



# Risen

EASTER 2023

Rhode Island's Source for Episcopal News





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## Happy Easter from RISEN, Rhode Island's source for Episcopal news!

In this issue you'll read about changes big and small, from the Bishop's musings on changing demographics, to a story about transformational love found at Church Beyond the Walls, to a new season of Tea Time Theology podcasts and the changing face of leadership at Episcopal Conference Center (ECC). Enjoy!





## BISHOP'S EASTER MESSAGE ■ What comes next?



At the recent meeting of the House of Bishops in Alabama, the Presiding Bishop said something in his opening sermon that I've not been able to forget. He observed that both death and birth have many of the same external qualities. They are times of anxiety, effort, blood, and tears. They both of often accompanied by fear. And both are profound disruptions and moments of great change.

He went on to say that sometimes birth and death events, at least for systems and communities, can be indistinguishable. And that such is likely true for churches and denominations — like ours. I spent much of the rest of the week I was at the meeting reflecting on the truth of the observation and on what it means for us in Rhode Island, especially in light of our experience in the pandemic and our return to more regular worship.

We are a church that is growing older. There are fewer young people in our congregations. That's true in broad strokes for all of us, though there are some exciting places around the diocese and the nation where that's not the whole story. But on the whole, we look like the rest of the state: a place with little to attract young people starting out in their lives and young families. Housing costs and housing stock make it almost impossible to find an affordable place to live. Jobs are moving to parts of the country where companies can find the sort of workers they want to hire. And we're all trying to understand how the aging population and the economic challenges are impacting our civil and religious lives.

Some impact is obvious. We don't have Sunday School the way we used to in most places. It's not likely we will again. I'm not happy about that, but there are other ways to form young people in the faith, and many of you have begun that transition. We don't have the sorts of youth groups that were common when I was a teenager. But our ECC programs are responding to that change too. We are seeing congregations aging, and as they do, their primary concerns are changing. But the fact that something is different doesn't mean it's a disappointment. It means that disruption is happening, as it has in the years and centuries before — and the Church is adapting to that disruption.

Good Friday, a time of death, and Easter, a time of new birth, are really part of the same liturgical moment in our tradition. Perhaps what we're experiencing now is like that. Things are changing, and that feels like a death in some ways, but we know from the joy of Easter Day that death is swallowed up in life. The change we're experiencing is also a time of new life — a life that we can embrace if we have eyes to see it.

I don't know what the future of the Church will be here in Rhode Island, for the Episcopal Church, or even the whole of Western Christendom. Things are changing. But I know that God is faithful and true. I know that God is still with us in the midst of all this disruption. And I believe and have a profound hope that something new is being born around us; something that will be different, yet still similar enough to be recognizable.

As people of faith, we have been given the gifts of the stories of our ancestors and can remember their times of hope and rebirth. And we can share those stories with our neighbors today. And we really should, because the thing they need most in a time such as this is hope.

— *The Rt. Rev. W. Nicholas Knisely,*  
*Episcopal Bishop of Rhode Island*





## PARISH PROFILE ■ Church Beyond the Walls

### Glimpses of Unconditional Love at Church Beyond the Walls

For ten years, Church Beyond the Walls, a congregation made up of both housed and unhoused members, has gathered in Providence's Burnside Park, next to Kennedy Plaza, on Saturdays at 2 p.m. for worship and food. The congregation has its origins in the 2011 Occupy Providence movement, when the Rev. Jennifer Pedrick and the Rev. Edmund Harris of Church of the Epiphany in East Providence began celebrating the Eucharist with those gathered in Burnside Park.

During that decade, Church Beyond the Walls has become the spiritual home for a faithful weekly congregation that ranges in size from a few dozen to sixty or more.

"To me, it's family. I'm more at home in Kennedy Plaza than anywhere else," Pasquale Moretti, who joined the congregation in 2014, says.

The Rev. Linda Forsberg, an ELCA pastor who has been the congregation's missionary since 2016, says that the congregation has missed only three or four Saturdays over the years: once

when the governor announced a snow closure and a few weeks during the early days of the COVID pandemic.

