



The Epistle

August 2018

The Episcopal Church of St. James on the Parkway

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

God's Love and Presence and Power

The Rev. William Heisley

For some time the discussions of transgender persons in our society have become increasingly frequent and thought provoking. I'll be honest. Until this became the case I gave very little thought to the people involved. Yes, there was the woman who attended a congregation I previously served, was well accepted, and disappeared. We were sad that she was gone, but we couldn't think of anything to do about it, other than what we did: reach out through telephone and email and ask her to come back. She didn't.

But lately I've been following a Facebook thread about transgender issues. A pastor who was one of my students here in Minneapolis some years ago writes from his current parish in Wisconsin to ask for help. A member of his flock has challenged him, something like this: "If God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them, (Genesis 1:27, NRSV) how can people think it's OK to change their gender?"

Indeed, I think that's a question that is asked often in one form or another, sometimes with a God reference, sometimes not. Is it OK to undergo gender reassignment?

I have been very happy and impressed and humbled that the people who have commented on the thread have universally said the same thing. Yes. It's OK.

Here's how it goes. God creates us in God's image. But we are also people who live and move and breathe and

change in every moment, whether it be growing nails or losing hair or whatever. We never, ever stay the same. To live is to change. If that is the case, how is it not OK to discover new things about oneself and to adjust ones life accordingly? If my teeth are naturally crooked is it wrong for me to decide to get braces? If my sight begins to fail is it wrong to have Lasik surgery? If I am born one sex and know that I am really another, is it wrong to make the corrections that are necessary?

My answer to every one of these questions is this: God has made us in God's image, the image of the living center of the universe. That means that God changes, too. Yes, we say that God is unchanging. God's love and presence and power is certainly unchanging. But the Bible reminds us that God's mind can be changed by circumstances and that God continually worked in evolving ways in the Bible.

And we know that creation is never done.

I think of the text of one of the most beautiful and greatest hymns of our

tradition, *Love divine, all loves excelling*, The Hymnal 1982, number 657, verse 3.

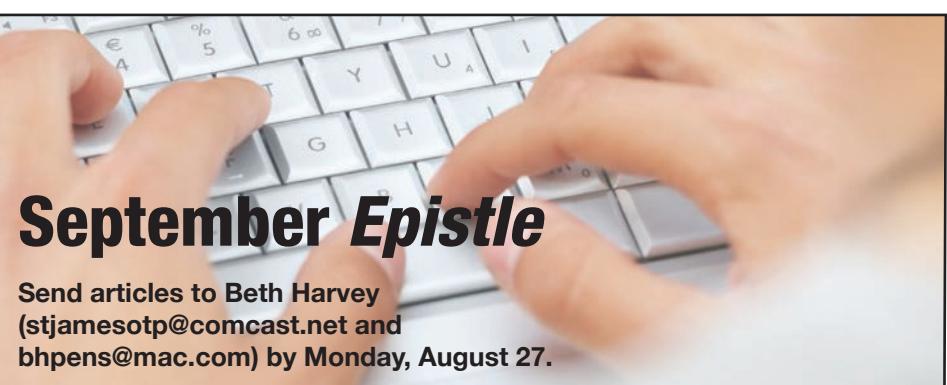
*Finish then thy new creation;
pure and spotless let us be;*

*Let us see they great salvation
perfectly restored in thee:*

*Changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,*

*Till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love and praise.*

We are unfinished creations. We pray in this hymn to be led to purity, that God will give us full perfection in God's self. In that perfection of our beings, we are changed from the glory of humanity to the glory of eternal life, sitting with God and giving our all in ecstatic joy, our souls filled with awe before God's wholeness, beauty and mercy. Around God's throne we are caught up forever in ecstasy. Until then, along with transgender people, we strive to grow into our birthright: God's glory.



September Epistle

Send articles to Beth Harvey
(stjamesotp@comcast.net and
bhpens@mac.com) by Monday, August 27.

From the Senior Warden Louis Hoffman

Plan for 2018 – “That means big changes. That’s the challenge”

I saved the bulletin from Mary Anderson’s funeral. Mary’s elder profile, written by Tony Morley in September 2013, was included. The first two paragraphs follow. Please read them:

“Yes, our building and grounds are more than our congregation can support. And, yes, we wonder how to keep the ship afloat. And yes, we all should step up to the plate.

