

# **AN ANGLICAN THEOLOGY FOR THE STREETS**

**JUSTICE AND MERCY CONTENDING FOR SHALOM**

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**MATTHEW 25  
INITIATIVE**



## INTRODUCTION

In one of his more brilliant illustrations, C. S. Lewis likens theology to a map. With the aid of prior explorers, a map keeps you on course or opens up new vistas. Yet on its own, a map is dull. It must be used. Setting sail across the Atlantic is dangerous without a good map but, map in hand, we can push off from shore with confidence. A map and an expedition need each other, or both are ineffective.

Lewis's analogy can be extended to the relationship between theology and the mission of God. Like knowing and experiencing God, all Christians are invited to participate in the mission of God. We are all called to “do justice and love mercy,” (Micah 6:8) especially among the vulnerable and marginalized. Too often, we neglect this mission in favor of inward piety or Church growth strategies. But this mission was critical to Jesus's ministry. He announces, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free” (Luke 4:18). We are invited to *this* mission—*Jesus's mission*.

The Matthew 25 Initiative (M25) seeks to continue the mission of Jesus. The aim of M25 is “to equip, gather, connect, and offer refreshment for Anglican Church of North America (ACNA) practitioners working in ministries that serve the vulnerable, marginalized, and under-resourced.”<sup>1</sup> M25 holds a unique tension between two potential pitfalls. On one hand, it avoids an overemphasis on the earthly, or the rudderless ship of the “Social Gospel,” which devolves into a humanitarian “doing good.” On the other hand, it avoids an over-emphasis on the other-worldly, or the pursuit of “saving souls” without any genuine care for those souls or especially, the bodies of those souls.

M25 unites Justice and Mercy in contending for *Shalom*. Father Nicholas Krause, an ACNA Priest, has attempted to sketch a theology for Anglican mission with attention to these themes.<sup>2</sup> His goal is to provide a theological framework “for both clergy and practitioners to locate their individual and collective works of justice and mercy within a larger account of God's redemptive action in the world and the Church's social witness and mission.”<sup>3</sup>

The goal of my article is to continue this theologically rich conversation but in a more accessible way. By accessible, I mean inviting and, more importantly, making it attainable for the clergy or the stay-at-home parent corralling kids or those feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, or visiting the imprisoned (Matthew 25:35-36).

My goal, in other words, is to give Anglicans an easily readable map.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.anglicanjusticeandmercy.org/about-us>

<sup>2</sup> *Justice and Mercy Contending for Shalom: Towards an Anglican Social Theology*: <http://restorationarlington.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Justice-and-Mercy-Contending-for-Shalom.pdf>. References to this article are footnoted: “Krause, pg. #.”

<sup>3</sup> Krause, 1.

## AN UNKNOWN, REMEMBERED GATE: THE BIBLICAL & THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MISSION

*“We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
Through the unknown, remembered gate  
When the last of earth left to discover  
Is that which was the beginning”*

T. S. Eliot

A defining characteristic of orthodox Anglicanism is a commitment to both Scripture and the Christian tradition.<sup>4</sup> Both our theology and mission are grounded in each.

In order to know the goal of the Church’s mission, we have to start with the foundations. Some in the tradition articulated an idea you might guess from its Latin name “*exitus-reditus*”: as all goes out from God, so all returns to him. Said another way: if you want to know the end, you have to start from the beginning.

In the beginning, God created man and woman in his image (Genesis 1:27). We often focus on the reflective features of the image: we are like God in some ways. But the image is not merely reflective. We are called—from the Latin *vocare*, from which we get the word “vocation”—not only to be like God *but to be representatives of God on earth*. By bestowing his image upon us God delegates to us a share in his own rule over the world.<sup>5</sup> In short, we are invited to participate in what God is doing on earth.

If we had to sum up in one word what God is doing, the work in which we join God as representatives, a good candidate is *shalom*. Fr. Nicholas Krause says, “Creation was formed in, is ordered to, and will be consummated as shalom.”<sup>6</sup> In your Bible, this Hebrew word, and its New Testament counterpart *eirene*, is likely translated as “peace.” But *shalom* is more than the absence of violence. At the very least, it includes “material prosperity and well-being,” “peaceable and just social relations within and without one’s communities,” and “moral health within and between persons.”<sup>7</sup> *Shalom* is what God intended when he created. It’s what we humans left in the Garden. And it’s what God wants to restore through his son, Jesus Christ—the “Prince of Peace [*shalom*]” who brings “endless peace [*shalom*]” (Isaiah 9:6-7).

