

My Journey in the Episcopal Church as a Person in Recovery

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by the Rev. Stacey Carpenter

I lived two seemingly distinct journeys that turned out to be intertwined like the roots of an old tree. My recovery from alcohol addiction and my faith journey both run deep, can be gnarly at times, go this way and that, but at the end of the day, they are grounded in the soil of God's unending grace, mercy, and love. These two journeys are full of paradox — a paradox that reminds me God is always calling me, calling all His creation, to be on a journey of uncovering, discovering, and recovering who we are so that we can be who God calls us to be.

Early on in my recovery journey, a 12-step sponsor shared four paradoxes with me. Over the past 16-and-a-half years, these paradoxes have become the foundation of how I understand what it means to live a life in recovery and what it means to live with God, through Jesus Christ.

1. We suffer to get well.
2. We surrender to win.
3. We die to live.
4. We give away to keep.

We Suffer to Get Well

As a child, I was drawn to God. I grew up in The Episcopal Church, going each Sunday with my Grandma Carpenter. I took to the rhythms of the Episcopal liturgy like a fish takes to water; they were a balm for my anxious little soul. The time that I spent with my grandma at church are some of my most precious memories.

My connection to God and church began to fade in high school, which is also the time I began to consume alcohol. In the beginning, drinking was fun. It was something that many of my friends did; it seemed like a rite of passage. It also helped me feel more comfortable in my skin and avoid feelings I did not want to acknowledge or know how to process. Over the next almost two decades, my drinking progressed like any untreated disease progresses — it became more frequent, more pronounced and more harmful. As my drinking increased, my connection to God, myself and the world decreased.

By the time I was in my early 30s, everything on the outside of my life looked great. I had received a promotion at work, bought a new car and home, had plenty of money in the bank, a partner, and a large group of friends. And at the same time, on the inside, I was emotionally and spiritually decaying. I felt like a shell of a person who could crack at any

moment. I didn't recognize it at the time, but paradox was rearing its head. I had all the trappings of how I understood society to define success, yet on the inside, I felt completely and utterly alone and defeated.

On January 21, 2007, I cried out to God for help. The answer I received was to call a friend whom I knew was in recovery from alcohol addiction. We talked for several hours. She listened to me. She never judged me. She told me that there was another way to live. She suggested I go to work the next day and find a 12-step meeting to go to in the evening. We suffer to get well.

We Surrender to Win

On January 22, 2007, I did exactly what my friend told me to do. I attended a 12-step meeting that evening and miraculously I did not drink that day. I know without a shadow of a doubt that God's grace and my willingness intersected that day. I took to the 12-step program as I had taken to church as a little kid; a fish who knows it needs water to survive. I heard things like, "keep coming back," "one day at a time," "let us love you until you can love yourself" and "the only thing you have to do perfect today is surrender and not take a drink."

Up until this point in my life, I thought surrendering was a sign of weakness. What I was shown by this fellowship of people was something completely different. I realized that if I were willing to surrender to the fact that I was powerless over alcohol — that I had lost the ability to safely drink — I could embark on a journey that would allow me to cultivate an honest and loving relationship with God, myself, and the world. We surrender to win.

We Die to Live

I was told that if I wanted to maintain my recovery, I would need to grow and change. I would need to let some things die so that new things could be planted. I asked someone to share their experience, strength, and hope of recovery with me and to take me through the 12-step program. I'm grateful to say this person is still walking with me on my recovery journey; our relationship is one of the closest I have in my life. As I continued working the 12 steps, my foundation with God began to crystallize, and the world opened in ways that I could not imagine. I began to uncover, discover, and recover who I was. I fell in love with God all over again while attending 12-step meetings in church basements and parish halls. Within my first year and a half in recovery, I heard whisperings from God of a call to ordained ministry.

As the whisperings from God continued, so did the work with my 12-step sponsor. She helped me learn many things, including the history of the 12-step program. I was elated to learn about the Rev. Samuel Shoemaker, an Episcopal priest, who was credited by the co-founders of the 12-step movement with developing the program's spiritual principles.