But you know something? That hasn’t worked. And won’t. So we’re waiting for solutions. The real challenge is to give them birth. That means big changes. That’s the challenge.”

This was true nearly five years ago when Mary and Tony talked. It was true when Rebecca and I joined St. James more than twenty years ago. And it was probably true long before that. So how have we met the challenge? We met in the Great Hall several Palm Sundays ago. Those ideas become the eighteen month ACORN/2020 process. ACORN/2020 resulted in the Abrahamic Tri-Faith Initiative and our work with three neighborhood churches on Nokomis Serves. That led to the NENA-

partnered Giving Garden, our conversation with two neighborhood churches about greater cooperation and sharing of community service ministries, faith formation, lay staff, and space, and the Plan for 2018 (please see last month’s Message). This may not seem like a lot. But it is. And it can only be the beginning.

A focus on community service and social justice. It seems that every time I’m at or drive or walk by St. James, Anne Scheible is working in the Giving Garden. Alone. Like the post office, nothing seems to stay Anne from her appointed rounds. Who else wants to help with the Giving Garden, school backpacks and Christmas gifts, crocheting and knitting, First Nations Kitchen, and Families Moving Forward and helping move Nokomis Serves forward? *Who can serve on a Community Service and Social Justice Committee and help with the organizational support?* Contact Anne if you can help.

Upgrading communication and congregational life.

Website. Our website is not what it could be. Thank you to Ruth Anne Olson for stepping up to the plate to get it updated and improved. And to Fr. William for keeping the calendar current.

The whole rest of the social media world. We’re not really on it. Is this something you’re interested in? *Who can bring St. James into the twenty-first century?*

Pizza Oven: Food and hospitality are central to scripture. Might it, in the form of a pizza oven, be something that we can make central to a reinvigorated congregational life at St. James? Everyone loves a party. Everyone loves pizza. *Who can help create a pizza party on the Parkway?* Contact Karen Murdock and Karin Spencer to help.

Rebuilding faith formation:

PrayGround. We’ve already talked to members and staff at St. Luke’s about this when a number of them were at St. James for Julie Braunerger’s Education for Ministry “graduation.” Anne Sween, who taught Sunday School last year, and I have talked about it. One of them, during the service, imagined how the Nave could be reconfigured to accommodate a PrayGround. Parents: will you help us make this a reality? Non-parents: how about you? *Who can help re-start programming for children and youth at St. James?*

Dinner Church for youth.

There are at least two youth actually interested in this and several parents who think their youth might give it a try. Again, parents: will you help us make this a reality? Non-parents: you too. *Who can help re-start programming for children and youth at St. James?*

As the summer continues, Vestry members will be asking you how you can help. How will you be part of the big changes? How will you meet the challenge?



Abrahamic Tri-Faith Exploration

By Ruth Anne Olson, on behalf of St. James Abrahamic Tri-Faith Working Group

St. James Abrahamic Tri-Faith explorations of the past two years have been rich. It's clear that our initial idea of creating an Abrahamic Tri-Faith Center has interested many people throughout the greater Twin Cities community.

But it's equally clear that despite intensive efforts, we've failed to find Muslim or Jewish neighbors looking to expand their community into a new space. So, with the blessing of the Vestry, the working group has divorced our Abrahamic Tri-Faith work from the question of how to save the St. James building. Instead we're putting our energy into opportunities to build relationships among our faiths—to break bread, serve our communities, to both work and play in friendship with one another.

The opportunities are many. The list that follows shows some of what's already happening among St. James and various Muslim friends and neighbors. To learn more check with the folks involved. (FMI = for more information.) As we explore more deeply with Jewish participants in our Abrahamic Tri-Faith Working Group, more opportunities will come.

