

RESPONDING WITH GRATITUDE TO THE GIFT OF GRACE AND GOD'S CALL TO ACTION:

A Reflection Guide for Paul's Letter to the Romans
The United Thank Offering & The Good Book Club 2019
Weekly Reflections and Discussion Questions for
Use by Individuals or Groups



**UNITED
THANK
OFFERING**

WELCOME

The Rev. Canon Heather L. Melton,
Staff Officer, the United Thank Offering

Welcome to year two of the Good Book Club! UTO is happy to partner once again with Forward Movement to support Episcopalians in a churchwide Bible study. This year, we are spending the season of Epiphany looking at the book of Romans. Romans is a great text and really well suited to the season of Epiphany. Romans is a wonderful lesson from Paul to the churches in Rome who are living into their faith. He speaks of the gift of grace, explaining how faith is the path to salvation. It seems fitting as we begin a new calendar year to wrestle with the text of Romans: What new things might we gather for the year ahead? How will our faith be strengthened? How can we respond with gratitude to the gift of grace freely given by God to us in the year ahead?

For those of you that are joining UTO for a second year, you'll notice some changes to our Good Book Club materials. First off, we've invited UTO grant recipients to write the majority of the reflections. Since Paul is writing to fledgling churches, we thought it might be better if you heard from the ministry innovators whom UTO helped to launch new ministries and new programs. We'll begin with a reflection from our UTO Board president and a little information about UTO for those of you who are new to this wonderful ministry of The Episcopal Church. Each week, you'll have a reflection, discussion/reflection questions, and information about the authors and the work they are engaged with in their community. (We'll also provide resources for you to learn more about their work if you're interested.)

A RECOMMENDATION AS YOU PREPARE TO DIVE INTO THE GOOD BOOK CLUB

Many of us have heard bits and pieces from Romans read in church many times. It's easy to start skimming when the text feels familiar. We recommend using a translation of the Bible that is new to you, or reading along with a commentary. One text that I have found useful is *Paul: A Novel* by the Rev. Walter Wangerin, Jr. Wangerin is a Lutheran pastor who wanted to make the Bible more approachable, so he turned it into a novel. Personally, as a young adult, I found reading Paul while I was doing Education for Ministry incredibly helpful, as long as I took it with a grain of salt, since Wangerin does add stories about Paul's personal life that are fictionalized because, in general, information about Paul's life is challenging to find. You might want to utilize this resource or *The Message*, which other folks find helpful.

My favorite commentary (they are inexpensive and widely recognized scholarship) is the *New Collegeville Bible Commentary*. I have relied on books such as these while creating my meditations. I like that you can purchase (or borrow from the library) a slim version for the specific book you are reading. The scripture is at the top of each page and the commentary is at the bottom. The books include some photos of the different places being talked about. The Collegeville group is also responsible for the creation of *The Saint John's Bible*, a wonderful hand-illuminated text. Reproductions are now available for purchase (and some libraries have copies to borrow), and it is another wonderful way to read biblical text anew.

Whatever text you choose to use, we are grateful to journey along with you!

WEEK 1: JANUARY 7-13, 2019

Sherri Dietrich, UTO Board President, Diocese of Maine

READ: ROMANS 1:1-3:8

REFLECT:

Paul often begins his letters with his “credentials,” as he does in Romans. It’s a lot of information that must have been important for his original readers to read, but it isn’t particularly inspiring to us 2,000 years later. We already know the story of Jesus and his disciples who were empowered to spread Christianity throughout the known world, and Paul doesn’t need to defend his right to write about Christ and faith at this point. But I am always moved by the greeting to his readers that follows, which is usually some version of the one in Romans 1:8: “I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world.” It may have been just the “Dear Reader” salutation of his age, but it’s lovely and it reminds me both of all the people I love and of the eternal importance of proclaiming our faith. Evangelism hasn’t always been embraced by Episcopalians, and it can be pretty scary to share your faith in a “post-Christian” age, but Presiding Bishop Michael Curry has reminded us that Christianity is indeed good news that’s too good not to share.

Now that I’m the United Thank Offering Board president, Paul’s greeting feels even more personal and significant to me because it’s just how I feel about all of the people who participate in UTO. UTO grants proclaim our faith throughout the world and help provide buildings and programs that allow others to then proclaim their faith to their neighbors, and I thank my God for every one of you.