Four years into my recovery journey, I recovered my relationship with The Episcopal Church. I began attending a 12-step meeting each morning that met at the Church of the Ascension in New York City. One day a fellow from the meeting invited me to a 12-step Recovery

Eucharist at the church. She explained it was a service that was grounded in Episcopal liturgy and integrated the 12-steps of recovery. I experienced a moment of clarity and realized that God was guiding me back to the church of my youth to move me forward with those whisperings about ordained ministry. At the end of the 12-step Recovery Eucharist, I spoke with the priest who led the service, the Rev. Shelley McDade, and told her about the whisperings I had been hearing from God.

I began attending Sunday services at Church of the Ascension during Holy Week 2012. I went to service each day, sat in the back of the church and cried tears of joy; I knew God was bringing me to a church home. I began to meet regularly with Mother Shelley to discuss the whisperings from God. In early 2013, she affirmed my desire to begin a discernment process with the church.

It took several years for my discernment process to unfold. I had a significant illness in 2013 that put things on hold until early 2015. When the discernment process resumed, I found that it was a process of ongoing surrender and letting things die so that new things could grow. Discernment helped me to see that life in recovery and life with God are a lot like the scene from *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. Indy had to step out in faith so that the bridge would appear; so did I.

In 2019 I was made a postulant for holy orders in the Episcopal Diocese of New York. I began seminary in the autumn of 2019. It was a whole new season of letting things die so that new things could be planted. I was ordained a deacon on March 12, 2022, joined Christ Church Christiana Hundred, Wilmington, on July 1, 2022, and on September 24, 2022, I was ordained a priest. Recovery and faith journeys reflect what happens at Baptism, we are called to die to one life, so that we can live another life — life in and with God. We die to live.

We Give Away to Keep

One of the first questions my 12-step sponsor asked me when we began working together was, “Stacey, will you give this away as it was given to you?” Without hesitation I said yes. A year and a half later when I heard my first whisperings of a call to ordained ministry, I heard the voice of Jesus saying, “Stacey, you are called to preach, teach, and pastor so that you can give away what I have so freely given to you.”

As a person in recovery and as an Episcopal priest, I believe I am here to share the gifts I have received which are embedded in the intertwined roots of my life in recovery and life in and with God. As it is prayed at every priestly ordination service, I pray that I can point others to know the saving power of God’s love, grace, and mercy so that they can uncover, discover, and recover who they are and who God is calling them to be.

“... let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord;

who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.” (BCP p. 528).

The Rev. Stacey Carpenter is a priest associate at Christ Church Christiana Hundred, Wilmington. She graduated with her Master of Divinity from the Seminary of the Southwest in May 2022. Stacey has a passion for liturgy, formation, connecting church and community, and the intersection of faith and healing.

Youth Trip: Dominican Republic

 delaware.church/youth-trip-dominican-republic/

“Since 2001, Christ Church Christiana Hundred has partnered with the people of Jalonga and the Episcopal Diocese of the Dominican Republic, hosting annual youth mission trips there. Through the decades, land has been cleared and developed for a community center, now used for a preschool program that the parish’s Global Missions Group supports with annual grants. In addition, adult and youth mission trips installed solar panels to provide for the electrical needs for the center, and most recently, assisted in the development of a well and water treatment facility that gives the center income from the sales of potable water. Our youth learn the meaning of service to others and broaden their experience while building lasting and fulfilling relationships with the people of the Dominican Republic and with one another. ”

— *The Rev. Ruth Beresford, rector, Christ Church Christiana Hundred, Wilmington*

Two young people who participated in this year’s mission trip reflect upon their experiences:

by McKinley Jefferson

This year’s trip to the Dominican Republic by Christ Church Christiana Hundred’s youth group was filled with lots of fun and enjoyment. We visited Jalonga, a town in the eastern Dominican Republic, to work and help renew the town’s community school and church. The day we arrived, everyone who was new to the trip was very curious about what Jalonga was going to look like. As we made our way to the hotel after eating a quick lunch at a lovely restaurant near the airport, we were soon to see the houses. They were small and pleasant. Some were bigger than others. We arrived at the hotel and were all greeted by a very nice groundskeeper who made us feel so welcomed. He also later joined us in a game of manhunt that was played on the hotel grounds.

On our first day of work we painted the outside of the church. Some of the local children joined in and helped us get the job done. Then we painted boards in bright colors to build a fence. Another group cut the boards to make them perfect sizes for the fence. Then we screwed them all to a railing to assemble the fence. Other groups were digging holes and putting together flower beds while some groups were scraping the old paint off a wall that needed a new coat of paint. We attended the local pre-kindergarten graduation ceremony at the school, as well as catered and served lunch to the parents and children who graduated or attended the service.

