



# The Epistle

July 2018

The Episcopal Church of St. James on the Parkway

A community growing in Christ, called to worship, learn, and serve.

## Experiencing A Life-Changing Event

The Rev. William Heisley

What is a life-changing event? Someone from St. James' Haiti Committee who's visited the island told me that my participation in our recent 8-day visit would be life changing. I wondered and I wonder what that could mean.

About 13 years ago I spent a 13-week sabbatical traveling across Europe. Only occasionally would someone from the U.S., both family and friends, join me for a few days. It was a life-changing event for me in several ways. First, it taught me that I can get by in foreign lands despite my lack of knowledge of the local language and only muddy take on the local culture.

Second, it taught me what it means to live in a place, as opposed to visiting it. I learned that living means to take time for oneself. To spend down time when I need it. Alone. And to celebrate that fact, rather than to rue the missed opportunities for sight seeing.

Third, I learned to more fully grasp the spirituality of others as I worshipped with Anglicans, Lutherans, and Roman Catholics from London to Nice. Each a unique expression of the same Lenten/Easter realities during my time living on the Continent.

Fourth, and most importantly, I learned that I am a whole person in and of myself. I am whole apart from my quotidian surroundings. I am whole IN my quotidian surroundings, wherever they are. In the love of God, in the mercy of Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in my through

my Baptism, I am whole.

My trip to Haiti was both a visit and a living there. Feeling alien and other, and celebrating sameness and common humanity. My thinking now is that it was not life changing. It was life affirming. My life of whole in the Love of God was affirmed as I shared it with the lives, the life, of so many warm, kind, and generous people.

The highpoint of our time in Haiti was Sunday morning. While I've told this story to several folks at St. James, I'll tell it here again.

On Saturday, our first full day in the tiny, mountainside village of Bigonet, a delightful member of the community, new to his role as translator, told me that Per Sonley, the parish priest, had phoned to ask if I had brought along "a long white dress." I tried not to snicker. I had not brought a dress, or an alb, for that matter. I learned that in that case Per Sonley would provide vestments for me.

Sunday morning arrived, as every day in country did: hot and humid. I donned long pants, a black shirt and a clerical collar and climbed the impossibly steep, rocky and slippery road to L'Eglise de Bonne Nouvelle. The five of us from St. James sat together, waiting, listening to music, and enjoying simply being there. Living in that moment.

Someone came to call me to the sacristy. Per Sonley and his entourage had arrived for his first visit in four months, and he had brought vestments for me. And they fit perfectly

and beautifully.

While vesting he asked me – his English is very, very good – if I would read the Gospel in English. Of course! But where is it? No English Bible or lectionary was available. So! When the moment for Gospel proclamation during the liturgy arrived he handed me his cell phone and I headed to the lectern. People listened attentively as that large group does and the Gospel was announced. Next, it was read in Haitian Creole. Then came the Deacon's 45-minute (or so it seemed) sermon. During the sermon that was preached with great fervor but in Creole, Per Sonley paged seemingly idly through the Book of Common Prayer. He settled on a page and leaned over to me and whispered that at the Eucharist he would read several brief lines and I would then read a long paragraph. Then he would read another brief section and I would read the last long paragraph.

I am happy to say that the prayer was not in Creole. But it was in French. I sight read the Eucharistic Prayer in French before 150 of the faithful and God was praised. Especially when I made it through!

I tell this tale because it is exemplary of the visiting/living we did in Haiti. At each turn there was something new, something for which we were seemingly unprepared, something that was challenging in one or many ways. And in the love of God, for the love of God's people, in the embrace of our dear

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sisters and brothers in Bigonet, all was well. Relationships were built and then strengthened and then celebrated throughout the week.

My time in Haiti was not life changing. It was life affirming. The people there live in the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, by most accounts. And yet, they are open and generous full of life. They praise God and thrive in their community of faith and their village and its environs. And we have much to learn from them.

Living is affirmed as we consider not the wealth or poverty of a place or a people, but as we embrace the fact that we are all created by God and we are thus equals. Period.

And for this, for Bigonet and Bonne Nouvelle, and for all of our friends both there and here, God's Name be praised!