- Masjid (mosque) At-Taqwa (1608 Como Avenue in St. Paul) operates a food shelf on the 3rd Saturday of each month (11 AM to 1 PM). Serving At-Taqwa's diverse neighborhood, this is low-key work, with rich

opportunities for conversation with people of many ages, from many countries. (FMI: Ruth Anne Olson olson248@gmail.com)

- Brooklyn Park Islamic Center is a new center, which faces resistance from some of its neighbors. Nausheena Hussain (who visited St. James several times in 2017) and Max Athorn are exploring ways that Christian allies might be helpful. (FMI: Max Athorn athorncm@mac.com)
- The Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) is an organization of policy advocacy, education, and much more. They offer a variety of volunteer opportunities and special training to work alongside colleagues of many faiths. (FMI website: <http://cairmn.com> email: info@mn.cair.com or contact Ruth Anne Olson olson248@gmail.com)
- Several St. Jamesians have participated in activities with Muslim Minnesotans. Ask them about their experiences:
 - Dan and Casey McGuire, Anne and Harlan Sween, plus former St. James folks Aileen Johnson and Dawnlynn Greeney all participated in Niagara Foundation's ThreeFaiths@OneTable.
 - Karen Murdock visited Abubakar As-Sadique Mosque and Islamic Center in Minneapolis.
 - Max Athorn and Rebecca Hamblin worshipped with

friends at Masjid (Mosque) An-Nur.

- Tony Morley and Ruth Anne Olson exchanged mosque (Masjid Al-Huda) and church (St. James) visits with a Muslim friend.
- Pat Morley is exploring St. James opportunities with a friend, Salima Kahkoo.
- And several St. Jamesians have attended Iftar dinners through the Taking Heart program of the Minnesota Council of Churches.

The news is full of Abrahamic news and events. In June, Minnesota teenager Ahmed Burhan Mohamed won the prestigious Dubai International Quran award. Less than a year ago Bloomington mosque Dar Al-Farooq, was bombed. In recent months Somali talent has found a home at the Minnesota History Theater ("A Crack in the Sky"), the Minneapolis Institute of Art ("I Am Somali") and the Minnesota History Center ("Somalis + Minnesota"). And a month ago, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld President Trump's ban on travel from Muslim countries.

These stories, plus those of our Jewish neighbors, move more-clearly across our field of vision when we see them through the eyes of people we know. Building those relationships is what St. James Abrahamic Tri-Faith exploration is about.

Working Group: Max Athorn, Rebecca Hamblin, Pat Morley, Ruth Anne Olson

Reflections of Teen Travelers: Leah Morley and Shakira Ryines

By Ruth Anne Olson,
St. James Haiti Committee

In June, the people of Eglise Episcopale Bonne Nouvelle in Bigonet Haiti, hosted travelers from St. James—the eighth such visit since the birth of our partnership in 2008. Teens Leah Morley and Shakira Ryines were among the travelers.

In July, I sat down with Shakira and Leah to talk about their experiences. The summary that follows can't possibly capture the effervescent energy of our hour-long conversation. For that, you'll need to snag one or both of them at Sunday coffee hour or maybe create another opportunity to talk.

Because Shakira's and Leah's impressions were most often a tumble of enthusiasms that built in tandem, I've attributed comments only when they expressed clear differences.

Question. You've met folks from Bigonet when they've come to St. James. But this time you were able to be in their community. To eat their food, be in their homes, and more. What was that like?

Answer. Mind blowing. When they come here, we have a chance to talk. But when we were there, we got to know them. In their own spaces. They're so bright, so funny, and so very very friendly. Being there was like feeling rainbows with sprinkles falling from the sky.

Their hospitality was off the chart. They gave us their own beds to sleep in—in Jacmel people even gave us their whole home to stay in. They fed us. Omagosh, the food! They always made



Shakira and Leah in Bigonet

sure we ate first. And it was all so good. Well, maybe there were a couple things that we didn't like as much. But they made sure we always took the first bite. Their kindness was just unreal.

Some things were a challenge. Finishing all the food we were served. There was just so much food! Some of the mountain trails were hard. And the bucket baths were hard—but really, all you need is water in a bucket and a bar of soap.

Leah: I was a little outside my comfort zone the way the days were structured.

We never knew for sure what was going to happen next—or when it was going to happen. It was a little uncomfortable for me to know that I had no control over any of it. But sometimes it's good to go outside our comfort zones.

Shakira: I actually really liked that. Everything was just so relaxed. And I loved the idea of having to adapt quickly. I liked all that. I was so happy there—like being in a sky filled with cotton candy clouds.

