

Back to the Future: Foundations and Change in Campus Ministry

PAUL J. CARLING* AND ARMANDO GHINAGLIA**

Campus ministry in general, and Episcopal campus ministries in particular, have had a major influence historically on the lives of college students, inviting them to consider the relationship between the life of the mind and an active faith in God. These ministries have provided opportunities for nurturing and applying that faith to life, and have encouraged vocations to ordained ministry. They also now face significant changes and challenges.¹

This article highlights one such ministry, the Episcopal Church at Yale (ECY), by describing its history and its academic and ecclesial context, as well as its students, its theological foundations, and how theology informs its practice of ministry.

Ministry Context: Yale University

Yale is a major research university with a long tradition of academic excellence. Like its Ivy League peers, Yale is extremely competitive in terms of admissions. It attracts students with a history of achievement in their academic work as well as across all areas of their development. It is increasingly diverse, drawing large numbers of international and first-generation college students. Yale's undergraduate enrollment in the 2015–2016 academic year was 5,453, and was expected to grow 15 percent in the 2017–2018 academic year, 87 percent of whom live on campus. In addition, 2,926 graduate and 3,933 professional students study at Yale,² among them students at the Yale Divinity School, which includes the Berkeley Divinity School, an

* Paul J. Carling is a developmental and clinical psychologist, an Episcopal priest, and Chaplain and Priest-in-Charge at the Episcopal Church at Yale.

** Armando Ghinaglia is a graduate of Yale College, a seminarian at Berkeley Divinity School at Yale, a Postulant for Holy Orders in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut, and a member of the Episcopal Church at Yale.

¹ Ellen K. Wondra, "Mapping the 'Greatest Domestic Mission Field' in a New Educational Landscape," *Anglican Theological Review*, 99.1 (Winter 2017): 65–70.

² Yale University, Office of Admissions Summary on Enrollment, 2016.

Episcopal seminary, and the Institute of Sacred Music, a collaboration between YDS and the Yale School of Music.

By contrast, the urban neighborhoods which surround Yale, while diverse, include large numbers of people living in poverty with multiple stressors, including violent crime, a “mission field” comparable to Yale itself.

ECY is one of over thirty chaplaincies on campus, coordinated through monthly meetings of Yale Religious Ministries, a program of the interfaith Yale Chaplain’s Office. Yale students today, like millennials in general, have very little interest in religion, or denominational loyalty. ECY students have some attachment to the Episcopal tradition but are also eager to see what other groups have to offer. The largest ministries are St. Thomas More (Roman Catholic) and the Slifka Center (Jewish), while the most rapidly growing ministries are Christian evangelical.

ECY’s students include undergraduates, graduate students in various arts and sciences majors, Episcopal seminarians at Berkeley Divinity School, choir members from the Institute of Sacred Music, and a few Yale faculty and staff. This diversity is a shift from what was, for many years, an undergraduate ministry, and is seen as an emerging strength. Younger students appreciate the multiplicity of role models, while non-students are attracted to the opportunity to worship with young people. On the other hand, non-students are disadvantaged by the fact that ECY meets only during the academic year and is not a year-round church for those seeking one.

ECY students participate in multiple tightly-knit communities and seem “programmed” from dawn to dusk. Constantly choosing between competing obligations is stressful and undercuts deep commitment to any one community, but this challenge also serves as an opportunity for students to apply their faith across diverse aspects of life. Despite all these activities, students are generally much more skilled at academics than at relationships, and ECY tries to create a “relational oasis” for their development, primarily through the organization of dinners that provide an opportunity for small group conversations, which can deepen faith-based friendships. Students report that this unique aspect of community is what they value most about ECY. Students are also less adept at self-care than is healthy. Saying no to an overwhelming number of opportunities causes many students angst, and few seem to resist becoming overcommitted. Forty percent of undergraduates have some contact with mental health

services while at Yale. Thus, ECY programs stress physical, emotional, and spiritual self-care by including speakers on life balance at dinner, mini-classes on prayer, and a new peer ministry program which will teach mental health first aid.

Yale is a highly secular university, where intellectual achievement is valued above all. ECY students often find their peers are astonished to hear that they are “both smart and go to church,” so ECY must address faith in terms of both heart and mind through preaching and discussion groups.

Episcopal Church at Yale: A Brief History

ECY began as the Berkeley Association on All Saints’ Day, 1869.³ It was thus the second independent college chaplaincy in the United States, forming four years after the Bishop Seabury Association at Brown University.⁴ The Berkeley Association brought clergy to campus to preach to Episcopalians and talk about various topics, meeting regularly for prayer and eventually celebrations of the eucharist in the decades that followed.

