



ST. MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The Messenger

SUMMER 2024



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A Word From The Rector

We receive you into the household of God. Confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in his eternal priesthood. BCP 308

As Christian people we proclaim that we are a family tethered together by a spiritual DNA. Our grandmothers and grandfathers taught us in Sunday School, led us through confirmation preparation, chaperoned us in youth groups, served on the altar guilds at our weddings. Our brothers and sisters in the faith were the kids we played with, went on service trips together, made fun of, shared a cabin at camp, dated, or maybe we married. Our children in the faith are the current children who we teach, confirm, give counsel to, chaperone, hope and worry about. All this activity takes place in the local church we call home. For us, that church is St. Mark's.

This is the "not family" we call family. This family is a tender trust created through the holy act of baptism. When we baptize we make a statement that we will support the baptized in his or her life in Christ. We answer, "We will," when we are asked this question. The future tense. We will do that, and more, because the lineage we possess goes back to the Jordan river in first century Palestine, to a moment when the Son of God came out of the water and a voice declared, "This is my beloved Son, Listen to him."

We listen to this Son, this brother of ours. What he says we have come to trust with our life and our death.

What this Son says is holy, life giving. The words of Jesus do not atrophy. At least they haven't yet. And even though the family of God argues amongst itself about the Word of God, these words still ring out life, not death. I am amazed when I realize that the same words I read in our scriptures were read by Dr. Martin Luther King, Susan B. Anthony, Shakespeare, St. Bridgette, Augustine, and St. Helena. And, are the same words my son and daughter heard and still hear. This lineage of words is a heritage beyond human understanding, knowing, comprehension.

These words formulate our ideas and actions, they buttress our responses and motivations. The invisible words of God cause us to sacrifice our egos, our desires, our ambitions for the sake of the others. We listen to the voice of Jesus, and we give up ourselves to each other. In doing that we find we are held up when we fall, attended to by a set of brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, grands and greats whose own baptisms called them to our aid.

As a fellow baptized member of the family, I see this in a macro-communal way-- when a member of St. Mark's is in need, we show up. When there is a call to serve, we go. When there is something that needs to be done, we do it. I have lived in and among this St. Mark's "not family" family for sixteen years and I am constantly inspired by that truth.

As we move and travel in and out of the summer months, please remember the good we do as the family of St.

Mark's. Please know your time and efforts make a difference in the lives of the people around you. Your actions in big and small ways build up the family of God, and set the family in a positive trajectory for the future. This was the hope of those first families who gathered to make our church, they were themselves inspired by the ones who taught them. This is the beauty of our faith, our future, our family in the ever-expanding gift of the household of God.

The Rev. Patrick J. Miller,
Rector



Patrick J. Miller is the Rector of St. Mark's Church. He is a husband, father of two, author, and TED Talk contributor. When not in his office or around the St. Mark's campus, you may find him working with Parkinson's patients at the boxing gym or playing his cello.

The Practice of Ordained Ministry

by the Rev. Canon Christine M. Faulstich



The following was preached at the Diocesan Diaconal Ordinations on June 15, 2024 by The Rev. Canon Christine M. Faulstich, Canon to the Ordinary of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas. Christine is married to the Rev. David M. Goldberg and attends St. Mark's Church with her children, John Felix and Lucy.

I grew up outside of Cleveland, Ohio, and my birthday is in June. This means that when I was fifteen and a half and learning to drive, it was December. I can recall my first time behind the wheel, cruising around an empty church parking lot that was covered in snow. I learned to drive on snow, and anyone who has ever driven on snow knows there are certain things you have to do differently in those conditions.

Even though it is different from driving on dry roads, one quickly becomes accustomed to it, so that it's second nature. Then, when spring comes and the snow melts, you get used to that. You forget all about the snow and start driving a different way, a little bit faster, a little more aggressive.