DIG DEEPER:

1. Whom do you thank God for every time you remember them?

2. Are there people who thank God because your faith has been proclaimed to them?

3. What first steps could you take to proclaim your faith throughout the world?

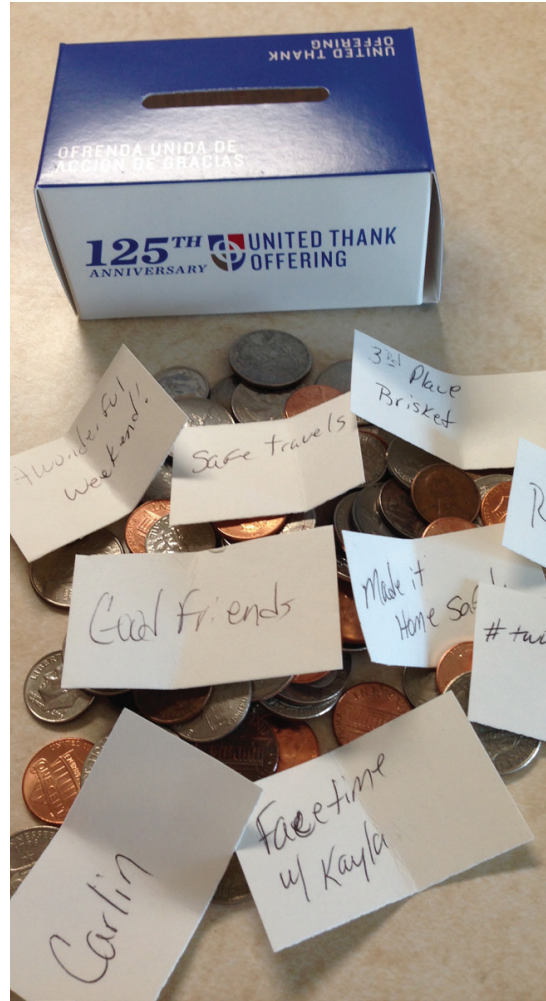


About the Author and the United Thank Offering (UTO):

Sherri Dietrich is president of the United Thank Offering Board. She lives gratefully in Midcoast Maine with her wife, cat, and 23 chickens, and often feels closest to God in her garden.

The United Thank Offering (UTO) invites all Episcopalians to participate in a personal spiritual discipline of gratitude and giving. For more than 128 years, UTO has distributed small Blue Boxes to Episcopalians asking them to place a coin in the box for each good thing that happens in their life. These boxes are collected annually in parishes and dioceses and then throughout the whole Church. All of the thank offerings are then distributed as grants to support innovative mission and ministry in The Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion. Please note that 100 percent of donations to UTO are given away the following year, and each year UTO receives more requests for grants than it can fund. We hope that hearing the stories of some of UTO grants will inspire you to participate more fully in UTO so that we can increase our thank offerings and support more innovative ministry projects like the ones you will learn about each week. To learn more about UTO, please visit:

unitedthankoffering.org or episcopalchurch.org/uto



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THIS WEEK I AM THANKFUL FOR:

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WEEK 2: JANUARY 14-20, 2019

The Rev. Dr. Steven Robb, Founder of Lego Love, Diocese of Rochester (NY)

READ: ROMANS 3:9-5:21

REFLECT:

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand. – Romans 5:1-2d

These writings remind us of the importance of not assuming that doing all sorts of good works gets us to the front of the line when we reach the Pearly Gates. Paul tells us that righteousness comes not through good works, but through faith. Faith then leads to endurance, which leads to character, which leads to hope. This faith is a gift from God – we cannot earn it, but we can live into it, loving God with all our hearts and minds and souls, and loving our neighbors as Jesus loved us.

I was struck, in rereading the above passage, by the word “peace.” We have “peace with God” because of faith. Perhaps this is the greatest gift we are given – the opportunity to be at peace with our God and to be servants as his Son served us, without worries, fears, or reservations. Sometimes I feel that I’m in perpetual “rush” mode – doing this job or getting to that meeting or joining this fundraiser or visiting that person. Whatever I’m trying to do all too often lacks any sense of peace. So when I read Romans 5:1-2, I stop and let that wonderful silence that evokes the presence of God wash over me. And I find that where faith is strong so is, deep within me, God’s peace. What a wonderful sense of gratitude this brings to me! Is this what grace is all about? Perhaps. This is my prayer: that we all can, through that peace that really does pass all human understanding, hear a small voice telling us, “Keep the faith, you good and loyal servant; for you are a beloved child of Mine.”

DIG DEEPER:

1. In what ways can we best show our gratitude to God for loving us so deeply?

2. How does your faith sustain you in your mission work?

3. How do we resolve the conflict between “in God’s time” and “in our time” when doing mission work?



About the Author and Grant Site:

The Rev. Dr. Stephen S. Robb has served Webster, New York, as a family physician for 28 years. He is a graduate of Davidson College, Jefferson Medical College, and Colgate Divinity School (CRCDS). His goal is to emulate Albert

Schweitzer, his role model for caring, carrying both stethoscope and cross on mission trips throughout Central America. He is married to Sally, his wife of 43 years, and has two sons and two Frenchies!