Usually, after work, we would go to a beach or a pool to cool off and grab some lunch. The beaches were especially fun because of the cool vendors that would walk up and down trying to sell you kites, sunglasses, inner tubes, etc. The pool that we would normally swim at had a great lunch and a super fun water slide that everyone enjoyed at least once. One hot day we drove about an hour and a half to another beach which had a restaurant right by the water. The beach offered a great view of sailboats and palm trees, which was a nice way to relax from our days of work, and the opportunity to work on our tans.

One thing I especially liked about this trip was that all the meals we ate were family style, together. It was usually one long table where everyone could talk to one another. After dinner we would play pool or just talk to one another until it was time for worship. We had little “family” groups that we would break off into and chat about different topics of the day. Each family group led worship one night so everyone could have a chance to read and pray.

One day of the week we went to a local orphanage and played volleyball and kickball with all of the kids. We also went to the town’s community baseball field where mostly everyone participated in a fun game of baseball. God was present in the happiness of the kids and everyone who pitched in on this trip.

One memorable experience I had was on the second to last night of our trip. I was playing pool with some friends and a really fun song started playing on the speaker. Everyone started singing and we all had a good time. There was nothing to complain about or worry about. Whenever the local kids would ask to help us and we agreed, their faces would light up with joy.

I found peace in seeing the hard work that my friends and I had done for the community. I also found peace in the very relaxing outdoor showers that the resort had. I learned many things from this trip, such as always trying to be a happy and positive person and that having a loving attitude will go a long way. I also made some best friends and have some great memories that I took home with me.

by Sydney Ayers

We arrived at the Punta Cana airport after a long morning of traveling. We landed in the early afternoon, gathered our luggage, and made our way out of the airport. We met a bus that took us from the airport to our designated lunch spot. After lunch we had about a two-hour bus ride to our hotel. During the bus ride I took in the scenery of the towns and the people as we passed by. Many people were outside. The homes were smaller and simpler than those in my hometown. When we finally made it to our hotel, we were all glad to have arrived and to get settled in. That night we had our first dinner together and then followed up dinner with worship. It was a fun time to start to get to know one another.

Sunday morning we had breakfast at our hotel and made our way to church. After enjoying a beautiful service with people from the community, we had a bus ride to our lunch spot that was right near the beach. We had a great beach day and got to buy and see many cool items that were being sold by the locals. After a couple hours on the beach we made our way home to shower up, eat dinner, and worship.

Monday was our first day of work. We took a 20-minute bus ride to the school and church we had attended service at on Sunday. We started painting the church but then moved over to the school to work there. We then finished our work for the day and had lunch. After lunch we enjoyed the refreshing pool and had fun on the slides. We then went back to the hotel to get showered, eat dinner, and worship. The weekdays had a similar schedule. On Tuesday we played baseball in the local village and donated some sports equipment to the community. On Wednesday we visited an orphanage and had a nice tour. We all loved seeing the babies! We also got to play a game of kickball with the girls from the orphanage.

As the last workday approached, we thought about all of the work we had been able to complete at the school. We had created a colorful fence around the school and installed fans in the church. I saw God most while I was working. Especially when the kids would come up and help us in our work. They always wanted to help, no matter how hot it was, and they were so happy. I noticed that they always looked out for one another, showing how much they cared.

On the last day we got to see the pre-schoolers graduate, thanks to the hard work and support of the local community as well as the Christ Church community. Friday night we celebrated two of our group members' birthdays, which was a lot of fun. Then before we knew it, it was Saturday. It was time to leave the village and go back home. We had an eventful trip home, with a flight delay and an unplanned extra night in Punta Cana, but we knew everyone was praying for our safe arrival home.

I left the Dominican Republic with connections that I had created with the children in the village, my group members, and a lot of gratitude. I am so grateful for the opportunity to go to the Dominican Republic and experience such amazing things. I am also grateful for the things I have and the kind people I have in my life.

McKinley Jefferson is a sophomore at Ursuline Academy in Wilmington, Delaware. She has been a competitive swimmer her whole life. She found this trip rewarding and is looking forward to more service trips.

