

# The Elizabethan



The Newsletter of St. Elizabeth Episcopal Church    Burien, Washington

August 2018

## From Fr. John: Spiritual formation

Last month, I wrote to you about hospitality, specifically, the role of gathering in the people that God sends our way. That's where our work begins. The mission of this church is "to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ." (from page 855 of the Book of Common Prayer on the Catechism.) It is not the responsibility or intent of St. Elizabeth to handle *all* people — that's God's job! But we do have a role to play in cooperation with God to provide opportunities for those people who are drawn to us to "find and be found by God," as we pray in the Prayers of the People.

One way to describe that role is that, as a local manifestation of the body of Christ, with God's help, we participate in God's creative actions to build and renew the community of God's people who will then go out into the world to embody the Gospel so that God can continue the process of establishing the "already and not yet" reality of God's realm on earth—a realm of forgiveness, reconciliation, justice and peace.

Last month, I referred to Alice Mann's book called "Incorporation of New Members in the Episcopal Church," in which she outlined four stages involved in gathering people into the life of a church: invite, greet, orient, incorporate. In this last stage, there are practices that serve the growth and spiritual development of people entirely new to their faith, those with some faith background and those who have long faith histories.

We "incorporate" or bring people into the body through practices that focus on translation, others that emphasize transfiguration and a handful that may do both. They are practices that fall under the heading of spiritual formation.

*Translation formation:* The practices that emphasize translation "in-form." That is to say, these are activities or experiences that add content to the way that you already think about things. Imagine yourself as a bowl. The shape and material of your particular bowl depends in large part on your family of origin, your culture and your life circumstances as well as the unique constellation of your interior landscape, including but not limited to your psychological make-up, your neurochemistry, your emotional and moral development. When these are sufficiently stable, we can expand our existing knowledge and practices by studying and learning, through participating in the life of the community and by serving side by side with those who have more experience than we do. *(continued on page two)*

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In the Episcopal Church, translation practices first begin with the very simplest “information” – finding a common language or platform for basic communication. From there, translation practices allow us to communicate how we do what we do, to explain some of why we do them and to listen to each other. We can explain which versions of scripture that we use and why, and which we don’t use as often and why. We expand English translations of Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Aramaic to gain a broader sense of scripture.

Translation of the Book of Common prayer includes not just the language, but the movements of the liturgy – where to find music in the hymnal, when to approach the altar, what to expect on feast days or irregular liturgies like Maundy Thursday or a Bishop’s visitation. We translate when we explain how the Episcopal Church is governed, when we introduce people to our catechism, when we describe church history and so forth.

Other less obvious avenues of translation include elements of learning how to live harmoniously in this particular church community. Casual gatherings, coffee hour, Dinners for Six, Coffee and Conversation, small special interest groups and retreats or field trips are just some of the ways that we expand each other’s knowledge and awareness.

Getting into action with other practitioners is where we learn about what it means to be Christ in and for the world. Stewardship of our church and personal resources expands our understanding of what God has provided, deepens our gratitude and broadens our generosity. We learn how to see our actions and our presence in the world can be extensions of our relationship with the God we encounter in our various relationships – in the church community, in our families, in scripture, and most importantly, with the Living Holy One!

Practices of translation, of informing, are crucial to spiritual formation and development. These are some of the ways that we add new skills, facts and ideas to an existing form mind/body/spirit. In fact, one of the great movements in spiritual unfolding over the centuries has involved the continual reinterpretation of tradition, scripture and practices in the light of new knowledge and understanding.

Translative formation provides the necessary stability for people to explore new terrain. They also provide fruitful renewal experiences for more seasoned practitioners who return to gather new “in-formation” that refills them with “the knowledge of love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ.” Study, conversation, deepening our competency with liturgy, learning new prayers, maintaining or creating small-group relationships — these refill and refresh without changing (much!) the “bowl” that we use to collect or update information — the bio-social, psychospiritual worldview that allows us to be in service to each other and to the God we worship together.

Some of these activities can stimulate a different kind of change in our worldview, but is worship that God most often coaxes or challenges us into new ways of noticing and experiencing the love of God. *(continued on page four)*

## New to our Library:

There is so much to be learned from other religions – you might be surprised more by what we share than how we differ.

*Walk in Love: Episcopal Beliefs & Practices* by Scott Gunn & Melody Shobe. A comprehensive overview of Episcopal faith and practice.

*Rambam's Ladder: A Meditation on Generosity and Why It Is Necessary* by Julie Salamon. From reluctance to responsibility and why it is important to give.

*Gifts of the Spirit: Living the Wisdom of the Great Religious Traditions* by Philip Zaleski & Paul Kaufman. Draws on wisdom teachings from the world's religions

*The World's Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World's Religions* by Philip Novak. Selections of texts from Buddhist, Hindu, Confucian, Taoist, Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and primal religions.

*Healing Zen: Awakening to a Life of Wholeness and Compassion While Caring for Yourself and Others* by Ellen Bix. Awareness and meditation techniques designed to help restore wholeness and health.

*The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred* by Phil Cousineau. There is a unique wisdom that is found when one travels with a purpose.

*Holiness* by Donald Nichol. An influential British theologian drawing on many spiritual traditions to present some (perhaps) surprising conclusions.

*Love Heals* by Becca Steven. An Episcopal priest presents principles that have transformed lives.