Several aspects of ECY’s more recent history were especially influential. In 1970, the Reverend Richard Fabian began his work as Chaplain at Yale, joined in 1972 by the Reverend Donald Schell. Their collaborative ministry launched an era of more clearly articulated theology and highly innovative practice, which ultimately led to the founding of St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco. This experimental parish was developed by Fabian and Schell in 1978 after they left ECY in 1976.⁵

Fabian and Schell introduced major changes in worship at ECY, anticipating and going beyond the trial liturgies that preceded the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*. They focused less on text and more

³ *Yale Banner*, Volumes XXI-XXIV (New Haven, Conn.: Tuttle, Morehouse, & Taylor, 1874), 82.

⁴ Brian W. Turner, *Pro Christo Per Ecclesiam: A History of College Ministry in the Episcopal Church*, MDiv thesis at Virginia Theological Seminary, May 17, 2010, 61; <https://issuu.com/janus532/docs/cmthesis>. See also Henry Waterman, *Sermons Preached before the Bishop Seabury Association of Brown University, Providence, R.I.* (New York: Bishop Seabury Association, 1868); <http://anglicanhistory.org/usa/providence/prefatory.html>.

⁵ See Richard Fabian, *Plan for the Mission of St. Gregory of Nyssa*, December 1977, www.saintgregorys.org/uploads/2/4/2/6/24265184/plan_for_the_mission_of_st._gregorys.pdf; and Richard Fabian, *Worship at St. Gregory’s*, www.saintgregorys.org/uploads/2/4/2/6/24265184/worship_at_st._gregorys_1.pdf.

on experimenting with liturgy itself, playing with the use of space, maximizing congregational participation, and offering freeform prayers, repetitive chant, liturgical dance, and gathering around the eucharistic table. ECY was an early adopter of the practice of open communion.⁶ Fabian and Schell also proclaimed a more radically inclusive community, welcoming LGBTQ individuals and sponsoring at least one for ordination as a deacon. Finally, they evolved a practice of daily liturgy, which was well attended.

A second major development that profoundly affected ECY was the public controversy in 2014 over a letter to the editor published in the *New York Times* that was written by then chaplain the Reverend Bruce Shipman, linking Israel's treatment of Palestinians to the rise of anti-Semitism in Western Europe.⁷ The letter led to deep and distressing conflicts on campus, nationally, and abroad, and elevated to notoriety what had been a small campus ministry barely known to most Yale constituencies. The chaplain resigned, and the Bishop Diocesan, in partnership with the ECY Board of Governors, appointed a chaplain and priest-in-charge to examine ECY's status and its sustainability as a ministry. Internal examination revealed a ministry in deep financial difficulty, with inadequate board structures and oversight, few effective campus partnerships, a dwindling membership over the years to fewer than a half-dozen students, a quarter-time chaplain, and a few hours of administrative support. Externally, through this controversy, the ministry had strained key relationships with the administration, the Chaplain's Office, and peer religious constituencies.

Current and Future Ministries of ECY

In less than two years, through extraordinary efforts by students, significant cooperation with campus partners, a re-energized Board of Governors, and strong diocesan support, ECY now has a half-time chaplain, a half-time administrator, a strong student Congregational Council, multiple adult volunteers, and an almost entirely new board

⁶ See Donald Schell, "Discerning Open Table in Community and Mission," *Anglican Theological Review* 94.2 (Spring 2012): 245–255.

⁷ Elizabeth Dias, "Yale Chaplain Explains Resignation After Oped About Israel and Anti-Semitism," *Time Magazine* (September 12, 2014), <http://time.com/3340634/yale-chaplain-bruce-shipman-israel-anti-semitism/>.

active in governance and fundraising, with funds available to pursue a sustainable future.

The congregation has expanded to include undergraduates, graduate students, and community members, averaging about forty weekly. The student Congregational Council oversees the ministry, designs and participates in the liturgies, and develops programs. One student is a postulant for ordination, and three others are discerning calls to ordination. Undergraduates receive homiletics training and preach at half of ECY's services. ECY has revived its service programs, including the eucharistic service for unhoused people at Chapel on the Green, a ministry of a local Episcopal church, and provides food to a local food pantry.

ECY has formed a five-year partnership with Berkeley Divinity School to become a training site in young adult and campus ministry for seminarians, and has developed a mentor program (see below). ECY has shared worship with the Lutheran, Congregational, Jewish, Roman Catholic, and Muslim communities, shared theological reflection events, and offers a weekly community dinner with discussions of practical theology and ethics through the *Pausing at the Crossroads* series. Campus unrest over the last two years focused on racism, as well as the political climate following the recent Presidential election, have provided a rich opportunity for ECY students to become involved and reflect on their own values. ECY offers Chaplain Chats and cookies at the library for students during reading week and exams, and is deeply involved in pastoral care, including mental health crises and referrals, and helping with the broad range of issues with which students struggle.