In his preaching and teaching, Jesus frequently invoked the Kingdom, his language for *shalom*.<sup>8</sup> The Kingdom of God, or of Heaven, invited hearers into a different kind of Kingdom than the ones they were used to. But the more Jesus teaches the more it becomes clear that this Kingdom transcends our normal boundaries between heaven and earth. In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus instructs his followers to pray, “Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). He charges his disciples to proclaim, “The Kingdom of Heaven has come near” (Matt. 10:7). The Kingdom is both *present* and *coming*. It is both *worldly* and *other-worldly*.

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<sup>4</sup> For more on what I mean by “orthodox Anglicanism,” see: Gerald R. McDermott, ed., *The Future of Orthodox Anglicanism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020). In particular, see the chapter “A North American Perspective” by ACNA Archbishop Foley Beach.

<sup>5</sup> For an overview of the use of image language in Genesis 1, see: J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Krause, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Krause, 3. These are Krause’s summations of Perry Yoder’s work.

<sup>8</sup> The word appears 114 times in the four gospels, in fact.

In *The City of God*, Augustine distinguishes between the “earthly city,” or the “city of man,” and the “heavenly city,” or the “city of God.”<sup>9</sup> This division, “not *within* society (say, between “spiritual” and “secular” authority) but *between* societies,” means Christians have dual citizenship.<sup>10</sup> Although we hold passports to the heavenly city, we are not absolved of the responsibility to seek the welfare of the earthly city. In this light, the mission of the Church “is both to witness to the eternal, perfect peace of the city of God—shalom, in its proper sense—as well as to build up the common life of the earthly city, seeking its common good and contributing to its flourishing.”<sup>11</sup>

Kingdom-centered mission recognizes its dual existence: at once heavenly, but also earthly. It requires the reorientation of our personal desires and habits—“Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven has come near” (Matt. 4:17). Jesus warns of a coming judgment for which we are to prepare ourselves. We prepare by turning from our sinful ways and towards God. And yet it also requires us to see the world with new eyes—the eyes of Christ—to enact *shalom*. The Church’s mission, like Christ’s own mission, cannot merely be stated as saving souls, growing Sunday morning attendance, or inducing inward piety. Her mission is also profoundly social. She aims not only to convert her neighbors but to care for them whether or not they are converted. She pursues justice and mercy on her street, in her community, in her country, and in her world.

In other words, the Church is oriented towards the city of God, but it is precisely this orientation that leads her to pursue *shalom* in our cities today. She anticipates the coming of God’s city “by tending the seeds of the kingdom in the soil of the earthly city.”<sup>12</sup> Augustine calls the Church to an “*exilic presence*,” which “calls the Church to see her social mission as one of faithful witness, seeking the welfare of the earthly city to which she is temporally bound but from which she will be eternally delivered.”<sup>13</sup>

## WORD AND TABLE: WORSHIP AND SOCIAL MISSION

*“I heard a man say once that Christians worship sorrow. That is by no means true.  
But we do believe there is a sacred mystery in it, it’s fair to say that.”*

Marilynne Robinson, Gilead

When we gather to worship, Anglicans gather around Word and Table. “Word” refers to God’s Word to us: Holy Scripture read aloud, proclaimed in the sermon, and recited in the liturgy. “Table” refers to the Eucharist, where Christ is really present in the bread and wine. In Word and Table, the Church, even if only provisionally, both proclaims and is sent out to enact *shalom*.

In the Word, the Gospel is preached. The Word invites us, both as individuals and communities, to “[r]epent! For the Kingdom of Heaven has come near” (Matt. 4:17). It reminds us that our world is fractured and broken. But it also reminds us that the fundamental problem of that brokenness is human sin and not material need. And it proclaims that the solution to that problem is Jesus Christ. The Word also invites us to enact *shalom*. We hear God’s heart for the world—he who “executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing” (Deuteronomy 10:18) and helps us “hold fast to love and justice” (Hosea 12:6). Anglicans are dismissed to “[g]o in peace to love and serve the Lord,”<sup>14</sup> which is more than a trite ending; it is our commission and the culmination of all that has been enacted during the liturgy.

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<sup>9</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. William Babcock (New York: New City Press, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Krause, 6-7.

<sup>11</sup> Krause, 7.

<sup>12</sup> Krause, 7.

<sup>13</sup> Krause, 9.