And over the years Moretti, a once-reticent attendee, has become one of the community's most prominent leaders, she says.

Moretti first came to Church Beyond the Walls at the invitation of a friend shortly after being released from a hospital stay. Homeless at the time, he held back at first, but soon realized the benefit of being part of the congregation.

"Starting from the foundation of my recovery and spiritual journey, the community of Church Beyond the Walls has been a great blessing. It's from that foundation of community that I'm able to lean into the challenges that I experience, and grow," Moretti says.

At Church Beyond the Walls, he found, he could use his past experiences of homelessness, incarceration, drug abuse and recovery to help other members see his transformation and find glimpses of hope for themselves.

"Often, we don't believe we're worthy because of things we've done in our lives," Moretti reflects. "At Church Beyond the Walls, we've discussed this under the umbrella of soul repair. Often being homeless, caught in the grip of addiction, or – given our context here in the park – sometimes military personnel or police officers are put in situations where they commit acts that aren't in line with their deep and personal values. It can be very challenging to come back from that experience.

"The Church Beyond the Walls community is not a group of casual acquaintances. With everyone there and everyone I meet, I carry the intention of building lifelong relationships while deepening my spiritual understanding and learning to love more deeply," he says.

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He even finds value in picking up litter, a task that is part of the congregation's commitment to steward Burnside Park. Moretti relishes the opportunity to interact with park regulars who might not yet be part of Church Beyond the Walls. As he talks with them, "they slowly work their way into the fold, just as I did, starting on the fringes and eventually embracing the strength of this loving community. I often joke about changing the world picking up one piece of trash at a time."

Stewardship of the park extends beyond litter patrol for Moretti, a graduate of the URI Master Gardener Program and manager of the Roger Williams Park community garden. "He'll show up an hour or two before the service when there's a lot of snow, to shovel everything out, or work in the garden in the summer," Catherine Thenault, a founding member of Church Beyond the Walls, says.

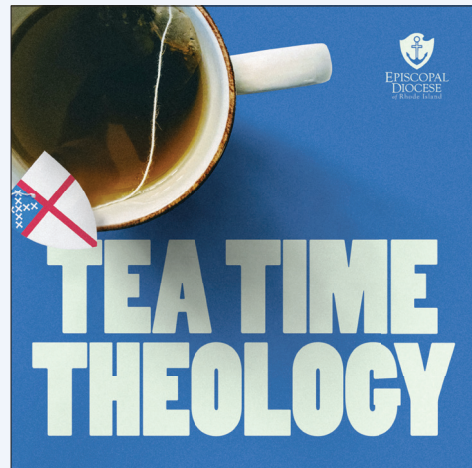
Moretti is also the Church Beyond the Walls music minister and a hospitality volunteer, and a member of the congregation's bishop's committee. He believes strongly that the perspective of a person who has experienced homelessness must be represented when decisions are made.

Despite his extraordinary commitment to the congregation, he is uncomfortable being called a

leader. "I don't feel it's so much about me as it is the message. Often in my life, I felt that love was a weakness. Today I see my capacity to love as a strength. I see someone acting out as I did as struggling with trauma of some kind, living in fear and desperate to experience the same loving compassion."

"I've done a lot of things in my life in the name of things that were done to me," Moretti says. "It was the people who loved me and showed me compassion despite some of my worst behaviors who helped bring about my transformation in life. Glimpses of unconditional love compel me to freely share what has been freely given. The community at Church Beyond the Walls has been a great example of that for me and I do my best to share it with others."

—*Canticle Communications*



## *Tea Time Theology Podcast*

If you could plumb the theological depths of any religious bumper sticker, which one would you choose? This spring, Tea Time Theology, the Diocese of Rhode Island's podcast, is asking that question of guests from across the Episcopal Church. In ten episodes being released from March through May, hosts Ivy Swinski, a member of St. Barnabas, Warwick, and Taylor Wilkey, a member of St. Luke's, East Greenwich, have invited clergy leaders to examine the origin and meaning of common bumper stickers, including "If you died, do you know where you would spend eternity?" and "COEXIST."

