

Although many of you have watched me grow up on my faith journey, I'd like to start by telling you a little but about what has brought me here today. Christian faith has been a part of my life since I was born. Although I did not have a parish I could call my own until fourth grade, I was raised within a family that surrounded me with God's love. Of all the Christian values that I have been taught, the importance of showing others the same love and acceptance that God shows us is the most important to me. When my family moved to Massachusetts, we joined the Parish of the Epiphany, and as I became more involved with the services and various youth groups, Christian faith took on new meaning for me. I learned that part of Christian faith is to serve everybody no matter who they are or where they're from. I feel as though God calls everyone to help others in some way, and it's important to me to base my service on what God has called me to do.

We are all blessed with certain gifts and my talents have always shone brightest in me when I've worked within a Christian setting. Jesus spent his life serving others and stands as an example to us of how we should live our lives. Many of God's teachings stress the importance of reaching out to those less fortunate than us and how service to others is a rewarding experience to both parties involved. Even in today's Gospel reading, Jesus states "And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will ."

Part of my mission is to use the talents and passion that God has inspired in me to make a difference in the lives of others. I've had various opportunities to volunteer, from helping the homeless and building homes in the Boston area, to participating in social justice initiatives in North Carolina during my year as a Johnson Intern, to shepherding youth on various mission trips to El Salvador and providing a caring heart to orphans in Honduras. One thing I have learned through these various experiences is that very little is predictable when it comes to service. For me to serve to the best of my ability I've learned to adapt to what I don't expect, and to be open minded and flexible. This mentality has led me to many amazing international experiences and learning opportunities, and serves to drive my desire to participate in global mission service.

Specifically, I would like to expand on my experience in El Salvador, a place where many people are living in poverty. El Salvador, has one of the weakest economies in Latin America because of internal strife and military dictatorship for over 50 years and a series of natural disasters. Nearly 20% of the population is without access to education, health care, and economic opportunities, making it extremely difficult to rise above poverty. Although medical care is free at all state health facilities, urban clinics and hospitals are in poor condition and rural areas often lack clinics and medical services altogether. For every 10,000 inhabitants, El Salvador has 9.1 physicians, 5.4 midwives, 3.8 nurses, and 2.1 dentists.

What I found most amazing about this beautiful country was that despite the difficult living conditions, everyone was very genuine and accepting, which made me reflect on my own life and culture. The people of El Salvador do not have much, but they do have strong, loving relationships because of their ability to connect and reach out to other people. What my travels to El Salvador and other countries in Central America taught me is that life is not about material possessions but about making connections and using the gifts God gave you to serve other people. I feel as though global mission service will provide me with even more expansive opportunities to serve others and make powerful connections and relationships.

Which leads me into my plans to travel to El Salvador on mission. Starting in September I will be embarking on a year long medical mission trip in El Salvador as a Young Adult Service Corps (YASC) Volunteer. The Young Adult Service Corps (YASC) was brought together by a diversity of Episcopal voices concerned with peace, youth, and mission and it is specifically administered by the Missions Office at the Episcopal Church Center. YASC is a program focused on bringing young adults into the life of the Anglican Communion, through work with an Episcopal church abroad. YASC offers one year assignments, from health care to youth ministry, to Episcopalians looking to explore their faith and grow through cultural engagement, vocational reflection, and serving others.

Just last Sunday I returned from a two week orientation with the YASC volunteers and other mission personnel. A major concept that we discussed and picked a part, was what is mission, which is something I think is worth touching on today seeing as it has a variety of different connotations, some good and some bad. We first looked at mission from a historical context- at the beginning of the twentieth century, missionaries went out, most likely with the expectation of evangelizing the world, believing they were taking Christ to heathen people; the focus was on conversion. Between the two world wars, the liberal denominations began to emphasize the churches's contribution to world peace over personal salvation. By the late 60s and early 70s, churches in other countries were asking for a new kind of accompaniment, they were asking for missionaries to stand by them in solidarity.

In 1993, the Anglican Consultative Council published a report of the Mission Issues and Strategy Group II, called "Towards Dynamic Mission: Renewing the Church for Mission" which suggested Ten Principles of Partnership in Mission- 1. Local Initiative, 2. Mutuality, 3. Responsible stewardship, 4. Interdependence, 5. Cross fertilization, 6. Integrity, 7. Transparency, 8. Solidarity, 9. Meeting together, 10. Acting ecumenically.

I specifically want to focus on solidarity as to how it plays into mission work and pulls from the gospel passage from today. In Matthew 10:40-42- Jesus says "Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. To me this passage is saying we are part of each other, we are committed to one another in Christ's body so whatever affects one member affects the others and thus no one is left to suffer or celebrate alone. If you welcome someone into your home or your life then you will receive the unique presence of Christ that they have in them and they will receive the unique presence of Christ within you, which leads to group cohesion and solidarity which are central to existence. When we stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters of Christ we are living into the mission of God and therefore we are really all missionaries.

As established by the Anglican church in 1990, The Five Marks of Mission are:

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom (which to me means spreading peace and love through God)
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers (I still have a bit of trouble grasping this one, but it speaks to me in encouraging questions and keeping the conversation about faith open)
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

Growing up in this church I have had the pleasure to be surrounded and learn from a congregation that encompasses all of these Marks of Mission and I can tell you that the one that calls me most strongly into mission is "to respond to human need by loving service".

Which brings me into; what exactly am I'm going to be doing for a year in El Salvador. Well, as a Family Nurse Practitioner I will be serving as a Community Health Coordinator, working towards establishing a self - sustaining community health program in the community El Pital, Lourdes Colon that addresses clinical, pharmaceutical, and preventive health needs. Nurses are educated to be caring health care providers and in order to uphold the Declaration of Alma-Ata (a world wide health initiative), which declared health a fundamental right nearly thirty years ago, it is my opinion that nurse practitioners should volunteer their work and offer their professional expertise to those who need it and ask for it. The Declaration of Alma-Ata, established a goal that "all people would reach a level of health that would permit them to lead socially and economically productive lives" and by working as a Community Health Coordinator in El Salvador, I will be participating in reaching this goal. I also hope that I will be welcomed in to the community at El Pital that I may stand in solidarity with them.

Going back to the gospel reading I want to remind you of the first line "Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me." As Jesus preaches,

I want to welcome you all to join me on my mission, that the love of God may flow through you all into the mission work that I undertake. As a YASC missionary I am a representative of my home worshiping community, specifically the Church of the Epiphany. Although there are a handful of YASC volunteers each year, we are all called to serve in different countries and therefore are on our own as we venture to apply our skills and talents into whatever projects we are asked to start, lead or help out with. Since I will be on my own, in a foreign land far away from family and friends, the support and prayers of you all will be essential. Therefore I invite you all to participate in my ministry abroad, so spiritually we will be together in doing this important work to make a more healthy and spiritually just world.