UTO Companion Grant with Costa Rica

Lego Love: Construction of a School/Community Center in Cartagena
This project will build a school/community center in Cartagena, Costa Rica, including a meeting room for community gatherings, a kitchen for proper food handling, and four classrooms with resources to educate 80 children ages 6-18, in order to help restore dignity to an impoverished community suffering too long from racism and injustice.

To learn more about Lego Love, please visit

gofundme.com/Hope4-Children-of-Cartagena



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THIS WEEK I AM THANKFUL FOR:

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WEEK 3: JANUARY 21-27, 2019

The Rev. Ranjit Mathews, Rector of St. James, Diocese of Connecticut

READ: ROMANS 6:1-8:8

REFLECT:

I am thankful for how the death-dealing ways of the world have been overcome through the cross of Jesus Christ. It gives the people of Jesus this incredible ministry of “repairing the breach” of the world as it is, and the world as it should be. I am beyond grateful for the opportunity to walk with the disciples of Jesus Christ here at St. James, in New London, Connecticut, as we walk this journey of racial reconciliation within our community and the broader community of New London and southeastern Connecticut. It’s a matter of being pieces of scripture, as the great biblical scholar Verna Dozier said so well, pieces of scripture out in the world. It takes boldness to step into the power of the Holy Spirit, which has been so mightily given to us through the gift of baptism. We are disciples of the Jesus Movement and endeavor to dismantle the ongoing, systemic realities of racism in our local and broader society. I believe that this is, more broadly, the very calling of baptized Christians. And we should not be afraid of stepping out and claiming through the Holy Spirit the new eschatological reality – the realm of God breaking into the world, as C. H. Dodd has aptly put it.

I wonder if, as Episcopalians, we take on the power of being alive in Jesus Christ. This may sound evangelical, but that is the calling: to be dead to sin and alive in Christ. And that’s the genius of Paul’s letter to the Romans. He’s exhorting them to cast off sin, but also to be alive in Christ. That means, then, that our lives are qualitatively different from where they once were and our life should take on a distinct saltiness. I am beyond grateful for the transformation that we have been invited into through Jesus Christ. Too often, as Episcopalians, our lives don’t give off that saltiness, and yet this is the ministry that has been entrusted to us as the Body of Christ.

My sincere hope is that our group of disciples can dare to believe that the Holy Spirit is actually leading us out and about onto the streets of New London and into the neighborhood to BE the people that we so often pray we were. My prayer is that we take our calling seriously enough to venture outside our comfort zone and repair the breach through the power of the Holy Spirit.

DIG DEEPER:

1. What is stopping you from being BOLD in defying the death-dealing principalities of this world, and leaning into the vision of the realm of God that is ever before us?

2. Who are the partners in ministry that will join you out in the neighborhood, boldly living into the call of Jesus Christ?

3. How can you partner with other Gospel value-oriented organizations that are doing this work in your own city or town?

4. Public ministry is inherently political because of the nature of being people out in the public square. Are you willing to take on the slings and arrows of being called “political” for the sake of the Gospel?



About the Author and Grant Site:

The Rev. Ranjit K. Mathews is the 22nd rector of St. James Episcopal Church in New London, Connecticut. Prior to serving at St. James, Ranjit served on the Presiding Bishop's staff for three and a half years as the partnership officer for Africa. He loves being a priest of the Episcopal

branch of the Jesus Movement! He is married to Johanna Kuruvilla, and together they have a son named Dhruv and a puppy named Samara, and they all in New London.

Bridging the Racial Divide

St. James Episcopal Church of New London will hold community conversations with area churches and nonprofits addressing racial discrimination, racism, and strategies to support those impacted by racism. Community conversations can often be courageous conversations, especially if across racial and ethnic lines. Our hope is that these conversations would also help to serve the youth that we hope to engage with over the summer, in similar conversations. The project includes a five-day camp for young people to discuss identity, culture, ethnicity, and racial justice issues. Conversations across difference may be what the Gospel looks like here for disciples here in New London. With the racial differences, it can be easy to stick to our own groups and to what is comfortable or safe, and yet the Gospel is always calling to go beyond our own comfort.

To learn more about this project, please visit stjamesnl.org



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THIS WEEK I AM THANKFUL FOR:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

WEEK 4: JANUARY 28-FEBRUARY 3, 2019

The Well, Lexington, Kentucky

READ: ROMANS 8:9-10:4

REFLECT:

There are themes throughout these chapters that Paul communicates to us. These themes are meant to aid in a mindset shift that actually makes our lives easier. When we attempt to control, worry, condemn, or facilitate, we are leaving God completely out of it. When really, the Holy Spirit is in us and interprets to God on our behalf, even when we do not know how to articulate our needs. The hope is believing and resting in the knowledge of two truths expressed in these chapters: 1) God knows us before we are born and knows our purpose and 2) there is nothing on earth nor in heaven that can separate us from God's love, as is explained in Romans 8:31-38. We cannot even rationalize our way out of it. We cannot control our way out of it. We cannot plan or stress our way out of it. If we accept the unconditional love of God and rest in seeking God's plan, we lift heavy burdens from ourselves, making life easier and more joyful and in turn give God the glory that was intended.