Sydney Ayers lives in Hockessin, Delaware, with her parents, brother, and sister. She is a sophomore at the Charter School of Wilmington, where she runs cross country, and plays basketball and soccer. She is active in the Eco Alliance club at school and enjoys volunteering.

A Cabin in the Woods

 delaware.church/a-cabin-in-the-woods/

... The Episcopal Church in Delaware has a house at Camp Arrowhead, the diocesan camp in Lewes. The house, he explains, is a little rustic. In fact, it is very rustic. It is a log cabin, albeit heated and air-conditioned. The television (yes, there is one) receives only one channel. There are no neighbors next door. In fact, there is no next door. The cabin sits alone on 110 acres on a spit of land on the shore of Rehoboth Bay....

by the Rev. Christopher Chamberlin Moore

It is a dark night in October several years ago. I am with our dog, Molly, driving through an extensive tract of woods to a place I have never seen before and where I will spend the next seven months.

When I say I am driving through the woods, I am literally driving “through” the woods. There is no proper road. I am driving along a hiking trail, my only illumination the light of the moon above me and my headlights reflecting off the pine trees on either side. After many twists and turns and wondering whether Molly and I will end up in Rehoboth Bay, I get to my destination. There in front of me is a log cabin, back-lit by the moon and silhouetted on the edge of Rehoboth Bay.

The circumstances in which I find myself are the result of a conversation I had a couple of months previously with the Rev. Max Wolf, then rector of All Saints’ Church and St. George’s Chapel in Rehoboth. He has called me out of retirement to become a half-time assistant at the two churches.

I will be dividing my time between my new duties in Rehoboth and our home in Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania, where I have recently retired as rector of the local Episcopal church. There is only one hitch. There is no clergy housing immediately available in Rehoboth.

Max offers a possible solution. The Episcopal Church in Delaware has a house at Camp Arrowhead, the diocesan camp in Lewes. The house, he explains, is a little rustic. In fact, it is very rustic. It is a log cabin, albeit heated and air-conditioned. The television (yes, there is one) receives only one channel. There are no neighbors next door. In fact, there *is* no next door. The cabin sits alone on 110 acres on a spit of land on the shore of Rehoboth Bay. Max asks me, somewhat tentatively: Do you think you could possibly make this work just for now?

I think I’ve died and gone to Heaven.

I've always been drawn to silence and solitude, qualities which are often at variance with the busy rhythms of daily parish ministry. In addition, I have just retired from more than 40 years of active parish ministry. I need time to figure out just what this thing called retirement is all about. I need time to be alone, to be *myself*, to discover just what this self is that I want to be alone with.

I need time to deprogram from 40 years of parish ministry.

Over the next few days, Molly and I settle into our new life in the cabin, and I settle into my new ministry at All Saints' and St. George's.

As the weeks pass, the days fall into an easy pattern. I read Morning Prayer at dawn with the first rays of the sun over Rehoboth Bay. Evenings at dusk, I walk Molly along the trails of Arrowhead. At three in the morning, when Molly's barking occasionally wakes me up, I come to realize that it is not an intruder outside the cabin. It is the deer and squirrels scampering around outside my bedroom window.

My first month in the cabin coincides with Halloween. I call my wife, Janice, back home in Pennsylvania the day after. She tells me she had more than 100 trick-or-treaters. I tell her I had 10 deer.

As the weeks pass, I come to realize that I am following a routine not unlike that of Jesus. Jesus had the most public of public ministries — preaching, teaching, healing, and traveling throughout Palestine. But he alternated these intensely public periods with time alone. Jesus frequently retreated to a "lonely place," where the disciples often had to seek him out.

The most balanced life, I come to think, is one which intentionally combines both solitude as well as community, and which seeks to combine the two in creative harmony.

During my seven months in the cabin, I often reflect that our society does not provide opportunities, such as I was experiencing, for people to renew and refresh themselves, or to adjust to radically changed circumstances in their lives. The fact is, we need to seek out such opportunities for ourselves. No one will do it for us.

Most likely these opportunities will not take the form of seven months in a cabin in the woods. But it may be a weekend at a convent or retreat center, or a week or two at the beach or in the mountains. And here's the thing — we need to give our spouse or partner permission to seek out such time for themselves if they feel the need to do so.

Finally, April arrives and the farmhouse at St. George's is ready for us to move in. Janice and I and Molly settle in, and a new phase of our life begins, one which involves rambles through St. George's historic cemetery and the woods behind the parish hall. But I never forget that cabin in the woods, or the dawn breaking over Rehoboth Bay.