## The Elizabethan

*The Elizabethan* is published monthly by St. Elizabeth Episcopal Church. The deadline for articles is the fourth Friday of each month.

Articles, calendar items and ideas may be mailed or emailed to the addresses below or left in *The Elizabethan* box in the Parish Office.

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**Treasurer:** Linda Knutson

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Scottish psychiatrist and philosopher, R.D. Laing, wrote a poem that captures how some translative practices begin to give way to other formative experiences:

The range of what we think and do  
Is limited by what we fail to notice  
And because we fail to notice  
That we fail to notice  
There is little that we can do  
To change  
Until we notice  
How failing to notice  
Shapes our thoughts and deeds

*Transfiguring formation:* Where some practices “in-form,” others “trans-form,” which is to say that they lead us out of our current stable and comfortable worldview into a new, more vulnerable worldview. They change the shape of the “bowl” we use to collect and consider life experiences; through them, God transfigures us and this occurs most often through time given to God in worship, prayer and silence.

And we are most at risk of transfiguring changes when we open ourselves to God in worship, prayer or silence and stillness. That’s why the Eucharist is at the heart of the Episcopalian way of being Christian in the world. Our Book of Common Prayer defines prayer as “responding to God, by thought and by deeds, with or without words.” God acts first. And our primary form of collective response is to gather to encounter, adore and receive God in the Paschal mystery of bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ, which we then carry within us out into the world for others.

God draws people and we respond by providing a holy space for gathering the most casual visitors to the most deeply committed practitioners. God invites us to the altar and we respond by coming still closer, readying ourselves to receive. God blesses the bread and wine to be the Sacrament of Christ’s Body and Blood, to make Christ actually present to us and we respond by taking Christ into our bodies, minds and souls. God fills us with God’s self and we respond by going out “into the world in peace to love and serve” the Christ we meet in every person.

We learn the mechanics of the liturgy through crucial translative practices like study and conversation. We keep the liturgical experience alive through our personal prayer life and through praying the daily office, individually or collectively. The Rule of St. John the Evangelist says that “In reciting the psalms, singing canticles and hymns, proclaiming the divine word in Scripture, or lifting our voices in prayer, we are to enter more and more into the mind, heart, and will of Christ, and to be borne up by the Spirit in him to the Father. Our praying of the Psalter, which is the heart of the Daily Office, takes us ever deeper into the mystery of the incarnation; the psalms

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give voice to the whole range of human experience which Christ has embraced and redeemed as the Savior of the world.”

Immersing ourselves in our relationship with God offers God an opportunity to introduce inklings of ideas, intuitions, feelings, sensations or other experiences that our current worldview cannot quite grasp. We may notice them as paradoxes or anomalies, as unexplainable events or synchronicities. Parts of the liturgy that move us deeply may appear to flow right past others. Details of the liturgy may annoy or confuse us while others seem to find them soothing or uplifting. Fragments of a dream may come to mind unexpectedly in a worship setting. From time to time, one hopes, a sermon will speak directly to our life situation. A psalm may cause us to tear up for reasons that we can't articulate. A positive worship experience may bring us face-to-face with a personal prejudice or challenge a teaching from our upbringing.

If we trust God, we can relax our need to shoe-horn these moments into our existing worldview — the container that we are used to using — and allow God to work on us a bit. We let the oddity be evidence that we are right at the edge of a growth experience. These are periods of incubation. As God continues to work on us, we may begin to notice a separation of sorts that can feel like doubt, frustration or loss, or it can like curiosity or challenge.

Persevering in the Eucharist and in prayer, our faith in God allows God to inspire - literally, to “breath into - this newly emerging worldview until we begin to notice a larger context. The more we give our consent to receive God, the more God can create greater capacity for Godself within us. In this emerging and still unfamiliar context, God provides bridges between our former worldview and this more inclusive reality. We respond by learning how to look through new, often corrective lenses seeking a new understanding of God who is already dissolving our illusions of separation from God and each other.

And as we become increasingly familiar with this new worldview, God helps us to integrate our new understanding of this wider, more grace-filled, and more loving experience of God's reality breaking into the world we live in. We are transfigured and once again go about the translative practices that help us to learn about this reality, we return to the Eucharist to give our thanks and we go out into the world to give away the light and love of God that we can see now where we could not before.

And then, of course, it's once more into the Mystery we go! Thanks be to God!



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“Jesus has made himself translucent, the burning glass through which God’s light comes to set the world on fire; he has made an empty space in the world for God to come in. And so he does not any longer belong just to the world of human beings; he is a space in the world, a silence in human speech, the place where God is free to act and to suffer. He has made room for God. That is why Jesus’ death is not the end of the story, the last point in his great struggle to free God into the world.”

~ Archbishop Rowan Williams

## **Welcome Celeste!**

We are very fortunate to have some new help in the office. Celeste Alfred, the former supervisor of the Early Head Start program at Neighborhood House, will be filling in as our Administrative Assistant during Christine’s absence. She will be in the office on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. We are closing the office on Wednesdays for the remainder of the summer and will continue to rely on volunteers on Mondays and Fridays from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. And a HUGE thank you to our volunteers: Sue Tierney, Anneke Szperski, Pat Lofstedt, Linda Knutson, Sue Chamberlain, Dana Freeman, Sandy Stonhouse and Patti McGowan. Many of them will be continuing to offer support while Celeste gets used to the routine. We are truly blessed!