To highlight the Episcopal contribution to Yale, ECY has launched four major campus events. First, it sponsored a series of Evensong services with multiple choirs, allowing the Yale community to experience the beauty of the Anglican musical heritage, while demonstrating the ECY partnership with the Institute for Sacred Music.

Second, a Profiles in Moral Courage Fellowship program was co-led by the Episcopal and Senior Jewish chaplains, through which Jewish and Christian students of various denominations and beliefs studied Holocaust resisters from one another's tradition. Each student presented their "profile in moral courage" in class and reflected on their own process of developing moral courage, asking questions like, "What would I be willing to risk social rejection for . . . go to jail

for . . . die for?” The group then travelled to Poland and Auschwitz over spring break, a transformational experience for all. When they returned, they reported back to their respective faith communities.

A third major event sponsored by the ECY was a campus-wide lecture by Tom Steyer on his faith journey from billionaire hedge fund manager to prominent environmental activist and philanthropist. This lecture cemented the ECY’s relationship with the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies program in Religion and Ecology.

Finally, the ECY organized a campus-wide forum called “God and Guns: An Urgent Conversation,” beginning with the showing of an acclaimed film on gun violence and the evangelical community, *Armor of Light*,⁸ followed by a panel chaired by our diocesan bishop and including the principals in the film. This event built strong relationships with local and statewide groups opposing gun violence, included a new undergraduate advocacy group, and demonstrated the Episcopal Church’s prophetic social voice.

The ECY is also looking forward to expanding its ministry in the future, as it recently received a National Leadership Grant from the Episcopal Church Center to launch several new initiatives. These include training students as “shepherds” or peer ministers to integrate their faith into their relationships across campus, and to support current students in remaining deeply involved in ECY. These peer ministers will also help to discover the potential “connection points” between the ECY community, uninvolved Episcopal students, and “unchurched” students through shared outreach and social justice initiatives. The grant will also help the ECY to double the size of its mentor program, in which graduate seminarians offer undergraduates support by combining their skills in spiritual direction with a “big brother / big sister” role, an especially popular program among undergrads. Third, the grant will provide funds for the creation of an individualized approach to student engagement in a variety of service programs. These students then participate in theological reflection groups focused on how service shapes vocation. Finally, the ECY plans to conduct the first study of characteristics and practices among the over 260 Episcopal campus ministries in the United States. This research, conducted collaboratively with the national church’s Young Adult and Campus Ministry program, will document characteristics of these campus ministries for

⁸ *Armor of Light* (Fork Films, 2015) was produced and directed by Abigail E. Disney and Kathleen Hughes.

the first time, and hopes eventually to identify especially innovative and effective approaches that others may replicate.

ECY: Ecclesial Context

ECY is a non-parochial “worshipping community” in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut, with the Bishop Diocesan as President of the Board of Governors *ex officio*, and the Bishop Suffragan, who oversees higher education ministries, as *de facto* President. ECY is one of a dozen Episcopal churches in the New Haven area, the only one focused on student ministry. Relationships with these churches are cordial and collaborative, and ECY encourages students to visit these parishes to experience the diversity of Episcopal worship.

Financially, ECY receives no support from Yale or the Chaplain’s Office. Current funding sources and their proportion of the total budget are: an annual grant from the Episcopal Church in Connecticut (21 percent), which sets the missional and ministry tone for the chaplaincy; Institute of Sacred Music funding for half of the organist and choir costs (8 percent); and income from a modest endowment (16 percent). Yale gives the chaplaincy free office and chapel space, a major advantage over parish ministries burdened with maintaining physical plants. On the other hand, ECY has no pledge income, so all other funds (55 percent) must be raised annually through grants and donations from individuals and Board members. The Board has prioritized development and financial sustainability for the future.

Theological Foundations and the Integration with Practice

In 2015, the student Congregational Council articulated a new vision for ECY, based on its history and its aspirations: “*ECY: Inspiring Worship, a Transforming Community, and a Passion for Justice.*” This vision reflects ECY’s theological foundations and their practical implications.

Inspiring Worship

Inspiring worship reflects ECY’s aim to distinguish itself as a community for Christians and seekers at Yale, drawing on the Anglican tradition’s riches of excellent music and beautiful liturgies that help students experience the sacred in community, as a balm to their immediate stresses and concerns and an inspiration to join God’s mission in the world. ECY’s worship, through highly contextual preaching,

student participation in every aspect of worship, and focused community discussions, empowers students to take on the mantle of discipleship (Eph. 3:16), and to do the work God has given them to do “with gladness and singleness of heart” (BCP 365; Acts 2:46).