The Rev. Chris Moore serves on the clergy staff of the Brandywine Collaborative Ministries in Wilmington. His latest book is Soul Stages: Surviving and Thriving in the Second Half of Life.
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Education for Ministry - Hear from Three Graduates

 delaware.church/education-for-ministry/

by Lola Michael Russell

Sewanee: The University of the South, School of Theology, is committed to preparing lay and ordained leadership for service to The Episcopal Church and the world. Education for Ministry is one of its most successful lay programs. According to its website:

Education for Ministry (EfM) is a unique four-year distance learning certificate program in theological education based upon small-group study and practice. Since its founding in 1975, this international program has assisted more than 120,000 participants in discovering and nurturing their call to Christian service. EfM helps the faithful encounter the breadth and depth of the Christian tradition and bring it into conversation with their experiences of the world as they study, worship, and engage in theological reflection together.

The EFM program invites participants into groups of 6-12, with commitments made for one year at a time. Groups meet with a mentor weekly, either in person or online, with the goal of providing tools for an individual to better carry out their lay ministry. Complete studies of the Bible, church history, liturgy, and theology, along with reflections, are included in their studies.

One such small group has flourished in the Episcopal Church in Delaware, despite the parameters imposed by the COVID pandemic. It is based at St. David's Church, Wilmington, under the mentorship of the Rev. Ann Kathryne Urinoski, who said: "EfM combines fellowship, study, and guided discussions in a small group format over the course of the program year. The group gathers weekly to discuss readings and reflect on the ways we find God in the world around us." This year, three of the group's participants graduated. We asked them their thoughts and reflections on the program and its impact on their lives.

Elinor Knodel, Robert "Bob" Irwin, and Robert "Rob" Carver came to The Episcopal Church from different backgrounds. Knodel was a cradle half-Episcopalian —her mother was Episcopalian, and her father, Lutheran. They decided that the family would become Methodist as a compromise. While a student at Columbia University, Knodel sang in the choir at St. Paul's Chapel on campus and after three years decided to become an Episcopalian. She was confirmed at the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine and has been a practicing Episcopalian for more than 50 years. She is a member of St. David's.

By contrast, Carver came to The Episcopal Church by chance. St. David's was just up the street from where he lived, and he decided to visit. He heard one of the Rev. Brad Hinton's sermons and decided to go back to hear a few more. He soon realized he had found a spiritual home. He was comforted by the kindness he encountered and appreciated the language of acceptance and love that had been missing in his previous church life.

Irwin was raised a Roman Catholic and came to The Episcopal Church as an adult. He is a member of Immanuel, New Castle.

As for what led these graduates to the EfM program, their paths toward it were again diverse. Carver said: "I attend a church that has many EfM graduates, who all speak highly of the program. For a long time, EfM was not offered in person in the diocese, although I knew that there were online offerings through Sewanee. That changed with this EfM cohort sponsored and hosted by St. David's. I joined this cohort as it was an in-person session, which is what I wanted."

Knodel had been drawn to EfM for some 25 years, but family and work responsibilities precluded her participation. She said: "Then, after my retirement, I'd say that St. Mary opened the door for me and gave me a nudge to enter the EfM world. When talking to a staff member at Christ Church Christiana Hundred, I noticed a lovely icon of St. Mary in his office. He told me that it had been a gift at his graduation from EfM years before, and if I liked it, I could have it. He also said that a new EfM group was starting at St. David's, to be mentored by the Rev. Ann Urinoski."

Carver, on the other hand, said: "I was unaware of EFM until Father Brad mentioned it to me as a possible next step on my spiritual journey. I had been involved in what we called *The 9:00 Hour* or the *Equippers* group at St. David's for a few years, but we were ending that program and I was looking for something that would provide the same spiritual spark, and which would allow for some deeper self-reflection like we had been doing in the *Equippers*. I decided to attend the informational meeting and then to give it a try for one year."

Irwin, who had waited years for the opportunity to participate in EfM in person, rather than online, noted: "The irony is that this cohort was in progress in March of 2020 when everything was shut down due to COVID. Our group pivoted and stayed connected through Zoom. This became an anchor in my life and something to look forward to as we navigated the pandemic. This is a group that changed as we had members of the cohort leave for a variety of reasons, and others join. The thread that ran through all of this for me was the relationships that I formed initially and sustained through our online gatherings. The discussions about the weekly readings and from the theological reflections were something that I looked forward to each week as the pandemic continued. The robust discussions led to additional readings and study that was well outside of the required readings."