<sup>14</sup> From 2019 *Book of Common Prayer*, pg. 138: <http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/BCP2019.pdf>

However, the Word is more than exhortation into mission. It helps accomplish that mission. The proclamation of God's Word—whether read aloud or expounded in the sermon—"shall not return void" (Isaiah 55:11). The Word is "living and active" (Hebrews 4:12-14). It penetrates the human heart, mind, and soul. Like the Ethiopian Eunuch, we read, hear, and receive the Word by the prompting of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:26-40). It is perhaps the primary means the Spirit uses to save us (Romans 10:13-15). God's Word not only invites and proclaims *shalom*, but it also brings *shalom* to every human heart. It turns us away from our sin, the opposite of *shalom*, and towards the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Since *shalom* is only possible when we are in right relationship with God, our mission cannot be divorced from God's living and active Word.

At the Table, God unites people to himself. We are fed with the Body and Blood of Christ. The 4th-century theologian Gregory of Nyssa said that Christ in the Eucharist, "sows himself in all the faithful" so that "by union with the immortal, man might become a partaker of incorruption."<sup>15</sup> Like the Word, the Table also proclaims the Gospel. Archbishop Michael Ramsey insists, "The Gospel of God is here set forth, since the bread and wine proclaim that God is creator, and the blessing and breaking declare that He has redeemed the world and that all things find their meaning and their unity only in the death and resurrection of Christ who made them."<sup>16</sup>

At the Table, we plant our flag firmly in the City of God. While a dominant state power, says William Cavanaugh, "creates victims; Eucharist creates witnesses, martyrs."<sup>17</sup> In the Eucharist, Christ's body is most consistently present in the Church as a body broken and bloodied. As the Church encounters Christ, so she "becomes attuned also to the crucified bodies of the wounded and afflicted in the world."<sup>18</sup> The physicality of Christ's presence in the Eucharist is mirrored in his presence among the vulnerable and marginalized. The Kingdom is for those who feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit the imprisoned *because Christ is present among them* (Matt. 25:34-40).

Our solidarity with the vulnerable, like our reception of the Eucharist, is then rooted in the incarnation—that God became a man.<sup>19</sup> As reflected in Philippians 2:5-11, "the incarnation entails the Son's inhabiting the position of oppression, in order to show forth divine solidarity with the suffering, afflicted, and oppressed of humanity."<sup>20</sup> An incarnational mission to the poor, suffering, and oppressed will be marked by at least three characteristics. First, it will be "fundamentally personalist," or "grounded in an affirmation and recognition of the dignity of all persons, not simply because of their created status as bearers of the divine image but also because of the dignity granted them by Christ's incarnation."<sup>21</sup> Second, it will prioritize "working *with* the least of these just as much as working *for* them" since Christians are actually *with* Jesus when they are with them.<sup>22</sup> Third, it will be "fundamentally about empowering the poor and oppressed to act for themselves, to discover agency, and to participate fully in our common life."<sup>23</sup>

So understood, Word and Table form the core of Anglican identity. They summon us to deep personal transformation, but also launch us into the world of the broken, vulnerable, and marginalized in the knowledge that we worship the One broken, vulnerable, and marginalized for our sakes.

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<sup>15</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Discourse: A Handbook for Catechists*, trans. Ignatius Green, Popular Patristics Series 60 (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2019), 149.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Archbishop Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (London: Longmans, 1956), 119.

<sup>17</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1998), 206.

<sup>18</sup> Krause, 14.

<sup>19</sup> Krause, 15.

<sup>20</sup> Krause, 15.

<sup>21</sup> Krause, 15.

<sup>22</sup> Krause, 15.

<sup>23</sup> Krause, 17.

## JUSTICE AND MERCY: WORDS IN NEED OF A DEFINITION

*“Language is very powerful. Language does not just describe reality. Language creates the reality it describes.”*

Desmond Tutu

Word and Table, among other things, enact a concern for the suffering and marginalized. They enact, in other words, *shalom* through justice and mercy. The use of words has always been important, but it is especially so in a culture that has been dubbed “post-truth.” We hold fast to God’s Kingdom and allow God’s Word to define our language, but we also live, work, and serve in a culture that is not similarly committed. For the purpose of *shalom*, justice and mercy are critical concepts worth thinking more about.

Justice is grounded in God because justice is an attribute of God.<sup>24</sup> God is the herald of justice (Isaiah 28:6; Ezekiel 34:16) and his ways are just (Deuteronomy 32:4). Although sometimes used as a synonym for fairness, the Biblical concept refers less to what is fair and more to what is right.<sup>25</sup> It is closer to the concept of *righteousness* than *fairness*.

Just like all good, true, and beautiful human virtues, the human virtue “justice” is derived from God’s own justice.<sup>26</sup> A just person is someone who acts justly towards others and we act justly towards others by doing right by them. This means ensuring as far as we can, that another’s natural rights are respected and that they have the space to flourish by contributing to the common good. There is in justice both a positive component that seeks the good of another and a negative component that avoids wronging another. In order to act justly, we must hold tightly to both.

