



Jesus Hacked: Storytelling Faith

a weekly podcast from the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri

<https://www.diocesemo.org/podcast>

Episode 003: Living Gratitude and the United Thank Offering

Jeanne Lucas King, diocesan United Thank Offering coordinator, member of the Board of Episcopal Church Women in this diocese, and St. Martin's Episcopal Church in Ellisville

Barbi Click, diocesan Jubilee Officer and manager of food ministries at Trinity Episcopal Church, CWE, St. Louis

Barbi Click: Welcome to Jesus Hacked, a weekly podcast on storytelling faith. I am Barbi Click. I am a member of St. Paul's Carondelet and I am also the manager of Trinity Food Ministry at Trinity Church in the central west end. Today we are talking with Jeanne King, diocesan United Thank Offering (UTO) coordinator about being raised on gratitude. Welcome, Jeanne.

Jeanne King: Thank you. Glad to be here.

Barbi Click: Can we start off with you just telling us what is UTO?

Jeanne King: UTO is a ministry that was started back in the late 1800s. It began with the women of the church because they wanted to be part of the governments and the mission of the church. It was originally called United Offering. The amount collected was about \$2000. What they did with that money was they built a mission church in Alaska and they subsidized a female missionary. The women

missionaries didn't get any money. That is how the United Thank Offering was born.

Barbi Click: That's wonderful.

Jeanne King: Last year the United Thank Offering from the United States was able to give about a million and a half dollars in grants. It's grown quite a bit.

Barbi Click: Yeah, just a tiny bit. How long have you been involved with the United Thank Offering?

Jeanne King: As the UTO coordinator for the Diocese of Missouri I have only been doing it since 2015, but involved with the United Thank Offering. As you introduced me you said that I was raised on gratitude. I have been someone that has always done thankful prayers. As I learned more and more about the Episcopal Church and came to the Episcopal Church I found out about the United Thank Offering and there was a way to count your blessings. And it was putting coins into a box and then at certain times of the year this money is collected by your parish, then the diocese, and then sent off to National United Thank Offering and redistributed in the form of grants. That is in a nutshell how I have always been with it.

Barbi Click: I remember my first experiences with UTO. I lived in Fort Worth. We were attending an Episcopal parish. We had our little blue boxes. I don't remember how much money we collected as a family. I know that we had four boxes. One for each adult and one for each child and that we filled them up and we got new boxes. It was really a big deal each evening to put our change, which was before the time of debit cards so there was actually change available, and we would say what we were thankful for that day. We utilized the Thank Offering idea of it and the blessings. It was a fun thing to do. We haven't actually done that in a while. We need to do it again.

Jeanne King: I think it also reminds us when we do that where God was in our day.

Barbi Click: You actually brought one of the blue boxes, or several actually, could you describe it and tell us about it?

Jeanne King: When you receive it it's flat. It's one of those boxes that you fold into the little rectangle and it's like a bank. It has a slit in the top and it has some words on it. It has a prayer that you could say, "Oh, Gracious God, source of all creation." It's a thankful prayer on one side of it. Then on the other it will just remind you to be thankful. It's very lightweight. When you fill it up and bring it in, my suggestion is that you tape the sides.

Barbi Click: So the coins don't fall out?

Jeanne King: So the coins do not fall out.

Barbi Click: It says on the end of it, "Expand the circle of thankful prayer". Yeah, it's in a circle. That's the reason why I was having trouble reading it. Exactly how does that campaign work? Would you repeat that? I know you said it just a few minutes ago but it starts at a parish level. How do parishes get involved?

Jeanne King: Well, they just choose to.

Barbi Click: Where do they find you?

Jeanne King: Yes, I can be found at diocesemo.org under "Ministries," if you want to go down. I have personally gotten in touch with every parish in the diocese so they should have my email and contact information. That is one way.

As you said it starts with the parish--It really doesn't. It starts with the family. You have to begin with the family and have gratitude, have that thankfulness always in your heart, and it can be thankful for finding a good parking space. It doesn't have to be some miracle that has happened in your life. Just those little daily blessings that happen to us. If we drop a coin into the box it accumulates to the point that when you hand it in your little box is filled with blessings.

It used to be that the parishes would do two in-gatherings a year. With our lives being busy, with debit cards as you mentioned earlier and other such things, most parishes have moved to one in-gathering a year. It doesn't matter when. Each parish sets it up themselves. What is a time that's convenient? Some do it in the spring as planting seeds. Others do it in the fall for gathering as harvest. That type of offering.

Then the money is sent to the diocese. The diocese sends it off to national. National accumulates it and this past year, as I said earlier, we were able to give a million and a half in grants. Those grants range from a grant for a particular parish--maybe they just need a couple thousand dollars to upgrade their facilities to make it ADA facility, or so seniors can come.