For each of these graduates, EfM kept them engaged for the full program. Carver commented: “The thing that kept me coming back was the community that we developed those first few years we were together. This also sustained me as we navigated life as the pandemic entered into the following fall. When we were finally able to gather in person again, it made the gatherings so much richer and an event to look forward to.”

Carver, too, said that the people he met in EfM kept him engaged in the program. “I always find it hard to pull down my mask and be my true self and in EfM I had an opportunity to do that and when we all did that — especially in the spiritual autobiography — I knew I wanted to spend more time with these folks and grow with them. Each week, after completing the theological reflection, I always felt a tremendous amount of connection with my Higher Power and with those in the group. There were God winks constantly, and that feeling is something that kept drawing me back week after week and year after year.”

For Knodel, deep desire kept her in the EfM program. “I had wanted to read and discuss the whole Bible with fellow Christians, which we covered in the first two years. The rest of the curriculum also intrigued me — Diarmaid MacCulloch’s *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*, and several shorter books on theology, ethics, and interfaith encounters.”

She commented that: “EfM participation requires a significant time commitment, but the rewards can be great. Aside from gaining knowledge from working through the texts, I experienced a spiritual growth through the close fellowship of the EfM group. We had learned to trust each other, shared aspects of how our lives were going, provided honest viewpoints on the texts, and during theological reflection a way of looking at life through a theological lens. Hearing how my fellow Christians were thinking about our current world made me open my mind and heart to other alternatives — it was an unexpected gift and a blessing.”

Their EfM experiences led to personal awakenings and profound realizations. Knodel commented that: “The experience made me more willing to wrestle with hard texts. Currently I am slowly working through *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ* by Fleming Rutledge, a book mentioned by one of my EfM friends. I also expect to continue participating in Christian study groups and specially to learn to listen more and speak less.”

Of his experience, Carver realized: “That God is everywhere and in everyone and everything. It is something I did not really understand before EfM. I also, quite honestly, discovered myself being a bit embarrassed to be a Christian. The history of the Church was more complicated and messier than I realized. There was a lot that I learned that truly disappointed me. At the same time, I am extremely blessed to be an Episcopalian and to have an opportunity to question everything. In a lot of ways, I think EfM has helped me to become a different kind of Christian, with an awareness and understanding of the past and willingness to reckon with it in order help create a future that reflects what Jesus and the disciples were trying to teach us all.”

He went on to reflect: “I think EfM has helped open my eyes to the difference between religion and spirituality and the need to bring those two things together again. I believe that EfM has shown me a path forward that will allow me to continue my spiritual journey WITHIN the church. EfM has taught me it is OK to be my authentic self just as God made me to be and that it is okay to question anyone or any institution that would want me to hide my light under a bushel.”

Irwin summed up his reflections: “EfM is part of the larger journey that I am on. I have developed a deeper faith and it has allowed me to apply this to my life in the world. EfM has led to serious additional study and a desire to learn even more. I have developed the ability to live with ambiguity and develop a sense of peace as I move through the world. My completion of year four of EfM, and marking a graduation of sorts, is not the finish of the process. Instead, I see it as a launch pad for future reading, study, and growth.”

Carver and Irwin are committed to continuing their EfM connections and will become co-mentors for the upcoming year, with the Rev. Urinoski, who commented:

“This fall, our St. David’s EfM group will begin our fifth year together. We’ll meet most Tuesdays from 6:30 – 8:45 p.m. on Zoom (with a handful of meetings throughout the year being in-person at St. David’s or other nearby churches). Our group currently has five members who will be starting their second, third, or fourth year of EfM. If you are interested in learning more, please join us for our interest meeting on Tuesday, Sept. 19, at 6:30 p.m. at St. David’s. We’ll share in refreshments and fellowship as we talk through our next year together. You also may reach out to one of this group’s mentors: the Rev. Ann Kathryne Urinoski, Bob Irwin, or Rob Carver.”

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A Summer of Sabbatical and Pilgrimage

 delaware.church/bishop-browns-sabbatical-2023/

“I expected the pilgrimage to be challenging, and it was. Very early on I asked myself why I had signed up for so many days and so many miles along not-exactly-easy geography. I journaled, “what have I gotten myself into?”