It was always amazing to me how, without fail, every year, the first time it snowed, there would be cars skidded off the road and accidents at stoplights. It was like the interven-

ing summer months had somehow wiped our memories clear of how to drive on this frozen precipitation. It's not that we had an influx of Floridians who had moved to the state since the last winter. It wasn't lack of experience driving in snow. It was lack of practice. Over the summer, you can get used to following too closely, taking the turn a little too fast, and stepping on the gas right when the light turns green—all of which are problematic when your tires don't have great traction. It seemed like it took that first snowfall every year for everyone to remember how to drive in the snow.

In writing this sermon, I realized that I wanted to talk about practice—about the practice of ordained ministry. Christianity, in general, is something that we practice, as Bishop Doyle reminded me recently. You don't just say, "Well, I'm an accountant." What kind of accounting do you do? "Oh, I don't do any accounting. I'm just an accountant." That doesn't make sense. Similarly, we practice our faith. We go to church and worship the God who has redeemed us from our sins, we read our Bibles and pray in daily life, and we seek to serve the least and the lost and make disciples of all nations.

So, Christianity is something all Christians practice. But ordained people, you soon-to-be deacons, will practice it in a particular way, an ordained way. For instance, when praying, you will carry not only your own concerns but also the griefs, struggles, and joys of the people entrusted to your care. You will bring those all to God in prayer, interceding for them as their pastor. And you'll know what these concerns are because you've listened—at coffee hour, before choir practice, and at someone's bedside in the hospital.

Sometimes the practice of ordained ministry is more about what you refrain from rather than what you do. There is a sacrifice to this work, with some roads now closed off to you. Paul says, "I have become all things to all people." Your calling is to serve the rich and the poor, the weak and the strong, the old and the young. This may mean that you have to think of all those people and how you can

continue to be in ministry with them before you say the dismissive comment or make the not-so-generous post online. It's one of the ways we practice ordained ministry. For most of us, this indeed takes some practice.

But it is not all sacrifice. There are tremendous gifts in this calling as well, as long as we understand our work clearly. Your job is not to save the church or change the culture. Your job is to be faithful to God in every moment. There is untold beauty and wonder in following that call.

The late Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey speaks of the work of ministry, saying,

"Amidst the vast scene of the world's problems and tragedies, you may feel that your own ministry seems so small, so insignificant... what a tiny difference it can make to the world that you should run a youth club or preach to a few people in a church, or visit families with seemingly small result. But consider: the glory of Christianity is its claim that small things really matter, and that the small company, the very few, the one man, the one woman, the one child, are of infinite worth to God."

Archbishop Ramsey notes that sometimes the challenge of ordained ministry is feeling like what we do doesn't matter, especially given the enormity of the world's problems. But he goes on, thinking about Jesus' life and ministry. He says:

Consider our Lord himself... In a country where there were movements and causes which excited the allegiance of many... our Lord gives many hours to the one woman of Samaria, ... one Martha, one Mary, one Lazarus, one Simon Peter, for the infinite worth of the one is the key to the Christian understanding of the many.

The infinite worth of the one is the key to the Christian understanding of the many. Is there any better summary of the life and work of a deacon [or any Christian, for that matter]? Responding to God in this moment and every moment. Responding to God in the face of the person in front of you is the perpetual work of this life. It is the true prac-

tice of ordained ministry. It is indeed a wonderful, challenging, meaningful, difficult, and joyous life. And yet, we can get distracted. We can develop delusions of our own importance. We can lose sight of our ultimate purpose. In other words, we can start to skid.

Even if you're practiced at it, sometimes your tires lose traction on the snow. When you start to skid, they tell you to stay calm, not to stomp on the brakes. And one key thing: look in the direction you want to go. So often I tell my small children, "Look where you're going." But what people have found is that, at least when you're driving, it's not that we need to look where we're going. We tend to go where we're looking. It's true when your car is skidding, and it's true in ministry as well. Pay attention to what you're looking at. Don't let the distractions of the world, your own ego or insecurities, the complaints and the pettiness, pull you away. Keep your eyes (and heart) fixed where true joys are to be found.

