

Journey Jottings: Notes from St. Luke's Deacon in Formation

Although deacon formation classes were not held in June, July, or August, the Class of 2020—Amy Bryan (St. Augustine's, Tempe), Susan Erickson (St. Philip's In The Hills, Tucson), and I—were not sitting idle! We had lots of reading to do, papers to write, events and activities to attend, and succession plans to develop for the ministries in our home parishes that we will be leaving behind when our internships begin on September 1st. But before talking about our internships, I'll recap our summer.

June 1st was Ordination Day for the class ahead of us, and we were asked to serve at the Ordination Liturgy. (As a side note, deacon ordinations are done at the Cathedral, rather than at the parish from which ordinands are raised up, to underscore the point that deacons serve directly under the Bishop.) From our seats in the chancel that day, facing the congregation, we had an “up close and personal” view of the ordinands as they were presented to the Bishop; ordained through the laying on of hands; vested with red stoles; and presented with Bibles. To be able to see the ordinands' faces as all of this was unfolding was, indeed, gift and grace!

In July, our class had a three day weekend at Chapel Rock, built around the theme of self-care; spouses (and my sister) were included, which made the experience even more special. The highlight for me was our Saturday afternoon session, which was essentially a mini-workshop on the labyrinth: a spiritual tool that quiets the mind and opens the heart as one walks on a circuitous path to the center of a circle. When used as a Christian spiritual practice, walking a labyrinth (or tracing its path on a hand-held one) is about centering oneself in God, and receiving whatever God has in mind for us when we arrive at the labyrinth's center. As some of you may remember, St. Luke's borrowed the huge, canvas labyrinth belonging to Chapel Rock a couple of Lent's ago, and made it available one evening in the Parish Hall (where it covered most of the floor!) for people to learn about its symbolism and history, and then walk its path. For the people who came that evening, it was a beautiful and meaningful spiritual experience. Fast forward to last month: the Diocese had just purchased a new, portable canvas labyrinth for the Deacon Formation Academy—and Deacon Robin Hollis, DFA Director, decided to inaugurate it at our retreat! After God's blessing was invoked on it (and on all who would walk the labyrinth in the future), the lights were dimmed, silence descended upon the room, background music with sounds of nature began to play, and we were invited to begin our walk whenever we felt ready. Without any planning beforehand, the first persons to enter the labyrinth were Amy, Susan, and I. Coincidence? Surely not! (See photo below.) After the labyrinth walk, the group shared Eucharist—a fitting and fulfilling end to a beautiful day!



In a practical sense, summer drew to a close last weekend, when deacons and deacons in formation from across the Diocese gathered for a three-day retreat at the Redemptorist Renewal Center in Tucson; it was a time of silence, rest, reflection, prayer, immersion in nature, and fellowship. Besides Bishop Reddall being with us for Eucharist, dinner, and informal discussion on Saturday evening, the retreat also included conferences given by Rev. Dr. Tom Lindell, a deacon at St. Philip's of the Hills, Tucson, who is also a scientist (Professor Emeritus of Molecular and Cellular Biology at the University of Arizona). His talks centered on the recent "coming together" of science and religion, after centuries of being at deep odds with one another—a chasm that was created during the Age of Enlightenment. Religion, for the most part, now understands the magnificent nature of the cosmos, and science has discovered that the intuitions and metaphors of religion are not as naïve as they were once considered to be. The talks gave us much food for thought, and challenged us to ponder our own images of

God and to not be afraid of reconstructing them if they don't work for us anymore. After all, images are like a house that we've built—we should feel comfortable living in it!

So, let's look forward now. On September 1st—this Sunday—the Class of 2020 will be starting our deacon internships. Amy will be serving at Epiphany, Tempe; Susan will serve at Grace St. Paul's, Tucson; and I will be at St. Thomas, Clarkdale, where Rev. Susan Armer is Vicar, and where Deacon Deirdre Moulinier also serves. I feel blessed by this assignment from many perspectives, and I know I'll be stretched in ways that I can't even imagine right now. One last thought about being at St. Thomas: this small, rural parish has just one Sunday liturgy, at 10 AM, so at that hour, every Sunday, until my return to St. Luke's, let us pray for one another!

Because deacons, after their internship, do not return to leadership of ministries that they previously headed in their home parish, there were implications for my position of Parish Nurse after the Standing Committee approved my moving forward into Candidacy in April of this year. Unlike the Centering Prayer group—which will continue in my absence, and from which another facilitator will emerge (God willing!) by the time I return—the Parish Nurse position is a one-person job. Because of that, and after consulting with Father Pierre-Henry and Deacon Chris Christy, a decision was made to morph the Parish Nurse position into a Health Resources Committee, which will be part of the Pastoral Care Commission, effective September 1st. This has been happening gradually, with Julie Cargill now writing the wellness columns that appear in St. Luke's Weekly Epistle. But be assured that health-related issues of the congregation will continue to be addressed—and, in a way it will actually be better. Instead of just one person filling the role, there will be a team, so it's a win/win situation for the whole parish!

Before bringing this column to a close, there's an upcoming event that I'd like to both mention and promote. If you are purchasing Just Coffee/Café Justo, you know how delicious it is, and how your purchase is a very real and concrete step toward the resolution of the immigration crisis. Well...Mary Ellen Rivero, who brought the Just Coffee ministry to St. Luke's, is planning a two-day trip to the border in October—the second one this year. My hope and prayer is that many people from St. Luke's—even those who don't drink coffee—will sign up and go! I went on the trip in April, and I can tell you that it deeply affected me. If you go, I can almost guarantee that you'll come home with visual images and memories of people, places, and things that will change you, deepen you, and galvanize you—simply because you were there. The cost is nominal, and the experience is unforgettable. And you'll get to meet some of the people who are part of Café Justo!

While I'll continue to write "Journey Jottings" during my internship, you won't be seeing me on Sundays (or, for that matter, ANY day of the week!), but be assured of my prayers for each and every one of you during the next six months. And please know that I'm counting on yours!

In God's grace and peace, Keehna Sture, Deacon in Formation