Hello beloved of God in Delaware,

I have returned from my sabbatical, and I can say unequivocally that I come back rested, renewed, and ready to reaffirm the blessings of life. I wrote in April [\[link\]](#) about what I hoped and expected from the time away. Here are a few reflections as I return to work and slip the mitre back on.

The centerpiece of the sabbatical was a wonderful month in Ireland. The first half was time of personal pilgrimage, alone on a motorcycle, where I rode 1,600 miles (about half the width of the United States) of Irish coastline. I rented a silver Royal Enfield Himalayan and each day set off with “Hi ho, Silver!” into the scenery of the Wild Atlantic Way.

Not only was the route breathtaking, but the locals I met were gracious and supportive. Even among all the natural beauty, I came to treasure most the journey itself. After early doubts, I started to relish the challenge of mastering an unfamiliar bike in an unfamiliar land on the left side of the road. (And yes, those large multi-lane roundabouts are something else.)

Sometimes the road was quiet, but usually it was as unpredictable as the sheep which roamed freely in the north. I chose not to use a GPS but relied instead on road signs. (This got tricky in a few places where signs were printed only in Gaelic.) At times, the day would become unexpectedly dramatic. I will never forget climbing the twisting, narrow, cliffside route up to a high vista that overlooked Ashleam Bay in County Mayo. The drop to the ocean below was steep, and there were often no guardrails or lane markers despite two-way traffic. I stayed focused on the ride, not the scenery. At the summit, I basked in the breathtaking panorama of the North Atlantic Ocean, feeling a profound connection to the grandeur of nature and a heightened sense of proximity to God’s beauty. I offered prayers and reveled in the sheer joy, thrill, and exhilaration of my achievement. As I prepared to descend and tackle the miles that lay ahead that day, I could not help but reflect on the pilgrimage’s overwhelming capacity to inspire, invigorate, and reaffirm my faith. It ignited a surge of creativity in my journaling, unlike anything I had experienced in years.

After two glorious weeks I bid farewell to ‘Silver’ and exuberantly met Caroline in Dublin. My heart was full as we celebrated her birthday and took in a ton of Irish history. We spent a few quiet days in retreat at Glendalough, the home of St. Kevin, and we were in Kilkenny when the city celebrated the local hurling team’s dramatic victory over Galway. We visited old

friends who have a home on Shirkin Island and basked in the local music and hospitality in yet another gorgeous corner of Ireland. The highlight of the entire month, no doubt about it, was our hike, in the glory of a sunny day, with our friends of Skellig Michael, the rocky mountain top of an island eight miles off the southwest coast where the beehive huts and chapel of an ancient monastery still stand. Skellig Michael is a bucket list destination for many for its history and dramatic, even dangerous, beauty. Though we approached the island with trepidation (that path to the top is not for the faint of heart) we rejoiced in the day and in what we had achieved together.

The rest of my sabbatical was spent back home in the United States, in Delaware, North Carolina, and Tennessee, largely as planned. I was able to spend time with my wife and daughters, to study, read, learn, and rest, all the while rekindling my personal prayer life. The activities of these weeks are not as sensational as those in Ireland, but they are certainly just as important. My family appreciated my undivided attention, my availability, and our Sunday mornings together during these precious moments of reconnection.

Having said all this, it is important to note: the secret sauce in a successful sabbatical is not to travel to a foreign land, experience a novel pilgrimage, or attend some other marquee event. Success hinges on the ultimate ability to truly separate from the constant demands and stresses of work. When I was on sabbatical, whether in Europe or at home, I was not doing the work of the church. I am profoundly grateful to the Mission Support Staff for shouldering additional responsibilities in my absence. The team was empowered to make any unexpected choices or big decisions without checking in with me. Accepting that level of responsibility requires a solid dose of two-way trust between bishop and staff that I am grateful for and do not take for granted. This also goes for the leaders and members of our governance bodies, including Diocesan Council, Standing Committee, Trustees, and the Annual Convention planning team. Thank you all for marching forward. I have confidence in you, and I am honored by the confidence I feel in return.

Sabbatical was a real blessing for me and my family. I am glad to be back, and I feel as ready as ever for the unknown roads ahead.

+Kevin