Q. What about your visit to the school? What was that like?

A. That was SO much fun. The classrooms had songs for us. They were so glad to see us.

We told them about who we are, and where we're from. One little boy asked, "What's Minnesota?" That was a sur-

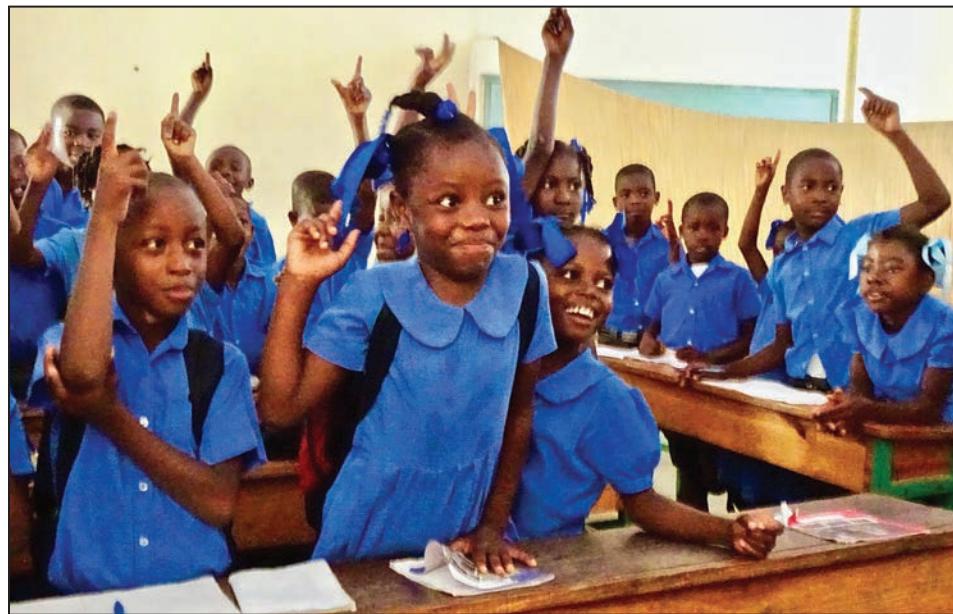
prise, but then we realized, "Of course. Why would he know that?"

The kids were so eager to ask us questions. The one we heard most often was, "When can we come visit you?" That broke my heart. Cause the answer of course is "You may never be able to come visit us." That was really hard. That really broke our hearts."

[Note: One afternoon Shakira and Leah were at the school as students came out of their classrooms for recess. With no Creole/English interpreter at hand, they wondered what to do.]

Omagosh! We realized we have to talk with them, but there's no one to interpret. So we started to teach them clapping games. It was hard, without words, to teach them the rules. But then they really got it. They were so eager, so respectful. And then they started making up their own version—and they started teaching us. It was kinda' scary at first. 'Cause what if we don't get it? But we did. I felt SO accomplished. And all this was with NO Interpreter.

That's when I really knew what our partnership is all about. The spirit of friendship was there, no matter what we were doing. It was there when we were in church, obviously. But it was there when we were at Ceder's house. It was there at Luckner's house. It was there when we were playing clapping



Bonne Nouvelle students eager to ask questions



Teaching—and learning.

Reflections of Teen Travelers: Leah Morley and Shakira Ryines

Continued from page 5

games with the kids at the school. We teach them; they teach us.

The older people started our partnership—the older people at St. James and Bonne Nouvelle. But now we're all in partnership. The older people, the kids, the teens. In both Haiti and Minneapolis, we're all really involved. Just knowing that, finding out about it, and especially experiencing it, it has changed my life. There's no turning back.

Q. We live in a city that's mostly white. The people of St. James are mostly white. The schools you go to are mostly white. What was it like to be in a nation that's mostly black?

A. Shakira: I loved it. I loved the pride, the strength, just everything about the people, the kids I was meeting. I could feel the comfort. I could feel the love. I've never felt so comfortable in my own skin as I felt when I was there. When I was in Haiti, I was really happy.

Leah: For me, I've never been so aware of how white I am, as I was in Haiti. I was aware that I didn't want people to assume I was there for a bad reason. It was really really different. It wasn't my favorite experience, but it was a very important experience.

[Note: Shakira, Leah and I were sitting at a picnic table in a public area, very near a street with passing car traffic.]

Shakira: Here I'm the one who's different. When people drive by and see us sitting here, they wonder who I am and why I'm sitting here with you. In Haiti, it was always okay. No one wondered why I was there.

Q. Tell me about the church?

[Note: Since 2010 when earthquake destroyed their building, Bonne Nouvelle has worshipped in a

patchwork-building of scavenged cement block, tin, tarps, etc. Every month they take a special Sunday collection toward a building fund. And recently members have begun carrying rocks up the mountain, from the nearby River Cormier. St. James Haiti Committee is exploring ways to help raise money.]

