

The Titusian

News Digest—September 2024



Youth And Young Adults Sunday



Carrie Matthews a nonagenarian celebrates birthday



Gathering on Sacred Ground with Presiding Bishop Michael Curry



CREATION CARE



**SAINT AMBROSE
EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

Titusians at the Pauli Murray Celebration



Presiding bishop speaks to 1,000 people during Sacred Ground's fall online launch event



Presiding Bishop Michael Curry spoke to more than 1,000 people gathered on Zoom Sept. 24, 2024, during a fall online launch event for Sacred Ground, a year-round, 11-part film-based antiracism curriculum for small-group discussions. Photo: Screenshot

[Episcopal News Service] “Sacred Ground is about freedom. It’s about the joyful liberty of the children of God,” Presiding Bishop Michael Curry told more than 1,000 people gathered on Zoom Sept. 24 during a fall online launch event for Sacred Ground. “God’s dream ... gets translated into practical ways of living that go forth from Sacred Ground groups, and go forth into the world as instruments and agents of the freedom ... intended for all of God’s children from the very beginning of creation,” Curry said.

[Sacred Ground](#) is a year-round, 11-part film-based antiracism curriculum for small-group discussions that initially was developed as a resource to learn about the history of racism in the United States and how that racism continues to manifest itself today in American social interactions and institutions, including church. It contains documentary films and readings that focus on Indigenous, Black, Latino, Asian and Pacific Islander histories as they intersect with European American histories. Participants also examine examples of systemic racism in today’s America, such as mass incarceration and its disproportionate effect on people of color. “It’s not just about the content; it’s not just about the learning. It’s the fact

that it’s happening in community,”

Andrea Lauerman, a part-time Sacred Ground program coordinator and a lay leader from the Diocese of Maine, said. “These small groups make a difference. This is where Jesus meets us. This is where we have accountability.”

The curriculum was designed [primarily](#) for white Episcopalians, but The Episcopal Church also welcomes people of color to participate.

Sacred Ground has been one of The Episcopal Church’s great Christian formation success stories since it launched in 2019. Thousands of groups have participated, and [participation surged in 2020](#) during a national reckoning with systemic racism that followed the killing that year of George Floyd and other Black Americans by white police officers and vigilantes.

The church now is working to maintain the initiative’s momentum with expanded staffing and the 90-minute fall launch event.

Earlier this year, the church's [Office for Racial Reconciliation](#) hired Lauerman and the **Rev. Valeria J. Mayo, a priest in the Diocese of North Carolina, through an anonymous donation from a Sacred Ground alum. Mayo is assisting as Sacred Ground's strategic consultant. One of the first things they did when they joined the staff was to create a [Facebook group](#) for volunteer Sacred Ground facilitators to share their experiences and best practices.**

Mayo, who is Black, expressed her gratitude for Curry helping to make racial reconciliation a top church-wide priority during his nine-year term as presiding bishop:

"The spirit of the Lord is in this place. I thank God for [Curry's] leadership and fidelity to this hard work – this long walk to freedom – and may we, all of us – God's children – experience that liberty," she said.

Webinar participants were able to ask questions and share their insights using Zoom's chat and Q&A functions. One person suggested that all Sacred Ground alumni should donate money to support the two active historically Black colleges with Episcopal roots, [Saint Augustine's University](#) in Raleigh, North Carolina, and [Voorhees University](#) in Denmark, South Carolina.

Many people asked if Sacred Ground would continue after Curry retires on Nov. 1. The Rev. Stephanie Spellers, canon to the presiding bishop for reconciliation, justice and creation care, noted that Presiding Bishop-elect Sean Rowe, who starts his nine-year term on Nov. 1, is a Sacred Ground alumnus.

"[Rowe] knows the power of this experience for LAUNCHING folks as transformative agents," Spellers wrote in the chat function.

"[Sacred Ground has] gotten deep in the soil of this church," Curry said.

The group spent time thanking Curry for his leadership and Spellers invited everyone to pray for him.

"May God continue to guide your feet, hold your hand and fill your heart as you continue to walk on sacred ground," Spellers said. "Walk in love, dear brother, knowing that you are beloved to God and to all of us, and you always will be."

Lauerman and Mayo concluded the webinar announcing that free, in-person regional facilitator gatherings are planned, with the first [scheduled](#) for Nov. 9-10 in Durham, North Carolina, at [St. Philip's Episcopal Church](#) and [St. Titus' Episcopal Church](#). The gatherings will serve as opportunities for networking, discussion and worship. The event will conclude with Eucharist at St. Titus'. The Rev. Miguel Bustos, The Episcopal Church's manager for racial reconciliation and justice, will preach.

-Shireen Korkzan is a reporter and assistant editor for Episcopal News Service. She can be reached at skorkzan@episcopalchurch.org.

