 19, the virus, which was lurking around for a while, was now stronger and deadlier, and for everybody's safety houses of worship were to close their doors! We were no longer able to hold community services in our church building, the church, thus, Deaf Ministry, went digital. The clergy worked with congregants to familiarize more of them with Zoom and Facebook streaming. These videos and livestreamed services were shared not only to our Deaf and hard-of-hearing congregants, and ASL classes, but also nationally and internationally on social media, with other Deaf churches throughout the country and beyond.

To facilitate this expansion, the following Sunday, March 22, ASL interpretation was added to all our Sunday services in Spanish, in addition to the English Eucharist. Unique in this trilingual approach, this addition was important for mixed families where the Deaf and the hearing members did not share languages but wanted to worship together. During Lent we distributed and prayed daily with our parishioners and friends the Stations of the Cross using videos in English/ASL produced by our church. Most of the videos (English/ASL, Spanish) were also closed captioned (CC) to reach a larger number of people including those who are hard-of-hearing.

Last August, in spite of COVID, we held our Annual Assembly and Election for Vestry members and we made history by electing a Deaf member to the Vestry. Vestry trainings and meetings are now trilingual – English, Spanish and ASL – with a regular and stipended ASL/Spanish/English interpreter. In spite of “physical distancing,” we have arrived at another Lenten/Easter season, and through technology and interpreting we remain socially connected, while providing spiritual growth, pastoral care, and inclusion for all through participation.

Left: Deaf Ministry leader Mo. María proclaims the Gospel in the time of the pandemic; middle top: Deaf congregant Lidia prepares to sign on Holy Week; middle bottom: Deaf Ministry, Deacon Gene reads while CODA interpreter Diely signs, Fr. Luis is at the altar; right top: Diely interprets the service; right bottom: Deaf congregant Carlos signs 'Jesus'





## Discussion Group in ASL

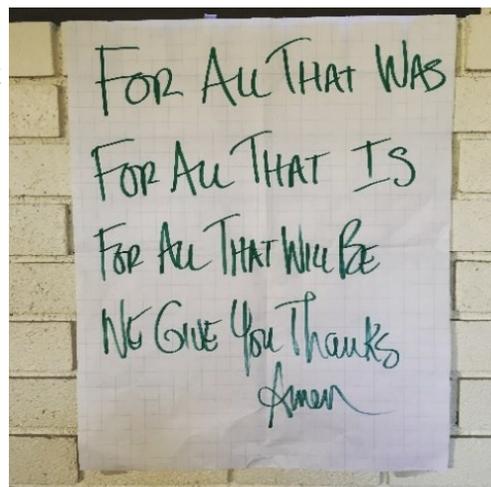
Education for Ministry (EfM) is a four-year theological program offered on Zoom by the School of Theology at the University of the South at Sewanee, TN. Participants commit to one year at a time and meet weekly in seminars led by one or two trained mentors. Over four years, participants study the Bible (the Hebrew bible and the New Testament), church history, and theology while learning to engage in theological reflection. EfM is a means for exploration and formation of Christian faith.

The seminar group is core to the EfM program. A group consists of 6-12 participants and trained mentors who meet weekly over the course of a nine-month academic year. Meetings are usually from 2 to 3 hours in length, and the EFM in ASL seminar group is conducted exclusively in American Sign Language.

Through study, prayer, and reflection, an EfM group moves toward new understandings of the fullness of God's kingdom. Every year, participants are supplied with a workbook, textbooks and resource guides and are expected to be prepared each week by reading and completing assignments. In weekly seminar meetings, participants share their discoveries and pose questions that are raised from the week's readings, and through discussion and guided reflection there is opportunity to deepen understanding of the reading materials and have the opportunity to apply lessons to daily living and vocational goals.

Another core element of EfM is the development of skills learned through group theological reflection (TR). The goal of a group TR is to learn to think theologically about a previously event and look for meaning. By examining their own beliefs and their relationship to our culture and the tradition of our Christian faith, participants can learn what it means to be effective ministers in the world. In coming to terms with the notion that everything we do has potential for manifesting the love of Christ, we discover that our ministry is at hand wherever we turn.

If you are interested in learning more or wish to join EfM in ASL, contact the mentors at [efminasl@gmail.com](mailto:efminasl@gmail.com).