It may be several tens of thousands of dollars. One grant in particular, this was 2015, that just struck my heart. It went to Liberia and it was during the time of the Ebola crisis. The grant went for a mobile school bus so that the bus was the classroom and went to the children because the children couldn't go to school because of the epidemic. That cost \$40,000. I think it was \$40,000 well-spent. The fact that my gratitude, my coins, went and helped those children in Liberia just warms my heart. I can't imagine it wouldn't warm anyone's heart who had put some money into the coin boxes.

Barbi Click: I know that there are many worthy grants that come through. Some particular to this diocese. Trinity Food Ministry actually received one this year, or in 2016. It was for two things basically. One to help us get away from Styrofoam and to decrease our trash footprint, carbon footprint. And I've actually got those plates

and the flatware and several of the dish dollies and things like that, that are going to help for us to be able to do that soon.

One of the really big deals, is that it helped us to increase our food offering. Not through food but through the tables we got. We were able to set out tables during the pantry time. Now we have people that come just to eat, just to sit and eat during the time that we're open for pantry. We offer three meals during the week now that before we weren't able to before, because we didn't have the space or the tables.

Jeanne King: You're also offering community.

Barbi Click: Yes, that's the big deal.

Jeanne King: Yes, it is.

Barbi Click: It has grown into a really large community actually. We serve anywhere from 30 to 50 people a meal the three days of pantry. It has been very exciting. We are recipients of that grant and it has been very beneficial. Tell me, what does it take? Who all can apply for these? How do you apply for a grant?

Jeanne King: The grant process is actually two grant stages. In September they have the grant stage that's offered to young seminarians ... I shouldn't say young. It's for young adults and/or seminarians. These grants that are offered are done in such a way that you don't have to do like one a diocese. You could actually have two grants in a particular diocese. Two young adult if in fact they met all the criteria.

Barbi Click: I didn't realize that.

Jeanne King: Yes, one of the grants for the young adults had gone to a particular fellow who worked in a high-tech industry where they seem to be very imbalanced as far as having a social life. They're very much in their community of workers at their computers doing their high-tech stuff, which I don't understand. At any rate, he wanted to offer worship and a spiritual life to his coworkers. He received a grant of just a couple of thousand dollars so that once a week for a year someone came in and prayed with these young people.

This is part of the ministry of the young adults. That's the only one I can think of off the top of my head but there are many. Now as far as the open grants that would be to anyone, they start usually January 1 and you can go online, United Thank Offering dot org, and the diocese Mo dot org, and get the criteria, get the application.

Now the application has to be in to national by five o'clock Eastern time March the 3rd. It's always like the first weekend in March that it has to be in. The bishop will have to sign off on it. If you were going to send it to me I'd suggest

you do it by mid-February so that I can review it and be sure that you have met all the criteria so that when I hand it into the bishop it's not going anywhere.

Now if more than one person or more than one parish is asking for a grant it only can be one a diocese so then a decision would have to be made. I would not make that decision on my own. I would, of course, gather up some of the women that work on the ECW and are familiar with how the United Thank Offering works. We would do it together. It would be a consensus of the board.

Barbi Click: Right. Okay. Okay, so I have written several grants over the past 15 years. I already know the answer to this question. What is your instruction to anyone who is writing a grant for the first time?

Jeanne King: Well, the criteria are the most important thing. We are not going to cover anything that is consumable. We don't pay for salaries. We do pay for startup costs. If you were starting a ministry that needed some seed money, yes, you could apply in that regard, in that way.

It has to be something, too, that is basically Episcopalian. I remember a grant that was ecumenical in the fact that the building was owned by many churches where this ministry was going on. We had to deny, even though they were very worthy. The United Thank Offering is an Episcopal Church Women ministry.

Barbi Click: One of the things that I like to do with my life is to take the day's events and to look back at these things to see if I can see where God was in all of the chaos, and how I might have done things differently or how I might be glad that I did it the way that I did it. Do you see Christ in this attitude of gratitude?

Jeanne King: Of course, I do. You know, this reminds me, and this is a personal anecdote, but I have a very high emotional IQ granddaughter. When she was about six I would pray with her in the evenings and when I did I would always say, "Where was God in your day?" That's how we would begin our prayer. This particular day she had just come from day camp and she said, "Oh, granny, God was everywhere. He's always there when you're doing something you love."

Barbi Click: That gave me cold chills.

Jeanne King: That's permanent. It's just part of me now. I see all kinds of connections. When I was asked to be the UTO coordinator for Missouri, the Diocese of Missouri was without a coordinator because someone had gotten ill. Anyway, we were without a coordinator and the General Convention had started. I went to the General Convention as a delegate for the Episcopal Church Women.

Well, someone from national, it was Peg Cooper, who is a member of our diocese came to me and said, "Jeanne, I need someone to represent Missouri with UTO in certain events." One of them being where we, all the dioceses, had a representative take our offering which was --since all our money is now direct

deposit, it's all done electronically—where we took our offering, a piece of paper with the amount printed on, to the presiding bishop. She blessed it.

