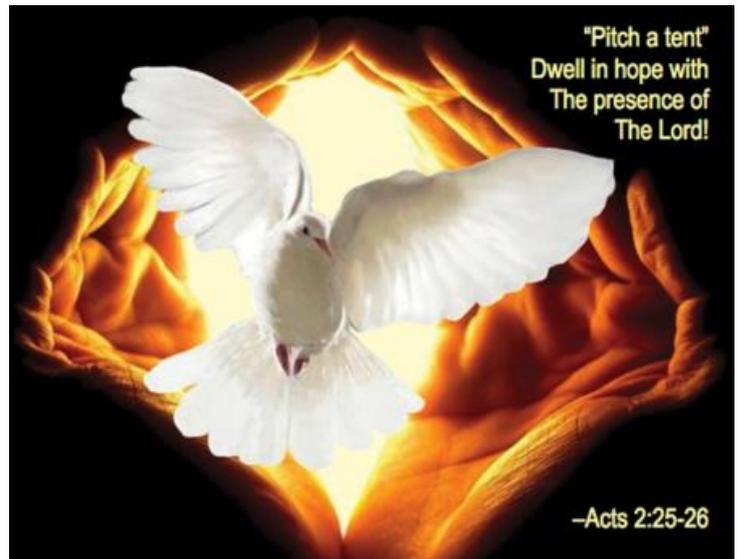


Episcopal Church Women Diocese of Washington

16th Annual Advent Prayer Breakfast December 5, 2020

Thank you for joining us for our first online Advent Prayer Breakfast. Many of our attendees asked for more information about the musicians, copies of the Advent prayers, and other Advent materials, so we thought we would pass these along to you by email.



Advent Prayers

A Prayer to Prepare My Heart for Christ's Coming

Father, just as You sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus, help me to clear the path in my heart, too. Show me the distractions in my life that block me from all-out worship of You this Advent. Lord, I await Your coming! As I celebrate the first Advent--the first coming--I look toward the day where I will see You face to face. I imagine what it will be like. Give me a heart, Lord, that looks for Your coming on a daily basis. Help me to live my life where I'm constantly seeking Your presence. My offering to You today is my righteous life for I know I am only clean because of Jesus. Show me today how I need to be refined, purified, forgiven. Give me the strength to ask for forgiveness and to then change my ways.

~ Sarah Martin, from "The Awe & Wonder of Advent: Day 18"

An Advent Prayer for Peace

Lord, in a season when every heart should be happy and light, many of us are struggling with the heaviness of life--burdens that steal the joy right out of our stockings. Tragedy arrives as innocent victims suffer, and an inner voice whispers, "Be afraid!" We need your peace, Jesus. We confess that our hearts are too often filled with wonder of a different kind: wondering when the bills will be paid, when the terror will stop, when rest will come. Will it ever? Is the message still true? In a world where worry, not peace, prevails, stir up that good news again.

This Advent, make it real in our hearts. Never have we needed Your joy and peace more than now. Thank You for the gift of Jesus, our Immanuel, the Word made flesh. We not only need Your peace and joy; Lord, we crave it. You've promised rest for the weary, victory for the battle-scarred, peace for the anxious, and acceptance for the broken hearted--not just at Advent, but every day of every year. Your

name is still called "Wonderful," "Counselor," "The Mighty God," "The Everlasting Father," and "The Prince of Peace." We know that peace on earth can only come when hearts find peace with You. You are still our Joy. You are still our Peace. You are no longer a babe in the manger. You are Lord of lords and King of kings. And we still celebrate You as Lord--this Christmas and always.

~ Edited from Rebecca Barlow Jordan's "A Prayer for Peace & Joy at Christmas"

An Advent Prayer for Courage

Dear Heavenly Father,
Help me to hear your voice.
Touch me once again.
Give me the courage to be your beloved.
Give me courage to choose joy.
I need you now this Christmas.
Be born in me again. Today.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

~ Bonnie Gray, from "Why it Takes Courage to Choose Joy"

What Is Advent Season?

(Excerpts from Our Little Roses; A Ministry Transforming and Empowering the Girl Child Of Honduras Santa Cruz-Resurrection Episcopal Church, Miami, FL.)

Advent Season is a very special time of year that sometimes gets lost in the bright lights of the Christmas season it precedes. The first day of Advent is the first day of a new Liturgical (or church) calendar and begins a four-week period of preparation in anticipation of the nativity of Jesus at Christmas.

The Advent Season is all about reflecting on how we can prepare our hearts and homes for Christ's birth in the world as it is today. It is a time for faith communities and families to remember, through prayer, reflections, special music, and good deeds what the true meaning of Jesus' birth is. There are many different traditions associated with the four weeks of Advent.