Historically Black North Carolina church fights environmental racism through advocacy, education, creation

care By Shireen KorkzanPosted Sep 26, 2024



Through its healing garden, St. Ambrose Episcopal Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, supports environmental justice through horticultural therapy, which involves promoting human healing and rehabilitation through gardening activities. Photo: St. Ambrose Episcopal Church/Facebook

Episcopal News Service] For decades, the historically Black [St. Ambrose Episcopal Church](#) in southeastern Raleigh, North Carolina, has focused much of its ministry on improving its community through [environmental stewardship](#).

In the late 1950s, during the time of [Jim Crow segregation](#), Rochester Heights was established as the first planned subdivision in Raleigh for Black families; it was [built on wetlands](#) the city had for over 70 years used as a dumping ground for raw sewage and garbage. The wetlands are a floodplain for Walnut Creek, a tributary of the Neuse River.

St. Ambrose has [always dealt with](#) environmental problems. It was founded as a church for emancipated people of African descent in 1868 in Raleigh's Smoky Hollow neighborhood, one of a few places where freed Black people lived during enslavement. Smoky Hollow [got its name](#) from noxious gas emitted from idle trains at a nearby railway depot. In 1965, the church followed the growing Black population and moved from downtown Raleigh to Rochester

Heights. In the decades that followed, St. Ambrose has [adapted its ministry](#) to respond to flooding and other environmental hazards associated with its geography.

"God gives us the environment to be good stewards and good neighbors," the Rev. Jemonde Taylor, St. Ambrose's rector since 2012, told Episcopal News Service. "We have had a history of sinning against the environment, so how can churches be repairers of the relationship between humanity and creation? We fight against environmental racism and try to be good ecological neighbors with the environment."

[Environmental racism](#) – also known as environmental inequality, ecological racism or ecological apartheid – is a form of institutional racism where environmental hazards, such as landfills, power plants, hazardous waste disposal facilities and incinerators, are purposefully and disproportionately located in poor communities, usually predominantly populated by people of color.

Polluting nature with sewage and garbage is “misusing and wasting what God has given you,” Carolyn Winters, a longtime parishioner of St. Ambrose, told ENS.

If you’re not from here and you saw what it looked like, you may not think it as such a big deal – just somebody being lazy and dumping their trash. But it was more than that, because the city of Raleigh knew who was living in the area when they dumped raw sewage there,” she said. “It was affecting the community that I had grown to love in a very negative way, and it was affecting me because we had to breathe that polluted air.”

Winters is a founding member of [Partners for Environmental Justice](#), a secular nonprofit group of environmental advocates in southeastern Raleigh that began as a ministry committee of St. Ambrose and two other parishes, [Trinity Episcopal Church in Fuquay-Varina](#) and [St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Cary](#). In the late 1990s, members of the group – then known as Episcopalians for Environmental Justice – began cleaning up Walnut Creek. [Over time](#), they started collaborating with conservation organizations and academics, and business and community leaders. Partners for Environmental Justice was instrumental in the 2009 establishment of the [Walnut Creek Wetland Park](#), which includes nature preserves and hiking trails and an education center with a free library with nature-themed books for all ages.



The Ethiopian-inspired labyrinth at St. Ambrose Episcopal Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, is designed make water soak into the ground and avoid flowing into Walnut Creek, a tributary of the Neuse River. Photo: St. Ambrose Episcopal Church

“We’ve been doing this work for more than 25 years, but we still have plenty left to do,” Winters said. For St. Ambrose, working to eradicate environmental racism includes advocacy and civic engagement. For example, Taylor chairs the [Raleigh Stormwater Management Advisory Commission](#), which manages resources to protect public infrastructure and residential property. He also in 2020 started [ONE Wake](#), an organization of more than 50,000 people and over 50 nonprofits. ONE Wake’s first task was [taking on](#) one of the largest developers in the region that had proposed a 150-acre development, 3,000 feet upstream from St. Ambrose. The plan included razing 80 acres of forest, which would have increased the risk in Rochester Heights of flooding from stormwater runoff. After negotiating, the development added a flooding mitigation contingency to the plan. “Combating environmental racism is in the DNA of St. Ambrose, because we are doing it for the survival of our church, or else we cease to exist,” Taylor said. “Our efforts are not an exercise that’s detached from reality.”

Developing green infrastructure is also instrumental in environmental justice work for St. Ambrose. [In 2021](#), The Episcopal Church awarded St. Ambrose a \$24,000 Creation Care and Environmental Racism [grant](#) to establish [The Healing Pod](#), a project that combines mental health counseling and a wheelchair-friendly healing garden with raised garden beds and pollinator-friendly native flowers, as well as an Ethiopian-inspired labyrinth designed to make water soak into the ground and avoid flowing into Walnut Creek. The project was developed in addition to previous conservation efforts on the church’s six-acre campus, including building three rain gardens and rainwater cisterns that capture rainwater for irrigation use. Your theology must match your geography,” Taylor said. “That’s how we look to see how to serve both the worshiping community and the surrounding community.”

