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Episcopal Church
celebrates 40 years
of women in
the priesthood.



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Episcopal Church in Connecticut
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The Episcopal Church
(www.episcopalchurch.org) is a community of two million members in 110 dioceses across the United States and in 13 other countries. It is a province of the Anglican Communion.

The Anglican Communion
(www.anglicancommunion.org) is a global community of 85 million Anglicans in 44 regional and national member churches in more than 165 countries.

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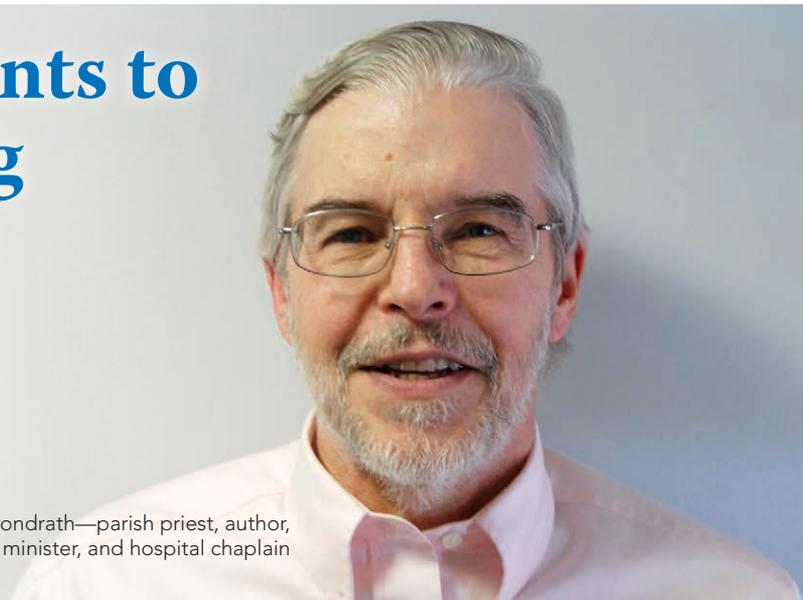


Front Cover photo
The Rt. Rev. Laura J. Ahrens, first woman ordained bishop in CT greets the Rev. Joan Horwitt, first woman ordained priest in CT at the 40th anniversary celebration at the Cathedral in Hartford.

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Feelings as entry points to engaging and valuing differences

Bill Kondrath



The Rev. Bill Kondrath—parish priest, author, teacher, campus minister, and hospital chaplain

When I was growing up, my father’s mother lived with us for several years. I have fond memories of coming home from school with my brother and a couple of our friends to the smell of Grandma’s homemade donuts. My memories from that time are tinged with sadness because Grandma spoke very little English and my father refused to teach my brother and me more than a few words of Hungarian.

Dad grew up on a farm in Ohio. His first language was Hungarian, though he also learned English early from his five older brothers and sisters. At school, he spoke only English in order to “fit in” and be a “real American.” Later, dad wanted to be sure that my brother and I did not experience any of the suspicion or prejudice he experienced growing up as a child of immigrants. The price I paid was not learning a second language, when it would have been easy as a child, and not being closer to my grandmother.

Though he spoke English with no foreign accent and continued to be able to converse and write in Hungarian all his life, he never thought of himself as bi-lingual or bi-cultural. And when my older daughter went to Japan at age 16 for a year, he couldn’t understand why she gave up a year of high school, family, and friends to do such a strange thing. (He wouldn’t have been any happier if she had gone to Hungary.) He died before she went to Cambodia with the Peace Corps. I don’t think he would have understood that either.

Having learned English and bought into his U.S. citizenship 120 percent, I think he believed that being American and speaking English only was superior to any other way of being. He would not have understood that that he had “internalized” the language and cultural oppression that he experienced as a small child — that he had bought into other people’s notion that he was less than they were because

he was the child of immigrants and knew more than one language.