The Advent season invites us to step away from what can be a frenzied time of parties and shopping to consider how we commemorate the birth of Jesus, one of the holiest times in Christian faith. It is also a time to reflect on the triumphant return of Jesus at the second coming.

The Advent Wreath

The most significant tradition of the Advent season is the Advent Wreath. The wreath and candles are full of symbolism tied to the Christmas season. The wreath itself, which is made of various evergreens,

signifies continuous life. The circle of the wreath, which has no beginning or end, symbolizes the eternity of God, the immortality of the soul, and the everlasting life we find in Christ.

Even the individual evergreens that make up the wreath have their own meanings that can be adapted to our faith. The laurel signifies victory over persecution and suffering. The pine, holly, and yew signify immortality and the cedar signifies strength and healing. The pine cones that decorate the wreath symbolize life and resurrection. The wreath as a whole is meant to remind us of both the immortality of our souls and God's promise of everlasting life to us through Christ.

The candles also have their own special significance. The four candles represent the four weeks of Advent, and one candle is lit each Sunday. Three of the candles are purple because the color violet is a liturgical color that signifies a time of prayer, penance, and sacrifice.

The first candle, which is purple, symbolizes hope. It is sometimes called the "Prophecy Candle" in remembrance of the prophets, especially Isaiah, who foretold the birth of Christ. It represents the expectation felt in anticipation of the coming Messiah.

The second candle, also purple, represents faith. It is called the "Bethlehem Candle" as a reminder of Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem.

The third candle is pink and symbolizes joy. It is called the "Shepard's Candle," and is pink because rose is a liturgical color for joy.

The third Sunday of Advent is Gaudete Sunday and is meant to remind us of the joy that the world experienced at the birth of Jesus, as well as the joy that the faithful have reached the midpoint of Advent.

On the fourth week of Advent, we light the final purple candle to mark the final week of prayer and penance as we wait for the birth of our Savior. This final candle, the "Angel's Candle," symbolizes peace. It reminds us of the message of the angels: "Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward Men."

Using an Advent Wreath is an excellent way to prepare your mind and heart for Christmas.

Online Advent Resources:

[Advent Words: A Daily Reflection Opportunity from Forward Movement](#)

This is a resource from Forward Movement that can be used to supplement your meditations during the Advent season.

[Countdown to Christmas](#)

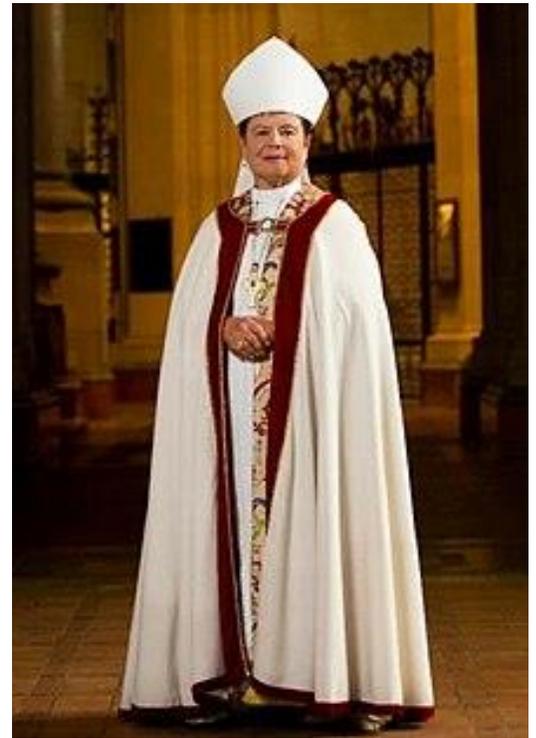
From the Church of England, meditations for the Advent season on the themes of Comfort and Joy.

Information about Our Special Speaker

The Right Reverend Chilton R. Knudsen

The Right Reverend Chilton R. Knudsen joined the Diocese of Washington as our Assisting Bishop, on February 20, 2019. Bishop Knudsen served as the eighth Bishop of Maine from 1997 to 2008. She has served in numerous interim and assistant bishop positions since her retirement in four dioceses including our neighbor, the Diocese of Maryland from 2015 to 2018. Bishop Knudsen has lived in Haiti as a missionary.

While living in Illinois, Bishop Knudsen in 1980 received a Master's in Divinity degree from Seabury-Western Theological Seminary. Her ordination to the Holy Orders of the Diaconate was in June 1980 followed by her ordination to the priesthood on February 24, 1981. As an ordained priest, her first vocational call in Bolingbrook, Illinois was to establish a new mission and she later became a staff member of the Diocese of Chicago serving as the Canon for Pastoral Care.