In my own life, I have found the most fulfilling moments of this calling are not times when all eyes were on me, when I was being promoted to the next position or celebrated. The most satisfying parts of this calling always seem to happen in quiet moments, with the unhoused neighbor who stopped by to ask for a Bible, the simple gratitude of someone who didn't expect to be remembered, the tired feeling after a difficult funeral, knowing God's Holy Spirit carried us all through.

Jesus' abiding presence with us, as one who suffers and transforms human life, is the center of our lives, the center of our work, and the way we make sense of this world as practitioners of Christianity. Another Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, ended his enthronement sermon by noting that this is Jesus' message to us about the cross: "If you don't know why this matters, look for someone who does—the child, the poor, the forgotten. Learn from them, and you will learn from me. You will find a life's work; and you will find rest for your souls; you will come home; you will sit and eat."

I wish you endless challenges in ministry, moments of grace, and the support of colleagues and friends. As you practice this work, this life, this ministry, over and over, I pray that God's abiding love will sustain you and encourage you. That you will indeed find a life's work and rest for your souls. And that you will know what it is to come home, to sit and eat.

Summer Choir Guest Musicians



Each summer, as our St. Mark's Choir takes a break from weekly rehearsals and singing choral anthems at the 10:30 a.m. traditional service, we take the opportunity to showcase amazing musicians from our church and community. We will hear St. Mark's Choir section leaders sing as soloists with bass Andrew Breuninger on July 28 and alto Abby Lysinger on August 11. On July 7 we will observe Independence Day with trumpeter Wes Miller and also welcome flutist Alaina Diehl on August 18. On July 21, early music specialists Maria Lin playing violin and Louis-Marie Fardet on cello will collaborate with soprano and Director of Music Renee Rybolt. Make sure to check out our weekly email to discover who will be our special music guest for the following Sunday 10:30 a.m. service from now through August!

The St. Mark's Choir is led by the Director of Music, Renee Rybolt. She has a Masters in Choral Conducting, and is the proud mother of two wonderful children, Avery and Carson, with her husband Wes Miller. When not performing or directing, you may find the avid music lover at a live concert.

The Unique Joy of Vacation Bible School

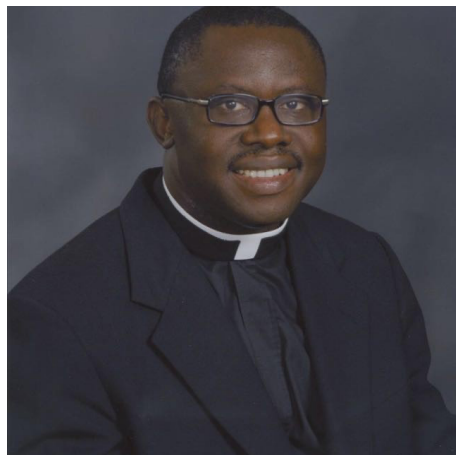


One of the joys of my job as Director of Christian Education at St. Mark's is the opportunity to create and lead Vacation Bible School every summer. This year, we are calling our VBS "WONDER VBS – Miracles of Jesus" and will be sharing four amazing miracles that Jesus performed throughout his ministry. Keeping the themes kid-appropriate, we'll be discussing how Jesus heals, changes, calms, and feeds us even now, just as he did through the miracles he performed thousands of years ago. Volunteers from St. Mark's Church and School will help lead break-out sessions for the children, including daily crafts, music, snacks, games, and lessons. Youth will help our adult volunteers as they enact our stories for the children every day. We hope that your student will join us for a week of fun filled activities!

Wonder VBS will take place at St. Mark's Episcopal Church July 22 - July 25 from 9 a.m. to noon. You may register your child today following the QR code on the back page of The Messenger. If you are an adult who is interested in volunteering for WONDER VBS, or the parent of youth grades 6-12 who is interested in volunteering, please contact Joseph Rawley, Director of Christian Education, at joseph.rawley@stmarks-houston.org.