DIG DEEPER:

1. Romans 8:31 goes in depth explaining all the ways we CANNOT be separated from God's love, that God's love is unconditional and infinite. It is difficult, at times, to grasp that we are infinitely loveable. How can this knowledge shape our mindset toward ourselves? How can it shape forgiveness of self? Forgiveness of others?

2. Romans 9:32-33 explains that the Israelites were so focused on keeping the laws that they lacked trust in God, which resulted in stumbling over the "great rock in their path." Where in our lives do we focus more on the "law" or "rules" rather than trust God and rest in God's unconditional love? Looking at how you responded to the previous question, can you acknowledge that it is not about what we do, but about what God has done?



About the Author and Grant Site:

The Well of Lexington provides a holistic program of safe housing, recovery support, education, and healing for women exploited by sex trafficking to empower them to reach economic independence and live productive lives. The women who helped with this writing have faced many kinds of darkness. Our job is to be the light that helps them stand in their own power.

In 2018, The Well received a grant from UTO to develop green cleaning products. To learn more about The Well or to support its ongoing work, visit thewelllexington.com

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WEEK 5: FEBRUARY 4-10, 2019

Katelyn Kenney, UTO Intern

READ: ROMANS 10:5-11:36

REFLECT:

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. – Romans 10:12

“In Christ There Is No East or West” is one of my favorite hymns, partially because I enjoyed playing the song on my flute with the church choir back when I was in high school, but also because of its unifying message.

*In Christ there is no east or west,
in him no south or north,
but one great fellowship of love
throughout the whole wide earth.*

The melody is bouncy and joyful, which makes this a fun hymn to sing, but it also embodies the vision of a unified kingdom of heaven where all are welcome and all are loved. In Romans 10:12, Paul states that there is no distinction between Jew or Greek, a sentiment that is expanded in Galatians 3:28:

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

We live in a world that lives by labels. When everything and everyone has a label, we can easily categorize and separate the things and people we like from the things and people we don't like. Some labels can be a source of pride, others can harbor painful memories and shame, but all labels serve in some form or another as a means to distinguish some groups from others. I could go on about how labels are placed intentionally to divide and oppress people, but listen to what Paul is saying: “There is no distinction between Jew or Greek.” There is no good or bad, clean or unclean, immigrant or citizen, gay or straight. There is only one great fellowship of God's children, each one being grafted onto the root of love that supports and sustains us.

DIG DEEPER:

1. What labels do you wear that you yearn to cast off?

2. How have you labeled and categorized someone before getting to know that person?

3. What steps can you and your ministry or congregation take to welcome all who desire to be grafted into God’s kingdom?

4. How can a posture of gratitude shape how we welcome and celebrate difference?



About the Author:

Katelyn Kenney is in the second year of her term as the Julia Chester Emery Intern for the United Thank Offering and is currently serving at the Office of Government Relations (OGR). In the previous year of her internship,

she participated in the Texas Episcopal Service Corps while also partnering with Missional Voices, an organization founded around sharing innovative ministry stories. Katelyn graduated from the University of Houston with a B.A. in Print Journalism and a minor in Leadership Studies. During her time at OGR, she will work closely in domestic policy with a specific focus on environmental issues and social justice.

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WEEK 6: FEBRUARY 11-17, 2019

The Venerable Janice L. Grinnell, Archdeacon of Diocese of Rhode Island,
Center for Reconciliation

READ: ROMANS 12:1-13:10

REFLECTION:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect. – Romans 12:2 (NRSV)

Personal transformation is not easy. Most people do not like change. That is a generalization, but I know that change is a challenge for me.

Some changes are easier than others. It can be fun to move around the furniture in our family room or take a trip to a place where we have never been before. But personal transformation is not simple. That is the type of transformation that Paul is talking about in Romans when he challenges us to renew our minds. He is asking us to embrace personal transformation to open our minds, hearts, and souls to become people who can discern the will of God.

The Center for Reconciliation (CFR) is an organization that was formed in the Diocese of Rhode Island to effect change. It is dedicated to educating, engaging, and equipping people to look at the truth of racism in our society, in our church, and in our individual lives. This important work is our diocesan response to the many resolutions adopted by several General Conventions. In particular, the CFR is our response to Resolution A-123 adopted in 2006 that asked the dioceses of The Episcopal Church to repent of the sin of racism. Rhode Island is the home to the largest slave trade activity in the USA. It is estimated that 60 percent or more of all slaves in the U.S. and Caribbean came on ships launched from Rhode Island. Our church's roots are directly connected with the slave trade, the enslavement of people, and the profits that were reaped as a result of this horrific time in our history.

