



ST. COLUMBA'S  
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

# *Love* **To Tell the Story**

COLLECTED STORIES FROM 150 YEARS OF ST. COLUMBA'S

Advent 2024

Happy 150th Anniversary, St. Columba's!

Dear Ones,

It has been a glorious year of celebration. We rejoiced with special worship first on Columba Day, then on All Saints' with commissioned music, festive picnics, and music on the labyrinth; with Bishop Budde's visit and the confirmation or reception of twenty-five youth and adults; with a successful \$6 million capital campaign (with over \$8 million pledged as of this printing!); and, with countless stories gathered and shared – with videos, on line, during worship, and here in written form.



Here is a sampling of stories, tales told by parishioners from across the past four decades. Many recount poignant moments of personal epiphany, grace, gratitude, and blessing. As we are one body in Christ, the stories of these individuals' past are also our own stories. They reveal to us something of the ethos and character of this extraordinary church. We have tales of deep commitment and tenderness, paired with playfulness and joy.

During my time among you, I am grateful that we clarified our mission to "live God's love." For me, the opportunity to live into this mission is as near as my next conversation, while it is as expansive as a lifetime. I read these stories through the lens of living God's love. May we be inspired by these stories, as we seek to live God's love in our own day.

Peace!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ledlie J. Laughlin". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Ledlie Laughlin, Rector



# A MOMENT IN TIME



## TOM BETHELL

When I think of St. Columba's in the 1990s, I think of cheerful chaos and open minds. Since theologically I was (and still am) something of a doubting and disorganized Thomas, I needed both, and consequently thrived. I may have been happiest when helping embattled Parish Administrator Karen Fitzgerald cope with the latest Buildings & Grounds kerfuffle (see, for example: endless roof leaks), or when greeting people as part of Chris Schumann's intrepid Nights of Columba squad (often accompanied by my hospitable dog Jack), or when writing for Newsletter Editor Susan Elliott, of whom Bill Tully rightly said, "You'll never find a better editor."

Here's one of the many memories that has stayed with me, all these years. It's from the dinner that Rosanne Hynes organized to celebrate the Nights, at which Brother Andrew Colquhoun, visiting from Holy Cross Monastery, spoke. His musical Scots burr is beyond my ability to capture, but this is a close paraphrase of what he said: "You'll be sitting at that little welcome desk, bored silly, eager to go home, and Jesus will walk in, seeking help. You won't recognize him, of course. *How will you respond?*"



# KAREN BURGESS

## JESUS AND THE TWELVE RECYCLERS

Like with many of the parishioners at St. Columba's, in our family, church was a family affair.

One day, some years ago, when our girls were still young, we were attending the 9:00 am service with our two daughters. I was always happy that there were legos and crayons in the pews to help keep them occupied during the sermon.

That Sunday, however, our younger daughter, then about six, surprised us on our way out of church by asking us about the sermon. She was curious about "Jesus and the 12 recyclers." (That was how she heard Bill Tully when he talked about "Jesus and the 12 disciples" in his sermon.)

We didn't want to make our young daughter feel embarrassed to have asked a question about the sermon -- about religion -- and I was searching for an answer when we came upon Bill Tully himself as we exited the church.

Looking for some help, I steered our family over to him and said, "Our daughter has a question about your sermon -- about Jesus and the '12 recyclers.'"

Without missing a beat, Bill bent down to be at our daughter's level and explained to her that Jesus had 12 companions who helped him recycle his love and energy throughout the world, and that is why they were called Jesus and the "12 recyclers."

To this day, this is how I think of St. Columba's -- a place where children are treasured and where all their questions are taken seriously. And for us in the congregation, aren't we those "recyclers" who leave St. Columba's every week and try our best to recycle Jesus' love and energy throughout the world?



## PETER CLAMP

When I turned 40, I moved from England to the Washington DC area to take up a job offer. Some friends of friends had recommended Janney School, and so my first wife, Oonagh, our eight-year-old daughter Jennifer, and I rented a house on Alton Place NW to be near to the school. Oonagh decided that Jenny should have some religious education and that it would do her no harm to sing in a choir. We could see the spire of St. Columba's from our deck. I had no idea what "Episcopal" meant, but the church was certainly convenient as there were only two streets to cross, and so off she went. After a week or two Jenny came home from choir practice to tell us that she had been invited to sing in a musical based on the story of Noah and the Ark. She had, she said, been invited to take the part of Noah's daughter Mary. We knew nothing about Noah's having daughters, but we didn't question it. The first time I went inside St. Columba's was when it was my turn to collect Jenny from a rehearsal of "Oh Noah!" I pushed open the door and was shocked to find women in fishnet tights and a tall man wearing an elephant's head, all dancing in the aisle and singing, "We are the sinners." I had never seen anything like this at St. Peter's Church by the Thames in Caversham, and I wondered if the Episcopal Church was a safe environment for an eight-year-old girl.

I discovered by chance that there was a small band of musicians that met at St. Columba's on Wednesday evenings. I figured that this was my opportunity to check out what was going on. The group, it turned out, consisted of a horn player, a tall lawyer named Dan, an elderly woman named Minnie, and a girl who was not much bigger than the violin that she played. We practiced a movement from a Mozart horn concerto. When the Sunday came for us to perform, I found myself seated in front of the organ. I was practically an atheist and felt exposed in more ways than one. At the same time, I was curious. As a child at St. Peter's, I could find absolutely no connection between what happened inside a church and what happened outside. Despite being churchgoers, the adults in my family responded to my childish questions about God and Jesus with shocked alarm; religion, along with all bodily functions, was a taboo subject. I was on my own trying to make sense of heaven and hell, sin and crucifixion, and my place in all of it. I concluded that all adults lived inner lives of hell, but were sworn to silence. At St. Columba's, my first

revelation was that the congregation and the choir members did not check out at the door; instead, they chatted happily with each other before services began. The Rector, Bill Tully, delivered powerful sermons that connected to real life as I experienced it. Here was a real, mature community that embraced big questions and shied away from nothing. I was hooked.



## SALLY AND STEVE COMISKEY

Our journey started with spilled coffee. Before St. Columba's, we spent Sunday mornings with coffee and the paper. This was very trying for our two-year-old son, Joe, and one Sunday morning as we mopped up the accidental spill, we got the message. We needed something more on Sunday, something for all of us -- we needed a church.

We asked around, we looked around, and we visited St. Columba's on a sunny June Sunday. We saw friends we knew, we heard beautiful music, there was even a bagpiper. WOW!

In our 30-plus years here, we have enjoyed good times and weathered not so good times. We are St. Columbans through thick and thin. This is our forever church home.



## REID DETCHON

I came to St. C's after Louise Moody and I were married there (by Bill Tully), and I dutifully helped shepherd my two new stepsons to Sunday school -- and later our three daughters to choir and the musical "Oh, Noah!" Somewhere along the way I signed up for a discernment class and spent an hour considering how God speaks to us. It suddenly became clear to me that I wouldn't hear God through my ears, but through my heart -- and that my passion for the environment was not a secular distraction, but a response to a call that was already within me. I might never be Mother Teresa, but I could be a small part of the body of Christ by helping to protect God's great and beautiful gift of Creation.

## DEBBIE DUSAULT

I joined St. Columba's because I wanted a welcoming church for my children. At that time there were no family-friendly services, and my son was a bit disruptive. I knew, however, that I was not the only one with this problem. The church decided to offer what is now known as Wee Worship. So I, my children, and one other family went to the first one. Presided over by Jay Sidebotham, it lasted all of about 25 minutes. The Gospel was told in kid-friendly language, as was the very short sermon. No music, just a short lesson and Communion. My children were very eager to attend this service, not the least because it was easier for them to earn a donut! They then went on to attend Sunday School and participate in all the other youth offerings.



# ALICE GREGAL

## THE MEREDITH SMOKE MEMORIAL WINEGLASSES

Meredith Smoke was one of the first people I met at St. Columba's in 1982. She was hard to forget as her nametag read "Meredith Smoke, I don't."

Having no children of her own, she adopted me. She said of my own mother, so different from Meredith, "How can you have come from *her?!?*"

Occasionally, she handed me updates on the plans for her funeral. Unread, I dutifully filed them in my home office.

When she died, in 2008 at age 84, I reached for Meredith's funeral file. To my surprise, her last wishes included putting me in charge of her memorial reception.

I knew that she would have wanted flowers and real wine glasses. *Thank you, Bill Riggs, for stepping up with the flowers.* I priced renting wine glasses at \$1 per stem. And I then realized that, for slightly more, I could buy them and donate them to the church.

As far as I know, dozens of Meredith Smoke's wine glasses are still stored in a St. Columba's closet. I like to think she'd be delighted that they are still available for reuse.



## DIANE HEATH ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF MUSIC

One day in 1996 I cold-called Judy Dodge, Director of Music at St. Columba's, and said, "I want to work for you." Judy said, "I don't have a position right now, but call me back in six months," and the rest is history.

As of this September I have had the pleasure of making music at St. Columba's for 28 years (about as long as Judy Dodge sat on the organ bench!). The supportive congregation and staff at St. Columba's, the magnificent instruments -- Flentrop pipe organ, grand pianos, and harpsichord -- all make this parish a musician's dream come true.



# DEBORAH KENNEDY COSTER

## ALIVE WITH LIGHT

Not long after I moved to DC and began attending St. Columba's, a friend came to town to attend an early spring conference, arriving on a Thursday. He had an evening event to attend and I had choir rehearsal, so we agreed that he would meet me at the church when rehearsal ended at 9:45 pm.

This was back when the Tenley Circle area was much less lively in the evening than it is now. The store on the corner of Wisconsin and Albemarle was a Sears. The tax preparation service H&R Block had an office in that building, with a separate entrance on Albemarle Street, and there was a mysterious security building where the Iona building is now.

It was after 9:00 pm when my friend arrived in Tenleytown. Here is what he wrote about his first encounter with St. Columba's:

I came up out of the Metro station and walked over the hill on Albemarle. The streets were shadowy and nearly deserted; I saw one poor straggler leaving the H&R Block offices, but no one else, and the buildings I passed were closed and dark.

And then I saw the church. What a contrast! All the doors were wide open. Light and music streamed out everywhere. And there were animals looking out of every window! I'll never forget it.

What my friend encountered that evening was the dress rehearsal for the spring 1988 production of "Oh Noah!," an original musical created by parishioners Terry Peel and John Pickard and performed by members of the congregation. Many Columba kids had roles as animals on the Ark, and they were in full costume, keeping themselves entertained by (among other things) looking out the windows while awaiting their cue to take the stage.

## AN ENCOUNTER AT THE EMPTY TOMB

An important part of St. Columba's education program for children is Story Time, when younger members of the congregation go out during the sermon to do an interactive learning activity in a separate space. For a number of years the Story Time activity on Easter Sunday involved taking the kids on a tour around the outside of the building, where they encountered various characters from the Gospels who told them about the events of the days leading up to Easter. At the end, they met the women at the empty tomb and then found the "tomb" itself, watched over by an angel. The "tomb" was against the wall of the courtyard under the little balcony that projects out from the Common, and the angel stood watch from that balcony, which was accessible through a door from the Common in those days.

I was assigned the role of the angel. My costume consisted of a white surplice over my choir vestment, a small set of fairy wings, and a headband-supported glitter halo. In addition, I had a bottle of bubble soap and a small bubble wand. I would stand on the balcony blowing bubbles as the kids met the women and heard that Jesus had been placed in the tomb but now was not there. I would ask the kids whom they were looking for and explain, "He is not here. He is risen!"

On one memorable occasion I spoke my lines and blew some final bubbles as the kids went on to their next stop on the tour. Then I went back into the Common, which was completely full of people in overflow seating that extended all the way up to the Sacristy entrance. As I stepped through the door from the balcony, I came face to face with a senior member of the United States Senate, who was seated in the overflow section and had evidently been watching my bubble-blowing performance right along. Nothing else for it: I smiled, bowed slightly, and saluted him with my bubble wand.

The Senator has long since retired, but I've always hoped that he found what, or whom, he was looking for at St. Columba's.

## A CHERRY TREE SURPRISE

During the worst of the COVID pandemic, when worship services and all other group activities were completely suspended, many of us in the St. Columba Singers recorded ourselves singing our choral parts karaoke-style at home and then sent our recordings to Anne Timpane, who did a heroic job of combining them into one track that could be played as part of each Zoom-based worship service. This kept the music going and kept us connected to one another, which was a great gift in that time of separation, anxiety, and sorrow. All the same, I was extraordinarily glad when we were able to begin worshipping together in the courtyard and the choir could sing as a group again.

For those services the choir sat in the northeast corner of the courtyard underneath a couple of the cherry trees. One sunny Sunday, overwhelmed with joy at hearing the voices of my choir friends around me and being part of a chord once again, I leaned back in my seat and looked up to the sky through the tree branches, sending a quiet personal prayer of thanks. And then my eyes focused on the branches above me ... the sun on the leaves ... the cherry blossoms ... the pine cone ....

Pine cone?

It was 15 feet up and appeared to have been fastened there intentionally. COVID took a lot out of us, I thought, but we remain resilient, intentional, inventive, delightfully surprising. All God's pine cones got a place in the choir.



