



ST. JOHN'S
EPISCOPAL CHURCH
LAFAYETTE

The Eagle

St. John's Episcopal Church | Lafayette, Ind. | October 2020



From the Rector

This spring, I was admitted into the Missional Leadership Cohort at Luther Seminary in Minneapolis. This program is an opportunity for Episcopal priests to learn together how to think differently about how we, as the Church, connect to our community. The framing concept is “adaptive leadership” — leadership that addresses issues that have no straightforward, technical fix. How do leaders in the church address new issues and rise to new challenges? How do we face an uncertain future, a future where there are no easy answers?

Little did I know that, when I applied, I would be asking these questions in the middle of a pandemic. Things seem really different now. The challenges seem new and unforeseen. This is not what any of us expected. For that matter, I was looking forward to several days at a retreat center near Minneapolis, not three days on Zoom.

But all the relevant challenges were there before. The pandemic may have exacerbated and accelerated them, but they were already there. (The same could be said for any number of problems facing our country — economic inequality, racial injustice, disparities in access to healthcare.) The church's role in society has changed dramatically in the past few decades (if it hasn't changed in your life, think about how it might have changed for your kids or your grandkids and ask yourself “why?”). More and more people — even in small-town Indiana — have no connection to the church, they don't

know the Christian story, and they simply don't care. People walk by our beautiful building, but they're not likely to come in, stay for worship, or join a ministry (or, let's be honest, sign a pledge card). Of course, the point has never been to get people in the building (or worse, to sign a pledge card). The point is to help people connect to God, to know Jesus, to find healing and transformation, forgiveness, reconciliation, beauty, meaning, community. But how do we do that, now? Since the religious landscape has changed and is continuing to change, how do we adapt?

In preparing for the first meeting of the cohort, I reread the parish history and interviewed several folks about their experience at St. John's. The history is so interesting (I recommend reading it yourself at www.stjohns-laf.org/history). The conversations were also really insightful. One particular strand of conversation stuck with me. In preparation for the major renovation of the church's campus in the 1990s, the members of St. John's made a conscious decision to remain downtown rather than move out into the booming areas of the county. As one member put it, this decision was made “in order to be available to the neighborhood.” We talked for some time about what that might have meant then or what it might mean now, but there were no obvious answers. I mean, our building is “available” for music events or 12-step groups and the like. It's open on Sunday and at other times for worship, and people in the *(continued on page 2)*

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neighborhood are welcome to come. It's available in that sense. But what about the other stuff — what about the connections to God, to Jesus, to healing and transformation, forgiveness, reconciliation, beauty, meaning, community? How do we remain available to the neighborhood and to the larger community in those ways?

This is a perfect illustration of an adaptive challenge. St. John's used to operate one of the largest food pantries in the area, and the pantry was "available" to members of the community suffering from food insecurity. Closing the St. John's/LUM Food Pantry resulted in a loss of identity for St. John's and especially for our outreach ministries (not to mention the community's capacity to respond to food insecurity). The pantry was one of our most recognizable ministries and the most obvious way for people in the community to engage with St. John's. But the truth is, only a small number of St. John's parishioners were actually involved in the pantry's operation at any given time. (This is not meant to disparage those volunteers or the pantry. For 40 years, people from St. John's and the wider community fed tens of thousands of people. Theirs was a beautiful example of Christian service.) It was, however, an easy ministry for us to point to, and it did bring hundreds of people into the church building on a regular basis. And, while we constantly hoped the pantry would help us build relationships in the neighborhood or the community (not necessarily to bring people into the church, but...), we consistently discovered that people came to the pantry for food, not for those relationships. Sure, people got to know one another, but it usually didn't go much deeper than that. One parishioner suggested (and our Outreach discernment a few years ago bore this out) that people yearned to build relationships rather than create programs. However, this goes against the tendency in churches, qua institutions, to measure success and availability in terms of attendance and contact hours, but it also goes against people's expectations. But the COVID-19 pandemic has given us an opportunity to see church differently (we may be the gathered body,

but we are not necessarily the body gathered in the building at any given time). Still, the very practical, transactional needs of the neighborhood and community remain.

The real challenge seems to be identifying new ways to connect to the neighborhood and community that recognizes the gifts, passions and abilities of St. John's parishioners and helps people find God, Jesus, healing, transformation, meaning, community. And maybe, because we're the Church and we're called to feed people or seek justice or the like, we'll find the need and work to address it. So the question becomes, how do we remain available to the neighborhood and to the larger community in these ways? For the record, I'm all ears. And I'll be reporting back to you about my conversations in the cohort. But I hope to engage all of you as this work develops.

