

“I’ve always been concerned with the practical nature of any ministry,” says Becca Stevens, an Episcopal priest in Nashville, TN. Being chaplain of Vanderbilt University’s St. Augustine’s Chapel means fostering service as an integral part of a living faith. Being the author of five books means moving readers toward a shared ideal of love and compassion for the world as it is. And being founder of Magdalene, a residential community for women who have survived lives of prostitution and drug abuse means offering the chance for recovery on all levels and for grounding in day-to-day living skills. “I want the women here to be employed, to have financial security, and to be able to change their tires,” she says. “A ministry that doesn’t concern itself with the economic well-being of its recipients is just so much wind.”

Stevens is working to bridge the gap between the sacred and profane, between humanity’s great need and God’s abundant grace. Her life is one whose underpinnings are as fixed as the seasons. “Love is my grounding,” she says. “It provides the axioms, those basic truths, that inform the system and govern what I do. First is that *love is the most powerful source for social change in the world*. Second is that *love heals*. I’m not called to change the world. I am called to love it.”

The implications of these axioms are interwoven throughout the operation of Magdalene, founded by Stevens in 1997. With funds from individual gifts and private grants, it offers “a sanctuary for the women where they can live for two years without having to pay.” In 2001 Becca founded Thistle Farms, a subsidiary of Magdalene, a social enterprise in which the women make and sell natural bath and body products. All proceeds directly support the community. Magdalene, which now sustains five houses, has inspired similar programs in several American cities, and has helped women in Rwanda start a business.

Stevens can trace part of the inspiration for her ministry to her mother, Anne Stevens. Widowed when Becca's father, himself an Episcopal priest, was killed by a drunk driver, Mrs. Stevens raised five children as a single mother. "The whole focus of our lives changed after that," says Becca, who was 5 at the time. "I grew up with a mother who completely reinvented herself." Anne Stevens worked her way from being a being a childcare worker to executive director of Nashville's St. Luke's Community Center. Stevens describes her mother as "the role model for the hands of God - always preserving an open door and caring heart."

Becca attended the University of the South, then Vanderbilt Divinity School, where she met and married Grammy-winning singer/songwriter Marcus Hummon. Ordained in 1991, she gave birth to their first child two weeks after becoming a priest. As chaplain of St. Augustine's since 1995, she now serves a congregation of 400 students, faculty and community members. With the support of St. Augustine's, Becca has been able to open the Anne Stevens School in Ecuador, a nursing program for an AIDS hospice in Botswana, and a center for contemplative justice in Nashville. "Being a priest in the Episcopal Church has enabled me to go out and serve," she says. "I'm grateful for that. I've never had to take a paycheck for my work at Magdalene."

Becca's published-writing career began when Abingdon Press approached her about doing a Bible study for its *Sisters* series resulting in her first book, *Finding Balance*. Her meditations became *Sanctuary: Unexpected Places Where God Found Me*, one of *Christianity Today's* Top 5 Spiritual Books of 2005. *Hither & Yon* and *Find Your Way Home*, a collaborative effort with the women of Magdalene, followed. Her latest publication is *Funeral for a Stranger*.

Her personality infuses her writing, be it books, blogs, sermons or lectures. She is earnest and empathetic, focused and funny. She is known for her wit as well as her humility, for day-to-day absent-mindedness and for steadfast practicality. Her writing is honest to a fault, shaped by the good and bad of life, and yet it is fervently

hopeful and determinedly loving. At once graceful and intimate, her prose wears real skin and muscle as it moves through the heaven and hell that inhabit the earth, imbued with the sweet unexpected scent of grace.

Rev. Stevens has raised over \$10 million and gained nationwide press coverage for the organizations she supports. Given numerous awards from organizations including the Frist Foundation and the Academy of Women in Achievement, Becca was named the “Alumnus of the Year” by the School of Theology at the University of the South, “Nashvillian of the Year” by the *Nashville Scene* and “Tennessean of the Year” by *The Tennessean*. She and Marcus live in Nashville with their three sons, Levi, Caney and Moses.