## DEE PAYNE

In the fall of 1974, we at St. Columba's had our own experience of being "in the room where it happened." The movement to allow women to become priests in the Episcopal Church progressed exponentially when William Wendt, Rector of St. Stephen and the Incarnation, permitted Alison Cheek to celebrate the Eucharist. Alison had been a lay leader at St. Alban's Church, where she had been encouraged to take courses at Virginia Theological Seminary. She was ordained a deacon in January 1974. Although William Creighton, as the fifth Bishop of the Diocese of Washington, was an early supporter of the ordination of women to the priesthood, he proclaimed that he would not ordain any women until there was approval by the General Convention. Upon learning of the celebration at St. Stephen's, Bishop Creighton charged Rev. Wendt for disobeying a "godly admonition." After a trial date was set, the Diocese began searching for a location in which to hold it. Bill Swing, our Rector, offered St. Columba's. The trial lasted several days and was attended by women from St. Columba's and from all over the DMV. It created many headlines locally and nationally because of the emotional debate over women's ordination. In the end, William Wendt was censored but not removed, as "godly admonition" was a hard crime to define!

St. Columba's also promoted the campaign for women priests by becoming the first parish in the diocese to have women seminarians: Allison Palmer, Joan Bowman, and Noreen Suriner. Noreen was ordained at St. C's, one of the first (if not the first) "regular" ordinations in the diocese. She was from the Diocese of Western Massachusetts and her bishop, with the approval of Bishop Creighton, officiated at the ordination.

When equity and justice are at stake, St. Columba's has always played an important role in our Church and our community. We excel in being "in the room where it happens."



# MATTIE SCHLOETZER

## MATTIE AND LUKE: 1,000 BY THANKSGIVING

When I reflect on our experiences at St. Columba's, countless fond memories come to mind. Amidst the challenges of the COVID pandemic, our family's connection to the church became especially important, and we are deeply grateful for the opportunities it provided for worship and service during such a difficult time.

Despite the limitations imposed by COVID, my son Luke continued to engage in online Sunday School, while I actively participated in virtual classes led by Joshua Daniel and took on a role on the Stewardship Committee. The following story exemplifies how St. Columba's facilitated meaningful engagement within our community, even during the years of COVID.

November 2020: During the COVID pandemic, Cami Caudill initiated a community-driven effort known as "1,000 Masks by Thanksgiving" to support individuals experiencing homelessness in our local area. My son Luke (nine years old) and I saw this as an opportunity to contribute and decided to participate by organizing a mask collection effort within our cooperative building.

Neighbors enthusiastically responded to our call for donations by dropping off bags of masks, some of which were handmade, at our doorstep. The collective effort garnered significant interest, and we were delighted to deliver a large quantity of masks to the church.

Due to pandemic-related restrictions, on the collection day, we met Cami outside the church, where a small group of us witnessed Joshua Daniel's blessing of the masks -- a beautiful moment symbolizing our community's resilience and compassion during challenging times.



## **CHRIS SCHUMANN**

### TOUCHED BY THE SPIRIT

One long-ago All Saints Sunday, Jim Donald preached a sermon on "saints known and unknown." Moved by Jim's words, I went up to the healing ministry to request a prayer for my grandfather and namesake, Walther Schumann. My grandfather lived with us until he died when he was 95 and I was 21. Although he had had a difficult and often disappointing life, he was a guardian angel to my sister and me. I knelt and asked the healing minister, "Please offer up a prayer of thanksgiving for the life of my grandfather Walther, a saint unknown to the world but known to me."

The healing minister began, "We give thanks for the life of Walther, a child of God." I had never thought of my old grandfather as a child. Thinking of him as a child, and a child of God, I wept -- not tears of sorrow, not tears of joy, simply tears of recognition. When I rose, I saw that the healing minister was weeping too.

As I was walking out of the Chapel, a fellow parishioner waiting in line for healing reached out and tenderly patted me on the back. Because my glasses were clouded with tears, I could not see who it was.

I will never know why the healing minister wept with me. And I will never know who patted me on the back. What I know is that all three of us were touched that St. Columba's Sunday by the Holy Spirit.

### A GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT

On a mellow September morning in 2006, my wife Cathy Wiss and I took Jamie, our beloved Wheaten Terrier, to Friendship Animal Hospital to bring his life on Earth to an end. I have never cried harder.

Walking home from the hospital, we stopped in at St. Columba's so I could do some housekeeping in connection with a lay ministry. Although it was a Saturday, I was moved to seek out a clergyperson to comfort us. I searched among the clergy offices, and there I found Helen Trainor, a deacon at St.

Columba's. Although I was unsure whether such a request would be doctrinally correct, I asked Helen to pray for Jamie's soul. She readily agreed to do so.

Laying her hands on us, Helen began, "We pray for the soul of Jamie, a servant of the Lord." Hearing Helen's words, I saw Jamie in a new light. I no longer saw him simply as the eccentric terrier who entertained our family with his antics for 15 years; I saw him as a servant who was sent to help teach us how to open our hearts more fully and to love each other, and all creatures, more freely. Jamie's grace-given service lives in us still.

I will always be grateful that I was moved that sad morning to seek out solace in what seemed like an empty church. Seek and you will find; ask and it will be given unto you; knock and it will be opened unto you.

### A MINISTER OF ST. COLUMBA'S

Many years ago, as part of the weekday evening welcoming ministry known as Nights of Columba, I was sitting at the desk near the second-floor door on Albemarle Street. As the evening's last groups were leaving, a man who had attended an addiction group's meeting asked to talk with me. I accepted the invitation, and we sat together for twenty minutes or so discussing matters mundane and matters spiritual. As he rose to leave, the man said, "You must be proud to be the minister of a church like this."

Surprised and embarrassed, I assured the man that I was not the rector of St. Columba's. Walking home, however, I realized that, in a certain sense, the man was right. At that point in time, for that man's purposes, I was a minister of St. Columba's. When the Holy Spirit calls us so to serve, so are we all.



## ELSA SKAGGS

The exceptionally intelligent sermons and outgoing leadership of Bill Tully spirited me in special ways. One personal instance was going to him as I was about to head to Georgia as my mother was dying of cancer. I told Bill of my angst about how to deal with my two older siblings around all the many things to be done. And he said to me: "Do you think you can just go down and *enjoy* your mother?"



## STEPHEN SMITH

St. Columba's has been my spiritual home for more than 20 years. During that time, there have been many memorable moments that have made the church an important part of my life. One that stands out happened at a Christmas Eve service in the early 2000s. I was joined by some members of my family, including my mother and my grandmother, who was then in her 90s.

I was raised Roman Catholic before joining the Episcopal Church in college, so it was something of an accomplishment to convince my mother and my grandmother to attend anything other than Roman Catholic Mass, especially on Christmas Eve.

On that night, the Rev. Margaret Guenther presided. I always enjoyed seeing Margaret, but it was already a big step convincing my grandmother to step into a church that wasn't Roman Catholic. I was more than a little worried about how she'd react to a woman at the altar.

Later in the service, Grandma tapped me on the shoulder, noted Margaret's presence, and told me that she was happy she had lived long enough to see a female priest celebrating the Eucharist. I won't forget how it felt to see the appreciation on my grandmother's face that night for St. Columba's affirmation of her faith and the roles women play in the broader Church.

# CAROLINE WILLIS

## OUR FIRST SUNDAY AT ST. COLUMBA'S

My family -- husband Jerry, sons Bill (ten) and Trevor (one) -- moved to DC in the summer of 1984. Jerry, a Roman Catholic, wasn't much bothered about which parish to join, but I wanted the right fit. So every Sunday I, a cradle Episcopalian, went to a different church near AU Park and Spring Valley, where we were house-hunting. As discerning as Goldilocks, it had to be just right, and I wasn't finding it. Finally, it was September and St. Columba's was next. It was Parish Fair Sunday, and the joint was jumpin'. At the 9:15 Family Service, as the miles-long youth choir processed in, Bill pulled my sleeve and whispered, "Let's go here." A mere 40 years later, I still attend St. C's.



# CATHY WISS

## A STONE FROM IONA

In 1987, St. Columba's undertook a capital campaign to raise funds to build the Nave Extension, Common, and Great Hall wing of the church. The theme of the campaign was "These Stones Live." During the groundbreaking ceremony on St. Columba Day 1988, I had a vision as priest Craig Eder was leading the prayers: "Why not bring back a stone from Iona for the church addition when my family and I go to Europe this summer?" Incorporating a stone from Iona into the building would physically link our church to the home of our patron saint and embody the theme of the building campaign.

That summer, our family -- my husband Chris Schumann, our children Sarah and Thomas, and I -- journeyed to Iona, aided by travel tips from Craig, who had led a pilgrimage to Iona by bike in 1974. To get there, we took a ferry from the Scottish port of Oban to the Isle of Mull in the Inner Hebrides. On Mull we boarded a bus that wound along cliffs draped with mist and waterfalls. At the western tip of Mull, another ferry carried us across the sound to Iona.

Iona is a small island with a village extending from the ferry dock to the Abbey, a short walk uphill. After quiet reflection in the Abbey, we set out on foot for the marble quarry about two miles away. Years before, another St. Columban had brought back two pieces of marble from this quarry. They were fashioned into candlesticks.

The path took us over a rise, where we could hear faint sounds like tinkling voices. Since ancient times, this place has been known as "Fairy Hill," or "Sìthean Mòr." Another name is "Hill of Angels." St. Columba is said to have prayed on this hill, and when he did, angels surrounded him.

Soon we came to the Machair, a plain farmed by monks long ago. Its slopes descend toward the sea, where they are met by outcrops of ancient gray gneiss. Beyond the Machair, the path became boggy and overgrown with heather. Finally, it was too wet to continue. Disappointed in not reaching the quarry and finding a stone, we headed back to the village.

Just before the ferry dock, we stopped at Martyrs' Bay, where in 806, Vikings slaughtered 68 monks. As I watched waves curl around stones on the beach, a half-buried rectangular stone caught my eye. It was

not Iona marble, but Ross of Mull granite from the cliffs across the sound. The Abbey and many of Iona's buildings are constructed of this stone. Pink when dry, it deepens to red when wet.

When I turned the stone over, though, the other side was still uncut, as if cast away before it was finished. I wondered whether it could be used in our new building, but then remembered Jesus' words, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." Matthew 21:42. Perhaps this stone could find a home in our church after all.

Bringing the stone home was challenging. At Heathrow Airport, security agents became alarmed when their equipment failed to read the contents of the bag in which it was packed. The stone had blocked the X-rays. It was too heavy for the plane's overhead bins, but small enough to fit under the seat. Back in this country, customs inspectors almost confiscated it as a prohibited agricultural product. Finally, when Thomas and I presented the stone to Bill Tully, we learned that the church addition was to be made of brick, not stone.

Now a place for the stone has been found, along with the candlesticks of Iona marble. They both grace the altar of the Wiegand Chapel inside the 42<sup>nd</sup> Street door to the Nave.



# LINDA YANGAS

## CONFESSIONS OF A J2A LEADER

"It is a large undertaking, but one which I believe will be deeply rewarding," wrote priest-in-charge Steve Huber in a letter asking me "to consider an important ministry at St. Columba's." He was referring to the leadership of J2A, which is the second part of the Journey to Adulthood curriculum. My letter was one of five sent to parishioners selected by a leader discernment group to call adult leaders for the J2A class beginning in the fall of 2005.

I hesitated, not knowing what I could contribute to such an undertaking. I was retired now, and my routines did not include encounters with children of any age. I didn't think that I could connect with them in ways that would be helpful or beneficial.

Following Steve's advice, I prayed and pondered whether this call was for me. I looked around at church and became more aware of the many children of all ages in our midst. And then I accepted, because I could sense the energy and excitement in the presence of these children. It gave me the impression that something important was going to happen, and I wanted to be part of it.

Steve's statement echoed in my mind after I had completed my commitment to the program. The rewards were plentiful although, in my case, not before unexpected initial challenges. Emily Gowdy Canady's encouragement and the support of co-leaders worked miracles. Before long (and with prayer) the class and I learned to listen to each other and to work together.

I showed up week after week to lead the Sunday classes with John Nolan, Woody Turner, and Charlotte Dean (before she had her babies), at times joining Erika Sward and Kevin Reese for the afternoon sessions (J2A PM). I participated in a winter retreat, and helped clean bottles and fill them with beans for the "Say It with Soup" pilgrimage fundraiser. I wrapped Christmas presents and helped with the spring pilgrimage fundraiser (which involved delivering flocks of pink flamingos to parishioners' lawns). And, with sleeping bag in tow, I joined St. C's participants in the overnight Cathedral Lock-In with other young people from throughout the Diocese of Washington.

We were pilgrims that summer, together seeking God in places away from our usual haunts -- in cities in California and Oregon, by the sea, up in the hills, beside waterfalls, on a river, and at the site of Lewis

and Clark's Fort Clatsop. We asked each other where we were challenged during our day-long meanderings, and where we each found peace. We reflected, asked questions, and questioned our assumptions. Just as there were moments of silence, there were times for fun and play. I took part in their games, learned some of their songs, and chatted at every chance. I shared my own stories.

The J2Aers showed me in simple acts how to live in community. They made space in our small classroom for latecomers and shared class materials. During the retreat and on the pilgrimage, they included me in their games, making accommodations for handicaps. They trusted the group, shared personal thoughts, and did not hesitate to speak of their doubts, some of which related to our faith. They cared for each other and for others, praying for their well-being. These young people celebrated God's gifts and gave Him thanks in simple, unpretentious prayers. They infused me with their craze for life, and I felt bound together with them.