Romans 13:9 says, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” In order to be truly engaged in a new life in Christ, we need to be open to racial healing, which will ignite racial justice, which will ultimately enable racial reconciliation. We can only truly be engaged in the transformation of our minds by embracing our own truth and being open to the truth as told by our neighbor’s story. Truth-telling is the foundation for all transformation.

DIG DEEPER:

1. How has your life been transformed into a new life in Christ? How did this transformation take place?

2. How do you show your gratitude for transformation in your life?

3. How have you engaged in understanding the roots of racism in our country and in our culture?

4. Where do you see racism still active in your community? What steps can you take to help eradicate racism?



About the Author and Grant Site:

The Ven. Janice L. Grinnell is archdeacon of the Diocese of Rhode Island and a director on the Center for Reconciliation (CFR) Board. Jan was one of the founders of the CFR, and is currently the chaplain to the University of Rhode Island (URI) from St. Augustine's – The Episcopal Center at URI. She is married to Ann Hamm and is passionate about racial reconciliation and growing the diaconate in our Church.

The Center for Reconciliation (CFR) focuses its work around:

- Educating people about the history of slavery, the slave trade, racism, systemic injustice, and their current implications
- Equipping people to process and constructively discuss racial and other prejudicial topics
- Engaging in the practice of racial reconciliation to build a more just society

The Cathedral of St. John in Providence, Rhode Island, was closed in 2012 due to declining membership and the need for renovations. When Bishop Nicholas Knisely arrived, the future of the cathedral was discussed in forums. Archdeacon Grinnell attended a conference where she saw the documentary *Traces of the Trade*, which highlights Rhode Island's involvement in the slave trade (more than 60 percent of the slaves in the United States came on Rhode Island ships), and she thought of a center for reconciliation at the cathedral. When presented at forums, it quickly gained support and was affirmed by a vote at diocesan convention. The CFR was formed in 2014 and began programs in 2015. It moved into the cathedral along with Church Beyond the Walls (CBW), a street church community that seeks to bring reconciliation to its members and to provide young adult ministry focused on a new generation who can become voices of reconciliation in their generation.



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THIS WEEK I AM THANKFUL FOR:

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WEEK 7: FEBRUARY 18-24, 2019

Teresa Henry and Anne Skamarock, Colorado Haiti Project

READ: ROMANS 13:11-15:6

REFLECT:

Why not put off today what we can do tomorrow? This has long been part of the human condition, as even Paul in the first century is relaying. The time is NOW to start living into what God would have us be, “for salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers” (13:11) he tells the Roman followers of Christ (and us). And what does Paul say is required to bring us closer to God’s dream for us?

First Paul exhorts, “Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (13:13-14). But what does this mean for our everyday interactions with one another?

“Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another” (14:13). There are two parts to this: one about judgment and the second about intentionally putting up roadblocks. For the Colorado Haiti Project, over our nearly 30 years working with the area of Petit Trou de Nippes, Haiti, we have learned that we don’t have all the answers. When we first arrived in Haiti, we wanted to share God’s gifts that we have been fortunate enough to be born into, like an education, health care, and all the privileges we take for granted living in the United States. At first, we felt that we knew what was best – that they needed education and health care, and they did. But we thought we knew what kind of education would help them the most. Fortunately, the people of this area were patient with us, and as the relationship grew, we started listening to one another. We found that just because they have different ways of addressing challenges in their

own society doesn't mean they are wrong and we are right. In fact, this interaction and this relationship have given us insight into how to address our own challenges in ways we had not thought of before. We listened to these people who primarily support themselves through the bounty of their crops and finally created an agriculture curriculum as part of St. Paul's School.

Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand. – Romans 14:4

When meeting the people of Haiti, rather than reacting immediately to preconceptions and judgment, we need to have enough respect to honor each person and each culture and to understand at a deep level that we can learn from one other. We are all so blessed and grateful for the lessons we have learned from our brothers and sisters in Haiti. I have often heard Americans come home from a visit to this part of Haiti saying, "These people are so poor but are also so happy." Truly, they may not always be happy, no one is. But they can be happy in their sense of community and family, which is so apparent when we are fortunate enough to visit. I think the Lord has made them stand together. They have grown where they were planted. The goal of the Colorado Haiti Project is to provide water and fertilizer so that they and we can grow together into what God would have us be, so that we can all stand together.

It is easy for us to fall into the complacency and the false comfort of tribalism, that is, believing our own group has all the answers for everyone else. However, we at the Colorado Haiti Project have found that, when we open ourselves to the Haitian culture and ways of doing things and we are able to do so without judgment, we are taking part in God's call to us to truly love one another. "May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (15:5-6).

DIG DEEPER:

1. When have you met “the other” and immediately judged their clothes, living situation, or intellect before getting to know them? How did that make you feel?