# Gallaudet Syle Day

By: Elizabeth Holland

The Episcopal Church has many feast days and recognizes various saints throughout the church year. In 1852, the Rev. Thomas Gallaudet, an Episcopal priest, founded St. Ann's Church for the Deaf, which is still active today. Henry Winter Syle, a parishioner of St. Ann's, was the first Deaf person to become ordained within the Episcopal Church, as well as in the United States.

These two priests were advocates of Deaf people all over. They paved the way for more Deaf clergy, Deaf Lay Leaders, and Deaf ministries and their movement still resonates today. Throughout the years, many Deaf and Hard of Hearing people have become ordained, or become lay leaders, Eucharistic Ministers, Lectors, Greeters, Altar Guild, and so much more within many religious denominations—all stemming from the foundations laid by Gallaudet and Syle.

At the 1985 General Convention, the Episcopal Church voted to include both Gallaudet and Syle in the Church's liturgical calendar. At the 1988 General Convention, the addition of Gallaudet and Syle to the liturgical calendar was voted and passed! To add a saint to the liturgical calendar, it needs to be voted and approved in two conventions, and it happened! The Episcopal Church declared Gallaudet Syle, Saints of the Deaf, to have its feast day be August 27th, in honor of The Rev. Thomas Gallaudet, who passed away on August 27, 1902.

The very first Gallaudet Syle feast day was celebrated across the nation on Aug. 27th, 1989. It was most notably celebrated at the National Cathedral, and was presided by The late Rev. Jay Croft, what a celebration it was!

The past two feast days of Gallaudet Syle have been celebrated in diocese across the nation, albeit differently, due to the global pandemic. This year the ECD convention finished with a worship ceremony from St. Ann's Church for the Deaf that honored Gallaudet and Syle. It was a wonderful tribute.

The Deaf ministry continues today!

*Collect of the Day: Thomas Gallaudet and Henry Winter Syle, Priests, 1902, 1890*

*O Loving God, whose will it is that everyone should come to you and be saved: We bless your holy Name for your servants Thomas Gallaudet and Henry Winter Syle, whose labors with and for those who are deaf we commemorate today, and we pray that you will continually move your Church to respond in love to the needs of all people; through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*



# Puzzles and Trivia

## DE WORD SCRAMBLE

AHERTW \_\_\_\_\_

EUDATGE \_\_\_\_\_

YUDNAS \_\_\_\_\_

CHCUHR \_\_\_\_\_

PWES \_\_\_\_\_

SDELNAC \_\_\_\_\_

RCMISTHSA \_\_\_\_\_

TEER \_\_\_\_\_

BDEAR \_\_\_\_\_

ANDTVE \_\_\_\_\_

EYANPIPH \_\_\_\_\_

INEW \_\_\_\_\_

ZMOO \_\_\_\_\_

Help! The Christmas Mouse needs to grab some cheese on his way home but he doesn't know the way.

Can you help?



- \* What day did Advent start this year?
- \* The First Sunday after Pentecost is know as \_\_\_\_\_ Sunday.
- \* Episcopal worship follows the same traditional seasons used by Catholics and Lutherans (true/false) T F
- \* Which day does Winter traditionally start? \_\_\_\_\_
- \* What week of Advent do we light the pink or rose candle?
- \* When should you take down your Christmas decorations?

## ANSWER KEY

**Scramble:** Wreath / Candles / Advent  
Gaudet Sunday / Christmas Tree / Epiphany  
Church / Bread / Wine  
Pews / Zoom

**Trivia:** Sunday, November 28th / Trinity Sunday / True / December 21st or 22nd OR the Winter Solstice / 3rd-  
Gaudete Sunday / January 5th, 12 days after Christmas