In this season's second episode, the Rev. Spencer Reece, vicar of St. Paul's, Wickford and a renowned poet, chose to discuss the bumper sticker that reads, "God is Coming and Boy is She Pissed."

"That's the only religious bumper sticker I can ever think of," he said. "It makes me laugh . . . In the patristic period when they were putting together the Nicene Creed . . . the biggest discussions were over the Holy Spirit and gender, and the Holy Spirit had no gender, and this was so problematic for people . . . I think that God is larger than words, and God is love, so love doesn't really come in a gender."

Reece began his ministry teaching poetry at Our Little Roses, an organization in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, that provides housing and education for girls who have survived poverty, neglect, and abuse. He describes Our Little Roses students as "my first theologians. And so God did come to me, and God came to me in the form of the female," he says.

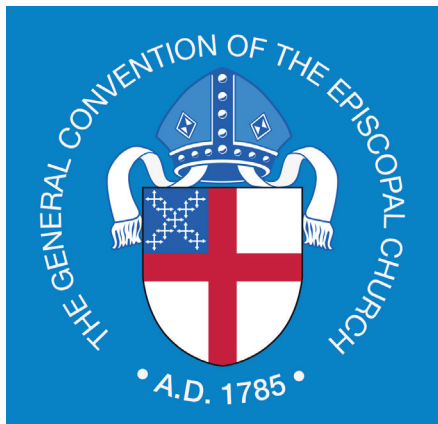
Now in its fifth season, Tea Time Theology has previously explored "God in pop culture," "overlooked bible figures," and "what 'service' really means." Swinski and Wilkey hope that the podcast's fresh approach to questions of faith will help listeners encounter God in new ways over a cup of tea, during a morning walk, or on a slow morning commute.

Tea Time Theology also aired special episodes last summer following the 80th General Convention and the 2022 Lambeth Conference. Those installments explore the underlying theological issues at stake in church governance, and serve as a primer on Episcopal and Anglican polity.

Tea Time Theology is available on all major podcasting services, including Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and Google Podcasts. Learn more on the diocesan website.

—*Canticle Communications*





## Executive Council of the Episcopal Church

From June 12 to 15, the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church will meet in downtown Providence at the Graduate Hotel. It will be the group's first meeting in Providence since 1995.

During the council's stay, Bishop Knisley will greet its members, including Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, who serves as chair, and House of Deputies President Julia Ayala Harris, who is the vice chair. He will also make a presentation about ministry in the Diocese of Rhode Island.

"Downtown Providence is a terrific place to visit in the springtime, and I look forward to welcoming Presiding Bishop Curry, President Ayala Harris, and the members of Executive Council," Bishop Knisley said. "Our diverse urban congregations, our ministries at Church Beyond the Walls and St. Mary's Home, and our partnerships at Hallworth House make this city a great example of how the Episcopal Church can respond with innovation and love to the needs of the communities we serve."

The Executive Council, which is charged with carrying out the programs and policies adopted by General Convention, includes 38 elected leaders from across the Episcopal Church. Four bishops, four clergy, and twelve laypeople are elected by General Convention to serve six-year terms, and each province of the Episcopal Church elects a clergy member and lay member to six-year terms.

Province I of the Episcopal Church, which includes the Diocese of Rhode Island, is represented on Executive Council by the Ven. Aaron Perkins from the Diocese of Maine and Betsey Ridge from the Diocese of Massachusetts.

—Rebecca Wilson,  
*Canticle Communications*

## IN OUR DIOCESE ■ Learn and Lead



Lay leaders and clergy from around the Diocese gathered at St. John's Church in Barrington on Saturday, March 18, for a Learn and Lead day sponsored by the Commission on Congregational Development (CDC). It was the first

such in-person gathering since 2019. Workshop topics included Vestry 101, How to be a Welcoming Community, and Fiduciary Checklist.