Bishop Knudsen's clergy colleagues hold her in high esteem for her expertise with conflict resolution, congregational development, and addiction and recovery. She is a firm believer that life opportunities even through pain can show us how to turn lemons into lemonade. In an interview with a local newspaper, she said "In my very devoted Christian heart, I believe that every ... moment of pain and every experience of grief and loss and anger breaks us open in a way that allows new things to happen." "I believe God can bring beautiful things out of awful things." Clearly her strong spiritual maturity and love of the gospel includes a foundation built on expectant hope.

Bishop Knudsen hails from a navy family which afforded much of her childhood spent growing up overseas. In addition to seminary study, she studied biology and ecology at Chatham College and obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1968. She is married to Michael J. Knudsen and has one adult son.

Information about the Featured Musicians

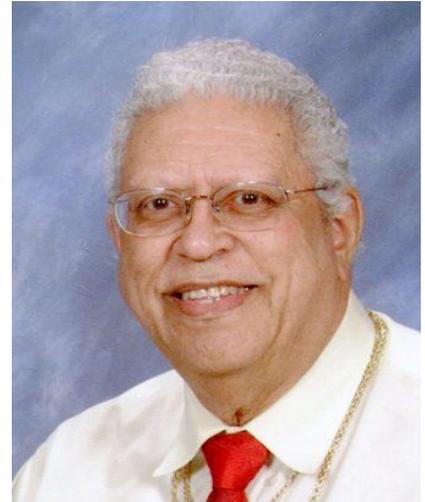
Elton F. King, Jr.

Organist

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Elton F. King, Jr. was born, raised and educated in Washington, DC and graduated with B.A. degree in Business Administration from Howard University. He started his music career at age of 2 1/2 taking lessons from the Eunice-Thompson Shephard Music school and music theory courses from the Sherwood School of Music based in Chicago, Illinois through his teens. During this time, he took organ lessons and began playing in churches from age 15. His work career began at the Peace Corps Headquarters in DC which later assigned him to several overseas African Posts as Administrative Officer overseeing PC Volunteer operations. Upon retirement, he joined Africare as Director of Management of 20 plus African Countries, helping improve quality of life. Once based back in DC, he became a Musician at Transfiguration Episcopal Church where he is currently Minister of Music. Prior to Transfiguration, he was organist at Calvary Episcopal, Holy Cross Episcopal in DC and at age 15 was organist at Metropolitan AME Zion Church in DC during his school years. He was a tennis star throughout his career and has a model railroad complete with landscaping and operating trains on display. He served on the Board of African Palms for a number of years.



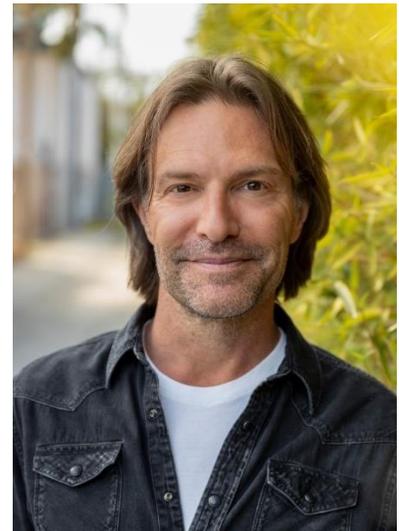
Eric Whitacre's Virtual Choir

ericwhitacre.com

Nothing about choirs is harmonious with COVID-19.

Group singing, which generates respiratory droplets at high rates in close quarters, dramatically increases chances of COVID spread. Linked to multiple outbreaks, choirs have been silenced in most places.

But that didn't stop conductor and composer Eric Whitacre from assembling the largest choir in history to perform his new piece "Sing Gently." The 17,572 singers were socially distanced online. Each had submitted videotaped vocals to Whitacre, who painstakingly stitched them into a massive online chorus, viewed so far by 1.4 million on YouTube.



Whitacre, a Nevada native and Juilliard School of Music graduate, has filled prestigious venues conducting orchestras around the world and won a Grammy for his 2011 Light and Gold album of choral works. He didn't expect to become an internet choir wizard.

“I played synthesizer in high school,” says Whitacre, 50. “I played in a pop band. One day, the choir director invited me to sing. On the first day, I sang Requiem by Mozart, and that was it. My life was completely changed. I became the world’s biggest choir geek.”

Virtual choirs before a pandemic

After unlocking the technical challenges to constructing virtual choirs in 2009, Whitacre began experimenting and producing giant cyberspace sing-alongs, building a reputation as a pioneer in the field. His first, 2010’s “Virtual Choir 1: Lux Aurumque,” included 185 singers from 12 countries. In 2013, Whitacre partnered with Disney to produce a virtual choir of 1,473 singers from all 50 states singing his Christmas song “Glow” for the World of Color: Winter Dreams show, which premiered at Disney’s California Adventure Park. He teamed with UNICEF for his Virtual Youth Choir featuring 2,292 young singers from 80 countries. It made its debut at the opening ceremony of the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games.