# Advent

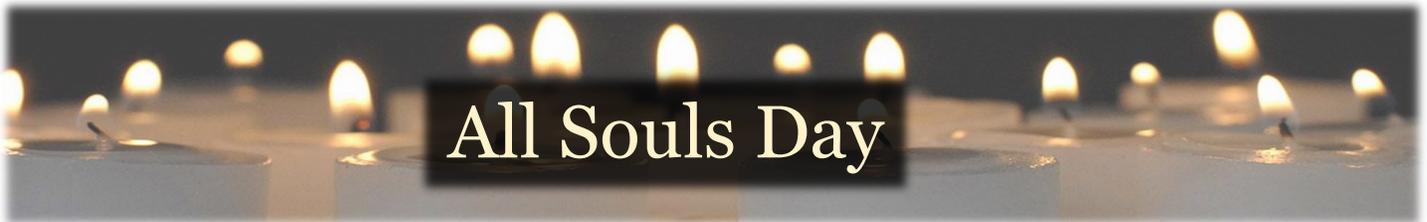


Advent begins November 28th so get out those calendars to mark down Advent Sunday and dust off those Advent candles because the time has come to prepare for yet another Advent season! What is Advent, I hear you cry? Well... let's dive into that, shall we?

Advent is the waiting season as we prepare for Christ to enter the world and it spans the four Sundays leading up to Christmas Day. It also marks a new liturgical year—in other words, Advent Sunday is basically the liturgical New Years Day. This Advent marks us going into Year C of the triennial liturgical calendar. As we wait for Christ's return, we mirror the exiled Israelites as they waited for the coming Messiah. Often, during the Advent season, we sing or sign the hymn "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel."

Advent Sunday Collect:

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen



All Souls Day was on November 2nd and is a day to honor the people who we have lost this past year who have helped shape us into who we are now. It's not a day to be regretful, resentful, or sad but a day to celebrate the hope of the resurrection and know that we will all be together again in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Some of the things you may have done on All Souls Day might have included:

- Lighting a candle at Church or at home for those who have passed
- Visiting or decorating gravesites for these "ordinary saints"
- Offering a prayer
- If you hadn't lost someone this year, maybe you were supportive to others, which can be very spiritual as well.

All Souls Day Collect:

O God, the Maker and Redeemer of all believers: Grant to the faithful departed the unsearchable benefits of the passion of your Son; that on the day of his appearing they may be manifested as your children; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

# Thanksgiving



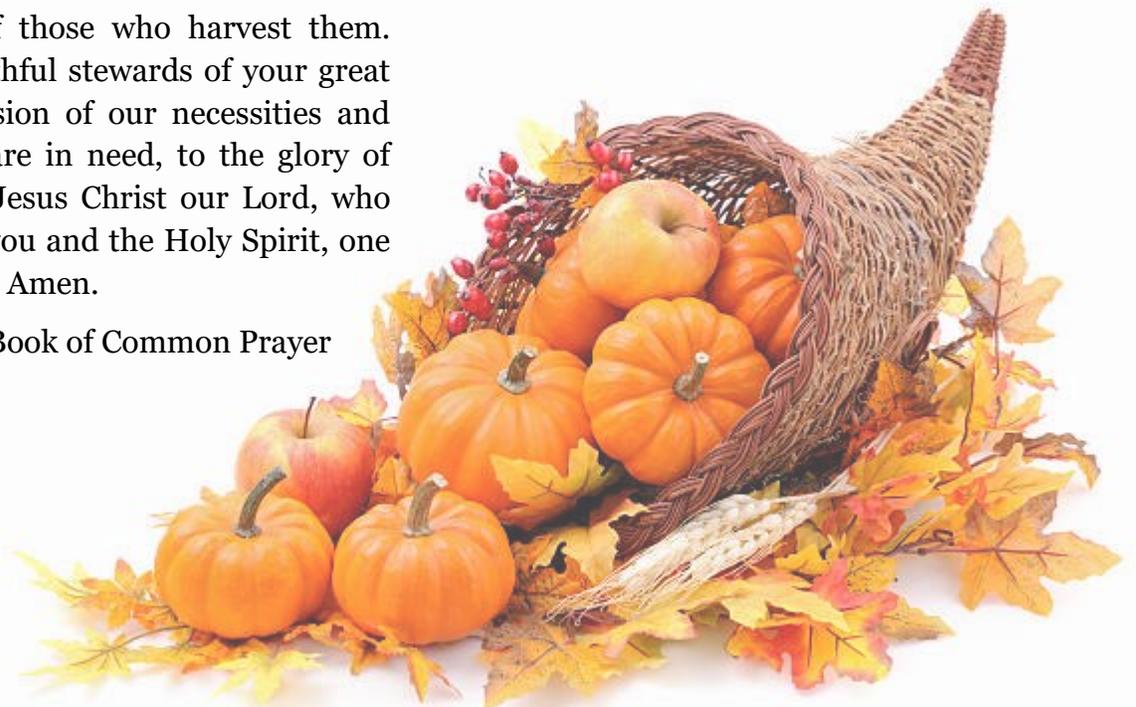
This has been another tough year for many people. We all went from quarantining with masks and social distancing, to no masks and vaccines, and back again. However, even with the challenges of the pandemic—and the economy—we can all still find things to be thankful for. Take a moment right now to think of something, or even someone, that you are thankful for. It can be the food in your fridge, the car you drive, your neighbor who always loans you sugar, or even a pet who brings you joy. Of course we are always thankful for these things, but this is the time of year to really highlight it and thank God for giving you the grace to be able to see these gifts every day.

