

# Looking Back with Joy

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by the Venerable Patricia Malcolm

I am looking back with joy these days, reflecting on the past 16 years of diaconal ministry. On a cold, rainy day in December 2009, St. Stephen's in Harrington was overflowing with tears of joy, wonder, gratitude, humility — and more than 400 family, friends, neighbors, and church leaders. Six of us — Cecily Sawyer-Harmon, Susan Phillips, Sheila Sharpe, Dorothy Vuono, Tom McCormick, and I — knelt at the altar for the laying on of hands by the bishop, the Rt. Rev. Wayne P. Wright.

The call was never just about serving within the four walls of the church, but about being an altar in the world — living out my baptismal promises and the mission of the church. I am constantly humbled that God saw something in me, and charged me to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world.

My diaconal vocation was hospital chaplaincy, working with the pain and palliative service at Christiana Hospital, serving under Tim Rodden, director of Pastoral Services, and Dr. John Goodill, director of the medical team.

This ministry was about identifying and supporting patients experiencing unmet spiritual needs and/or spiritual distress during a serious or life-limiting illness. I understood that each person's room was to be a place for compassion and mercy. In our time together we were in a sacred space, standing on holy ground.

We all start out as lay persons sitting in the pew, discerning where God is calling us to serve the church. And, although I am resigning from full-time ministry in a few short months, I am still discerning where and how God is calling me to serve him in the next chapter of my life.

In addition to my ministry as a deacon, another place I find joy in serving the Church is being a member of the Commission on Ministry, a bishop-appointed group that is tasked with helping members of our diocese discern their ministries ordained or lay. I am a part of a discernment process where I hear the hearts of others and the wonderment of the Spirit's call. I am a spiritual companion journeying with other travelers who are discerning where God is calling them to serve in the church, whether it be ordained ministry, a Sunday school teacher, working on the altar guild, singing in the choir, serving on a diocesan committee, or some other way to serve and glorify God.

After being appointed as the archdeacon of the Episcopal Church in Delaware, it was first a challenge to balance the administrative duties of the archdeacon while remaining true to the responsibilities of my diaconal ministry. It was through the prayers and support of my sister

and brother deacons that I learned my new role was not different — it was still about being a servant leader modeling humility, compassion, and dedication.

The greatest joy has been serving with the clergy, vestry, and my sisters and brothers at Christ Church in Dover. We have cried together, laughed together, discovered together, and prayed together, and we have gone out to love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit, together, Alleluia, Alleluia!