A. I just can't wait for them to finish. They told us their plans ... to push one wall as far as they can into the hill ... another wall as close as is safe to the edge of the cliff. To have a floor. A roof. To make it bigger — which they really need 'cause it was really crowded when we were there.

Q. What about the Sunday worship service?

A. Leah: It seemed really long for me. I wanted to understand the sermon and everything else. But it wasn't being translated for us, so it seemed like it was really really long.

Shakira: It was the perfect amount of time for me—kinda like black church services. I'd thought ahead about both French and Spanish. Though I never heard many people speaking any Spanish in Haiti, I was able to pick up a little of the French they were speaking.

Q. St. James has invested a lot in the partnership with Bonne Nouvelle, and you're among a small handful of people who've had the opportunity to go there. What would you tell people who haven't had that privilege?

A. It's not a trip that everyone can do. For sure, there are some things about it that some people would be really uncomfortable with.

But if you can, GO! You definitely need an open mind. To prepare yourself for the unexpected. To know that you have pre-conceived notions. There's a lot about Haiti that the West wants you to believe. And so much of it is so NOT true.

People talk about the poverty. They say it's all so sad and so starving. So miserable. So dusty. Well — NO!

Haiti is just people living their lives, like anyone else. They're seriously working with what they have. They don't need a can opener. They don't need a tub or a shower. They don't need a car. It's okay to share a house with crickets. It's okay to live where it's hot.

Leah: Haiti is just people living their lives, like anyone else. They work with what they have, like we do. And they are happy with it, like we are. I really want to emphasize that this is the most important thing I learned.

Shakira: For me? I wanted to stay in Haiti.

Both: Haiti Rocks! We want more people to have this experience.

Note: To learn more about the June St. James trip to Haiti, come to the Adult Forum—Sunday, August 12 at 9:30, and watch for perspectives of other travelers in the September Epistle.

Mesi anpil! (Many thanks!) An update on our 2018 Haiti Pledge Drive

In May 2018 The St. James Haiti Committee conducted its once-yearly pledge drive, for donations that form the backbone of our financial contributions to Bonne Nouvelle. Results: 25 pledges total \$10,491. This is a tad more than 2017 (24 pledges totaling \$10,435); and slightly down from 2016 (22 pledges totaling \$11,147).

Mesi anpil to all who gave—and for all many ways that St. James supports this partnership.

From the Tresurer Tony Morley

Financial Report — January-June

We have finished half the year. Pledge payments are about \$5,000 less than expected, which is not a good sign. However, “other income” is way better than budget, a very good sign. A our bottom line for total income is \$11,000 better than budget. Property and office expenses are high, but not by much. Total spending is almost exactly on budget. Bring your pledges up to date, and we’ll feel even better.

Meanwhile, our four non-budget, non-operating funds are all in healthy shape: Piotrowski memorials, \$2,100; Haiti, \$10,500; Tri-Faith, \$3,900; Building assessment, \$1,700.

	YTD Budget	YTD Actual	over / (under)
Pledged Income	73,522	68,782	(4,740)
Other Income	35,976	51,857	8,199
Total Income	109,498	120,639	11,141
Expenses	96,637	95,925	(125)
Net	12,861	24,715	11,854

We've Been Screened!

No, the Transportation Security Administration isn't screening church goers! It's our windows that have been screened. You may have noticed that all but two windows of the Main Church now have screens. With two more and the six Gallery and four Narthex windows to go, St. James is about to become free of bees, flies, mosquitoes, wasps, and other creatures best left outdoors*. How, you may ask, did this happen? A huge thank you to Vince Nelson who's built and installed the screens. Vince and his wife Kerry, the Vestry Clerk, are new members having moved to Minneapolis from Traverse City, Michigan. Thank you, Nelsons, for jumping in to life at St. James!

You may have noticed in the accompanying picture of one of the screens that the once lustrous brown paint on the wood around the window is faded and peeling. Faded and peeling paint isn't uncommon at St. James. Are there people properly horrified by this state of affairs who'd like to step forward to start the process of scraping, priming, and painting? First impressions count...

* This doesn't necessarily include rodents, which do occasionally find their way into the building. But that's another story.





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