Unlike last year, some of you may be able to gather with loved ones to celebrate Thanksgiving together. If you are able, be safe and mindful but most of all—be Thankful. However, if you are unable to gather this Thanksgiving season, know that you are still able to connect in other ways such as video platforms, letters, and phone calls. You will be in someone's thoughts and prayers this Thanksgiving season, and that is something to be thankful for as well.

## Thanksgiving Day Collect:

Almighty and gracious Father, we give you thanks for the fruits of the earth in their season and for the labors of those who harvest them. Make us, we pray, faithful stewards of your great bounty, for the provision of our necessities and the relief of all who are in need, to the glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

- Book of Common Prayer



# 75th ECD Convention

The road was long, but the journey has been completed!

In 2018, planning started for the 75th Convention in Washington State. Lee Holland was an amazing leader of the 75th ECD Convention committee, consisting of Melissa Render, Sharon Dilks, Beth Klein, and Fran Ralston Croft. They met and discussed details to make sure your convention was fantastic. Then, heartbreak in 2020. The global pandemic caused events around the world to be postponed, including our convention.

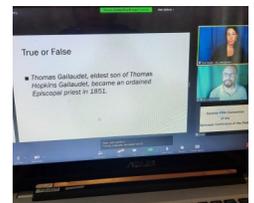
The Convention Committee immediately jumped into discussions regarding alternatives. The committee worked on preparing the in-person and possible live-streamed convention in 2020 until the decision was made to make it completely virtual. The reason for this decision was that 100% safety with the continuing pandemic could not be guaranteed. Then the committee shifted and made different plans for the virtual convention.

While researching various platforms for remote meetings on a larger scale, the Diocese of Olympia offered to host the Convention virtually. And so the committee met with representatives from the Diocese of Olympia regarding various topics, including workshops, hosts, voting, and interpreters. Thanks to the hard work of the Convention Committee, the Diocese of Olympia (Western Washington), and the Technology team: Matt Koski, Kerry Allman, and Josh Hornbeck, the ECD was able to hold a successful virtual convention in August 2021.

The 75th convention had over 30 people registered! This was our largest convention in several years. Thanks be to God! The Presiding Bishop's "Way of Love" practices was the theme, and it resonated well with everyone.

Some highlights of the convention were:

- ◆ Reports of the last four years
- ◆ President's message to you all
- ◆ Lovely worship services from some of our Deaf Churches around the country
- ◆ Way of Love videos
- ◆ The Right Reverend William Michie Klusmeyer of West Virginia
- ◆ Mission Reports from six Deaf Churches and Missions
- ◆ Game Night with Ricardo Lopez
- ◆ Advocacy workshop with Lee Holland and Fran Croft
- ◆ ECD Awards
- ◆ Thank you for voting! Your votes also introduces the new ECD Board!



Ricardo Lopez at game night



Lee Holland & Fran Croft at Advocacy Workshop

Many thanks to Cass Martensen for her almost 20 years of service on the ECD board.



Elizabeth Holland showing Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's Way of Love introduction video

# Chaplain's Corner

*To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.*

*-- Martin Luther*

For Episcopalians, the season of Advent is one of beginning again. We begin again the reading of Scripture according to our *lectionary* (the cycle of reading we use for which parts of the Bible are read when). We begin again our journey through Jesus' life: his birth, death, resurrection, ascension, and continuing action in our lives. Sometimes, in order to help children understand that our "liturgical year" is a real year but not a calendar year, we say "Happy New Year!" on the first Sunday of Advent. It is a way to introduce them to the way we observe time in the church, and how God's time is different than human time.