A Miracle of Generosity

by The Rev. Johannes George



"I was hungry and you gave me food." Matthew 25:35 NRSV

The presence of diamonds, bad governance, corruption, fragmented social institutions, low literacy rates, and youth marginalization invited and led to the civil war in Sierra Leone. There were unequal benefits from the diamond mining industry in which the local Lebanese traders smuggled and traded illegally, while revenues went into the hands of private investors to purchase weapons and ammunition, as illustrated in the 2006 political thriller movie, "Blood Diamonds."

Frustrated with the government, rebels took up arms on March 23, 1991, the beginning of an eleven-year brutal civil war that claimed the lives of over 50,000 people. The rebels were brutal and killed indiscriminately in their fight, amputating, and maiming innocent civilians, mainly women and children while the men were brutally killed or taken to fight as rebels against the soldiers. The catechist of my parish was beheaded when he refused to join them. The headmaster was also beaten to death. Within three hours, the town I lived in was reduced to a ghost town.

There was a barrage of gunfire some 10 miles away and the missionary nuns feared for their lives and asked me to drive them out of town to safety. I had a 1975 Isuzu pickup truck and I drove them together with the two boys staying with me to the district headquarters, Kenema. The vehicle constantly broke down on the 63-mile muddy road.

Arriving in Kenema, I was asked to coordi-

nate relief for the hundreds of thousands of people displaced, some refugees from neighboring Liberia. It was a daunting task. Where am I to get food for these people? I recalled the words of Jesus to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" (John 6:5 NRSV) Philip said, six months' wages would not be enough to buy bread for everyone to get a little. Twelve (50 kg) bags of wheat were what I received from the bishop. What was this amongst hundreds of thousands of displaced people and refugees? I thought of the generosity of God in which a man came from Baal Shalishah, bringing the man of God twenty loaves of barley bread baked from the first ripe grain, along with some heads of new grain. "Give it to the people to eat," Elisha said. (2 King 4:42-44) As the bishop loaded the 12 bags of bulgur wheat into my truck, he said, "Give it to the people to eat." Like Elisha, I thought of the multiplication of the loaves of fish. Jesus fed the people miraculously, astonishingly.

It was emotional to see lactating mothers with their babies on their backs crying for food. I was helpless, but I knew I had to do something. Driving around with the 12 bags of wheat and distributing them to lactating mothers, people came out and offered canned food, dry food, and gently used clothing. It was like the multiplication of the loaves and fish. Appeals to the International community yielded great results. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) provided a shipload of relief items including food, medicine, and clothing. The United Nations (UN), the World Food Program (WFP), and the European Union (EU) all gave their support. A coordinating team comprising religious leaders of all faiths was established and 150 relief workers were employed to distribute the much-needed items. A total of about 400,000 people were fed every month.

Special attention was given to malnourished children. Amputees and wounded persons were transported to satellite clinics manned by local doctors. Truckloads of hired vehicles were dispatched to villages with relief items for the elderly and sick. Some of the roads were impassable, destroyed by the rebels.

In addition to dry food distribution, wet meals were provided for displaced school children

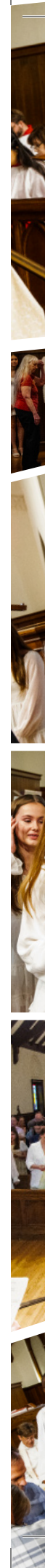
and unaccompanied children in temporary shelters and camps.

Food distribution was very risky. There were so many attempts on my life and some of my distribution team members were killed in ambushes. A missionary priest from Ireland who assisted with food distribution, together with a Dutch doctor, his wife, and three-year-old daughter lost their lives at the hands of rebels as they were escaping. As God multiplied the resources for the displaced, we started to experience more threats, jealousy, and sometimes outright attempts on our lives. I even experienced betrayal from a brother priest who secretly walked to the rebels when they captured the town of Kenema and told them I had instructed the team not to give food to them. The rebels formulated a plan, setting out to kill me that night. But God sent one of his angels, a 75-year-old woman who overheard from her mud house the rebels talking to each other about their plan to come and find me at one o'clock in the morning. She walked three miles and during curfew, she came to the parochial house to inform me. That night, I escaped to the church where I kept awake and alive. I had a satellite phone from the United States government, which I used to report the incident and others, and the fighting beyond rebel lines. After the rebels were repelled from the town, I found safe passage to the United States.