While individuals can be just, justice is not only an individual virtue. It can also refer “to the structures of a community’s social life and the sphere of public action.”<sup>27</sup> Individuals can behave unjustly, but communities can too. This can be explicit or implicit. As for individuals, communal or social justice includes both a positive and negative component; a just society is ordered towards ensuring goods for the community and avoiding wrongs. A society is just when its individual members have basic needs met and can contribute to the common good.<sup>28</sup>

Christians recognize that, due principally to the results of sin, our society is not perfectly just. This leads to suffering, oppression, and marginalization, among other things. The Christian response to this is mercy. Like justice, mercy, is a divine and human attribute but refers to a response in the face of suffering. While mercy is something we *feel*, it manifests itself in *action*.<sup>29</sup> Multiple times in the Gospels, those suffering ask of Jesus, “Have mercy on me!” (e.g. Matt. 9:27; Mark 10:47; Luke 17:13). This is not a request for Jesus to feel something, but a cry for help.

As individuals, we are called to have mercy on those who suffer or are oppressed. But like justice, mercy has both an individual and social expression.<sup>30</sup> Just as our social systems and institutions can be unjust, they can also be merciful—and our individual mercy can and should be directed towards individuals who are victims of social injustice.

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<sup>24</sup> Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 474.

<sup>25</sup> Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman III, 474.

<sup>26</sup> Or, as Thomas Aquinas would say, human virtues are analogous to divine virtues. They are not, on the one hand, univocal nor, on the other hand, equivocal: so, they are analogous.

<sup>27</sup> Krause, 20.

<sup>28</sup> Krause, 22.

<sup>29</sup> Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman III, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 547–48.

<sup>30</sup> Krause, 25.



According to Thomas Aquinas, justice and mercy are the “principal modes” in which Christians care for the vulnerable and marginalized.<sup>31</sup> They are two sides of the same coin. Principally, mercy instills in justice a concern, for those who suffer and the most vulnerable. Justice instills in mercy a concern for properly ordered individual relationships but also societal structures and institutions. Justice and mercy are primary ways we seek *shalom* and seek to bring God’s Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Anglican mission should be centered around the twin virtues of justice and mercy because this is how God acts towards our broken world. Our mercy inspires deep empathy and concern for the other, especially the suffering, but also a commitment to action. Our justice provokes concern for the rights of individuals or groups of people as well as a right ordering of our society and its institutions. The Church unites both in seeking *shalom*.

## THE CONTEMPLATIVE ACTIVISTS: AN ANGLICAN GUIDE TO MISSION

*“Anyone could be attracted by the beautiful and the charming. But could such attraction be called love? True love was to accept humanity when wasted like rags and tatters.”*

Shusaku Endo, *Silence*

In charting *The Anglican Way*, Father Thomas McKenzie identifies two features of Anglicanism: Anglicans are *activists* and Anglicans are *contemplative*.<sup>32</sup> By activist, he means “vigorous action and involvement” towards our goal of *shalom*. By contemplative, he means “a posture of receiving from God rather than doing for God.”

Embedded in the heart of the Anglican tradition is a spirituality, or way of practicing one’s faith, called contemplative-activism. *Contemplative-activism* is “marked by the dialectical movement between prayer and action.”<sup>33</sup>

When done well, contemplative-activism avoids two extremes too common among Christian groups. It avoids, on the one hand, activism detached from God and the pursuit of his Kingdom. When we make activism the core identity of our faith, we are bound to drift from Jesus’s own message of love, repentance, and even conversion. Christ’s mission was not just to heal the sick and feed the hungry, but to invite people into right relationship, through him, with his Father. Apart from this, we can never be in *shalom*.

On the other hand, contemplative-activism avoids a life of prayer detached from action. It was “the righteous” to whom Jesus speaks in Matthew 25 when he says, “Because you didn’t feed the hungry, clothe the naked, or visit the sick and imprisoned, *you missed me*.” The “righteous,” in this sense, are perhaps those who attend Church, memorize Scripture, and pray the Daily Office, but neglect to love and serve “the least of these.” Faith without works, says James, is “like the body without the Spirit”—dead (James 2:26). Neither James nor Jesus says prayer isn’t important nor do they say prayer is only for the sake of helping others. But both emphasize that true faith in God includes caring for the vulnerable and marginalized. If we miss them, we’ll miss Jesus.

The Anglican tradition is full of examples of contemplative-activists.

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<sup>31</sup> Krause, 17.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas McKenzie, *The Anglican Way: A Guidebook* (Nashville: Colony Catherine, 2014).

<sup>33</sup> Krause, 28.