2. When working with other cultures and peoples, like in Haiti, where access to medical, educational, and economic resources is limited or nonexistent, what is your motivation? Are you interested in truly being present and listening with respect to “resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another,” or just making yourself feel like you are doing good?

3. Reflect on a situation in the past where you have been fighting for a cause (it doesn't have to be a big cause). Was it worth the emotional capital you invested, especially if it caused animosity or division between you and your community? How do you think your judgments fit into the bigger picture and God's plan?

4. As humans, we often put off today what we can do tomorrow. Make a list of things you can do every day to "lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy" (13:12-14).



About the Authors and Grant Site:

Teresa Henry is the current board vice president of the Colorado Haiti Project (CHP), which she has enthusiastically promoted and supported since 2007. She

founded the Livelihood (formerly Vocational) Development Program in 2012 to offer education in agriculture, entrepreneurship, and vocational and professional studies to the communities of the Nippes region of Haiti. Through outreach events and numerous visits to Haiti each year, Teresa ignites a contagious passion for CHP everywhere she goes. Teresa has been a florist all her life, graduating from the University of Illinois with a degree in Ornamental Horticulture. She was the owner of Boulder Blooms for 12 years and still enjoys any floral assignment. Her greatest passion is travel and fun with her crazy and loving family.

Anne Skamarock is a past board member and executive director for the Colorado Haiti Project and continues to volunteer with CHP. She traveled to Petit Trou de Nippes in 2005 and 2015 and was thrilled and amazed at the change accomplished by CHP together with the people of the area in those 10 years. Anne is a marketing consultant who has spent 40 years working with enterprise computer systems, storage, and software technology companies. Anne has held positions in large and small companies, has been part of a number of successful startups, and has run her own consulting business. Anne and her husband, Bill, love traveling and learning about new places, people, and cultures.

The Colorado Haiti Project has been working with community leaders in the rural town of Petit Trou de Nippes, Haiti, for more than 28 years, supporting community-driven programs in education, community health, water and hygiene, girls' and women's empowerment, and agriculture. CHP provides resources to Haitian leaders, building bridges from the U.S. to Haiti that provide vital support for local vision and leadership.

The Colorado Haiti Project received two grants from United Thank Offering that enabled CHP to start an agricultural education program at St. Paul's School in Petit Trou de Nippes. The work continues and all



plans from the community are for future development in this impactful agriculture program!

The first UTO grant was for *Increasing Career Readiness of Students in Rural Haiti*, which supported the community with faith, hope, and love. The main focus was on hope. The purpose of the project was to increase the career readiness and entrepreneurial skills of secondary school students in Petit Trou de Nippes, to expand Petit Trou's educated workforce, and to create new chances for economic growth and opportunity. The program focused on agricultural and business/entrepreneurial training, as this area of study is most likely to offer job opportunities in the community upon graduation.

The second grant was for *Creating Opportunities for Eco-Friendly and Healthy Livelihoods in Haiti* to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and to sustain and renew the life of the earth. The purpose of the project was to reforest with a focus on improving nutrition, strengthen family gardens and small animal husbandry programs at St. Paul's School, train area producers in eco-friendly practices, and empower girls with nutrition and agriculture skills.

Because of these grants, an incredible agriculture education program has been introduced to more than 100 middle school students in rural Haiti. An agronomist has been hired to be a community resource to local farmers, the girls' clubs have held agriculture-focused programs at their summer camps, and hundreds of trees have been planted. The program continues to grow, and the acceptance and even enthusiasm for the program are strong. For the last two years, there has been an agriculture festival at St. Paul's, highlighting the success of the program. Through this festival and preparation for it, the students learn about entrepreneurship and agriculture production.

To learn more about the Colorado Haiti Project and ways you can get involved, please visit coloradohaitiproject.org or call 303-938-5021.

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THIS WEEK I AM THANKFUL FOR:

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WEEK 8: FEBRUARY 25-MARCH 3, 2019

Dr. Caroline Carson

READ: ROMANS 15:7-16:16

REFLECT: *“Accept one another,” Paul writes.*

The vision of God’s righteousness is revealed in Christ. He calls us to treat one another with respect, to welcome one another (doing so as honored guests), and to accept one another without judgments. This is sometimes easier said than done. How can we have distinctions without divisiveness in the world today? There often seem to be such deep contrasts between the powers-that-be on every level and the powers from above that urge us toward changes. In the fathomless heart of God there is no division. This beautiful floating ball that is Earth harbors distinction in emergent creation, but it is not division.

