

## After 25 Years

I suppose I should speak the longest since I was part of the committee that brought Michael here. In fact, I wrote the letters to him because I was the secretary of the search committee. Nancy Joyner and I were both suggested to be the chair the committee, but when I pointed out that if I were chair she would have to do what I said, and if she were then I would have to do what she said. No surprise that I became the secretary.

I remember the first time we saw Michael and Barbara at a dinner at Nancy's house. Right away I knew we had made the right decision. They were young, eager and came with little Ruth, which we knew would mean they would attract other families with young children.

During the first few years I was grateful for Michael's eager adoption of Rite Two when so many of the other priests in the Diocese were still clinging to Rite One since it was most like the 1928 Prayer Book. He had a fresh approach to worship and his sermons were often about openness and about how we were the hands, the eyes, the voice and heart that got God's work done on earth. We knew he had gone to a conservative seminary and that he had early on been involved with evangelical churches, but from the beginning he has been reluctant to talk about sin and damnation. What a relief.

It became clear that Michael had found a spiritual home here at St. David's. We learned that he had wanted to live in the mountains since he was a teenager in Greenville. We heard some of those stories of camping, hiking, and sliding down Bust Your Butt falls with his buddies. Somehow, he always turned those tales of adventure into lessons for living. Some of us needed to hear those lessons. Michael had been a songwriter in Nashville and traveled in different parts of the world singing. He quickly began using that talent by putting together a Christmas Pageant with fresh songs for the participants, some with a rock beat.

I had never thought much about our church's name, but Michael had. He started our practice of St. David's Day celebrations. He wrote music, we had costumes, and he gave out indulgencies for our sins. We were having more fun in church than ever before. Maybe it is time to return to that practice of indulgencies. Some of us need them.

Michael shared his online discussions with other priests about the appointed Gospel lessons for the Sunday. It was reassuring to know that even priests were puzzled over some of our readings. How refreshing to hear Michael admit he is not exactly sure what Jesus meant in some of the readings, or how he really does not want to talk about the ones that are condemnations of followers.

I particularly appreciated how Michael used poetry in his sermons, often letting poems be the crux of the lesson he wanted us to hear. In a similar way, he introduced us to Creation

Theology and led the way to adopting a Creation Cycle in the church year. The banner up there is our response to his guidance.

After Michael had been here 10 years, he took a sabbatical to Wales. While there he began an ambitious project of writing new hymn words for each of the Sundays in the three-year cycle. He tried them out on us, and now these wonderful hymns are in our pews which we sing each Sunday. I really love these hymns. They capture the essence of the lessons for the day with a real-world relevance. They are like condensed, lyrical sermons except there is a tune and they are short.

Because he had loved Wales he instituted our St. David's Pilgrimages. We first went to St. David's Cathedral in Pembrokeshire. He brought back this rock from the cathedral there and we have a supply of water from St. Non's Well, St. David's mom. He led pilgrimages every few years, to Lindisfarne, Ireland, Iona in Scotland, and other parts of England.

Michael led the way in the Diocese in adopting a gender-neutral service. We often heard him speak of God as Mother, and he developed and got the Sunday service we now use approved. It is the grey book in your pews. In the same way, Michael led the way in welcoming LGBT worshipers and blessing same-sex unions and marriages. We may have been the first in the Diocese or the south to do so.

I could go on, but I want to end by thanking Michael for introducing mindfulness practices in our church. He offers regular services weekly, bi-weekly, and monthly. Plus, he posts the readings he has used on his Facebook page for many others to enjoy. And speaking of Facebook, I think all of us enjoy the photos he shares from his hikes here in the mountains. I hope he continues them.

Twenty-five years now seems such a short time, but it has meant a lot for me, as I imagine it has for you. Thank you, Michael.