The keynote speaker was Emily Keniston (pictured below), Director of Faith Formation for the Diocese of Maine, who got the day started with a wonderful and energetic discussion encouraging us to live into and celebrate the messiness of the current moment because that is where the possibilities lie. [Watch the address at bit.ly/keniston-ri](https://bit.ly/keniston-ri).

Thanks to the CDC, St. John's, and the ECW for this life-filled event.

### EMILY KENISTON

*Director of Faith Formation  
The Diocese of Maine*

### On lifelong formation

"Formation, our coming closer to God, our deepening of our spiritual relationships with God, our coming to know ourselves in our full stature with Christ, is a lifelong experience. It is never finished. We must let go of the idea that formation equals Sunday school equals children. This is simply not so and the faster we dispense with that the better off we will be."



### On "lifewide" formation

"Mature Christian faith comes from an ability to see ourselves connected to the story of God's people across our life experience. Not just across the spectrum of our lives, but across all the things we do, all the moments in our lives."



# Transitions: Clergy Profiles & New Calls

## Meet the Rev. Alan Hesse, the new Priest-in-Charge of Saints Matthew and Mark, Barrington



**The Reverend Alan Hesse** grew up in Iowa and Arizona, with most of his formative years spent in a small farming community in the northwest corner of Iowa. He graduated from Morningside University, a Methodist liberal-arts college in Sioux City, Iowa (B.A. in Mass Communications and Business). From there he went on to graduate work in Communications at Pepperdine University, in Malibu, California.

He graduated with a Master of Divinity of Degree from the Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Prior to his call, for more than 20 years he worked in the communication field, at AM/FM radio and at television

affiliates of NBC and ABC in Iowa and southern California.

Alan served for 10 years as a board member of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts Camp and Conference Center, Barbara C. Harris Camp. He most recently served as the Chair of the Board. He has also served the Diocese of Massachusetts on the Diocesan Council, Executive Council, and Bishop's Search and Consecration Committee. He is a trained anti-racism facilitator and has served on the Diocesan Social Justice/Antiracism Ministry Team.

Currently Alan serves as Trustee to the Church Home Society, an independent non-profit corporation related to the Episcopal Church of Massachusetts. Its objective is to provide support to young persons (ages 9–25) by making financial grants to both religious and secular organizations. Fr. Alan is grateful for this opportunity to better the lives of the underserved youth of Massachusetts.

Father Alan is also a member of the Board of Trustees for the Stevens Treatment Programs, formerly the Stevens Children's Home, Inc. A residential-based treatment facility, it is a private, non-profit corporation, operating a continuum

of therapeutic residential programs as well as community and home-based transitional services, in Swansea, Massachusetts. Stevens serves youth (ages 11–22) with behavioral and emotional problems that present serious treatment concerns. Stevens' youth-guided and family-driven programs are committed to positive outcomes. Stevens believes in offering a pathway to a new beginning and a chance for an improved future.

Alan is married to Dr. Tim Orwig, who is a lecturer at Boston College, Lesley University, and the University of Massachusetts, Lowell, and author of many articles and publications. His most recent book is *Cape Cod Canal*, a history of the canal on its 100th anniversary. They have one son, William, an athletic 10th grader who has introduced his family to all sorts of new athletic adventures.

In his "off" time Alan enjoys reading science fiction novels, saltwater fishing with his son, kayaking, and playing the saxophone.

Alan is passionate about the Gospel, the work of justice, and empowering young people. He is excited for his new ministry with Saints Matthew and Mark!



## Changes

**The Rev. Canon Meaghan Brower** (top right) will be stepping down as Executive Director of the Episcopal Conference Center, and joining St. Mary's Church in Portsmouth as Associate Rector. This summer, Sara Clarke (bottom left) will be serving as Chief Operating Officer, and Marisa Rainey (bottom right) will serve as Camp and Program Director. The Bishop is grateful to Canon Meaghan for her years of dedication to ECC, and to Sara and Marisa for stepping up to keep the good work going. Read more about this leadership transition at [www.eccri.org/eccstaff](http://www.eccri.org/eccstaff).







**The cross is my anchor**

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