Our mission as a Church includes compassion, justice, and reconciliation, and in order to fulfill that mission and truly know what it means, we need active relationships with others who are different from ourselves. Our distinction is bound and shines in our relationships with each other, but not by the division on which we humans often focus. Holding a personal ethic that does not insist on superiority over the world or others and that does not force its way over others but welcomes all as we are is one way to witness to God’s mission. Welcome opens doors for potential healing in an anxious world. Ways of welcome can include other key words and ideas in this rich passage. Proclaiming the good news is vital and a Christian duty. Prayer is a privilege and an opportunity to praise, lament, explore, and be vulnerable in the presence of holiness. Pray with and for each other. Support is what Paul requested from the communities he visited and those to which his colleagues would come. For the common good, we support each other in this life. Support can come from both gratitude and vulnerability. We must free the space that already exists where God might enter and bring peace to us and the world around us. Only by being vulnerable, can we begin to accept ourselves, thus making room for reception of others. “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”

DIG DEEPER:

1. How easy or difficult is it for you to proclaim the word of God to others?

2. How does this scripture speak to you in your current life situations?

3. Have you considered incorporating varied methods of personal prayer in your life?

4. How does your community support one another or others far away, overtly and behind the scenes?

5. How does your church receive a stranger/newcomer? With a flurry of instruction, opportunities, and food, or quiet distance?



About the Author and Grant Site:

Dr. Caroline Carson is finishing her senior year of seminary at the Sewanee School of Theology and was ordained a deacon on December 15, 2018. She hopes to return to her home Diocese of Louisiana to serve as priest after graduation. Coming from an almost 20-year career as a

conductor and professor, her ministry passions include global mission and partnerships, systematic theology, and liturgical music. Caroline hopes to be a resource in mission and liturgy and music for her future church, diocese, and beyond. She sees life through lenses of enthusiasm and peacemaking, and she loves space and her cat, Bluebell!

Introducing Pastoral Care for Refugees in Egypt

My UTO project involved introducing pastoral care to refugees who came through the Refugee Egypt organization to the Diocese of Egypt with North Africa and the Horn of Africa. This Episcopal/Anglican diocese is within the **Province of Jerusalem** and the Middle East in the worldwide **Anglican Communion**. It extends over eight countries: Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, and Djibouti.

I got to know the Refugee Egypt organization, its staff, and many refugees who came through during the month I was in Egypt. I sat with refugees and heard their stories about walking to the border of Sudan, crossing the country, and arriving in Cairo with children in tow. I prayed with them. I heard tragedies of what it is like to live in the middle of a corrupt area with rebel factions stealing your land, house, and food and killing your friends or your wife. I listened, prayed, and shared tea with them. It was visceral and dramatic and is what millions experience along portions of their personal timelines as they migrate across vast lands to find shelter, begin a new life, renew hope, and attempt to preserve their heritage. Many arrive at the center still in shock at being uprooted or in poor health due to such lengthy travel with limited, if any, rations. I had seen this shock in other refugees while I was in Rome. It moves you. It demands your heart. It changes you. Some were sick, some frantic, some hopeless, and

some hopeful. Everyone handles the world's darkness in his/her own way. Sometimes, simply being with someone helps. Often, being able to share an experience gives it shared value and opens one up to make room for healing. I also worked with refugees in career training and helped teach English communications for interviews, meetings, etc. We had fun! I am still in touch with these wonderful souls. I volunteered as photographer at events and churches, reintroduced Taizé worship (planned and implemented several services), attended clergy meetings, explored outreach programs, and gave a workshop on well-being. The workshop was hosted by the diocese's Bridges Cultural program, which aims to gather community members (including some refugees) of Muslim and Christian faiths for sharing, learning, and social interactions. It included music and movement, confidence-building exercises, healthy habits for personal well-being, and an introduction to types of meditation and the purposes and methods of each. It was well received and there was hope that I may return. Indeed, I want to return and build upon this relationship with the people there, strengthening ties with The Episcopal Church and this branch of our Anglican Communion.



GRATITUDE JOURNAL

THIS WEEK I AM THANKFUL FOR:

[illegible]

WEEK 9: MARCH 4-5, 2019

The Rev. JK Melton, Doctoral Candidate, Fordham University, Diocese of Colorado

READ: ROMANS 16:17-17:27

REFLECT:

Tucked in between two helpful pieces of theology – an admonition about dissention and doxological praise to God – is a glimpse into the life of the early church: greetings among friends and acquaintances. As I read this passage, these greetings strike me as a reminder of how to live in community and gratitude over great distances.

I am reminded of times I have extended greetings and received them, often while traveling. “Please give your colleague, my old friend, my best,” or “Do tell your spouse that I said hello.” These greetings create and sustain connection. One example of this in my daily life is when people always are telling me to give my daughters a hug from them. In all of these greetings there is an act of love. It is easy to pass over, but in a world that is often cold and aloof, these small acts are worth dwelling on.

I do not write as many letters as I should. Too much of my keeping in touch is through social media or text messaging. I wonder, instead, how my longer-distance relationships would feel if I wrote letters, like Paul. I could write about my work and my faith and my family. What is more, I could add greetings from my friends and family to my far-flung friends and their loved ones.