A pair of laypersons in the Church of England led the charge against the slave trade in Britain. Olaudah Equiano, an enslaved West African who eventually purchased his own freedom, converted to Christianity which became a catalyst for his life-long fight against the evil that once held him captive.<sup>34</sup> William Wilberforce, who considered leaving Parliament for Anglican priesthood, remained in politics where he fought for justice for enslaved people.<sup>35</sup>

Described as a “devout Anglican evangelical,” Josephine Butler is most known as an advocate for women’s rights in England during the 19th century. She abhorred dead faith, or faith marked by ritual without care for the marginalized. In addition to women’s suffrage, she in particular objected to unjust laws that treated women as mere objects rather than humans made in God’s image.

James Theodore Holly was himself born a free black man in the middle of the 1800’s, but was nonetheless committed to pursuing racial justice and reconciliation.<sup>36</sup> After being ordained a minister, he spent fifty years in Haiti—a country ravished by slavery—preaching, teaching, and counseling the Haitian people.<sup>37</sup>

The Anglican minister John Wesley started a small club at Oxford devoted to leading a devout Christian life. They spent *hours* each day in prayer but also devoted themselves to care for the sick. Wesley would preach whole sermons, such as “On Visiting the Sick,” devoted to caring for the vulnerable which, he insisted, included caring for their physical and spiritual needs.<sup>38</sup>

During a series of epidemics that culminated in the epidemic of 1878, a group of Episcopal nuns led by their superior Sister Constance, stayed behind to care for the sick while others fled. In their commitment to providing much-needed care to the most vulnerable, many of them, including Sister Constance, died of the disease. They are now known as the “Martyrs of Memphis.”<sup>39</sup>

These examples, and many others, are a reminder that our Church is a Church on mission. This includes a commitment to prayer and activism—activism marked by a concern for the vulnerable and marginalized. Our dual citizenship is a reminder that we cannot neglect a deep concern for building God’s Kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven.

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Our world is broken. It will not fully be redeemed until Christ returns and makes it whole again. When God created our world, he made us to live in eternal peace. He bestowed upon us meager humans his image and, in doing so, invited us into caring for this world. We failed miserably. But God’s good redemption plan is in motion. It is not, however, an escapism from our past mistakes, but another invitation: to join with him in bringing his healing on earth as in heaven.

A good place to start is in seeking justice and mercy, contending for *shalom*.

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<sup>34</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Olaudah-Equiano>

<sup>35</sup> Eric Metaxas, *Amazing Grace: William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009).

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.bu.edu/missiology/missionary-biography/g-h/holly-james-theodore-1829-1911/>

<sup>37</sup> Holly recorded *Facts About the Church’s Mission in Haiti*, which can be read here: <http://anglicanhistory.org/usa/jtholly/facts1897.html>

<sup>38</sup> Kenneth J. Collins, *John Wesley: A Theological Journey* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003).

<sup>39</sup> <https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/religious/constance-and-her-companions/>

<sup>6</sup> *“Is not this the fast that I choose:  
to loose the bonds of wickedness,  
to undo the straps of the yoke,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to break every yoke?*

<sup>7</sup> *Is it not to share your bread with the hungry  
and bring the homeless poor into your house;  
when you see the naked, to cover him,  
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?*

<sup>8</sup> *Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing shall spring up speedily;  
your righteousness shall go before you;  
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.*

<sup>9</sup> *Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;  
you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’*

*If you take away the yoke from your midst,  
the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,*

<sup>10</sup> *if you pour yourself out for the hungry  
and satisfy the desire of the afflicted,  
then shall your light rise in the darkness  
and your gloom be as the noonday.*

<sup>11</sup> *And the Lord will guide you continually  
and satisfy your desire in scorched places  
and make your bones strong;  
and you shall be like a watered garden,  
like a spring of water,  
whose waters do not fail.*

<sup>12</sup> *And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;  
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;  
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,  
the restorer of streets to dwell in.*

## **ISAIAH 58:6-12**

## GET INVOLVED

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### **DONATE TO M25I AND THE GATHERING**

The Initiative offers care, equipping, networking and training for justice and mercy workers in the trenches as well as parishes.

The Gathering brings everyone together for encouragement, cross-pollination, soul care, and strategic dreaming. Learn more at:

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The Matthew 25 Gathering is a hybrid of a retreat and a conference, knowing that practitioners on the ground need encouragement and equipping in order to serve and love well in difficult and challenging contexts. Parishes that want to learn more are resourced and inspired. Learn more at:

[www.anglicanjusticeandmercy.org/about-the-gathering](http://www.anglicanjusticeandmercy.org/about-the-gathering)

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