I suspect my parents, especially my dad, experienced shame, growing up as a son of immigrant farmers. He saw his own ethnic difference as inferior to those around him. I think he was afraid of religious, ethnic, and racial differences. He didn’t have much patience for, or curiosity about, cultural differences. And, as a shop manager, he was angry because he believed that newer immigrants (from Mexico and China in particular) had not worked as hard as he had to leave behind their language and culture.

As a white, heterosexual, economically-comfortable, and ordained male, I have a lot of unearned privileges and benefits in society and in the church. The messages I received as a child planted and reinforced the idea that being straight, white, male, English-speaking American, well-educated, wealthy, and Christian were better than any alternatives.

I grew up without the fears or anger of my father toward people from other cultures and without the internalized oppression he absorbed in his childhood. Instead I learned not to notice differences, to be “color blind,” which meant not noticing how groups of people are treated based on their skin color, gender, language, or country of origin. I believed that the hard work ethic and rugged individualism that helped my father fully accounted for his success in accomplishing the American dream.

I was mildly curious about people different from me. But it was not until I was in college

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Stimulus	Feeling	Message	Need or Response
Real or perceived danger	Fear	There is a danger or threat	Get safe; find protection and support
Real or perceived violation	Anger	Violation of boundaries or expectations	Renegotiate boundaries or expectations
Present or anticipated loss	Sadness	I have experienced loss	Get comfort and support to grieve
Awareness of connectness	Peace	I am centered; connected to God, self and others	Continue to be connected, centered
Accomplishment; Anticipated success	Agency or Power	I am competent and able	Foster competence; empower others
Inner gratitude, awe, wonder	Joy	I am excited, happy	Relish and share the joy

For an explication of this theory, see William Kondrath, *Facing Feelings in Faith Communities* (Alban Institute, 2013).

that I ventured into living in and working in an African American and Latino congregation, where I was one of just a few white people. Though the experience enriched my life enormously, it was only years later that I saw that it had given me the desire and skills to more see and understand differences, the humility to realize I didn't know everything and didn't need to pretend that I did, and the longing to live in a more technicolor, multicultural world, where differences, even the ones that are challenging and stir up uncomfortable feelings, add value to my life.

As I reflect on my daughters, now adults, I see the role emotions play in recognizing and valuing differences. My daughters are not scared or angry when they encounter people who are radically different from them. They are excited and curious. They see the possibility of personal and professional relationships that will add value to their lives and improve the quality of their work projects. They find joy in diversity.

So what does this mean to congregations, the diocese, and the wider church?

I suspect that learning to understand, value, and celebrate *all* the differences in our various communities will require exploring the feelings we harbor, but do not often express, about people we think we are not like. It will mean asking new questions: What are we afraid will happen when we engage with those who are different? What anger do we carry when we are/were treated as less than by someone else? What shame do we feel when we realize we have treated others as less than? What sadness are we willing to name when we have to give up some pattern of behavior that is familiar in order to make room for new relationships and interactions? What joy may emerge when someone new brings gifts and talents to our community that we did not previously have? How might our community be empowered in new ways when each person is able to show up as fully themselves with all their diversity?

When I have taken the risk to name and to come to terms with my own feelings and what they tell me I need, I have become more open to the people around me who have different attitudes, values, and beliefs. When I have asked others not only what they think, but what they feel about worship, community, work, or family, I hear stories told differently and I open myself to empathy rather than comparison and judgment.

The path to a more multicultural church travels through the landscape of emotional awareness — knowing what we are feeling, and being responsive to the feelings of others.

The Rev. Bill Kondrath is an Episcopal priest who taught leadership, supervision, and multiculturalism at Episcopal Divinity School. He is author of *God's Tapestry: Understanding and Celebrating Differences* (2008), *Facing Feelings in Faith Communities* (2013), and *Congregational Resources for Facing Feelings* (2013). He is a consultant with VISIONS, Inc., and has worked within the Episcopal Church in Connecticut. His work can be accessed at www.billkondrath.com.