My work and the work of many others all played a part in helping save perhaps hundreds of thousands of lives, including my own. The work was hard, mentally taxing, dangerous, and life-threatening. But in giving out relief assistance, in the midst of war, surrounded by devastation, I also saw first-hand the generosity of God through the hands of the donors, the kindness of God in the eyes of fellow refugees, and the love of God in those who risked their lives to help others.

The Rev. Johannes George is an Associate Priest at St. Mark's Episcopal Church. With an infectious smile, warm heart, and calming kindness, you may also find him serving at Bridges to Life and Brazos Towers.

The pictures found on page 5 are from this year's confirmation at the 10:30 a.m. service on May 5 with Bishop Rayford High





Why Do We: *MISSION TRIP*

by Stephen Adkison

During the summer of 2013, I joined my high school youth group on a summer mission trip to New Orleans. One of the regular adult volunteers was from there and had moved to the metroplex after Hurricane Katrina. She was excited to show us the sights and comment upon just how much had changed. I did not realize at the time how affected The Big Easy still was. While I was not unaware of the struggles many faced, seeing the continued impacts almost a decade out was eye opening.

Our activities were varied, from working at a local vegetable garden to helping with a daycare for underprivileged kids. The work every day was hard, and we would return to the church we stayed at worn out. It was a struggle to stay awake for the Bible studies.

And yet, I still remember so many small moments of that trip. In the van, my youth minister insisted on singing along loudly to Usher on the radio. My friends and I had a running joke where we would take a picture next to a statue of us recreating their poses. There was a young boy at the day care who struggled the entire time listening to instructions, and for some reason I was tasked with trying to get him to focus. Virtually every volunteer and staff member deciding one afternoon to take us to the fabled Bourbon Street, despite insisting to parents that we wouldn't. By the light of day, of course.

The very word "mission" dates back to 1598, coming from Ignatius of Loyola, Frances Xavier, and the Jesuits. While the many ideas encapsulated within the word have arguably existed since the Church's founding, the journeys of Paul, and the Great Commission, it was in the concept of The Age of Discovery that they coalesced under the banner of "mission." The ostensible good intentions here can obviously be problematized, and the same can be said of the modern "mission trip." But, stripping away the negative baggage, the goal of missions and mission trips is simple: to spread the good news of Jesus Christ and the love of God.

In my experience, something magical happens through the Holy Spirit during a mission trip. In addition to the good work being done serving others and the lives changed by experiencing God's transforming love, something happens to those who go on a mission trip. They themselves are changed. We aren't merely a passive conduit, absorbing God's love and sending it outwards like a Holy Antennae. By serving God, we become like Christ, who, despite being equal with God, came to the world to serve others, even up to emptying himself out on the cross.

This summer, I and a couple volunteers are taking a group of 9 high school students to Charleston, South Carolina on a mission trip. It is our first big trip in a while, and we are very excited. We'll be partnering with an organization called Youth Mission Co, who is connecting us with their local charity partners. During the week, our activities will vary between sorting out donations, cleaning up the beach front, and much more. We would love to have your support through regular and ongoing prayers, for safety, good weather, and that we encounter God's life-changing love.

Why Do We: _____? is a series built to give answers to the questions we may ask about our church communities. For more information about youth gatherings, please reach out to stephen.adkison@stmarks-houston.org.



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ST. MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

July 22 - July 25
9 a.m. - Noon
St. Mark's Church

Register Your Camper Today!

Join St. Mark's as we Wonder at the miracles of Jesus. Rising PreK 4 thru rising Grade 5 students are invited to a week of music, crafts, games, lessons, and more!

