

Reflection on ten years at St. Cyprian's

In 2005 Caren and I were visiting our daughter who lived in LincolNville. As we were walking in the neighborhood we passed by St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church and Caren said, "That would make a great gig in retirement." I remember rolling my eyes, and continuing to walk by the church without even giving it a thought. After moving to St. Augustine a couple of years later (yes, we had fallen in love with the place) we spent several months traveling between here and Asheville where we had a second home just a few hundred feet from where my mother was living. She was ill with COPD and in hospice home care. It was after my mother's death in the fall of 2007 that I started to look for a church in St. Augustine in which to worship and found St. Cyprian's.

I knew nothing of St. Cyprian's history ... recent or past. There were about 20 people worshipping on Sunday morning, and I soon learned of the 2006 schism that left the church somewhat dispirited and directionless. Yet, St. Cyprian's felt very comfortable, and I slowly began making it my spiritual home.

Caren and I had spent several decades working and consulting in churches that needed healing, transformation, and redevelopment after conflict or tragedy. So we offered some of the skills in our toolbox to the congregation as they dreamed about their future. Rooted in a past that welcomed the marginalized, the congregation began to form a vision of a faith community of radical hospitality. In the fall of 2008 Bishop Howard asked if I would consider serving St. Cyprian's as his Vicar, and I began my formal ministry on All Saints Day, 2008.

It is hard to believe that was ten years ago. It was supposed to be a part-time position, for two or three years ... just to get the congregation back on its feet. Yet, here I am a decade later. St. Cyprian's has grown in size, spirit and ministry. Today we are, once again, a cornerstone in the LincolNville neighborhood. And this continues to be the most rewarding ministry of my career. Here is why.

The community of St. Cyprian's is made up of people who care about each other in a very special way. Everyone who walks across our threshold is a misfit, and everyone who sits in our pews is hurting or vulnerable in one way or another. Most of us really don't "fit in" in some part of our culture, one way or another. And many of our life-experiences have left us in places where we need healing. We don't always know everyone else, but we have concern and empathy for the others around us who share our need for a safe and sacred space. Just look at what happens during the Sharing of the Peace. We support each other by including everyone ... unconditionally. And each person is valued for the support they offer the community by the mere fact that they show up on Sunday morning. This is what the earliest faith communities were really about, and somehow St. Cyprian's has learned that. The liturgy, the music, the Bible stories, the preaching, and the prayers all frame our gathering on Sunday morning, but it really is the sense of community that makes the difference.

However, we are not perfect. Sometimes ... individually and as a community ... we come up short, or we miss the mark. But, we also know that we are forgiven, and it frees us to try again. And, we are not for everyone. Yes ... believe it or not ... there are some people who are put off by what we do and how we do it at St. Cyprian's. But we keep trying to do our best. We keep trying to live into that image of God in which each of us is made. We keep working on actively living out the God that is alive in each one of us, just like Jesus lived out God who was alive in his life. We keep seeking to take seriously what Jesus took seriously.

That is all why this is not about my tenth anniversary at St. Cyprian's, but about the life we live together. My role is to be a pastor to this community, and I happen to have some gifts to share. But each of you has something that you bring to this community also, and all these gifts are needed to make us whole. Whether you have been with us one week or ten years, this is your anniversary as well.

Little did I know, over a decade ago, that this community of St. Cyprian's would "make a great gig in retirement." I know I was led by God's Spirit to this place, as I believe that each person in this congregation was led by God's Spirit to share in our life. That is what I celebrate on this tenth anniversary of my ministry at St. Cyprian's.