

JOC Stories of Engagement and Volunteerism

Helene Gardner

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"When I walked into the Parish Hall for the Discernment Seminar on a Friday evening last fall, there was the happy hum of friends greeting each other as they gathered around the big round tables I have come to love. I passed the clusters and approached a table with only one occupant. Tiny Ellen Smith looked up at me and announced, "I'm new." I was in the right place. "I'm new, too!" I said.

I had been attending Trinity online during the summer when I heard the seminar advertised. Even through the imperfect portal of zoom, the warmth and welcome of Trinity was clear. I needed community. It was my first fall after retiring from UCSB, where I was a tenured teaching professor in the Environmental Studies Program, teaching toxicology, air quality, and environmental chemistry.

I was looking for a way to go to church in person without the awkwardness of not knowing anyone and wanting to scurry away along the baseboards to the nearest exit afterward to hide the fact that I was a stranger. And I happened to need discernment, so I signed up for the weekend seminar. I figured I'd meet some people that I could smile to during worship and maybe chat with at coffee hour. And then there was Ellen, proclaiming her newness, too. Jennifer Bergquist and Deborah Wells Ah-Tye landed at Ellen's table, too, and on Saturday, I was in a small group with Kaye Cantu. I was right; I met a lot of great people, and I got an answer to the question for which I was seeking discernment.

So I started attending worship in person and set myself the task of introducing myself to one person after each worship service. I thought I recognized Holly in the choir and asked her at coffee hour if she had sung at a funeral at First Presbyterian a few years ago. She had. It was the funeral of my mother. What a blessing to make that connection.

Because of my interest in homelessness and environmental justice, I agreed to join the Justice and Outreach Committee when Jennifer invited me. And there was Kaye and a lot more great people. Deborah and I ran into each other at the lunch to learn about preparing dinners for Transition House, and, with Christine Green taking the lead, we formed a team to make dinner there in March. We had a blast. There are so many ways to serve through Trinity, and the opportunities for spiritual growth are tremendous. The services alone are worth the price of

admission, but then there is reading *Do I Stay Christian?* (What church assigns that for Lent?) and *Between the Listening and the Telling*, hearing Brain McLaren, Mark Yaconelli, Becca Stevens, and Sr. Joan Chittister, participating in forums on human trafficking and gun violence, and meeting new friends regularly for prayer. All are helping me along my journey with and to God."