Yes, leadership in J2A was a large undertaking. And, yes, it was absolutely rewarding.





**JOURNEYS  
IN FAITH**

# BETTY ARBUCKLE

## THE IMPACT OF ST. COLUMBA'S ON OUR FAMILY

My second child was born with a birth defect: the bones of his skull were fused together. In order to allow the brain to grow, he required surgery at two weeks. Although doctors prepared us to expect brain damage, over time we were relieved to see that such was not the case. A series of operations over the course of his childhood helped; however, his face remained slightly disfigured. And this is where my St. Columba's story begins.

Our family was living in the neighborhood, and I was searching for a nursery school for my son. We first went to a school nearby where the director of the school informed me that she would need to talk to the parents; she was concerned that his looks might be too off-putting for the other children and their families. That was devastating to hear. I went to St. Columba's Nursery School next. The reception from Sylvia Buell, Nursery School Director at the time, was a stark contrast; warm and welcoming, she said -- and I won't forget these words -- "What a gift! He will give us so much. Thank for choosing us!"

My son went on to have a wonderful nursery school experience, and St. C's became our church home. He, along with his two brothers, participated in the boys' choir, Sunday school, and other youth activities. After nursery school, he and the other boys went on to Janney School. He is thoughtful and intelligent; what he lacked in athleticism, he more than made up for with his sports knowledge among the other boys -- he knew all the statistics. An ever-joyful child, he was friendly and would smile and greet everyone he met. He has found incredible acceptance over the course of his life and is now a professor at a small liberal arts college in the Midwest, where he is loved by his students.

My son has flourished, owing in large part to St. Columba's warm reception and his ongoing activities in our church. It has brought joy to me and to his family to know that others can see him, accept him, and love him the way that we do. I am most grateful to St. Columba's, as this experience has had a lasting impact on my son and on the lives of our family.



## DOROTHY BIARD

Congratulations on St. Columba's 150th anniversary! As the chair of the America 250! Committee of a local lineage group, I, too, am working on activities celebrating an upcoming birthday, this one for our nation. I wish you well in your project! A St. Columba's parishioner since 1983, my introduction to the church came during Bill Tully's tenure. We were parishioners first at St. John's, then at St. Alban's as we had children. Following a move, we were drawn by St. Columba's convenience, as we bought a house quite close, and by the Nursery School under the direction of Karen Strimple, a mighty educator who understood and loved my quirky younger daughter, who brought her pet slug to school and was so sad when it melted away. Karen helped get her into Beauvoir, where she fell in love with the school, the Cathedral, and the Bishop's Garden, to which we still go. The azalea bushes around our house are all from the Spring Fairs, bought some 40 years ago and still thriving. In their mid-40s, my daughters still compare whose personal bush is bigger! The Episcopal Church has many tentacles!

So many things stand out about St. Columba's in the 1980s and 1990s. One was the music program, which rose to awesome heights with beautiful arrangements and multi-part congregational singing. A lover of tradition, I always looked forward to singing "The King of Love My Shepherd Is" on Columba Day and "I Am the Bread of Life" -- an eternal favorite. Bill Tully had no problem stopping a song to encourage better participation or rehearsing a song before the service started. This was not a time of simple melodies! The installation of the new organ was a highlight. Our older daughter went through Primary Choir, Boy and Girl Choir, and all the other student choirs up through high school, and she returned to sing when home from college. She both participated in primary choir music tutoring and rang through all levels of the handbell choirs, leading us to take a blanket and sit on the Cathedral lawn for the ringing of a Triple Bob Major during one of the Cathedral's celebrations. The Primary Choir members autographed a Church Hymnal and presented it to our older daughter as a thank-you for her teaching help. I even took a brief turn in the Adult Choir. The most fun part of the music program was the church musicals, in which we all participated. In three musicals written and directed for St. Columba's by the talented Peel and Pickard duo, I remember being a singing fish, a tap-dancing pig, and possibly a sheep (past 80, my memory fails on some details!). I still remember some of the songs, cherish the memories of our family involvement, and even have my commemorative mug these many decades later.

My impression of those years is that St. Columba's was quite "high church," and the music reflected that bent. I've never loved anything to do with church music so much again, so am glad to have had that unique experience. It enriched our lives!

Another program that stood out is Sunday School, which my two children attended, and I taught at least one session a year from three-year-olds up through the middle years. The Summer Camp was a re-creation of a village in ancient Jerusalem. We had "tents" and a visiting petting zoo, crafts, activities, snacks, and an archeological dig in the playground sandbox. The youth group of the nearby Methodist church participated with their youth minister as age-level group aides. We loved it! It led me to explore the possibility of a Christian Education degree, with Pat Thomas as my sounding-board, though in the end my MAT came from Johns Hopkins, but St. Columba's is responsible for it.

Holidays were always special. From Ash Wednesday's anointing to Holy Week, we participated in every offering. From the dark undressing of the church and the Stations of the Cross to high holiday celebrations, we were there. For the Christmas Pageant, the girls dressed up in costume and were part of the procession into the church from the sidewalk staging area. Their Sunday School classes made Jesse Tree branches, and they brought them up to be inserted into the tree during the service. As they got older, we favored the beautiful late evening service with its soaring choral music. My older daughter sometimes sang and rang at multiple services at Easter. We went to the Wednesday night suppers, the Tuesday night pancake supper, and all the services of Holy Week, including carrying our palm fronds around the church on Palm Sunday. We took our pets to the Blessing of the Animals. We walked the bounds of the parish. At one point, I was asked to read the Lesson on a Sunday; one or two came up afterwards and said, "That is the way the Bible should be read," so at least I hadn't made a mash-up of it, as one can so easily do. St. Columba's became our second home. We were neither unique nor the only ones, just one of many like-minded families. I remember well one Bill Tully sermon on priorities where he asked everyone to make sure they had taken care of everything at home before volunteering at church.

St. Columba's presented itself as a journey church. Anyone from any faith tradition or none was welcome. The church also opened its doors to the neighborhood. Our Girl Scout troop met there. I organized a Senior Citizens Day, announced in the Northwest Current, where students from Georgetown Day School came and helped record the memories and stories of older citizens as part of a Tenleytown community effort to establish a Grant Road Historic District and a Tenleytown Historic Trail. We felt we were an

active part of a participatory neighborhood community centered on the church. All these events at St. Columba's meant a great deal to us, and we will never forget its role in our family journey through life. When the Columbarium was installed, I wanted to buy two spaces, but Billy Tully told all of us that the niches needed to be filled as people passed away, rather than being held empty for future use. It was full when my husband died and his ashes are in the Columbarium at Arlington National Cemetery, where mine will one day join his.

St. Columba's was an activist church and anybody with a good idea could start something. I remember tables stretching down the Great Hall on Sundays, with stacks of information sheets about each of the many projects, activities, and ways parishioners could participate. The church had depth and breadth, serving the needs of a huge congregation, said to be the largest east of the Mississippi, but that may have been a boast! Even something small, like Hattie's Book Cart, served a need, and the girls and I always stopped there after the Sunday service to talk to Hattie and check out the new donations. A large initiative, begun in 1994, involved a bunch of us organizing an on-going educational relationship with Truesdell Elementary School. I recall offering the title STEP, or St. Columba's-Truesdell Education Partnership, and it was approved on a vote by the group. Another thing I particularly recall is our having a black minister of a church near the school coming to talk to the group and telling us we were all racists. I was taken aback, and it was the first time I was ever called out for the color of my skin. What it must be like always to be labeled based on your birth genetics. Today, my younger daughter lives a couple of blocks from the school.

One idea that never got off the ground was Bill Tully's effort to close the street behind the church and build an assisted living facility to serve the surrounding community. It fell to neighborhood concerns about ambulance sirens and parking and was a cause of the rector's growing view that St. Columba's was a "golden cage" he needed to escape. His desire to expand the main church space was sat upon by the city, which permitted lesser changes such as adding multiple doors into the Great Hall (a Bill Tully sleight-of-hand move). With the doors all open, this provided room for rows of folding chairs to be set up in the Great Hall, thus greatly expanding the Nave. I sat there from time to time myself on SRO Sundays. I loved the Gothic look of the church when we first became parishioners and noted that, with each transformation, the church interior became lighter and lighter in color and more modern generic church in appearance, though still very attractive. Church services also gradually changed from standing, sitting, and kneeling, as required by the service, into a "standing" church for most of the service, something I

could no longer do with physical comfort. These days, as a very senior citizen, I tend to Zoom the Cathedral services from home, seated at my desk, something I began after St. Columba's quit Zooming later in the pandemic. I now especially enjoy watching the flags, the banners coming down the aisle, and the various choirs of the Cathedral, but I still keep my tithing membership at St. Columba's, where I have recently started attending several things, such as the new monthly Thursday seniors group and the tai chi class on Saturday morning. St. Columba's has a way of drawing you back!

Praying was emphasized strongly. I can remember going up behind the altar for a personal prayer at times too stressful to bear alone. I sometimes called and left prayer requests for those ill, in need, or dying. When a colleague's young niece was dying, the St. Columba's prayer team prayed hard for her. I am convinced St. Columba's saved her life. Her doctors called it a miracle. I call it St. Columba's. On the other hand, when St. Columba's brought in a priest to teach us how to pray, I lost my innate sense of prayer. I've prayed all my life, and it took a while to realize that prayer, for me, is an individual private conversation with God. My great-grandmother taught me the Lord's Prayer as a child and I still say it, along with praising and speaking to God. I now find comfort watching Morning Prayer each weekday on the Cathedral website, especially when former St. Columba's priest Rose Duncan is leading the service.

One thing that really needs recalling is the clergy who led all this. After Bill Swing left in 1980 to be Bishop of California, Bill Tully was a strong decisive presence before moving on to a New York urban church in 1994. His 1995 replacement, Jim Donald, was a steady presence for all of us. I remember seeing him shopping locally and jogging around the neighborhood. He was one of us, and it was a profound shock to learn of his sudden medical crisis in 2005. As a modern woman, I was pleased to see the presence of female priests at St. Columba's and was an admirer of Margaret Guenther, a woman of great faith. For me, the priest who really stood out was Craig Eder, a warrior for God and the closest thing to a Biblical holy man I've ever met. Monastically inclined, he was a man of specific religious ideas and beliefs. He and my husband were both fond of dogs and were contributors to the Washington Humane Society. I remember on several occasions his talking about the Desert Fathers and wanting to follow their example, seeking the bedrock roots of Christian faith and practice. He is the only priest I've known who was so clear and open about his faith journey. I remember his mentoring the young St. Alban's School priest Will Billow and saying that he would stick his arm down from Heaven and yank Will up, whether he wanted to go or not. He was a man of strong views, on which he acted whether it benefited him or harmed him. One of my fondest memories is Easter Sunday, when Craig would carry

red-dyed Easter eggs in his robe pocket and never fail to give me one as he handed them out -- a true Easter treasure! It is a delight to know that during his lifetime the Cathedral created a gargoyle with Craig's face and raised it high on the Cathedral tower to be as close to Heaven as possible. I was on the Library Committee for a while and was so happy to see the library named the Craig Eder Library and his cast head placed on a plinth there. I used to visit it for a moment on Sundays. I was deeply sorry to see it all pass away as the church and the congregation changed through various rectors and adapted to other ways in recent years. The building is still there but the clergy leadership and the congregation are now mostly unknown to me. I know that Ledlie Laughlin has been good for St. Columba's in its rebuilding phase. It will be interesting to see where the church goes in the future.

I will always be grateful for the role of St. Columba's in our family life and its support in reaffirming my Christian faith over the years. Living God's Love is currently the focus of both St. Columba's and my religious practice, always a work in progress. It makes me smile, though, as 'living God's love' is the basic tenet of the Moravian Brethren, the oldest Protestant denomination in Christianity, which was founded in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in 1741 to do just that during the era before the American Revolution. I am reminded that the more we change, the more we remain the same.



# INGA BLUST

## FAITH STORY

Well, I don't know about you, but whenever I get asked to talk about "my faith," I get really nervous! Is "my faith" really deep enough to talk about, do I have the vocabulary to make what I feel sound spiritual enough, is my faith strong enough to be examined deeply?

My faith did not come to me with a transformational experience -- it has been with me since childhood. I think of it as a smoldering fire that every now and then sparks up through some particular happening or experience. I was fortunate in that I grew up with a Lutheran mother, who, though not a regular churchgoer, certainly knew her Bible and prayed with me every night. At the age of 14, I was confirmed in the Church of England. I remember the preparation as being the first time that I was confronted with what belief in God meant, at least from the Church of England's point of view. I thought of my confirmation day as being a step towards becoming an adult, and I liked the discussions and the fact that our views were listened to seriously.

I continued to go to church regularly through my teens, but I have to say that by the time I went off to university, I was beginning to feel a bit of an anomaly. In fact, it was at that time that my evening prayer usually ended with, "Dear Lord, let me not feel embarrassed to say I believe in God." Still, wherever I was, I usually found a church, but never one that truly engaged me.

I met my American husband when I was serving with the British Embassy in Warsaw, Poland, and eventually, with our three little girls, we came to live in Washington. St. Columba's happened to be our nearest church, so we gave it a try. It was a revelation to me that you could enjoy church so much. You could sing joyfully, make music, and take part in plays, but above all, you could be open about being a believer in God. One day, I suddenly realized that I was no longer praying, "Lord let me not be embarrassed to say, 'I am a Christian.'" Through the years here, I have come to feel that my faith, my smoldering fire, has been able to burn brighter, and I have become a bit more the person that deep down, I have always yearned to be.