The project also includes developing St. Ambrose’s Wading Deep podcast that addresses “the impact of environmental racism, economic disenfranchisement and the resilience and resurrection of a community.” Presiding Bishop Michael Curry was in-

interviewed for Wading Deep's 11th episode in April 2023.

"[Creation care] is engagement with God's vision for the creation, for all of us from the beginning," Curry said in the podcast.

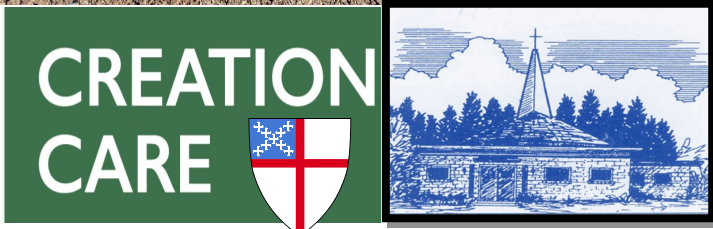
Through its [healing garden](#) situated fully enclosed in the church's courtyard, St. Ambrose also strives to support environmental justice through [horticultural therapy](#), which involves promoting human healing and rehabilitation through gardening activities. Studies show that horticultural therapy [can help improve](#) mental and physical well-being and reduce stress. Children and adults are welcome to plant, tend to and harvest fruits and vegetables in St. Ambrose's healing garden, which is open to the public. The church also hosts educational events throughout the year, such as herb potting and Malian bôgòlanfini – mud cloth – dyeing, and offers meditative activities in the healing garden to help promote self-care. Kirsten Reberg-Horton, a parishioner of St. Ambrose, is a professional landscape designer and therapeutic horticulturist who designed the church's healing garden. She told ENS that "aha" moments occur every time someone enters the garden, which "always leads to wonderful conversations."

"It's amazing to see parishioners come in and be like, 'That's how strawberries grow. That's how collards grow. I had no idea. And what role does the flower on the strawberry have in development? I want to learn,'" Reberg-Horton told ENS. "It's also amazing to see people taking home fresh food and feeling nurtured by it. ...Children adore the garden. They run out every week after church to see what's growing, and they look forward to helping harvest and plant and water the garden."

Taylor said every endeavor, whether it's advocacy work, education or addressing mental health, plays an important role in fighting for environmental justice.

"As a congregation, one of our guiding principles is the [last chapter of Revelation](#) – 22 – where St. John the Divine sees that a new heaven is coming to Earth and a new creation is being made," he said. "We're always striving to work toward not going back to

Eden, but to look forward to Revelation and how to make the signs of a new heaven and a new Earth visible and tangible today."



St. Titus's Garden welcomes helping hands to attend to our cutting flower mound, and vegetable and herb gardens. All are welcomed, whether your talents lie in donating compost, watering, seeding, planting, fertilizing, harvesting, cutting flowers, or donating garden tools. Currently, gardening takes place on Fridays from 10:00-11:00 a.m. However, we are considering meeting at an alternate time period to better accommodate people's schedules. Please contact Anne Hutchins (achvamc@aol.com) to learn more about the garden, ways you can volunteer your time and talent, and make donations.

Dr. Pauli Murray's childhood home opens as center to honor activist, inspire social justice work



Syrena Williams, guest presenter for Homecoming Celebration. She is a St. Titus' parishioner and the founder of **The One Experience-A Faith-Based Approach to Your Restoration and Recalibration**



Announcements and Upcoming Events

A LOOK AHEAD TO FALL

September 19	Vestry Meeting
September 21	STEC Parking Lot Ministry--NCCU vs. NC A&T
September 26	STEC Fall Leadership Intensive
September 29	Youth and Younger Adults Sunday
September 29	ECW Meeting
September 29	Pride Eucharist at St. Joseph's Episcopal Church
September 30	Ordination of Lachlan Hassman
October 1	National Night Out
October 2	Meeting of St. Titus' Clergy
October 5	Pauli Murray Center Pilgrimage
October 6	St. Titus' Worship at El Buen Pastor
October 10	STEC Fall Leadership Intensive
October 12	STEC Parking Lot Ministry--NCCU vs. Virginia-Lynchburg
October 13	Blessing of the Animals
October 15	Committee Reports Due
October 17	Vestry Meeting
October 24	STEC Fall Leadership Intensive
October 26	NCCU Ultimate Homecoming Experience Parade
October 26	STEC Parking Lot Ministry--NCCU vs. Morgan State University
October 31	Trunk or Treat
November 7	STEC Fall Leadership Intensive
November 10	Sacred Ground at St. Titus'
November 15	STEC Parking Lot Ministry--NCCU vs. Howard University
November 21	Vestry Meeting
December 1	St. Titus' Annual Meeting
December 15	Children's Christmas Pageant

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