

# About the Matthew 25 Initiative and Our Local Involvement

By The Rev. Canon David Wilson

In 2015, Archbishop Foley Beach caught a vision to help churches across the Anglican Church in North America [ACNA] to reach the poor and needy in their communities. Out of that vision emerged the Matthew 25 Initiative, an ACNA ministry funded by donations from ACNA dioceses, parishes, individuals and an initial \$1 million dollar matching grant from an anonymous donor.

The purpose of the Matthew 25 Initiative is to expand and develop ministries in North America that are engaged in working, living, and serving on the margins of society. These programs reach

some of the most vulnerable and under-resourced populations, fulfilling Jesus' call to love "the least of these." (Matthew 25:40) The Archbishop called upon the Rev David Roseberry, Provincial Canon for Mission of the ACNA, to turn that vision to reality by organizing the Mt25 Initiative which has rapidly evolved into the Mt25 Movement. Since it's beginning 18 months ago, ministries of gospel justice and mercy have been springing up and growing across the ACNA.

This past September, over 100 Anglicans from Canada, the United States, and Mexico came together at the Matthew

25 (Mt25) Gathering held at the Franciscan Retreat Center in Paradise Valley (Phoenix) AZ, to receive support, training and refreshment of energy to go back home and serve. The stated theme of the Gathering was: "Justice and Mercy Contending for Shalom."

Through this Initiative, Mt25 is finding that a younger generation is energized and engaged around these topics and churches are reaching out to "the least of these" in their contexts. In fact according to their website, to date, 68 different ministries have applied for matching grants under the Matthew 25 Initiative; about 40 of these met the specific criteria and were awarded a matching grant.

Five of these ministries reside the Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh. Shepherd's Heart Fellowship in the Uptown neighborhood of Pittsburgh strives to serve the homeless in the city with an emphasis on homeless veterans. Seeds of Hope Church in Bloomfield/Garfield ministers to low-income families especially through their large urban summer camp program called Earthen Vessels Outreach. Uncommon Grounds Café in Aliquippa established by the Church Army in 2001 offers a variety of ministries to the downtrodden and those without hope in that community by focusing on recovery from addictions and moving from "isolation to community." The Christ the Redeemer Diaper Pantry each month provides 50 free diapers to each qualifying child in need of diapers. Since its founding in February 2015, over a 250,000 diapers have been provided to needy families throughout Southwestern PA. South Side Anglican Church also



Attending from the Diocese of Pittsburgh: (left to right) Deacon Joanne Martin temporarily seconded to the Diocese of the Southwest and Bishop Mark Zimmerman, the Rev Mike and Tina Wurschmidt of Shepherd's Heart, the Rev Greg Miller the National Director of the Church Army, the Rev David Wilson of the Christ the Redeemer Diaper Pantry and Captain Herb Miller of Uncommon Grounds. Not attending were Mt25 grant recipients: the Rev John Paul and Marilyn Cheney of Seeds of Hope and the Rev Charlie Treichler of Southside Anglican.

received a grant from Mt25 for Expanded Community Development and Outreach Ministry.

Each ministry in attendance was specifically prayed for during the Gathering with the laying on of hands. The Church Army was given special recognition for 150 years of gospel outreach to, “the least, the lost and the last.”

Professor Albert Thompson, Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic, gave an address titled: *A History of Race and the Church in the American Anglican Tradition*, followed by a panel discussion, and then open mic responses by those gathered on the issue of race in America. The powerful address took a deep look at the history of racism in the Church from its origins in the fifteenth century to the modern era, with an emphasis on the Anglican tradition in the United States.

Professor Thompson gave an exposition on race from ancient times (the Greeks and Romans) until the end of slavery in America in 1865. He did so in a very factual and dispassionate manner without bias explaining the history from the perspective of an African-American whose relatives were slaves. Thompson made it clear that generally our American perspective until recent decades came largely from the group that were the slavers not the slaves. Thompson quoted Kwame Nkrumah, the first prime minister and president of Ghana, “The history of a nation is, unfortunately, too easily written as the history of its dominant class.”

