

**An End to the Long Loneliness** “Heaven is a banquet and life is a banquet, too, even with a crust, where there is companionship. We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community.” Dorothy Day

I believe our most vibrant future lies in becoming a place of deep connection and loving community. Christ Church is a place where people can lay deep roots. In our parish community, people can discover a true place of belonging, deep spiritual growth and transformation, and most importantly perhaps, a place where people are certain to meet the living Christ. We often say phrases like “meet the living Christ” and we aren’t really sure how that happens. In our modern world we are often offered a version of community that simply entails a group of like-minded people gathered in one place to share a common experience. This version of community isn’t all bad of course; it certainly has its place in the wide range of ways we can connect, but as a mainstay of connectedness for the human creature, it is a pale imitation of the real thing. As a steady diet, it leads to what I call the experience of “communal isolation.” Communal isolation is the experience of being in the company of others, but still not being truly known, loved or cared for. I see it every day and I think it only intensifies what the great Dorothy Day called the *long loneliness*. There is probably no greater loneliness than when we feel lonely in the company of others. But a community where people meet the living Christ is very different. Christ driven community invites that we not only acknowledge that we are gathered with others, but that our communal experience is only ratified when we meaningfully engage those around us. Christ’s warm and welcoming life happens in community where we encounter a sense of welcome and belonging and where we become *known*. This is the kind of community for which God formed us, this is the kind of community that Jesus made and this kind of community, true community, is very, very, very *messy*. Becoming a Christ-full community means we have to encounter disappointment with one another, and we have to do the hard work of forgiving one another, and quite frankly, sometimes we have to learn to get along with people we simply don’t like (think of the disciples)! And sometimes, with deep sadness, we must say goodbye to those who choose another path. It is all part of the ebb and flow of life. To meet Christ living and true in our midst means being a community where we *actively* seek to reach out to others and share our joys and accomplishments, we *extend ourselves* in sharing our grief or sorrows, and hopefully we find the safety of letting others know who we really are---we get to share the hopes and fears of our lives and find companionship when we feel most alone. And to create a safe, Christ-centered community we create behaviors and boundaries wherein everyone feels safe and nurtured. All of the human condition is encountered in a church family. Sometimes bullying behaviors make their way into our midst and we must all have the courage to say no to such behaviors. Forgiveness is ever present, but boundaries must sometime remain. A community in which we meet the living Christ is where we push ourselves beyond our comfort zones and dare to have the courage to be transformed. We attempt deeply intentional behaviors that shine with integrity and compassion. We love beyond our own likes and dislikes and we reach for that all-encompassing love of Christ. We offer forgiveness lavishly and we apologize to those whom we’ve wounded profusely. Vestry, Finance, all of our leadership is called to shine with the values we hope to embody in our family. This is the kind of community in which the living Christ is met and shines, and this is the kind of community that I believe the world needs now more than ever. I believe that we have so much good upon which to build, Christ Church can continue to flourish and grow into a place of deep and abiding fellowship. A place of honesty, integrity and where we do indeed work hard to be a place where God’s unconditional love is known to all! These are meaningful words on paper and they are life-changing when we purposefully name the actions we will take to make them a living, breathing reality. We are all part of a loving, mysterious, transforming God. We can do so much, in a multitude of small ways to live fully into our promise as a community of faith. I encourage you to think about where you feel your own long loneliness and to tend to that tender place, and I also invite you to consider those with whom you gather Sunday after Sunday and ponder as well what their long loneliness might be and how you can be a source of God’s love to them. Grace and Peace, Stephanie+