We are continuously innovating based on student feedback, seeking to balance the intimacy our community desires with the beauty of the Episcopal tradition. This year, for example, ECY reorganized seating in the chapel, introduced Taizé chant, and began physically gathering around the altar for communion. Next year the building housing the chapel will undergo renovation, so students have formed a team to identify other liturgical spaces and use this dislocation as an opportunity to become an even more porous and inclusive community.

A Transforming Community

As ECY forms Christians and sends them out into the broader community, it encourages students to offer themselves in worship to God, and to “be transformed by the renewing of [their] minds, so that [they] may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2). Students are challenged to examine their relationships with each other and the community through preaching and community discussions. In this way, ECY prepares students to “first take the log out of [their] own eye” in order to “see clearly” the ways they might be called to work for justice in the world beyond themselves (Matt. 7:5).

ECY also seeks to help students see themselves as Christians transformed by God as their “inner nature is being renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16). In the midst of the trials around them, they are being sent out into the world to share the gospel and to witness through their lives what it means to follow Jesus. This witness begins with students themselves being trained as preachers, sharing their own testimonies of faith with the ECY community, and then exploring how they might articulate the Good News to others in their lives.

A Passion for Justice

In witnessing to others, students are called to devote themselves with passion to justice. Jesus calls us to “hunger and thirst for righteousness” (Matt. 5:6), and to incarnate what it means to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31).

In this academic context, passion means nurturing one’s individual relationship with God and strengthening a commitment to serving

God's will. This is facilitated through individual meetings with students, as well as retreats, preaching, and various programs.

Our work for justice begins with God's will for the world (Micah 6:8, Phil. 2:13) and God's call for reconciliation and restoration of all things to God and to one another (2 Cor. 5:17–20). Our current deacon works closely with students to encourage their engagement in outreach and social justice, and is developing theological reflection groups to explore how these experiences shape their vocational aspirations.

The ways that these ideas have been elaborated and developed are influenced by missiological, sacramental, and incarnational concerns in theology, and reflect a desire to form disciples and apostles through integrating worship, formation, and service across all areas of students' lives. Then, when students graduate, we try to help them connect with a local worshipping community.

Sacramentally, the connection between being fed with the Body of Christ at the eucharist and then going out to feed the world is central to how ECY integrates liturgical worship and a passion for justice. For example, we try to connect students with local programs for people who experience food insecurity and who are unhoused, and with tutoring programs for local children who need enrichment.

The sacraments pave the way for an incarnational approach that strengthens students to realize who they are and to become more fully what they receive in the eucharist—the Body of Christ given for the world. This allows students to explore what it means to live out their vocation as people working for peace and justice wherever they live and work after graduation.

The Future of Episcopal Campus Ministry

Colleges are an ideal context for practical experiments with an emerging church: campuses come in many forms, serve diverse groups, and are the place where many young adults are “being formed.” They have a high capacity for risk-taking with fewer serious consequences and provide multiple opportunities for change and reflection on change. As denominational identity breaks down in American Christianity, it is increasingly clear that the Anglican tradition can provide unique contributions to contemporary society. Our societal problems require wisdom drawn from many traditions, which suggests the need for campus ministries to work more closely across

denominational and religious difference on missional initiatives that reflect the particularity of our baptismal identity. This has been a priority for ECY.

At the same time, Episcopal liturgy and polity offer a real opportunity to create a welcoming and inclusive oasis of rest, worship, formation, empowerment, and experience of community for Anglicans, for those who are unchurched, and for people who have had negative experiences with church. At ECY, people can enjoy shared worship and support, and by interacting with those from different backgrounds, they can discover the commonalities they share.

One key to the success of any campus ministry is that community members “own” and exercise a high level of influence over every aspect of their common life. This approach requires chaplains with skills in “giving away” the traditional authority of priests. Campus ministries also require chaplains with a broader range of skills than those found in a traditional parish priest, including building bridges across religious difference; focusing continually on “what God is up to” in the broader community; understanding the complexities of academic settings and how to navigate them effectively; growing and sustaining a healthy organization through partnerships with other groups; board development, fundraising, and strategic planning; and above all, nurturing student “ownership” of the ministry.

Such skills require substantial organizational and life experience. Many college chaplains are appointed right out of seminary without such skills and experiences. These are often part-time, low-paid positions compared to parish ministry, creating an incentive for people to stay only a short time before moving on. A more fruitful approach would pair younger, less experienced chaplains with more experienced clergy, in a campus or affiliated parish setting.

Finally, if they are to succeed, campus ministries need consistent investment from the rest of the church, principally at the diocesan level, including financial support and ministry network development. Such investments can have huge payoffs for the emerging church, by encouraging the engagement of a cadre of young adults whose lives and vocational choices reflect the transformation they have undergone in their undergraduate years, and who are ready to take their place as leaders of a church prepared to meet the needs of an emerging world.