One year, I had some heart issues, and I was faced with a transfer from one hospital to another for an urgent operation. Before I went off in the ambulance, I asked my daughters to please call St. Columba's

and put me on the prayer chain. I can only say that as we drove through the evening, I felt very calm. I knew that whatever happened, it would be all right. I just felt lifted up by my fellow Columbans. Now that was a definite spark! Thank you, St Columba's!



## **SHANTEL BOLKS**

### SHANTEL AND REXON

When I started going to the Water Ministry in November 2022, I didn't yet know that I was already almost three months pregnant. There, I got to feel safe, clean up, have positive interactions with a lot of people from St. C's and visitors, and eat healthy and delicious meals throughout my whole pregnancy. I hadn't been to church in about 13 years, but had been thinking about it for a while, and the sign for Wee Worship caught my eye. When my brand-new baby boy, Raxon, was one week old, I brought him to Wee Worship at St. Columba's. I was a bit nervous and awkward feeling, but the atmosphere was so positive and relaxed. After a few weeks, I started attending regular service as well, and started to get to know everyone at church a little better. I had nothing when I came to Water Ministry, except the backpack I was always wearing, and now, with a lot of work, prayer, and tons of help from the other mothers and families at St. C's, I have been blessed with a comfortable home that's well-furnished and close to church, so now it's easy to bring Raxon every week to Wee Worship -- a place where it's hard not to see and feel God's presence in all of those sweet, happy children! I'm so grateful every day for the love, support, generosity, kindness, and acceptance that I have received from St. C's more than anywhere else.

## **SUZANNE BURROWS**

Bob and I have been parishioners of St. Columba's for 25 years. We joined the parish after moving into the neighborhood and were attracted to the vibrant, family-friendly church community. The Nursery School was appealing as we began our family. The Rev. Jim Donald was the Rector at that time, and the Rev. John Thomas baptized both Buddy and Abby. Buddy and Abby both sang in choir and were positively influenced by John Heard, Diane Heath, and Anne Timpane. We feel extremely blessed that Abby and Buddy had the stability and faith formation nurtured by the Nursery School, the Sunday School, and the youth programs. Bob and I have held various volunteer positions and leadership roles and are continually reminded of what a very special place St. Columba's is to us. Across that 25-year span, we as a family, and individually, have had a variety of enriching and spiritually expanding experiences and interactions as members of the St. Columba's community. Alleluia, thanks be to God!

# MARY BETH CAMPBELL

## WHERE ELSE WOULD I GO?

My husband Mark Sisteck and I came to St. Columba's in September 2000, and we joined about six months later in 2001. Here's my story.

One May Sunday in 2019 an early morning phone call brought news that my brother had died. We were the last two members of our birth family. My husband was sleeping, and I didn't want to wake him. It was too early to notify anyone. Feeling lost and not knowing what to do, I went to St. Columba's for the 8:00 am service. As I walked up to the 42<sup>nd</sup> Street door Ledlie was there, and he greeted me. I looked at him and said, "My brother died this morning. I just got the call. I didn't know what to do -- so I came here." I remember the compassion that crossed his face. He put his arms around me and embraced me. We talked briefly, then I went into church. Shortly after, Ledlie came over to me before the service and asked me my brother's name. During the liturgy, he prayed for my brother by name.

I don't know where else I would have gone that May morning -- or for the past 24 years, for that matter. We arrived in September 2000 -- Catholics, no longer at home in that tradition. At St. Columba's, we found a church, a faith home, that embraced, welcomed, and ordained everyone -- very important to us; and also, a church that celebrated the Eucharist -- especially important to me. We discovered a church community that wants to build a beloved society and world with justice and tenderness; a church that offers us many ways to pray; and the opportunity for worship, service, learning, and fellowship that is intergenerational. When I was received into the Episcopal Church in 2006, our formation class included people of all ages. The youth in our class, two of whom are now priests, likely do not know how their thoughts and ways touched me at the time; nor do Jennifer and Woody Turner's children, or so many others, including the children and youth I met through Grate Patrol -- many too young at first to be allowed on the mobile meal van, and now in college and beyond, forging their own creative ways to be authentic and loving. This church community, this faith home, has offered me so many individuals of all ages whose faith and ways have left their mark on me because I had the opportunity to listen and learn from them; share a ministry; sit next to them on a random Sunday or at a gathering in the Great Hall; or pray together for their needs or mine, especially through the Healing Ministry. We have celebrated joys and mourned losses, both personal and communal. I have experienced fellowship with gratitude and generosity; and have found cherished friendships. So many embraces, in-person and virtual, in the name

of love, and Living God's Love, have marked these past 24 years. Recently, Mark and I purchased space in the Columbarium. Niche 80, to be specific! Like on that day in May, I cannot imagine where else I would go or what else I would do when my end arrives -- or whom else I would trust with my remains. We'll be gone. But our remains will be here, embraced by the enduring love of this beloved welcoming Christian community.



# CYNTHIA CATHCART

## LED BY THE SPIRIT

The youngest member of our family is out of the ordinary. Alex has Asperger's Syndrome, a type of autism, which was diagnosed when he was four years old. The doctors and educators were concerned about how he would fit into school. No one suspected our biggest challenge would be fitting into church.

The plan adopted by some families with special needs children in our previous church was the "Sunday Dose." They would increase their children's medication on Sunday morning so they would be perfectly quiet, and dull.

We chose not to follow that plan, but with devastating consequences. One Sunday morning our church leaders asked my husband Eric and me to permanently remove Alex from Sunday School. The teachers are just volunteers, they told us, and it was unfair to saddle them with our "problem" child.

We completely withdrew. How could they choose to reject a member of our family? We removed our name from the membership roll and left the church.

A year passed, and one day Alex's older brother Brian said he wanted to go to church. A friend had told us months earlier that we should try St. Columba's, and I recalled this old advice. Sunday morning Brian and I went alone as scouts to test this church for signs of welcome. We left Alex safely at home with his father to await our report.

We were late to the service. Not a good start! We slipped in beneath the balcony and tried hard to blend in. After the service, Brian's assignment was to check out the Sunday School. He identified another seven-year-old child and followed him. I pursued information, discovered the Welcome Table, and took one of every brochure: music, outreach, education. With these riches I retreated to the Nave, the one familiar place for me in the building.

It was peaceful there. I sat and rested, catching my breath after the rush of the morning. I felt an impression of quiet patience, as if the Lord was waiting and it was up to me to begin. I made a simple prayer for a sign that this was to be our new church home. "If our search is already met, Lord, please let me know somehow, because if this isn't it we need to keep moving."

I truly heard His voice. He said, "Look in your lap."

I looked down at my pile of brochures. On top was a printed woodcut image of one of my favorite Biblical stories -- Jesus welcoming the children, all the children, not just the perfect ones. With a sigh, I opened the leaflet to read.

I had to read it twice to believe what was written there. Here was a description of the Special Needs Ministry of St. Columba's Church.

Brian and I met again in the Common, and he said, "Mom, we found it." We rushed home with the good news. On the following Sunday, the whole Cathcart family came to church again. Pattie Ames found us wandering in the hallway, rapidly assessed our situation, and placed Alex in Sunday School again. Within a few weeks, Alex was paired with a companion to help ease him through the social conventions of attending Sunday School.

Eight years later, my prayer continued to be answered. Alex was honored as a "Rite 13er." Joy Belew was called to be our new Special Needs Coordinator and began a program of "Individual Spiritual Plans" for our special needs parishioners to ensure that all of us could find our place at the table. No child in this parish will ever be asked to leave because they are out of the ordinary. All God's children are welcome here.



## ANDREW DAVIS

Through various ministries and Sunday services, St. Columba's has enriched my life and deepened my faith in so many ways. St. C's is most profound in its friendly and welcoming congregation, terrific clergy, and staff that is so closely connected to the parishioners. It really is a place of welcoming and joy.



# SUSAN DEWITT

## FAITH STORY

What is faith? Webster's Dictionary gives it six definitions, two of which are: a belief and trust in God; and a belief that is not based on logical proof or material evidence. My faith story begins when I was 17. I had been baptized as a baby, and my family had gone to church off and on over the years. But when I was 17, I had an experience so profound that it really cemented my faith and my belief in God. It has stayed with me all these years and continues to inform my faith today.

I grew up moving around a lot. My father was a Foreign Service Officer with the State Department, so my young life was spent mostly in Latin America: in Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador, to be specific. I'm very grateful for that life and those experiences for many reasons, but moving around and living outside of the States did take a toll. When I was in high school, my dad asked for a Washington assignment so that I could finish high school in the States. I was excited to live back in the States and go to Bethesda-Chevy Chase. But one of the results of living overseas was that I was kind of different from my classmates. I didn't have a local history, most people didn't really know where Ecuador was, my clothes were more formal, and one classmate even said I spoke English a little differently -- he asked if I was from Austria. I just didn't fit in. It was a very hard transition for me. I think high school is a time of a lot of contradictions -- you want to be recognized for yourself, the person you are growing up to be. But you also want to fit in with your peers, to be like others, to belong. I really felt very alone at that time, like I didn't belong anywhere, and it was hard.

In addition, my parents' marriage started to unravel. Life in the Foreign Service isn't easy. It is interesting and challenging and can be very rewarding. But uprooting a family every few years, going to a new country, sometimes having to learn a new language, all of that can put a strain on a relationship. I believe my parents really loved each other in many ways, but the stress of their lives had brought about a distance and an inability to see things from the other's perspective. That year there was a lot of arguing. It was very painful for me to witness.

One Saturday afternoon my parents had a very heated argument which ended with my mother in tears. They said a lot of very hurtful things to each other. I didn't know what to do, so I went into my room, closed the door, and started crying myself. Out of nowhere, I heard this male voice. He said, "I love

you.” I was so startled, I stopped crying and looked around to see if someone was there. It wasn’t my father’s voice, and he was not in my room. No one was there. I felt this great sense of peace come over me. I truly believed, and I believe to this day, that God had spoken to me.

I think God came to me that day in a form that I would recognize: as a male, fatherly figure. But I don’t believe that is the only way that God could speak to people. With years of practicing my faith, I do believe that God could speak to people in many ways, not necessarily a conventional way that fits with my traditional Episcopal Church upbringing of the 1960s and ’70s. He could be present in the morning rain, or in the song of a bird, or in myriad other ways. I have never had another experience like that one. I had not been questioning my faith that day (at least, not intentionally), but because of that experience, I have a firm faith and belief in God. I do believe that God is love, and that while we are alive, we should do everything we can to live that love. I became a member of St. Columba’s in 2012 and am so grateful to have found a church community that truly reflects my faith. The message to “Live God’s Love” is present in everything that happens at St. Columba’s.



# CARLOS DIAZ

## FAITH STORY

My name is Carlos Diaz. My wife Tamara Carrera and I came to St. Columba's in 2021 after moving to DC from Atlanta to be close to our daughter and her family. Our first visit here was on the first Sunday back in the Nave after its renovation.

- Although Tamara and I were raised in different Christian traditions, early in our marriage we found our way to the Episcopal Church, having decided to participate together in a church community open to all of God's children and committed to service and social justice.
  
- And every time we moved, in more than 50 years together, we made it a practice to find a church home in each new place as soon as possible. This journey has brought us:
  - To St. Stephen's and Emmanuel parishes in Boston for seven years,
  - To St. Thomas of Canterbury on Long Island, where our children were baptized, Tamara was received, and I was confirmed, for 11 years,
  - To Holy Innocents in suburban Atlanta for 29 years, and
  - Finally, to St. Columba's
  
- So, after all those years, and after I retired from sequential careers in local government, international business, and non-profit management, I went looking in the Bible for what happens after you retire. I found that no one in the Bible -- not Moses, not King David, nor any of the prophets or apostles -- got a gold watch or a plaque after answering God's call. Instead, you just keep getting called.
  
- When we were exploring joining St. Columba's, we participated in the Wednesday evening Zoom calls for newcomers with Courtney Hundley and Ledlie Laughlin. Towards the end of those sessions, Ledlie asked each person in the group where we might become engaged in

the St. Columba's community. My first easy answer was, of course, that I would join the choir. But I quickly added that I was open to whatever else God may put in front of me. I don't know if Ledlie thought I was copping out from giving him a meaningful answer, but in my experience, it always takes some time and discernment to lock into what God wants us to do. At St. Columba's, already I have been wearing a blue choir robe for two years. Also, Tamara and I have joined the Water Ministry, and we are becoming engaged in the work of anti-racism.

Reflecting back on that search for what happens after one retires, I reached for a little book I read back when I was in my 20's, an introduction to the Bible titled *The Book of the Acts of God*. Its fundamental insight is that the Bible is about what God does in human space and human time, most often through human efforts. Time and time again, God calls people into a life of service and provides them the means -- strength, courage, talent, support -- to accomplish the mission. All we have to do is say yes. AMEN!



# TERRY DOWD

## TERRY AND DICK'S STORY OF BEING AT ST. COLUMBA'S

This is a long story that I (Terry) will tell.