From the Senior Warden Louis Hoffman

## Plan for 2018 – “Just Add People and Serve”

You may remember that the Vestry held a retreat at the ECMN offices in North Minneapolis on June 2. And you may note from the Vestry minutes and agendas that come with your weekly e-mail and the *Epistle* and that are posted on the Action Wall that the Vestry has been talking about a *Plan for 2018* since February. There hasn't been much said about the *Plan for 2018*. But it's been very much a topic of conversation at Vestry meetings once we get beyond the usual dose of money and property. And it was the main topic of the retreat.

We have a plan for your consideration. So now we're moving into the doing phase. *But this doesn't mean that the Vestry's doing it.* Clearly, the Vestry has an important role in the life of the Parish. And it does a lot. But that doesn't mean that the Vestry can or should implement the *Plan for 2018*. As the headline says, “just add people and serve.” Those people being you.

As an aside, “Plan for 2018” made much more sense in the cold and dreary days of February than it does on a hot and humid July day with this Vestry's term nearing its midpoint. So look for a bold, new name that reflects that this is a plan for our life together as a faith community working with other faith communities and other organizations in the larger community beyond 2018.

To quote Lenin, “what is to be done?” I'm not advocating a Communist revolution. But there are some things that we *can* learn from the Great October Revolution. That is faith (in God, not

Marx), focus, and organization. Put simply, we do a lot at St. James, more than many of us realize, but we're punching above our weight. We can't do that indefinitely. A lot of what we do depends upon a handful of people. People who may die, get sick, leave the church, move, or just decide that enough is enough. Long term success demands that many of our endeavors be transformed from solo efforts to, dare I use the word, the work of dreaded “committees.” Did you know that “soviet” is the Russian word for council? If it'd make it more interesting, we could have soviets instead of committees?

This is what I think we need:

- **Community Service and Social Justice.** We need a couple service-minded folks who can help Anne Scheible organize and recruit for the “service” part of our “worship, learn, and serve” braid and with moving our Nokomis Serves four – church service cooperative forward. We have Families Moving Forward, First Nations Kitchen, the Giving Garden, the Haiti Committee, the Knitting Circle, and backpacks and Christmas gifts for Simpson. And we have a ton of service opportunities available through the Nokomis Serves catalog! Think about the good that our service does.
- **Communication and Congregational Life.**
  - We need a couple of people who have a passion for communica-

tion, for sharing St. James' story, and who are comfortable doing so on social media. This includes fixing our website. We can't be on paper in this world.

- We also need a couple of people who take the lead in welcoming new people into the life of the congregation, who follow up with them, and who shepherd them into membership.
- We also need a couple of people to work with Karin Spencer in learning about pizza ovens, seeking funding to build one, and coming up with a plan – and implementing that plan – to use the pizza oven as the cornerstone of our hospitality and outreach.
- **Faith Formation.** Nine children participate in our children and youth programs from infants through high school. Out of 23. Two ideas that have stirred some interest:
  - **PrayGround.** St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Southwest Minneapolis has a prayground. It was their response to declining Sunday School attendance. And it's been successful enough that older “children” had to have their own programming and Sunday School is again becoming a viable option. We're not totally sure what this is or what it'd look like. But it sure worked at St. Luke's. This is something, by the way, that we

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learned about at the ECMN Mission Area Gathering at St. James earlier this year.

- **Dinner Church for youth.** The concept of dinner church came up at the ECMN Lay Leadership Day earlier this year. It’s an untraditional way of reaching out to hard-to-reach groups. In our case, high school age members. This would be a youth designed and driven program that would center on food (the pizza oven? Who doesn’t love pizza?) and activities that could include

camping, confirmation for those interested, fun activities, and service to the church, the congregation, and the community.

Anne Sween, who taught Sunday School in 2017 and 2018, is really interested in both of these ideas. But you see the theme. I hope. She can’t do it alone. Are there a few people, with or without kids, maybe teachers, people with backgrounds in art, drama, the outdoors, and theater, who can help get this off the ground, support the PrayGround and the Dinner Church, and keep them moving?

I’ve talked about taking the Cross to the marketplace a lot. We really do have to do that because it’s what we’re commissioned to do. But as with any endeavor, taking the Cross to the marketplace needs a

strong foundation. The MacDonald and Mack Building Assessment told us everything we need to know about the foundation of our building. Nokomis Serves and our conversations with Lake Nokomis Lutheran and Living Table United Church of Christ are paving the way to the marketplace. What the *Plan for 2018* calls for is strengthening the foundation of our community, how we are a community and, how we support each other.