Thompson shared that when the ancients enslaved people they defeated in war, they did so on the basis of conquerors over conquered people not on race or color – it mattered not that they were black, brown, red, yellow or white. It was only following the “discovery” of the New World by the Spanish, Portuguese, French and English that race or skin color was used as the basis



for enslavement. As a Caucasian and a student of history this perspective was not only new to me but an eye-opener as well.

It became clear to me that one of the most important reasons in God sending me to the Matthew 25 Gathering was to prepare me to live into the plans our parish had made with the African American congregation around the corner from Christ the Redeemer. On October 29 we visited our brothers and sisters at Mt. Olive Baptist Church for a joint worship service at which I was asked to preach. Mt. Olive will visit us in January with their pastor, the Rev Anita Lovell, as the preacher. The intent of our gathering together began with

Pastor Lovell and my wanting to begin to do our part in dispelling the truth of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s famous words that, “We must face the sad fact that at eleven o’clock on Sunday morning when we stand to sing ‘In Christ there is no East or West,’ we stand in the most segregated hour of America.”

This journey has been a blessing to me and to our congregations and we are excited as we anticipate our future relationship with our neighbor church in Canonsburg. ■

Photos of the Gathering and of Archbishop Foley Beach courtesy of Canon David Roseberry and used with his permission. Pittsburgh photo courtesy of Tina Wurschmidt and used with her permission.)

# Fellow Anglicans Participating in Hurricane Relief

## Hurricane Relief — The Local Church in Action

by Christine Jones

The 2017 hurricane season brought devastation to many communities across the southern United States and Puerto Rico. While images of flooded cities, downed trees, and residents escaping with only the shirts on their backs have captured the news, local churches have been reaching out to bring hope and help to those in desperate need.

“I am impressed and amazed at how the people of the United States have come together for Hurricane Harvey,” – Bola, a recent Nigerian immigrant commenting on the relief efforts underway.

### Houston

In Houston, The Church of the Apostles, became an official Red Cross Shelter. Families were able to stay together and parents knew their children were safe with the volunteers at the church while they left to deal with the myriad of details necessary to rebuild their lives. Tricia Lowenfield, wife of Bishop Clark Lowenfield of the Diocese of the Western Gulf Coast, describes the effort as, “a loving buzz of energy. The volunteers are pouring in from all over the city to cook, teach, clean, coordinate, give hugs, organize supplies, share Jesus and love and love and love.”

Church of the Apostles was already entrenched in the local community. A backpack drive for a nearby under-resourced elementary school had already been planned. But the drive took on new urgency when the church realized that these children who already had so little now, in many circumstances, had nothing. Nancy-Page Lowenfield, a volunteer at Church of the Apostles said, “Backpacks and supplies may seem like small things, but to children living in the midst of post-Harvey chaos, they can provide an amount of comfort and stability that can be rare right now.”

### Florida

Meanwhile, All Soul’s Anglican in Jacksonville, FL has been coordinating relief efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma. Through the website, [www.irmarelief.faith](http://www.irmarelief.faith), both volunteers and those in need have been able to connect. Around the Flagler Estates particularly, elderly residents have received help from teams from all over the country!

Rev. Frederic [Ric] Sperry Smith, one of those spearheading the efforts in Florida, comments, “Thank you Flagler Estates for allowing us to help. In three days we helped over 100 families, gave out 300+ care bags and offered 150 meals. We praise God for this opportunity!” Ric and his team are already coordinating another weekend of service, welcoming volunteers from churches across the region.

In times of crisis, the local church is vital to rebuilding efforts. Who else can offer the love and hope of Jesus in such tangible ways? Many who might never have noticed the neighborhood church might now consider a relationship with the Jesus who inspires such selfless assistance. Ric described the amazement of one resident, Terry, who received help clearing debris from his home. Ric explains, “[One] night Terry asked, ‘So, are you from Bob’s church?’ I said, ‘yes we are.’ Terry replied, ‘I don’t understand it, but I am grateful! Bob is a good man.’”

There is still a lot of work to be done. These communities have a long road ahead of them to full recovery. But the local church, working with funds collected by the Anglican Relief and Development Fund plays an important part of the story.

To learn more about ARDF’s continued relief efforts, give, and join future volunteer trips, visit [www.ardf.org](http://www.ardf.org). ■

**About the Author:** Christine Jones is Director of Mobilization for ARDF.