We came to St. C's in 1979. Our older son, Rick, was 13 years old and was addicted to drugs after enduring a very painful surgery on his thigh bone. Dick was in desperate need of going to a church. I was reluctant -- angry at God. A friend told us about St. C's. We went and Dick loved the ritual; I refused to participate and would only sit in the back row.

We found the outreach programs and started working on making food for St. Stephen's and passing out food there on Saturdays.

We met many parishioners who became friends.

We participated in a small discussion group about teenagers that was very helpful to us.

We also participated in a newly formed outreach committee and the STEP program where St. C's supported the first graders at Truesdell School through their high school years and assisted with college applications and tuition.

Dick helped to form Friendship Place and Samaritan Ministry. He was on the board of Samaritan Ministry and volunteered there. He was also on the board of Friendship Place.

I became a member of the Vestry.

After a couple of years, we became friends with Barbara and Scott Kragie and David Brown. The five of us decided to start a Bible study group. This has worked for more than 45 years, and we are still meeting. It has been a Godsend for us. I decided that if I was going to participate and accept God, I needed to know more about God. That group has provided both of us with deep friendships and deep commitments to God.

The next part of our story changed our lives. In June 1987 Dick had a serious stroke. He almost died; his doctor could not understand why he was still alive. He was in the hospital for six weeks and then in outpatient care for two years. The church rallied around us. Parishioners came to the hospital to visit and helped me. More friendships were cemented. One day when I was driving home from the hospital, I started crying and I pulled over into a side street. I heard God speak to me: "You are standing alone in the world, and you are completely dependent on me." I have never forgotten this, and it changed my life.

Dick was given a Sunday pass from the hospital, and we went to church. We walked in and Bill Tully stopped the service and welcomed Dick, and everyone rejoiced with us. We felt fully embraced.

When Dick came home finally, we started doing morning prayer at home. We started meditating when we learned about a physician who wrote about the connection between meditation and health.

We heard of an Episcopal monastery in New York State, and we went there. That was the beginning of a long connection with the brothers. We became associates and helped to form a group of parishioners who go up to Holy Cross every year for a retreat. I started spiritual direction with one of the monks. In 1990 we formed the Benedictine Cell at St. C's, where we still gather to share reflections on the Rule of St. Benedict twice a month.

After Dick had recovered as much as he was going to recover, it was clear that he could not continue his environmental consulting practice. He and I were on the way to a conference in Las Vegas for his last professional talk. On the plane, he heard God asking him to work in outreach at St. C's. He went to see Bill Tully and found that the church needed a new outreach coordinator. And the deal was sealed.

The church had just finished the new addition, which included a shower and a small kitchen on the second floor. During an outreach weekend for all parishioners, we tried to find out if the homeless men at the Metro station would come to the church that day and take showers. A lot of the men came and were grateful. And the Water Ministry was born! It has been expanded and offers showers, laundry, and lunches four times a week.

The Bishop of Honduras requested St. C's to participate in assisting the Diocese of Honduras by helping to build churches in small villages. Dick participated in establishing and attending at least three mission

trips to Honduras. They offered Bible study, developed play groups for the children, and helped build churches.

Dick and I both participated in the early years of "Christmas in April" -- a mission started by a parishioner to go to the homes of underprivileged people who needed help keeping their homes in good repair. There was a funny story the first year. We were house captains and had arrived with our team of 20 parishioners ready to work. We knocked on the door of the house. The resident took one look at us and slammed the door shut. We were standing around when behold, a reporter from the Washington Post showed up. We told her our situation. She said she would try talking to the resident. The resident opened her door, listened to the reporter, and decided that she would let one person (me) in on the first floor and the rest in the basement garage. The first floor had a narrow path because it was filled with junk; the garage/basement was filled, floor to ceiling, with newspapers. We all set to work. We took two three-quarter-ton truckloads of junk away. The next year we visited the resident and found that her house was completely free of trash. So the next group was able to work on structural issues and utilities.

I was a lawyer practicing in a firm in DC. After Dick's stroke I cut my hours and began to think about what God was calling me to do. I thought it was going to be outreach of some sort. I talked with lots of people, including my spiritual director. It slowly became clear that I was being moved in a different direction -- to a life centered around contemplation. I retired and got permission to spend my days in a room in the College of Preachers on the Cathedral grounds. I went to noonday prayer every day. It was a rich time for me. My spiritual director at Holy Cross encouraged me to go to the bishop and request to be received as a solitary in the Episcopal Church. I talked with the bishop, and he agreed. And there was a lovely ceremony at the Cathedral. I report to the bishop every year.

I also took a course at a Catholic seminary in Takoma Park to learn to be a spiritual director. I have directed and still do direct several St. C's parishioners.

I served on the Sunday Forum team for several years.

Dick and I became members of the Healing Rite group at church. Dick still participates.

# COURTNEY HUNDLEY

## FAITH STORY

Almost one year ago I walked into a hospital room where a dear childhood friend lay dying of cancer. Having the opportunity to sit next to Christine's bed, to hold her hand, to talk with her, and to pray with her and Brooks has been among one of the greatest blessings in my life. It has been sacred moments such as this one where I have had the privilege of entering the life of another, during a vulnerable time, and where I have felt Christ sitting beside me and sharing in the pain, the beauty, and the surrender.

I was baptized in the Episcopal Church as a child but attended church only sporadically until I found my way into an Episcopal school and began teaching in my mid 20's. I was confirmed at the age of 26 in the National Cathedral and began dating a young man who shared with me that he was interested in going to seminary. Frank Wade, our beloved rector at the time, told me before Brooks was ordained a priest, "it's a crazy way to make a living, but a wonderful way to live." It has been and continues to be a wonderful way to live and to love. I remain grateful and humbled by the opportunities for deep connection that have been bestowed on Brooks and me as we have been on this journey and call together. And yet I needed to find my own way and pursue a spiritual path that felt right for me so that I could be nurtured and fed. I was searching for community and connection and found my way to St. Columba's.

A friend had told me about the Mothers' Group when I was home with our two small children. The Nursery School and this ministry provided an entryway for our family into this large parish. The sacredness of this group, the support system, the love and camaraderie have been an integral part of my experience in this church. Whether it's meeting in room 203, at someone's home supporting them during their grief upon losing a parent, attending a memorial service for a child gone too soon, listening to parental struggles, or being in fellowship with one another, I have felt the power of the human spirit working in us and through us in this remarkable, ever-growing group of women. Esteemed author and social science researcher Brene Brown defines connection as "the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard and valued; when they can give and receive care without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship."

I have witnessed the power of the spirit in other ministries as well, in Loaves and Fishes and on Grate Patrol. I asked my friend Joe, a few years ago, why he volunteered at the New to You sale year after year. "Because I feel seen," he told me, and "because people seem to care about me." Joe was a guest of the Water Ministry and one of a handful of amazing gentlemen who volunteered alongside us each year. I loved and cherished the relationships that formed across generations. Many of the people I met I would not have known otherwise because they attend a different worship service on Sunday. We had time and space to engage in conversation as we fluffed, priced, and sold. I was reminded that St. Columba's provides a sanctuary in a myriad of ways, some predictable and others surprising. This has taught me to trust that God is with me and working through each one of us.

Faith is not clear or linear or tidy. It's messy, wavy, and rocky, beautiful and filled with moments of grace, clarity, and awe. For me my faith is inextricably linked in relationships with joy, gratitude, hope, forgiveness, and wonder. As I reflect, I find it is my connection to people that has nurtured my belief in Christ and that sustains me through the many blessings and challenges of this life. I am grateful that my family has found a spiritual home here, and I count my blessings each day that my faith and life in Christ will continue to grow. May I be filled with the gift of the Holy Spirit to go out beyond this place, with others beside me, to be the hands, feet, and body of Christ in the world.



# BARBARA WOODALL KRAGIE

## A VILLAGE IN THE BIG CITY

Scott Kragie and I began attending St. Columba's Church sometime in the early 1980's. The exact date is obscured by the mists of time, but I vividly remember one of the first services we attended. We were in what was then "the Great Hall" while the Nave was being renovated when someone began encouraging us to attend a musical being "produced" by the church, "Jonah Jazzman." As part of the "advertisement," some music began in the middle of the service and Jay and Peggy Treadwell jumped up and danced "wildly" in the aisle. Having been church-shopping for quite a while, we were hooked.

As young lawyers with no children, we jumped in with, what we found out in retrospect after having kids, lots of free time. Priest Craig Eder assured me that I could take the Confirmation Class even if I had no intention of being confirmed, and there I met life-long friends George de Garmo and David Brown. We started a "theology book group" that continues to this day. Scott and I especially loved all the outreach projects and formed more life-long friendships with Dick and Terry Dowd over large pans of meatloaf as we prepared food for Loaves and Fishes. They joined our book group, too. Later, those friends (and their spouses) became our children's godparents.

When Rector Bill Tully asked us to be in charge of Decoration Sunday in our first year, we readily agreed even though we'd never seen the church decorated for Christmas. We were assured that "it would just happen." We spent the preceding Saturday soaking A LOT of greens in huge vats of some fire-retardant liquid and polishing candle holders, etc. We were grateful when "enough" people showed up to help us with those endeavors, but we were really overwhelmed the next day when grown men ascended huge ladders to "deck the halls," hanging the greens up over the ceiling lighting fixtures and generally all over the place. Hordes of other people worked on wreaths, candles, flowers, and all kinds of things, and it did "just happen." We were awed and amazed -- and ready to sign up for more.

The next year, after working in the St. C's nursery "for practice," we had our first child, Alex, and learned that we no longer had so much free time. No problem: we knew about the St. C's nursery, and soon we learned about the Nursery School. Our outreach projects changed to mostly Sunday School teaching and STEP (St. Columba's-Truesdell Education Partnership) projects, working with the young children

whom St. Columba's was supporting with educational and social programs as they progressed through school.

In the meantime, St. Columba's was a great village in which to raise our own children, including Andrew, who followed Alex by several years. For Alex, Sunday School and sporadic programs for young people were followed by his participation in SCAP (St. Columba's Appalachian Project) after ninth grade. In his article on the experience in the St. Columba's newsletter, Alex proclaimed the experience "the greatest week of [his] life!" We began to rethink our family vacation planning and other summer activities and always, always had to plan around SCAP week for years thereafter.

By the time Andrew left the elementary Sunday School, St. Columba's had adopted the Journey to Adulthood program for young people. With an amazing youth leader, Emily Gowdy Canaday, Andrew began the Rite 13 program. Soon, Andrew was dragging us all to church, something that other Rite 13 parents were discovering as well. The whole program, with its pilgrimage and spiritual explorations, was incredible. When sacristan service and SCAP were added in for Andrew, he was joyfully making St. Columba's an important part of his life. In fact, he later announced in his youth sermon that "St. Columba's [had] raised [him.]" Someone looked at me and murmured that I'd had something to do with it.

The "village life" continued when both boys served in the children's Christmas Pageant for years, well into their adulthoods, as "Chief Shepherd" and "Chief Animal," even when every year Alex would stretch out his hand and read his one line off of it. People nearby would suggest that he continue with his "day job." But I was undeterred, and Children's Ministry Leader Pattie Ames always said I was one of the most enthusiastic mothers at the Children's Service.

And so, St. Columba's will always be home for us. We've had a niche in the Columbarium for years, and it has served to "ground" us. If there were any disagreements when we served on church committees, we knew we'd be with these folks "for eternity," and that put things in perspective. Now, although COVID has often made us members of the Zoom congregation, when we walk into the church, we are in a community that we never imagined we'd find in the anonymity of the big city.

## MEMORIES OF CRAIG

I first met Craig Eder in the early 80's, when he agreed to talk with me about the possibility of joining St. C's. After that, we stayed in warm, if irregular, communication, with times of very deep closeness. His joy with the Iona Poets, icons, the Friends of St. Benedict, Dilly the dog, etc. has given me much joy, too. He always had thoughts to share about Laurens Van Der Post, C.S. Lewis, Evelyn Underhill, Baron Von Hugel, and many others.

My most intense times with Craig were in the five years in which he reflected on living his 85 "good years" and dealt mindfully with what he called "the time of troubles." We began in 2004 when we worked together (and with others) on a St. C's course on "Winter Grace: The Theology and Psychology of Aging." We spent much good time together and moved naturally into sharing his experiences as he faced the challenges of what is sometimes called "the fourth age."

Craig wanted me to share his experiences with people, but he "didn't want to sound pompous." When I doubted that anyone had ever thought he was pompous, he said, "Oh, Edie warns me about it all the time." He thought that maybe I should wait until after he died, giving me permission to take notes and save his thoughts for others.

Craig faced the transitions square on. Shortly after the Winter Grace course was given, Craig's major hospitalization made a move to a continuing care community a hard, but appropriate, option. So he, Edie, and Dilly moved to the Methodist Home and Craig began the process of seeking community there.

That was, I think, the key to Craig. He was always seeking, creating, and living in community, whether it was St. Albans School, St. Columba's Church, the Iona Poets, the Friends of St. Benedict and the St. C's Benedictine Cell, or his own dear family and world of friends. His article in a 2006 St. C's newsletter ("Springs of Water") illustrated beautifully how he even created a community during a hospitalization for a serious illness.