As the summer proceeds, Vestry members will be asking you how you can help. No one has to do everything. Or even anything. But if a bunch of people do a little, we can, working together, ensure a bright future for our church home. Please pray and think about what God is calling you to do at St. James.

# Volunteer for Families Moving Forward

Please join with our neighbors from Lake Nokomis Lutheran, Living Table United Church of Christ, and Minnehaha United Methodist from July 31 to August 13 to make this important ministry possible. Sign-up for the four setup days or an evening or overnight of your choice is now OPEN! Go to the Families Moving Forward link at [www.lakenokomis.org](http://www.lakenokomis.org) to sign up. If you have questions or need more information, please contact Louis Hoffman (612-618-7206 or [hoffman.louis@comcast.net](mailto:hoffman.louis@comcast.net)) or Anne Scheible (612-619-9692 or [annebillscheible@gmail.com](mailto:annebillscheible@gmail.com)).

Families Moving Forward is the shelter program of Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative. As host congregations, we provide shelter and hospitality to families experiencing homelessness in their transition to permanent housing. More than fifty volunteers are needed to:

- Set up sleeping and activity spaces during the day Tuesday through Friday, July 31 to August 3 and taking them down afterwards.
- Prepare and serve dinners each evening Sunday through Sunday, August 5 to 12.

- Plan and coordinate activities for adults and kids each evening Sunday through Sunday, August 5 to 12.
- Serve as on-site overnight hosts and set up grab-and-go breakfasts overnight Sunday evening, August 5 to Monday morning, August 13.

### Who can volunteer?

Adults and youth can help. And since all the families will have children, your children are encouraged to join us, too (provided your child doesn’t require your attention!). This is an ideal opportunity for high school students who may need volunteer service as a graduation requirement.

### Why volunteer?

Be transformed by being in relationship with our brothers and sisters experiencing extremely challenging circumstances. And meet neighbors from our Nokomis Serves partner churches. And then there’s the Great Commandment: “Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul,

and with all thy mind. . . . Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”

### Haven’t volunteered before?

We provide training (week of July 22 at LNL with specific date and time to come – check the weekly e-mail for date and time). Each new adult volunteer must complete Beacon’s Safe Place Policy and background check forms. If you volunteered in April, new training and background check aren’t required.

### How to volunteer?

Sign-up is OPEN! Click on the FMF link at [www.lakenokomischurch.org](http://www.lakenokomischurch.org) or contact Louis Hoffman (612-618-7206 or [hoffman.louis@comcast.net](mailto:hoffman.louis@comcast.net)) or Anne Scheible (612-619-9692 or [annebillscheible@gmail.com](mailto:annebillscheible@gmail.com)).

### Need more information about Beacon?

You can find out about the mission of the Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative at [www.beaconinterfaith.org](http://www.beaconinterfaith.org).

From the Junior Warden Patrick Morley

# Sweet Summer Sweat!

Hello Friends – Summer is upon us and we're grateful to God for the warmth, the breezes, the wonderful scents of blooming vegetation, and the songs of birds. God's abundance does not discriminate so weeds abound. Our project days in July and August will be dedicated to grooming our property and keeping the prolific weeds at bay.

The community garden continues to thrive and is tended by a splendid crew of volunteers from St. James and NENA (Nokomis-Ericsson Neighborhood Association) but I'd like to give a special shout out and acknowledgement to Anne Scheible for her tireless efforts to keep that garden productive and looking healthy. When you see her in church please be sure to thank her.

Our next work day at St. James will be Saturday July 28, 10am. We will be weeding, trimming, and otherwise keeping the grounds looking well kempt. If volunteers are so inclined we can also work inside on the lighting in the main church, which has a few fixtures left yet with bulbs to be swapped out.

Other updates you should be aware of: We are negotiating a new lease with Mandala Montessori and expect settle upon a very workable agreement for all parties. The Senior Warden and the Vestry will keep everyone informed on any significant developments related to that lease.

As always, the more hands doing God's work, the more quickly we can get to God's play (yes, God wants us to do both – work and play – but in that order).

Thanks again for all you do at St. James in whatever manner you do it. May the Peace of God be with you always, and enjoy the beautiful summer God has given us!!



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