Just as the calendar New Year is used by many as a time to "turn over a new leaf," make resolutions, or embark on good or healthy habits, Advent for us can be a time to focus on our relationship with God in a more intentional way. The season of Advent is a quiet season of preparation, despite the fact that during its calendar time, the world is preparing for the birth of Jesus in a very different way. We are encouraged to spend time in quiet, thinking about and meditating on the birth of Jesus and the awesome power of God's love in the gift of his son. All around us (even before Hallowe'en), advertising and store stock are focused on the preparation of finding the best gift for someone, the best decorations for our homes, the best food for celebrations.

What if, in this "new year," we turned our eyes toward God and our relationship with God? A good friend of mine recently wrote a book, [Seek and You Will Find](#). The Rev. Dr. Rhonda Mawhood Lee encourages us to discover a practice of prayer that deepens our relationship with God as she weaves together ancient and modern spiritual practices with her own stories of discovery. As I read this book, I was encouraged to "try on" different ways of praying. The best part of this book about prayer is that it encourages us to experiment with our contact with God, and does not hold up one way to pray over another or suggest there is a "right" way to pray.

As Deaf or Hard of Hearing people, we have a lot of experience with communication. The times when communication is successful for me and I am able to get my message across and really connect with another, I feel understood, connected, perhaps even loved. When I find myself unable to communicate thoughts, feelings, or requests to another, I am frustrated. And when that happens (on one of my good days), I try another way to communicate: use a different word, find a pen and paper, type it on my phone, enlist the help of another person.

Why should it not be the same with God and me? I want to communicate with God and sometimes I am successful, and sometimes I am not. (*For the record, I believe all*

*attempts at communicating with God are successful, but my measure of success and God's are often quite different*). The important lesson that Rhonda taught me was that there are many ways to communicate with God.

Research into learning a second language has shown that there may be a critical period during which the language can be mastered. Learning a second language past the age of ten, the theory suggests, does not result in the same mastery of that language as a native speaker. The most important thing is this: a person does not need to fully master a language in order to communicate. My first language is English and my second language is ASL, which I learned as an adult. My skills will never be equal to someone whose native language is ASL. For me, getting my point across sometimes takes much longer and many times I make mistakes. But if communication is the goal rather than language mastery, the connection is made.

There is not one right way to communicate with God. Prayer has many different forms and actions. If our goal is to listen for God and speak to God, there are many languages we can use. From Dr. Mahwood Lee's book come these diverse ways of prayer:

the daily office

praying through movement

the rosary

silent prayers

praying the psalms

To explore a new way to communicate with God would be a rewarding thing to try during Advent.

There is one important thing I need to remember as I explore my connection with God: God's first language is silence. A friend of mine was describing what he called a "mystical experience" of God's love. He said, "There is no reason it should have happened to me at that time or in that place. I didn't do anything special. I just sat in silence and opened my heart to God."

Whatever way I express my thoughts and feelings to God, whatever language or style or method I may use, God is full of joy at my desire.

May your Advent be a time of deep and loving connection with God!

Yours in the love of Christ,

*Cathy Deats*



## Words From a Church Mouse

Hey there! Long time, no squeak! It has certainly been a busy several months and there is a lot to catch up on. Since my last report there has been Covid changes like vaccines and new strains, celebrations like Lent and Thanksgiving, and fantastic events like the ECD Convention! From what I understand, there are even some new members to the ECD board, which is wonderful news! Welcome and congratulations on your appointment!

I know it's been hard, and continues to be difficult, for many people regarding the pandemic. Whether you find yourself stifled by restrictions or mourning the loss of friends or family, I just want you to know that through my travels, I have heard many prayers going out for people just like you. Now that more churches are back in live services, I'm glad there are still Zoom services out there so we mice don't have to travel too much, which is more difficult this time of year when we are filled with all the great food of the season!