When Craig's attempts to develop a ministry among the Methodist Home residents did not work out as well as he had hoped, he consciously developed a "Theology of the Beautiful Moment." The moments occurred in "significant conversations with an understanding of real truth." "The moment [was] when it is really felt, from being involved in it and you stand back and say, 'That was

good.” He likened it to a stanza from his poem about Clapboard Island in Maine:

We live between the woods and open sky  
Among the spectrum colors; their source is pure, white light.  
Their tension opens up the heart’s great depths  
To presence that dispels forever more, the soul’s dark night.

Whenever we talked through the years, Craig usually had developed a new construct for viewing his experiences. “St. Paul wrote his best letters in prison.” Craig tried to put each day in a spiritual context and never stopped looking for an elder spiritual community. When sometimes that didn’t work, he noted that “the ‘wilderness experience’ takes away everything but God.” “The Zen master says you have to empty the cup and be ready to receive.” He also pondered why God was “letting me stay around.” “I must have something still to do.”



## KATHLEEN ROMIG KREPPS

My favorite part of Sunday service at St. C's is watching the children barrel up the aisle and slam-dunk food donations during the offering. It's not only because of the slapstick humor that I love it, but because of what it says about the place of children in our community. Before I came to St. C's, I spent a lot of my time in the pews shushing my children and imploring them to sit still -- often unsuccessfully. I would leave church many Sundays feeling depleted. When I started coming to St. C's, that all changed. The sign outside promised, "Crying babies welcome." The Great Hall was full of "live bait," as my friend described it. The fabulous playground would give me an hour or two after church to get to know other parents while my boys ran and shouted to their hearts' content. We quickly found friends and ways to engage. I'd leave church feeling fulfilled. As the kids have grown, their place at St. C's has evolved. But at every stage, each of us has always felt embraced by and important to the life of our community.



## OSCAR MCGERVEY

I love choir. This is my eleventh year singing in the choir and my seventh year ringing bells. Sunday School made me a Word Search master, as well as introducing me to a cohort of peers I remain close to to this day. I haven't seen another community as tight as St. C's. I stay at St. C's because there are so many people here that I care about.

# JOHN NOLAN

## FAITH JOURNEY

As you will soon hear, after some basic background information, my story centers on my faith journey here at St. Columba's.

I was raised Roman Catholic and "religiously" (pun intended) attended church every Sunday even through college. In high school I was very active in church youth activities. In college I needed that once-a-week check back with God to center myself and seek divine guidance with my studies. My wife Joyce was raised Methodist and she, too, had a tradition of regular worship. I would go to my church three out of four Sundays and hers the other Sunday, and she did the same. We've moved eight times in our marriage, but when we moved to Princeton and our kids were 12 and 10 we decided we wanted to find one church for the family. I needed the ritual of the Mass and Joyce craved the fellowship and structure of her church tradition. We found both in Trinity Episcopal Church in Princeton. All four of us thrived in that church environment. I served on the Vestry. The youth program there was great for our son and daughter. A priest there, upon hearing we were moving to DC, said, "You have to find and go to St. Columba's. It's perfect for you." We had no idea where it was and were too busy with the move to do the research. However, when we moved in, our new neighbors asked if we were looking for a church. They loved theirs: St. Columba's.

So ... why is St. Columba's important to me ... to us? From the very first Sunday we came we felt welcomed. The service is what I was looking for; the music is terrific and adds so much to the service (not just the choir, but the active participation of the congregation); the preaching is thought-provoking and frequently challenges me to assess my life and where my priorities are; there are so many children and the programming and emphasis on the youth is truly special; we treasure the relationships we have built here with so many interesting and talented people. I never cease to be amazed at the life's work and interests of the congregation. Early on in our time here, I was serving as an usher at several funerals for parishioners I had only a passing acquaintance with. I learned so much about them at their services, and I was angry with myself for not having gotten to know them when they were alive! I have tried to remedy that by getting involved and reaching out to people here. Each of us has a story and, like pieces in a

puzzle, we seem to fit together to make wonderful things happen when we work and pray together ... guided by a staff and clergy that are so very caring and exceptional in their own ways.

My faith story here started with being asked to co-lead Decoration Sunday before Christmas our first year here. We met a lot of people that way. One of those people invited me to join the Ushers Ministry, and later I was approached to join the Lay Eucharistic Ministry. I thought joining the Stewardship Committee might be a good way to interact with more people. It was. I was then approached to serve as one of the leaders of Journey to Adulthood (J2A), working with our eighth and ninth graders and later with Rite 13. Both wonderful experiences! I was asked to run for Vestry and promptly lost. But a couple of years later I was asked to run for the Junior Warden position. I figured I could win an election where I was unopposed! While serving as Wardens, Jennifer Turner and I led the last capital campaign. That led to becoming involved with Courtney Hundley and Elizabeth Rankin in starting and running our New2U rummage sale for five years. It also caused me to want to get involved with the Property Committee and with planning for the Columbarium expansion. Since I had asked people to donate, I wanted to make sure we followed through with our plans as our funds allowed. A sermon by Ledlie in which I heard that we should not let opportunities to support our mission pass us by led me to decide to help organize the Community Response Ministry, which is now operating -- AND WE CAN STILL USE MORE VOLUNTEERS!

Each of us has skills and things we like to do or want to try. Sometimes it is hard to figure out where to look to find how best to use our God-given talents and make a difference. My point for laying out my journey at St. C's is that there are so many opportunities for service, learning, and fellowship here. I have found that this is a place to find ways to make a difference. As our lives change, sometimes we have less time than at other times. But I have found it is too easy to let time and the chance to make a difference slip away. As we hear at the end of our Sunday services, "Life is short, and we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who make the journey with us. So be swift to love and make haste to be kind." There are opportunities that take very little time and others that are more expansive. My St. C's journey has shown me that this is a place where, if I listen, I can discover ways to carry out my faith. I saw a quote recently that I like: "You get one life. One chance. One go. Why not create something wonderful?" I believe we can and should do that here. And we are surrounded by interesting and talented people to do it with.

# MOLLY REYNOLDS

## FAITH STORY

I like rules. I've liked rules for as long as I can remember, and I grew up into a person who basically thinks about rules for a living. But as a kid, being a steadfast rule-follower meant that I was constantly concerned about making mistakes. So when I was in middle school and my friend Liz invited me to a youth group activity at her church, I said yes, mainly because I thought she was cool and saying no seemed like it would be a big social mistake. It wasn't because I was necessarily eager to go to church -- in my family, going to church wasn't something we did. But I went with her that first time, and then I kept going back -- on retreats, to Sunday School, to church camp, on mission trips through high school and college -- not because I liked Liz and the people I met there, though I did, quite a bit, but because I was captivated almost instantly by the idea of a God who loved me whether or not I got it "right." That profoundly changed the way I understood the world and my place in it.

Years later, about a year after I moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan, for graduate school, the assistant rector of the Episcopal church I had started attending called me and asked if I would be interested in co-leading the high school youth group, including going along on their Journey to Adulthood (J2A) pilgrimage. This was a challenge for me. On one hand, I had no idea what a youth pilgrimage was, and, in my mind, I wasn't really an Episcopalian. The church I had been active in as a teenager was a Moravian church. Usually, this would be the part where I explain to you that you've probably only ever heard of the Moravians if you've spent a lot of time near Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, where I grew up, or in parts of North Carolina. But I am, I think, the third St. Columban to talk about Moravians as part of my faith story, so you're all way ahead of the curve on that front. But that meant between being new to the Episcopal Church and, not having years of Sunday School to prepare me, I was terrified of being asked questions I didn't know the answer to. On the other hand, I was desperate to spend some of my week talking to people who weren't also in graduate school, and I am generally bad at saying no to things, so I said yes, and I'm so glad that I did. Over the next four years, I learned that it didn't matter if I knew the "right" answer. An authentic relationship with God isn't about being right, it's about being honest and open to new experiences and to what God is calling you to do.

Somewhere along the way, I managed to finish my dissertation and, just weeks before we were to move to DC from Michigan, my now-husband Joel and I got married. When we went in for our first pre-marital

counseling session with the rector, one of the first things she said to us was that we lived in a world where we certainly didn't have to get married in the church -- so why were we doing it? My initial reaction was, "What a silly question! Of course we'd get married in the church! That's what those rules that I love so much say!" But I knew she wasn't going to let us off the hook with that answer, so I thought about it for a bit. And what I came up with was this: getting married in the church wasn't just about what I was "supposed" to be doing, it was about declaring publicly, including to people with whom I had never been terribly comfortable discussing it, that my faith was such an important part of my life that I wanted it to be part of one of the most important moments in my life.

When we first came to St. C's shortly after that, I'll admit to being overwhelmed by the size -- it was the biggest church I had ever attended. But as early as that first visit, I sensed that that size brought with it a relentless energy. I've gotten to experience this energy in ways that I've expected -- I've had the privilege of continuing to work with youth as a St. Columba's Appalachian Project (SCAP) leader -- and in ways that have appeared to me by invitation, like serving on the Adult Formation Team. But most importantly, St. C's has been a place that keeps encouraging me to ask questions, even if the answers aren't easy to find.



# CHIP SOMODEVILLA

## PICTURES WITH PURPOSE

My name is Chip Somodevilla, and my family and I have been members of St. Columba's since 2009.

Like some of the others who have shared their faith stories, I was raised in the Episcopal Church. In the Church I had several families of different sizes. And each of these families helped inspire and instill in me a deep sense of service to others.

My parents, in fact, chose careers that were focused on serving others.

As a social worker for the State of Texas, my father felt the call and was ordained an Episcopal priest when I was 12. He was a parish rector in Dallas and Memphis, and was later appointed Canon to the Ordinary in Tennessee and again back in Texas.

My mother was trained as a medical technician and left lab work to be a full-time mom to me and my three siblings. And, as though raising her own four hyperactive children wasn't enough, she later became a public school teacher, guiding numerous kids to careers in health care.

After retiring from teaching, she continued her deep connection to the Church in many ways, including as national president of the Order of the Daughters of the King and with the Kellerman Foundation, which does mission work in Uganda.

That was my nuclear family, the small family.

My big family was the Church.

When your parent is also parent of a parish, your sense of family grows to include the folks at church. When I wasn't at home or school, I was at church. All my best friends -- and some of my girlfriends -- were at church.

And this bigger family had many members who also inspired my sense of service. There were police officers and sheriff's deputies, nurses, counselors, and lots of teachers.

While in high school, I attended a youth retreat called Happening. Happening is a spiritual renewal movement where young people lead other young people into a deeper understanding of and relationship with God.

It brought together hundreds of kids from two large dioceses and got involved in educating, organizing, and leading retreat weekends. In fact, that is where I met my wife, Gina, when we were just teenagers.

So I was a young person wrapped in layers of religious life: my father as head of household at home and on weekends at church. And then the bigger renewal community. When it came time for me to think about my own path, my faith asked a bigger question: What was my mission?

There were so many choices when thinking about a career. Computer science was popular, so was business school. Counseling was a strong suit, and psychology was always an option.

When a friend introduced me to the journalism program during college orientation, I was immediately hooked.

The profession had a strong core built on community service and helping others. After hearing so much about justice and self-sacrifice from the pulpit, I liked the idea of giving a voice to the voiceless. I had my mission.

I've been working now as a news photographer for more than 20 years. When thinking about my faith story, I'm reminded of the individuals and communities who have trusted me to tell their stories.

There was Shana Reynolds-Fairley, an HIV-positive woman who for many years let me document her struggles with homelessness, and document her final days, so that others could be inspired and learn from her life.

In Iraq, I photographed people celebrating their first days of freedom from Saddam Hussein, but also their growing rage with the U.S. occupation.

And Haiti, where I tried to capture the resilience and dignity of survivors after more than 200,000 people were killed in a massive earthquake.

And then there are the communities that have been scarred by mass shootings. I photographed the aftermaths in Aurora, Colorado; Charleston, South Carolina; Annapolis, Maryland; and, most recently, the senseless shooting at the Virginia Beach Municipal Center.

And during some of those harder assignments, I would sometimes whisper quiet prayers from behind the camera.

I asked for strength and clear vision. When alone in my hotel at night, I prayed for the victims and the survivors.

And then, finally, when back home and in the pews here at St. Columba's, I also prayed for myself and my own healing.

I covered each of these stories because I believed that my images could inform, inspire, and motivate people to change their lives and the lives of others. And sometimes some good came from the work.

Like the woman who donated money to build a gymnasium in Indiana after seeing my photos of a man teaching boxing to at-risk kids in his own garage.

Or when the Environmental Protection Agency launched a massive cleanup following a year-long investigative project documenting the devastating effects of lead poisoning on the poor in Detroit.

In today's political climate, we hear a lot about "fake news." And while that can feel like a personal attack, I try not to let it worry me.

As long as my heart and mind stay open to the Lord -- then I pray that the work will always be in service to God.



# CHARMAINE STEWART

## FAITH STORY

I grew up in Jamaica in the Anglican Church and attended an all-girls' school. It provided a solid, rule-based foundation and operated under a strong ideal of meritocracy and sisterhood. All was well -- if you followed the rules. My family emigrated to the United States during a tumultuous time in Jamaican history -- a socio-political upheaval in the 1980's. Having dreamt of becoming a physician, after finishing college, I was accepted into medical school and began a long period of training in medicine, an internship and residency, and fellowships in my specialization. Gratefully, after completing my training, I landed a plum academic and clinical position at a top medical center in Philadelphia. I worked with patients, taught medical students and residents, and conducted my own scientific research. The position was fulfilling -- the reward, I believed, for a lifetime of working hard and following the path I had designed to the best of my ability. After all, I had bargained with God and believed we had an arrangement: if I followed the rules and asked for the things I needed, He would come through for me.

