



The Church of the Holy Comforter

543 Beulah Rd NE Vienna, VA 22180 ▪ 703.938.6521 ▪ www.holycomforter.com



The Rev. Lyndon C. Shakespeare, Ph.D. Interim Rector
The Rev. Valerie J. Hayes, Senior Associate Rector
The Rev. Cara Rockhill, Interim Associate Rector

I have found in my time in ministry, both lay and professional, that it is best to be as fully and completely transparent as possible. To help achieve that, I would like to share with you all about my role here at Holy Comforter, and my vision for Youth and Family ministries.

Part of why I was hired at Holy Comforter is to conduct an evaluation of the youth program. This evaluation will not be done in any kind of judgmental way, but will be an honest look at the program, what our goals are for the youth program (we meaning students, parents, and teachers), and what that program will look like. More succinctly, my goal is to capture a realistic picture of the identity of the youth program at Holy Comforter, and a picture of what those involved in the program want the program to look like.

Who we are as a program should be decided by the members of the program (student, teachers, and parents). There is a tendency in the Episcopal Church to have the identity of a program be tied up in the identity of the clergy person in charge of it, but this creates a problem when that person leaves. This is particularly difficult in Youth Ministry, where most clergy people are only in place for 3-5 years. As a result of this evaluation, the youth program of Holy Comforter will be able to find a youth minister who matches your identity, rather than adopting the identity of the youth minister.

This will require participation from the youth, parents, and teachers. I am still determining the best way forward to conduct the evaluation, but I believe it will be the most accurate if we use a combination of an online survey, in person discussion, and group meetings. I hope to have the online survey ready to go by the end of October or early November. I would like to have a group meeting (or 2) before then, and will send out a link soon to see when people would be available. Individual meetings (which will include students and parents), will likely follow the online survey.

Again, the goal is to capture a realistic image of who we are, what our strengths and weaknesses are, and how we can best combine all of who we are, into who and what we want the program to be. It's an honest look at community, and how to best move forward.

While a big part of my job as Interim Assistant Rector, the evaluation is not my only role here at Holy Comforter. I also have oversight over the youth program. I've taken a brief look at the youth group program, and am working with the adults who have volunteered to lead youth group to develop a sustainable program that will meet the needs of the youth at Holy Comforter. More information on that will be available soon.

A switch to a clergy person with oversight from having a youth minister might seem like merely a change in semantics, but it's actually much more than that. My role is to make sure that the lay leaders of the youth program are equipped and empowered to be successful on their own. This works very closely with the evaluative piece.

The curriculum being used this year is part of my vision for the direction I believe youth and family ministry is moving as a whole, within the Episcopal Church. My vision is to embrace the



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reality that life is really busy. At best, Sunday School teachers have the children 40 minutes every 2-3 weeks. And this simply isn't enough for children to learn how to embrace Christianity and become Christians as they grow.

Life is busy, and I know that finding more time to be at church for formation is difficult. I also played several sports growing up, a couple of them reasonably well, and am the person I am today because of that experience. I completely understand that there are games and commitments on weekends and that there are times when you simply can't be at church. All of that is okay. As a faith leader, I believe my role is to help God be relevant in modern lives - busy as they are!

To accomplish this, I am asking all parents for 8 minutes a week to talk with their children about faith.

These 8 minutes can help your children have a lifetime of relationship with God. To help facilitate this conversation, we will provide you a prayer and talking points to be said before a family meal, or a summary of the sermon or readings from Sunday with a few talking points (for older and younger children).

And best part, this can happen in the car on the way to school or practice! Or in the kitchen! While walking the dog! My hope is to find 8 minutes when you are normally together anyway and invite God into that conversation. This will give you all an incredible time to talk with your children, and hopefully find new ways to connect with your family in a topic as important as their faith. The 8 minutes a week will begin to appear in the weekly newsletter soon!

And, if there is any interest, we will host a conversation (or a series of conversations) during the adult forum about how to go about these conversations and to offer techniques for making this process painless for everyone. This will also offer an opportunity for you as parents to share your thoughts, concerns, and vision for the youth program here at Holy Comforter.

That's my plan for my time at Holy Comforter. I genuinely would like to talk to parents and students about the youth program, and about faith. If you'd be willing to talk with me, please let me know! Crockhill@holycomforter.com

Thank you for your time.

Cara+