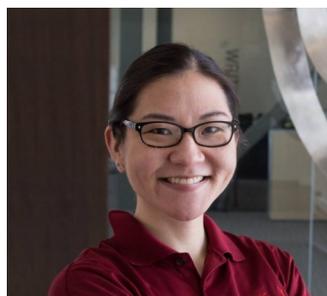
Speaking of food of the season, let's chat about some holidays, celebrations, and events that we may have missed this year. In Spring we had Easter, of course, as well as the start of Lent. For Pentecost, the Deaf ELM recorded a special Pentecost service—it was amazing, were you able to attend? Maybe they'll do it next year! Many churches celebrated Gallaudet-Syle Day this past Summer with a special service—did your church do anything special for that day? We finished out the year with All Saints and All Souls day, honoring loved ones who have passed before us. Now, having just celebrated Thanksgiving, we are kicking off the Advent Season—Happy New Year!

The big event of the summer, besides Holidays and special services, was of course, the 75th ECD Convention! I popped in with my Zoom to watch the workshops, the Way of Love videos, the discussions, and voting (of course being that I am a mouse, I couldn't vote but I did try)! I hear there was an amazing turn out with over 30 people in attendance!

All the previous board members gave very moving summaries of their time spent on the board, which was four years instead of the standard three due to the pandemic. I was rooting for all the people running for the various positions on the board and I want to take a moment to just send out big congratulations to our new board members. You can see their pictures below.



The Rev. Dr. Cathy  
Deats



Cami Ouellette



Fran Croft

# **The Gift of Christmas**

**By: Camille Ouellette**

I love Christmas. I love baking cookies, shopping for my loved ones, singing loudly (and off-key) to Christmas carols, and driving through neighborhoods to look at the holiday lights and decorations. It's a magical time of year and it's easy to get overwhelmed with long hours of cooking, shoveling snow, and stressful travel plans. However, it's important for us to remember the first Christmas, when God gave humans the greatest gift – his only Son, Jesus Christ.

The name Jesus comes from the Hebrew term Yehoshua which means “the Lord has saved”. As Christians, we are not ashamed to believe in his birth, death, and resurrection as the gospel, which is defined as the good news of salvation through Jesus (Romans 1:16). During those days, the term “gospel” was highly honored and used for news like military victories, births of sons, and weddings.

Jesus was born in a time of peace during the Roman empire. Emperor Caesar Augustus allowed states to govern themselves, as long as their rulers followed Roman laws and paid taxes to Rome. The society of Judea and Galilee had three main groups. First, villagers that were farmers, shepherds, craftsmen, and fishermen. Second, traveling merchants that brought goods and news from around the empire. These two groups worked long, hard hours and often lived humbly. Third, a wealthy elite that included tax collectors, who often bullied the lower classes into paying more than they actually owed, then pocketing the excess.

During his short lifetime, Jesus traveled throughout Judea and Galilee, offering hope to the two lower classes (Matthew 5:3-12). He scolded the Pharisees, a wealthy elite group, for caring more about people washing their hands before eating (Mark 7:1-23) than following the greatest commandments of loving God and their neighbors (Mark 12:28-34). He ate with tax collectors and sinners, comparing it to a doctor ministering to the sick (Luke 5:27-32). He healed people from numerous ailments, simply because they believed in him (John 11:1-44).

However, some leaders became jealous of how popular Jesus was becoming. He was viewed as dangerous to the Roman empire (Luke 23:1-5) and ultimately betrayed by Judas Iscariot (Luke 22:3-6). Jesus was killed because of these sins of jealousy and betrayal (Mark 15). Three days later, he was resurrected, representing God's forgiveness of those sins (Romans 4:25, 5:9-11). What an amazing gift – forgiveness for all of our sins and a new life with Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23).

This Christmas, let us honor God's ultimate gift of Jesus by living our lives the way Jesus did (Matthew 25:31-46). Instead of reciting the Beatitudes, we can give hope by volunteering at holiday meal drives or going through our closets for unused clothing to donate. Instead of scolding the Pharisees, we can shift our focus from holiday rituals and traditions to actions of love. Instead of dining with tax collectors or healing the sick, we can write letters to or call those who are hospitalized, quarantined, or lonely. What else can we do to live more like Jesus?

In closing, I wish you a very merry Christmas and a happy new year. May God bless you and yours with love and peace. In the words of Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians, “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” (2 Corinthians 9:15).

**Mission:**

*Empower Deaf people with the Good News of Jesus Christ, encourage full participation in Church Life, and advocate for Deaf Ministries.*



**Vision:**

*Full inclusion in Church life.*

# The Deaf Episcopalian



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