For a while, all was well. I worked, got married, had a beautiful daughter and a lovely house. Then, one afternoon at the end of a busy day in the clinic, I was walking past the white, sterile pillars along the long hospital corridor toward my office, charts in hand (this was before the invention of electronic medical records). As was customary for me, I began listening to my messages. I recognized my sister-in-law's voice but could not quite understand what she was saying. I listened again; this time her words began to congeal into some kind of sense: "Charmaine, Mark has died." My husband Mark was in London and had been taken to the hospital for a minor issue. He was scheduled to be discharged the following day. Certainly, it could not be true. I wondered if I was dreaming. My world collapsed.

We all have different stress reactions. Mine is to take "action." I telephoned my sister-in-law, who confirmed the worst. I called the hospital where he had been staying and asked to speak, doctor-to-doctor, with the senior physician. He was in clinic and unavailable. Instead, a first-year trainee answered the phone. She seemed overwhelmed, in over her head. I asked about my husband. A pause. Then, she responded, "No, he is not dead." My head began spinning. I tried to keep calm. I was relieved, began to think systematically. I asked for my husband's clinical findings and laboratory results. The results were critical, grave. She told me he had been transferred to the intensive care unit. I coached her through the care he needed. I asked if she agreed with my suggestions and understood. She confirmed that she did.

All this time, I was thinking about Danielle, my four-year-old daughter. How would I tell her about her father? What would I tell her?

I made arrangements to fly to London with my daughter that evening. I tried to keep calm so Danielle wouldn't get frightened. Inside, I was falling apart. Mark died before we landed. At the hospital, I asked about what had transpired between the time I had spoken to the trainee and his death. None of the agreed-upon plans for his treatment had been carried out. "Negligence," I knew it, and said so. The hospital -- the trainee, the other doctors, and the nurses -- were negligent!

I no longer trusted other doctors, lost faith in the institution of medicine that I had striven to belong to for so many years, felt as though the pillars that supported me were gone. I became unmoored. I could not pray; I could say to God only two words: "Help me."

Though I was falling apart, I knew that Danielle needed me. That, somehow, I needed to keep it together. We returned home to Philadelphia and eventually I went back to work, in clinic and on-call at the hospital. I could not enter the ICU, could not face patients who were hospitalized there. For the first few months, I left those face-to-face encounters to my trainees, who served as a bridge between my patients in intensive care and me, who was separated from them by a glass door. I no longer felt as if I was leading my team; my trainees had become my partners, my peers, who shuttled back and forth between the patients and me, who stayed outside the glass door, pouring over clinical data, making decisions about their care, keeping them at arm's length. Over time, the space between us began to recede. I began to see the eyes of my ICU patients and could see them look into mine. Now, however, I saw them differently. They were transformed. I was transformed. The experience had transformed the leaders into followers and the teachers into trainees.

My recovery was not linear, there were ups and downs. I lost weight, could not sleep. I was operating on empty. I had energy to care for Danielle and my patients, but not much more, nothing for myself. My friends and colleagues at work formed a strong support group, one that was stronger and more sustaining than I had imagined was possible or even recognized until a long time later. I took a course in meditation called "Mindfulness for Physicians." Meditation became part of my daily practice. I read the writing of mindfulness teacher Jon Kabat-Zinn. It was another tool that I added to my armamentarium. I continued on my journey toward healing.

I became a seeker, striving to learn more, to become more spiritual. I began reading the writing of Thomas Merton, an American monk and contemplative, and deepening my Christian spirituality. Seeking to find and make connections with others and to become more receptive to them, I became interested in

Christian mysticism. It was the beginning of a rebirth. For me, contemplative prayer became woven into meditative practice. I began to recognize and acknowledge both my own vulnerability and the vulnerability of others. Through that vulnerability I gained strength. It became for me a more important foundation than the self-assured meritocracy upon which I had been raised. My patients taught me. And I taught them.

Eighteen months later, offered a big opportunity, I left Philadelphia and moved across the country to a medical center set in the middle of a corn field in Minnesota. For the next 15 years Danielle and I lived in the cold, flat, and sometimes strange Midwest. We had to adjust. We were separated from our support system. As an immigrant, I had always believed that America had only "one" uniform culture. But this one was not one I recognized. We continued learning, growing, forming new connections. Staying strong. We became a new family.

Now, I have returned to the East Coast, where I spent my early adulthood, where I trained and matured as a physician, where I built a family. I am back in DC, where my daughter was born. I have come full circle. I have come full circle as a public health physician. After over 20 years of direct patient care as a transplant hepatologist, I have found a new mission in my career.

I have come full circle spiritually, as well. I returned to the Episcopalian/Anglican Church in which I grew up after experiencing the sense of community and warmth that was extended to me by the Church during another difficult period in my life when my mother became gravely ill and died. I discovered St. Columba's serendipitously one day while on a walk through my neighborhood. After reading about its mission of social justice, I stayed to become a member. Ledlie's message welcomed me, inviting me to fill out a card and drop it in the offering. I, and we, are "a church on a mission." I have found strength in acknowledging my vulnerabilities and freely expressing gratitude and forgiveness. I recognize myself, my colleagues, and my friends in and through their frailties and vulnerabilities. I see myself and them as people, perfectly flawed and imperfectly perfect. I have formed strong and growing partnerships with God, my trainees, my friends, and my community. My daughter has grown into a remarkable woman with an interest in making a difference to others.

Thank you for listening.



## MARY HALL SURFACE

One of the reasons we were attracted to St. Columba's 30 years ago was emphasis on the arts in worship. The church had and has an extraordinary music program. I remember being delighted and somewhat amazed that the church had its own orchestra, small but mighty. Once folks found out I am a theatre artist, I was enlisted early on to direct the Passion Play for Palm Sunday. Over the years I've directed it many different times, in many different ways. In the late 1990s, I brought in a timpani player to add drama and costumed the Roman soldiers in secret service headsets for a congregation that seemed to enjoy the theatricality. Then I remember in the spring after 9/11 Jim Donald, the Rector, asked me to "tone down the violence" -- to find another way into the heart of the story. So from that year on, we offered versions without costumes but with rich emphasis on words and simple movement. I loved asking the reader-actors to imagine that no one in the room had ever heard this story before -- that we were telling it for the first time. I will always remember the discoveries those readers made thinking about the Passion in that light and how that fueled their beautiful performances. Then, in 2019, the clergy supported our doing an all-female cast for the telling of the story -- one that expanded how the Passion might be heard and experienced. So many members of the congregation told us that they felt like they were hearing the story anew -- even for the first time. I treasure how St. Columba's embraces the power of theatre and music to open our hearts and minds and to deepen our faith.



# MARJORIE SWETT

## FAITH STORY

I have been at St. Columba's for over 30 years now. I am a cradle Episcopalian. My father was a career military officer, and as a result we lived all over the world, including Central America, where I became keenly aware of the great gulf between rich and poor, and the wrongness of that fact. It was a formative experience and has a lot to do with my choosing clinical social work as a profession.

As a family we went to church regularly throughout my childhood. I accepted Christian teaching, though as time passed, I began to puzzle about aspects of the doctrines, as I understood them at the time.

For me, the central message of Christianity was an inclusive one. It was about love, loving God, loving my neighbor. When I went to college, I brought this frame of reference to the work I did in a volunteer "town and gown" program coordinated between the college and the local Social Services and Welfare Department, pairing students with families in need. I loved my program family and became very involved in their day-to-day life -- organizing activities with the four children, recruiting my classmates to help with home repair projects, trying to be useful in various other ways. The mother had a major mental illness, schizophrenia, but seemed utterly "normal" to me -- until, that is, she suffered an episode of psychosis and was hospitalized. I went to visit her and was overwhelmed by how ill she was. She did not make sense. And she did not know who I was, which was extremely confusing to me. This proved to be a developmental turning point, causing me to confront my naivete, and my belief that "all you need is love." No. Love is not enough. Necessary, but not sufficient. Love cannot protect someone from mental illness. Expert knowledge and skill are also required.

I worked after college as a social worker, obtaining my MSW along the way; and also along the way I stopped identifying as a Christian. When I read C.S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*, in which he describes the imperative of dying to the self, I said, "That's it. I'm not a Christian." I was, after all, immersed in professional development, where becoming a self, and helping other people become themselves, was a fundamental goal. I realized I was agnostic, veering towards but not quite committing to being an atheist.

A change occurred after I attended my first-born nephew's baptism at St. Columba's. Bill Tully preached. I don't remember the sermon, but I do remember the impact it had on me. I was inspired. And curious.

A few years later I moved down here and joined St. C's right away. I had decided that despite my continuing agnosticism, I would suspend my disbelief and live into the practice of faith through engaging in an energetic, inquiring, loving community. I decided to have faith that the meaning of Christianity would emerge and evolve through this experience.

In the ensuing 30 years, I have greatly benefited from the transformative power of the worship services and from participation in many of the educational offerings, including the four-year Education for Ministry program. I have served on numerous committees, been a Rite 13 leader, and currently continue in the Benedictine Cell and the annual silent retreats at Holy Cross Monastery in New York. All these experiences, I have come to recognize, are in support of the goal of equipping me to bear the realities of life, with its relentless succession of losses, sorrow, and pain; yet still to appreciate, and be responsive to, the great mystery and joy of life as well; to love as much as possible, in combination with knowledge and skill. To learn from Jesus.

Some years back I was at an annual professional dinner for the center where I was in an advanced psychotherapy training program. My supervisor in the training is married to a minister, and she knew that I attended St. Columba's. She called me over to introduce me to a colleague, saying, to my surprise, "This is Marjorie, she's a Christian, too." I had never before announced myself to be a Christian outside of my church community. But I crossed a threshold then and there. I know I am a Christian, despite ongoing doubts. There is much I cannot make sense of, I cannot explain. I fail daily in following Jesus's example. But I am a Christian. I believe.



# ELIZABETH TAYLOR

## FAITH STORY

I'm a cradle Episcopalian, which for me meant attending a church in Raleigh, North Carolina, that had no life at all. When I was about 12, my mother developed breast cancer. She was terrified and found her way into a fundamentalist evangelical prayer group. When it met at our house, I joined. That led me into evangelical youth groups, which I attended through high school and into college, but long before graduation, I had tired of being told that I couldn't speak in church because I am a woman and that I just needed to accept the evangelical articulation of faith without asking any questions. I also was studying English with a wonderful Jesuit professor, who taught classes like "Man's Argument with God in Modern Fiction," where we dealt with hard questions of evil and pain in a world that God created.

I decided that I wanted a chance to throw everything I thought I believed up in the air and see what filtered down. I was awarded a scholarship to attend Yale Divinity School, where I spent two wonderful years. I studied the unsuccessful efforts of brilliant people over the centuries to prove the existence of God and to prove that the historical Jesus was divine. I also read everything I could get my hands on by Soren Kierkegaard, an existential philosopher. He made sense to me -- the Gospel is absurd and irrational, and we are never going to prove it true, either historically or theologically. But a leap of faith makes sense of our human existence. I also read a lot by C.S. Lewis, who describes the discipline of discipleship -- just showing up and carrying out the disciplines of faith goes a long way toward faith.

So I (with my wonderful husband David) have practiced that discipline, not always in our private devotions but at least in showing up here, worshiping in community, and raising our children here. Many times, I couldn't tell you with certainty whether there is a "there" there or not. But I have been blessed with a handful of experiences of the divine breaking into my far too rational world. One was at my father's deathbed. I sat with him for his last hours, and I had a palpable sense that there was a curtain being drawn back for my dad and that the dividing line between this world and the next was very thin. When I described this to Rosemary Dickerson, she told me about the Celtic idea of the thin place, where the veil that separates heaven and earth is lifted and one is able to receive a glimpse of the glory of God. I was in that thin place.

I have also experienced grace in times when I know that God was lifting up our poor efforts to do something in His Name. Some years ago, David and I led the effort to furnish an apartment at Partner

Arms, transitional housing for people moving out of homelessness. We spent a few weeks getting parishioners to offer to donate all of the furniture we needed and then, on a Saturday, we got trucks and drove around collecting the motley array of donations. There were probably ten of us from St. Cs in the apartment at the end of the day when we finished. We looked up and it was perfect. Everything fit. It was cozy and inviting. The colors even matched. We knew that God had graced our efforts, and we gave thanks.

That's my story. I give thanks for all of you and for this community that means so much to my faith.



# JOSHUA WILSON

## FAITH STORY

My brother Chris died in a car accident when he was 19. He had just returned to Delaware, where we grew up, from what was supposed to be a gap year between high school and college which he spent sailing in the Caribbean and South America. He had been having the time of his life.

I was 22 at the time, and on top of the world myself. I was in law school in Chicago and it was going well. I had scored a summer job at a firm downtown and was staring out the window of a high rise on LaSalle Street by the Board of Trade when my Dad called with the news. At that time, I have to say, God and matters of faith were pretty far from my mind.

I had not been to church in a while. And though part of that had to do with settling into a new place, I was honestly pretty focused on myself. And having plenty of doubts about my faith.

