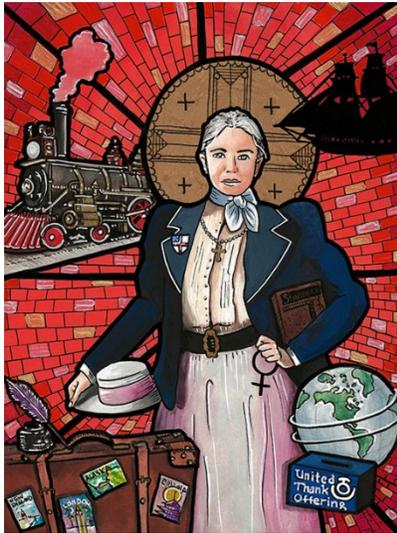


Julia Chester Emery

September 24, 1852 (Dorchester, Massachusetts) – January 9, 1922



Julia Chester Emery, or “Miss Julia” as she was affectionately called, is the first Episcopal Saint icon I have written. Now that I’ve had the chance to get to know her, I feel like she fits right in with my girls St. Hildegard von Bingen, St. Edith Stein, and feminist theologian Sallie McFague. Miss Julia traveled around the world twice, carrying a suitcase full of savvy inspiration and call. She rode the first Union Pacific train after the completion of the Trans-Continental Railroad. She influenced so many people and even gave up a substantial portion of her own salary to keep others employed and make sure the deaconesses and missionaries of her time were taken care of in their retirement age. She fought for the canonical status of the deaconess program, “leading the charge that

deaconesses be treated equally as canonical standing deacons.” She even turned down marriage in favor of serving the church and her position in the women’s auxiliary.

While not much is known about JCE’s childhood since she was a very private person, we do know that she was persistent and led many “quiet rebellions.” She even led her fellow high school students to leave their textbooks at home when their teacher wanted them to study Milton instead of Shakespeare, Julia was having none of that. Her classmates joined in, and the teacher was subsequently forced to instruct on the Bard. This tale seems to be a great metaphor for her life.

I feel close to Julia Chester Emery in her travels, so the focus of this icon is on places she's been and how she got there; from a ship captain's daughter to riding the first Union Pacific train. There are so few images of her (but a lot more than most of the Saints!) so I researched what she may have worn to travel in, considering where she went and her style. She was always writing journals and articles for “Spirit of Missions,” so you’ll see the ink and quill, something I am particularly fond of since I am a writer myself. She fought for women to have a voice in the church and rights of deaconesses and missionaries, so she’s holding a women's symbol. As a future female Deacon, I am extremely grateful for her work. She traveled the globe twice, so I included the globe with two ribbons. The blue box is for her work and founding of United Thank Offering; an Episcopal Shield for her work in the church; cross for her love of God, and even a book on Shakespeare because I just love the story of defying her teacher in the name of doing what’s right. And finally, you'll notice the travel stickers on her luggage - Alaska (diocese started because of UTO funding), China (where she traveled on the Yang-tse River), London (where she went to the Lambeth conference), and New England (where she's from). She traveled to many other places, but there’s only so much room on one

suitcase. People said she “traveled well,” likely attributed to her father being a ship captain, so I imagine she packed light.

I like that JCE was quiet and didn’t want the attention focused on her but led people to do the right thing, traveling the world inspiring others along the way. Certainly a force to be reckoned with. I just wish I could sit in a Union Pacific Train car across from her, sipping some Earl Grey, and listening to her stories of fighting for the rights of women in the church, giving up a portion of her salary so others had enough in theirs, her two round-the-world trips, and especially how she bamboozled her way into meeting the Royal Family at the Lambeth conference in London! I’m a big fan of Miss Julia and I don’t think people know enough about her. So, I invite you to sit alongside Miss J and discuss how you can inspire others like she did, how you can perhaps make life a little easier for those less fortunate than yourself, how you can quietly fight the patriarchy, and maybe how we can learn the spiritual gift of packing light, not just our suitcases, but the baggage we carry around through the world in our day to day lives.

When Miss Julia quietly resigned by formal letter to the officers of the General Convention in 1921, she said “It is time for a new generation of women to lead this work.” She believed that women can and should lead; that the future of our church and its ministries lies in the creativity, mentorship, support, energy, and voice of women of all generations. But she most especially believed in the new generation; that when given the chance to lead, can effectively turn the church towards a better and brighter future. She was an example of faith, grace, humility, and inspired leadership. I hope to see a lot more Julia’s in the church, do you see any sitting next to you?

A Prayer inspired by Julia Chester Emery

written by Kristen A. Wheeler

Mother God, Father Spirit, Child of Creation,

Help us learn the spiritual gift of packing light; filling our physical and proverbial suitcases with lightheartedness and joy and not overstuffing them with things we don't need for the journey, like resentment, anger, and frustration at the world.

Please recall us to Julia's mission and inspiration so we can effectively turn the church towards a better and brighter future; for it is easy to get lost in the politics and structure of our church and reconciliation and justice are in the hands of our generation and the generations to come

Remind us of those less fortunate than ourselves and inspire us to serve in a way that makes those hardships less of a burden on their souls. For no matter what we have in the bank, or what we carry in our hearts, there is always something left to give of ourselves to better one another.

The women of the church have a special place in your heart dear God; you demonstrated this exceptional love with Mary Magdalene and all your other women witnesses in the world, including Julia. Help our women continue to get into good trouble for the sake of your name, fighting for the marginalized and oppressed, and being an example of Christ's love in the face of fear, loneliness, and scarcity.

Keep us humble and grace-filled, you, our Creator, our mentor, our support, and our voice of reason. For you are not a distant being, unreachable in the faraway sky, you are right here with us.

You are the solemn tears of Mary Magdalene, the aged hands of Julia Chester Emery, the bleeding hearts of justice warriors; you are the ship and its captain, the train and its conductor, the suitcase and its contents, the little blue box and the penny. You are our whole world and everything existing within it.

Amen.