While we should be cautious around people who stir up dissent, and while we should offer proper praise to God, let us also focus on the people around us, as well as their friends and family members with whom we are acquainted, and let’s show them a sign of love, too, with a simple greeting.

DIG DEEPER:

1. When have you received greetings that surprised you and made you grateful for a friend, colleague, or family member whom you have not seen recently?

2. To whom could you send a letter? And whom else should you send greetings to when you write that letter?

3. How might developing relationships be related to issues like managing disagreements (in the church and beyond) and offering praise to God?



About the Author:

The Rev. JK Melton is a priest in the Diocese of Colorado and a doctoral candidate and teaching fellow in the Department of Theology at Fordham University.

GRATITUDE JOURNAL

THIS WEEK I AM THANKFUL FOR:

[illegible]

NEXT STEPS

Now that you've completed the journey through Romans and are on the eve of Ash Wednesday, we want to invite you to continue on the journey with us through Lent to Easter. UTO has created a Lenten Calendar that shares the story of the 2018 UTO Grants and invites you to consider the blessings of your life each day. You can download the Lenten Calendar from episcopalchurch.org/uto.

If the Good Book Club was your first experience with UTO, we want to invite you to learn more about the ministry and work of UTO by visiting episcopalchurch.org/uto where you will find resources to develop your own personal spiritual discipline of gratitude or to help others in your congregation learn about the importance of gratitude. Each year, UTO collects thank offerings from around The Episcopal Church and gives every penny away to support innovative mission and ministry in The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion through two grant cycles (the first Friday of August through the first Friday of November for Young Adults and Seminarian Grants, and the first Friday of December through the first Friday of March for our Annual Grants). If you want to learn more about UTO, please contact the Rev. Canon Heather Melton at hmelton@episcopalchurch.org.

Thank you for being on the journey with us this Epiphany. We hope you enjoyed reading Romans and the reflections in this booklet and spending time wrestling with Paul.

We wish you a holy and blessed Lent.

The UTO Board and Staff



Lent 2019

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
For every item I have on this list, I commit to placing: In my UTO Blue Box.		Mar 6 Ask Wednesday Give thanks today for the journey of Lent.	7 Spain # of times you exercise per week	8 Kenya # of water faucets in your house	9 EMM # of non-"American" restaurants in your town (eg, Mexican, Hungarian, Italian)	10 1st Sunday of Lent Give thanks today for the ways your church community has blessed you.
11 Arizona # of houses you've lived in as an adult	12 Connecticut # of camps/retreats you've attended in your lifetime	13 Convocation of Churches in Europe # of cabinets in your kitchen	14 Alaska # of jobs you've held	15 Dallas # of refrigerators and/or freezers in your home	16 El Camino Real # of bridges in your town	17 2nd Sunday of Lent Give thanks today for the ways your home blesses you.
18 Idaho # of schools in your town	19 Iowa # of faith groups in your town	20 Iowa COMP # of rooms in your house	21 Lexington # of cleaning products in your house	22 Louisiana # of performances (theater, concerts) you've attended in the last 6 months	23 Maryland # of locks on your house	24 3rd Sunday of Lent Give thanks today for the ways your family bless you.
25 Massachusetts COMP Tanga # of people who can fit around your table	26 Newark # of years you attended school	27 North Carolina # of Christian churches in your town	28 ND COMP SD # of vehicles you own	29 Northern MI # of podcasts or radio stations you listen to	30 Rhode Island # of lights in your house	31 4th Sunday of Lent Give thanks today for the ways your friends bless you
April 1 Rochester COMP Costa Rica # of appliances in your kitchen	2 South Dakota # of books you own in your native language	3 Southern Ohio # of outreach ministries you support	4 SWVA # of community centers in your town (library, town hall, aquatic center)	5 SW FL # of varieties of vegetables in your fridge	6 Upper SC # of young people in your life	7 5th Sunday of Lent Give thanks today for the meaningful work you have in your life.
8 Utah # of pairs of shoes you own	9 Virginia # of bathrooms in your house	10 Southern Ohio # of loved ones who have died in the last year & give thanks for the ways their life blessed yours	11 New York # of friends who attend a different church than yours	12 Virginia # of times you've gone to church this year	13 Vermont # of peace poles or parks in your town	14 Palm Sunday Give thanks today for your life, and your journey.
15 W.NC # of National Parks you've visited in the last five years	16 Haiti # of garden beds or pots in your yard	17 Central Florida # of people you'll invite to church on Easter	18 Maudy Thursday Louisiana # of faith formation groups at your church	19 Good Friday Navajoland # of tables in your house	20 Tamale, Ghana # of musical instruments or speakers in your house	21 Easter Day



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The Episcopal Church Center
815 Second Avenue
New York, New York 10017