I can't tell you how overwhelming an experience that was. Not only the rehearsal for this, the actual doing of it, with all these other women and they were all dressed in blue. Everyone wore blue. It was transforming. Then I was also able to receive a grant for Missouri. Again, it was the award certificate, not the actual monies, for St. Stephen's Parish who were, at that time, receiving \$33,000 to upgrade their kitchen.

Barbi Click: That was in 2015, right?

Jeanne King: Yes, right after the Ferguson event and St. Stephen's is right in the midst of it. They had an ongoing food pantry but they wanted to industrialize their kitchen so that they could also prepare meals. They do that. We were able to provide a grant for \$33,000 and I was presented the award to give to them at convention.

When in fact Peg Cooper asked me, "Would you take this on as a ministry?" I did some praying over it but it really didn't take much because I had such moving experiences at convention in representing UTO. I was already there. She didn't really have to ask me because as I've said to you before this interview I was raised on gratitude. That was how I was taught to pray. It was never about supplication. It was never about anything but to be happy that you are who you are.

Barbi Click: That's beautiful. I actually remember that ceremony. It's phenomenal. I was at General Convention in 2006, and to watch that procession as each diocese's name is called out it was a very cold chill moment. It was beautiful.

Jeanne King: It is beautiful. When you see that our diocese is giving \$42,000 and another diocese giving \$20,000 and then New York giving a million. It doesn't matter. It all goes into one pot. It's all prayed over, blessed by the presiding bishop. It is. It's a moving experience.

Barbi Click: I think the one thing that I would like people who are listening to this podcast that I would like for them to walk away with is to know how big of a thing it is when they give their nickels and dimes. Even their pennies. Or if they throw a few bills in there to make the box a little lighter. Just how big of a thing it really is. Not just to places far away but to right here in our own diocese like St. Stephen's. The grant that we received at Trinity was relatively small but it means so much to the people who benefit from those grants. I just would like everyone to realize how big of a thing it really is.

Jeanne King: When you're part of it too it is just joy-filled. Now if there is a small parish in rural Missouri and they send in \$20 it still goes into all of those grants. It's interesting how the small parishes with the ... I guess it's that widow's gospel in the fact that

Barbi Click: Widow's mite.

Jeanne King: Yes. They tend to be the most generous. I don't think they're any more grateful than anyone else. That was one of the things too when I was hearing the amount of money at the General Convention that the Diocese of New York gave and the amount of money that some other small dioceses gave. It didn't matter. I don't think anyone was more grateful. It just so happens that the New York people were more affluent but not more affluent in their own gratitude and prayerfulness of their gift.

Barbi Click: I read your diocesan convention report and your signature line at the end of that report says, "Your change changes lives." Do you have any other insights or stories about thanksgiving or counting our blessings?

Jeanne King: Well, what I would like to change that to is "*our* change changes lives." I didn't like how I wasn't including myself in that. I have since changed that signature. I found myself thinking, "Why am I putting this on someone else? I'm part of this too. A big part of this." It is just your change that provided the bus in Liberia, that provided the kitchen in Ferguson, that provides the sustainable ware that you're doing at Trinity, that provides the ramp that is going to make it easier for seniors to get into their place of worship. All these things matter.

There was another grant that was given out at convention. I want to say it was North Dakota. I'm sorry that I don't remember the actual diocese. They got forty some thousand dollars. \$46,000 or something. They were building six of those tiny houses that you see like on HGTV.

Barbi Click: Oh, yes.

Jeanne King: For the Sioux Indian. You know how we hear about the pipeline and such? Okay, well, they were going to house six men in these tiny houses to help them start a life. They were 18 to 26 or something. They were young men. Anyway, this was my gratitude back here in Missouri was helping provide a launch pad for a productive life for some men in the Sioux reservation. How can you not be overwhelmed and gripped by that and not see God in that? That is God's grace at work when this senior citizen in Missouri is helping this teenager in North Dakota by just being prayerfully and monetarily grateful.

Barbi Click: Okay, Jeanne, I am really thankful for you.

Jeanne King: Thank you.

Barbi Click: I am thankful for your attitude and just the overwhelming attitude of gratitude. It comes across. It comes across beautifully. I'm also thankful for you for helping me with this last grant. Were it not for you I would not have been able to get this grant because I did not read the instructions carefully enough and I would

caution everyone to remember that. Read the instructions and follow them. I'd also say contact you if they need help.

Jeanne King: I am very willing to help. During the grant process, I am through web seminars and phone/email/whatever, in contact with national. Reverend Heather Milton is the person in charge, like the CEO, of the United Thank Offering. She is such a giving woman of her time and knowledge and so and so. Yes, contacting me, I may have to contact her but believe me she is all giving. It'll come to fruition for you if you want it and need it.

Barbi Click: So the web address, again, where your information can be found is Diocese MO dot org slash?

Jeanne King: UTO. Right. Yes.

Barbi Click: All right. Thank you for sharing your ministry with us today.

Jeanne King: Thank you for having me, Barbi. It's always good to see you.

Barbi Click: Always.