My brother and I were raised in the Episcopal Church in Delaware, attended the Episcopal boarding school there -- St. Andrew's School -- and spent our summers at Camp Arrowhead in Lewes, which is run by the Diocese. But apart from camp, which had always moved me in a spiritual way, I often experienced church as a formality. It was something expected of me, and when I had the freedom to choose to spend my Sundays in some other way, I did.

On top of that, with some critical distance from church and Sunday School and mandatory religious studies classes, and with all the invincibility and confidence of a 22-year-old, I was pretty comfortable betting on myself. It's not that I had lost a moral compass or turned away from the compassionate and hopeful Christian framework through which I had been taught to see the world. It was more that I had bought into a powerful illusion that I was in control.

But when I heard the news that my brother had died, I felt out of control. I remember feeling numb and angry, looking around at people on the L train who I was sure in that moment deserved to live less than my brother. Why were *they* here? Why was *he* gone? What did *I* do to deserve this? What did *my parents* do to deserve this? It wasn't fair.

These feelings were compounded by the fact that my brother was one of the gentlest, nicest people you could imagine. He was kind and quiet, had an easy way around kids younger than him, and was a natural teacher. He was almost always smiling, and in a family full of type-A personalities, he was the one who mostly listened and spoke only when he had something insightful to say. Finding out that he had vanished felt random and cruel, and wrong. I could see no plan from God in this. No purpose in it.

It took a long time to sort through those emotions. And I am not about to tell you that I came to a renewed place of love and faith through the sheer power of prayer. It wasn't until 2005 -- five years after my brother's accident -- that I even returned to church.

But renewal for me did come from Christian faith, and from love, and ultimately, from church.

And my journey here, to this wonderful community at St. Columba's, was guided by a few realizations.

- 1) There are some pretty important ways that humans are not in control. We all experience profound loss. We don't get to choose when. And we can be sad, or angry, or bitter about that. But those feelings will not change the fact that we are not in control.

From that realization, for me, came humility. A sense that I needed not only to accept but to respect that there are awesome powers outside my command. And for me, that was a doorway into understanding God. Because if I humbled myself to God, and focused on those things I could actually control, I was able to see more clearly that it very much matters how we humans use those powers we do have to help each other. And that God, by urging us to humble ourselves, leads us to build communities where we are willing to acknowledge our vulnerabilities, to lift each other up, and to remember what we can do to be God's light in the world.

- 2) A second and related realization for me was how much community, and Christian community in particular, mattered in my life.

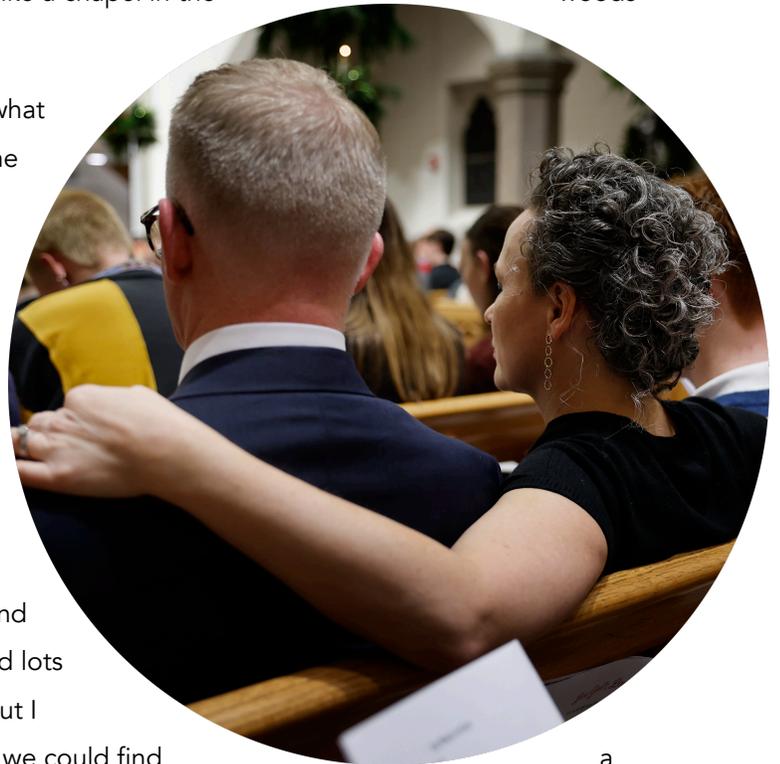
When my brother died, and I arrived at home, my parents' house was swarming with activity. People were everywhere, cooking, cleaning up, helping with funeral arrangements, and then, later on, pouring wine and cracking jokes and helping us heal. There were many friends who supported my parents unconditionally, but their church family at Christ Church in Dover was at the core of it.

The community of Camp Arrowhead played a similar role for me. I realized right away that I wanted the camp director to be there at Chris's service with his guitar. And I wanted at least some part of that service to feel the way I felt on summer nights in a screened-in chapel in the woods with a breeze blowing through the Eucharist and candlelight and everybody holding hands. And a Grateful Dead song woven in there somewhere among the hymns. I can't remember if they were wearing homemade tie-dyes and Birkenstocks, but there were at least 30 former or current camp staffers who showed up at the service,

and our old colonial-era church in Dover did feel like a chapel in the woods for a little while. It was magic.

woods

Over the years I spent a lot of time reflecting on what my parents had done in their lives to help build the communities I was raised in, at church, at camp, and in civic life in our town. I began to see that a lot of what I had taken for granted around me was the product of a lot of hard work. And it seemed to me that this community-building was God's work. And I wondered what would lie ahead for me and whether I would be so lucky as to be part of such communities.



When Becky and I found St. Columba's in 2011, and began attending services in the Great Hall, we had lots of good feelings about the energy in this place, but I worried about the size of the parish, and whether we could find way to fit in. There were so many smart and motivated people

a

championing

so many different missions and ministries, and we were just trying to make it through the service and into the donut line without too many tantrums in between. At the same time, we were meeting the parents of our children's classmates and making friends with neighbors here in AU Park. And we have been blessed to forge great friendships, and to find and build networks of support in our neighborhood, in our children's school community across the street at Janney, and here at St. C's.

But there is something different, and something very special, about our community at St. Columba's that I recognize more clearly the deeper our ties here grow. God is in this place, and not just because it is a church, or because of our ceremonies, or our spiritual music, or our acts of service. God is here because the people of this parish bring God here, in our interactions with each other, in our worship together, and in our service and generosity that we try to carry outside these walls.

Too often in my own interactions with even dear friends outside the St. Columba's community, I find that my guard is up, that I use sarcasm as a shield, that I am often talking or posturing more than I am listening or loving. When I return here each Sunday to worship, or to lead a youth group class, I am renewed and reminded that our great gift from God is each other. And when we love and serve one another, we bring God into the world.

# CLERGY VOICES



# BILL SWING

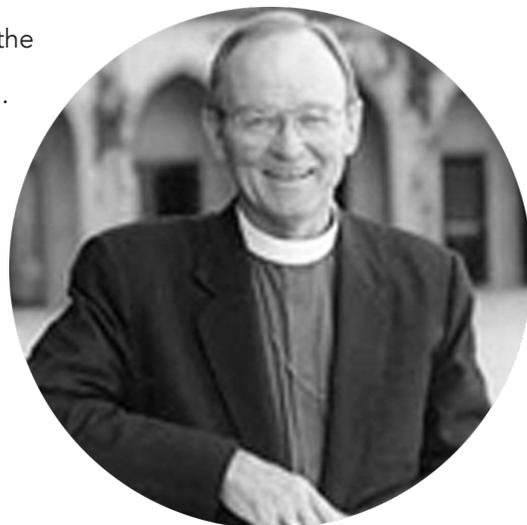
RECTOR, 1969-1979

One memory: when we arrived from a little plumbing garage/church in a steel town in West Virginia, the Diocese of Washington was building Friendship Terrace across the street from St. Columba's. Adding this senior population to the mostly senior population of St. Columba's, Bishop William Creighton, upon my institution as rector, said to me, "You have a great opportunity of making St. Columba's a flagship of the diocese in terms of specializing in senior ministries." As a 32-year-old priest with youthful intentions, I wasn't about to challenge my new bishop at that moment. But I thought: "Oh, my, you just wait. This is going to be a vigorous, youthful, experimental place." The words of Al Jolson echoed in my heart: "You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet."

Over the past years I have heard extremely high praise for the way Ledlie has led that community. I salute and admire him.

Have a superb 150th,

Bill



# BILL TULLY

RECTOR, 1980-1994

Fourteen eventful years and so many memories that it was hard to choose. But this turned out to be a defining moment that in a way carried all of us through those years.

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I was never able to get the 1980 Search Committee to reveal whether they were as surprised as I was that their search landed on me. But I was acutely conscious of my age, 33, and of the fact that I had never been a rector. One early moment crystallized that reality.

A few days before my first Sunday, August 3rd, I came by the parish office to meet with the staff and sort through a few logistics. I stepped through the second floor Parish House doors, and sitting in the lobby was the estimable Miss Esther Barr, known as "the Saint of St. Columba's." Before I could introduce myself, she said, "You must be our new rector. I'm Esther Barr. I trained the last two rectors, and now I'm going to train you." I stammered out something like, "Great to meet you." She simply smiled. (About 80 that year, a DC native, a lifelong parish member, friend to all ages.)

Esther was true to her word. And she was the leading edge of a great process of mutual training and ministry. I had plenty of chances to lead, to shape the agenda, to try things and sometimes fail -- and always to be forgiven and loved. And a marvelous group of all ages, with all kinds of opinions and dreams, and skills and experiences new to me, kept training me the whole 14 years.

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Congrats on reaching this anniversary with energy and faithfulness.  
Have a wonderful celebration.



# JIM DONAL

## RECTOR, 1995-2005

After I was graduated by General Seminary in 1978 my first position as an ordained person was as Lower School Chaplain at St. Alban's School. I was clearly the low man on the totem pole and so it fell to me to attend a meeting of representatives of all the schools in the diocese. I found myself sitting next to a woman who identified herself as the new Head of the St. Columba's Nursery School, none other than Karen Strimple. When I asked what was up there she told me that right off the bat one of her teachers was moving out of town and she needed a replacement. Did I know of anyone who could fill such a position?

It just so happened that my wife Kathryn was an experienced teacher and had been the Director of the Nursery at the seminary for two years. They met; Kathryn spent a day experiencing the school and entered the place as Karen's first hire.

Come February 9, 1979, we marched the entire St. Alban's population next door to the Cathedral, and I was ordained a priest. Part of that liturgy includes some clergy and some lay people who "present" the candidate to the bishop. I chose two of my Second Form students as presenters, Joe Payne and John Guenther, both St. Columba's kids.

About three months later I received an inquiry from the Rector Search Committee of St. C's; they had received my name as a potential candidate. Was I interested?

I remember replying that it was a flattering concept, but I was sure that the parish would be better served by someone who had been celebrating communion longer than the three months I had.

Nearly fifteen years later I was again contacted by the Rector Search Committee from St. C's. I remember chatting with Don Boardman on that committee and relating that story from 1979.

When I mentioned the letter in which I had replied, Don said they had just put it in a file to which they had returned. They were back for another try!



# STEVE HUBER

PRIEST-IN-CHARGE/TRANSITION RECTOR, 2004-2006

Dear Friends at St. Columba's,

I started this letter on June 9 in 2024 because that day, the Feast of St. Columba, has been etched in my heart ever since my love affair with St. Columba's Episcopal Church in Washington, DC, began in 1999. And every June 9 since has been filled with memories wrapped in affection and gratitude for the opportunity to have been one of your priests.

My years at St. C's were the happiest of my priesthood because of you, because of Jim Donald, who became the most influential mentor in my life, and because of the incredibly talented staff and wonderful, hard-working vestries. But most of all, because of your vibrant understanding that the Church celebrates and empowers the ministry of *all* the baptized. St. Columba's was never about the clergy, yet you took exceedingly good care of each of us! Thank you for that.

About three months into my work with St. C's, Jim moseyed down to my office and asked how it was going. "You seem to like it," he said. "In fact, you're like a kid in a candy store." In response, I described my sense that St. Columba's incarnated every lesson taught in Divinity School about the ethos of a healthy, thriving community of faith -- a place where the people who make up the community are empowered to make decisions, start ministries, and try inventive ideas that might flourish or not, with the support, but not the control, of the clergy.

One of Jim's great lines to staff was, "Let's lead with 'Yes' rather than 'No' and encourage creativity. If something fails, God will still be glorified, and the roof will not have caved in!" When I became your priest-in-charge and then rector under special circumstances due to Jim's tragic cranial aneurysm, and in every place I served after that -- as Vicar at Washington National Cathedral and Rector of All Saints' Beverly Hills, California -- I tried to model and teach that standard for how a community of faith best responds to the call of God in its midst.

I've been around the Church long enough to know that often successful parishes like St. Columba's begin losing a central virtue of the Christian faith, humility, replacing it with way too much hubris. While that was never my experience of St. C's, I don't intend my positive reflections to promote such feelings.

No institution or its people are ever absolutely perfect, but my experience as your priest was nothing but completely positive, full of love, compassion, fun, and mutuality.

Being with you for six years was an enormous and formative gift in my life. You have a huge place in my heart, and I will forever be grateful for our time together.

Congratulations on 150 years of grace-filled ministry on behalf of the Good News of the Risen Christ in Washington, DC. And most importantly, blessings for all the creative good work that lies ahead as you discern where the Spirit is calling you in the years ahead.

With love,

Steve