I want to close with one last comment about St. John's and the community. In my time at St. John's I have found that members are very active in the community, just not necessarily in the name of the church. I have attended any number of forums, rallies, community events, etc. and found a large contingent of you there. For instance, I attended an event at City Hall to discuss a report outlining the ways the Indiana Department of Education was failing Black youth. There were about 40 people there, but 10 of them were from St. John's. Dozens of people from the church showed up to protest George Floyd's murder and demand justice. You are engaged in several of the organizations in the community (LUM, Transitional Housing, Family Promise, etc.) by your own initiative and not through the church. My guess is that some of you wouldn't mention the church or even your Christian faith as a reason for that service. Still, the work is critically important and you're doing it. Like good Episcopalians, you do the work because that's what you're called to do. And while you may be more likely to recommend your favorite restaurant or a good NPR story before mentioning your faith, some of the work is getting done. To be sure, that's no small thing. — *Bradley Pace, bradleypace@stjohns-laf.org*

**Celebrate the Feast of St. Francis
The Blessing of the Animals
5 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 4
St. John's Garden**

Support the LUM Pantry

This October at St. John's

As part of St. John's Sharing Ministries, there will be opportunities to support Lafayette Urban Ministry's Protein Pantry this October. The following items are the most critically needed for donation: toilet paper, diapers (sizes 3-6) and baby wipes. If you prefer, you can support LUM directly with a cash donation or donate to St. John's. We will do a drop-off in the Memorial Garden 10 a.m.-noon Saturday, Oct. 3 and 10; and 5-7 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 7. There will be coffee and doughnuts as a thank you for your efforts. — *Mary Kay McCauley, mccauley.mk3@gmail.com*

Save the Date: Pre-Convention Workshop with Canon Stephanie Spellers

7 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 7

The Rev. Canon Stephanie Spellers, Canon to Presiding Bishop Michael Curry for Evangelism, Reconciliation and Stewardship of Creation, will be this year's diocesan convention keynote speaker. The author of *Radical Welcome: Embracing God, the Other and the Spirit of Transformation* and *The Episcopal Way* (with Eric Law), she has directed mission and evangelism work at General Theological Seminary and in the Diocese of Long Island. She founded The Crossing in Boston and has led a number of church-wide renewal efforts.



The Rev. Spellers

At 7 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 7, Canon Spellers will lead an online pre-convention workshop. Other workshops will be offered on Wednesdays in October and 7-p p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 4. Watch for more details.

Neighborhood Prayer Walks

Beginning in October

Beginning in October, members of St. John's will meet weekly one or more times to walk the neighborhood around St. John's and to offer prayer for our community. Times and dates are still to be determined. More information will be forthcoming. — *Bradley Pace, bradleypace@stjohns-laf.org*

The Rev. Andrea Arsene Featured in Diocesan e-newsletter

The following appeared in recent issues of the IndyDio e-newsletter

The Rev. Andrea Arsene is the newest participant in a renewed curacy program through which the diocese partners with congregations who are ready to provide training and mentorship to a newly ordained priest. Arsene began serving as curate at St. John's in Lafayette on Aug. 1. A recent graduate of Church Divinity School of the Pacific, Arsene comes from the Diocese of Los Angeles, where she

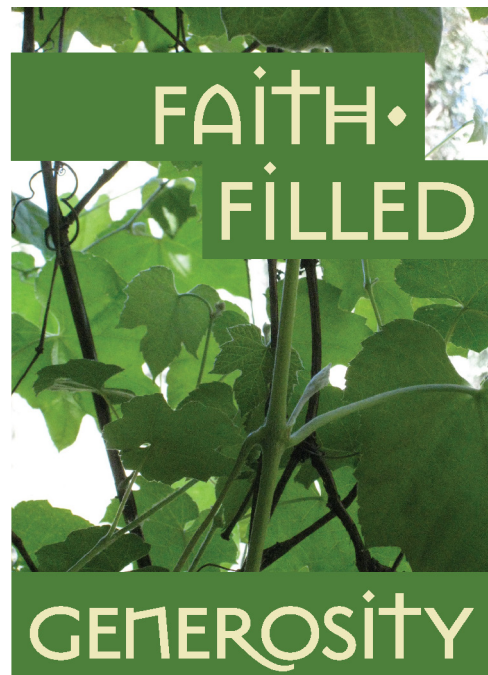


The Rev. Arsene

was ordained to the diaconate on June 13. It is expected that she will be ordained to the priesthood in December.

"I am enjoying the opportunities to preach and officiate during Sunday worship," Arsene says of her first month with St. John's. "I am looking forward to more pastoral opportunities and to connecting over different media and in different ways to get to know the members of this beloved community of St. John's." Of the move from California to Indiana, Arsene says, "I'm adapting to the rain, having lived in the desert for years!"

To subscribe to the IndyDio e-newsletter, go to www.indydio.org.



Look for more information coming soon on how you can support St. John's ministry in 2021.