“The first one, which I didn’t think anyone would see, went viral and got picked up by international news media,” Whitacre says. “People started writing me, ‘When will be the next one? I have to be a part of it.’ Each one gets bigger and grander. We don’t try to make them bigger. If anything, we reduce the length of time we accept videos.”

A virtual choir with a deeper purpose

So he embarked on Virtual Choir 6. He wrote the music and lyrics for the graceful, uplifting “Sing Gently,” and then built a website that included lyrics, sheet music, detailed instructions, guidance videos and an invitation to singers interested in joining the choir. A staggering 41,820 people signed up.

“We made it as accessible as possible,” Whitacre says. “We made videos to help people who don’t sing and have never done this. They record on their phones or whatever they’ve got and send it to us. With everyone staying home, a lot of people recorded themselves in their cars because it was the only quiet place they could find.”

The “Sing Gently” virtual choir includes a dozen singers with hearing impairments who participate with sign language and a dozen singers with visual impairments who were able to download materials that could be reprinted in Braille. All the singers followed Whitacre’s guide track, a video of him conducting four professional singers.

As submissions poured in, Whitacre’s 16-member team became overwhelmed and unsure it could shoehorn every usable track into the video.

“We always make sure every face is featured in the video somewhere,” he says.

In the end, many were discarded for technical reasons. The 17,572 who made the cut do indeed appear in the video and in the credits, which run for seven minutes. The singers range from 5 to 89 years old and represent 129 countries.

None was excluded for being off-key. The sound? Heavenly.

“Voices have this unique property,” Whitacre says. “When you mass voices, it smoothes out the edges. At a football game, 60,000 people singing sounds terrific.”

Charles Tolbert

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Charles “Bliss the Violinist” Tolbert, aka Bliss Ananda, has been soothing the palates of listeners with his electric violin for over 30 years. Whether performing solo, with an ensemble or a 10-piece jazz band, this extremely accomplished musician has touched the ears and souls of thousands this year alone with key performances from New York City to St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, where he recently won over the hearts of audiences at the Our City Radio Music Festival. Bliss Ananda’s keen musical sense and love of entertaining allow him to effortlessly capture crowds of all sizes. He is like a musical chameleon in that he can change his style to accommodate just about any genre, from Celtic, jazz, rock, R & B, soul, to downhome blues, and more contemporary sounds.



While touring in the U.S. Virgin Islands, Bliss Ananda was a huge hit among listeners with his multiple performances throughout the island. He always received a very warm reception with patrons and had extensive media exposure; no doubt Bliss Ananda expanded his wide fan base. In just a year’s time, Bliss Ananda has amassed over 120 performances. At least 10 times a month, Bliss Ananda takes his show on the road, treating jazz enthusiasts and contemporary music fans to the unprecedented sounds of his signature blue electric violin. Whether it is original music or covers, Bliss Ananda adds his eclectic touch to every performance, resulting in electric audience grooving.

Bliss Ananda boasts a very diverse performance schedule. His performance philosophy is based on the belief that music is a panacea. He feels fulfilled if he can make just one person’s day better with his music, and he performs to bring a smile to fans’ faces. From notable performances at the White House, massive outdoor venues such as the Merriweather Post Pavilion and national conferences, to intimate sets at the trendy Rockville Town Center’s VisArts performance venue, birthdays and other respected gigs, Bliss Ananda makes crowds of 50 to 10,000 people smile.

Although performing is an essential love of the seasoned musician, who plays 7 instruments (and sings), Bliss Ananda takes pride in teaching the youth. Since 1980, Bliss Ananda has been teaching the violin and piano in various capacities, including serving as a formal educator with Fred Frost and his Community Youth Orchestra for several years. Now, primarily through private lessons, Bliss Ananda hones the talent of his clientele. With extreme passion, the musician says “I constantly reflect on how music saved my life. In turn, exposing the youth to music and providing them with a health outlet and hobby is my personal way of giving back.” A true testament to Bliss Ananda’s work is the success of former student Allen Price, who Bliss taught from age 9-18. Notably, Price is now a freshman at the famed Berklee College of Music in Boston.

There is no slowing down Bliss Ananda, who is still reveling in the success of his coveted “Trinity Too” album. Bliss Ananda can’t wait to reach the masses this year with all the great things he has in store, including new musical projects and recordings. Growing popularity and visibility have certainly afforded Bliss Ananda with a prime position on the entertainment circuit. Bliss Ananda is in demand, and he thanks God for his so many gifts, opportunities, and fans.

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