



St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

November 1, 2011

Dear Beloved of St. Stephen's Church:

I have received a call from St. James the Less Episcopal Church in Ashland, Virginia, to serve as their priest-in-charge. I have accepted that call, through deep discernment, and with unqualified encouragement from Gary Jones and Bishop Shannon. My final Sunday here will be November 20, 2011.

I am convinced that God is involved in all of this. I know there are people anxious about many things, but I see good and healthy paths forward for St. Stephen's, for my colleagues, including Gary, for St. James the Less, and for my family and me.

You know you are God's beloved, held always in love that is your wellspring of beauty, richness, strength, healing and joy. As the priest God is making of me, that is what I am called to convey. I have found that to be what you convey to me as well. Your love, support, kindness and prayers for me and my family have made that love known to us continually in the nine years I have been among you, including during some of the darkest of days for us. You have given me so much, and all that I have needed to be fashioned with peace, joy, and strength for the next phase of ministry.

It is very difficult to leave you, to leave this wonderful parish, so rich in vital and loving ministries that are touching more and more people; it is very difficult to leave this awesome staff, my colleagues in ministry. I certainly could not leave if I were not confident, with Gary, about his condition and the excellent clergy and lay leadership we have at St. Stephen's. The fact is, I see St. Stephen's on a grace-filled path that is unfolding with all sorts of blessings in simply amazing ways. I see my move as right because of all of the above, and more.

For a good while now I have had a sense of God being "up to something" within me. About nine months ago my spiritual director suggested that I meditate on the image of the expectant Virgin Mary. That image holds the truth that there are specific periods of time when something new and holy is in creation, a time when God is doing a new thing. My prayer has been to see what great thing is happening. Into my life has come the opportunity to minister at St. James the Less. It is a marvelous parish: a community desiring to worship God in spirit and in truth, reaching out to the poor and struggling with its embrace, ready to offer vibrant and new ways to touch more and more people, and a parish ministering to the struggling and dying. Their needs and the gifts I bring to ministry seem to blend beautifully. Together, I believe we are called into a rich, extraordinary, and fun time, living out our common ministry to be a sacred center for Ashland and its surroundings.

You, St. Stephen's, are in my heart. You have once again served to fashion another priest for the broader church. May you love ever deeper, may you bless ever more wondrously, and may the mercies and bounty of God continue to unfold through you. Thank you for more than I could have ever asked for or imagined.

In Christ,

The Rev. David T. Anderson



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Dear People of St. Stephen's Church,

I know David's letter brings difficult news, and its timing will surely be stunning to many.

It is hard for me to imagine being at St. Stephen's Church without my trusted friend and colleague. Years ago, I invited David to serve as vicar of the parish, not only because he is such a skilled priest, but also because he is a man of deep personal integrity whom I could trust in every aspect of our parish's complex ministry and operations. David has been a gift to me.

Many of you, of course, have developed a deep bond with David as pastor, mentor, spiritual guide, and confidante. David has been at St. Stephen's for nine years, and he served as chaplain at nearby St. Christopher's School for seventeen. After twenty-six years of loving engagement with this community, it must have seemed to many that David was a permanent presence who would always be there for them.

But as difficult and stunning as David's letter surely is for us, in a deeper way, it is cause for joy and celebration. David is being called to a ministry that is enormously exciting to him and that will surely bear much fruit for his new parish. Personally, professionally, and spiritually, David's call to become the priest-in-charge of St. James the Less in Ashland is a joyful opportunity for David and his family. And when we love someone, his joy is our joy.

More than that, St. Stephen's Church and St. James the Less are sister communities. David is not so much leaving us as he is going to care for another part of our family, and we of course rejoice in that.

Other churches are regularly calling on our fine clergy at St. Stephen's, inviting them to consider a new position. They see in our clergy people of great faith and talent, and they see them engaged in meaningful ministry that they hope might take root in their own communities.

For years now, I've always told churches who were considering David Anderson that they'd be foolish not to call him, and I hoped he would turn them down. But I knew the day would come when such a call was all too clearly from God and that David should not turn it down. That day is here, and I am delighted for all. And I say this with the conviction that the ministry God has begun in David Anderson and in the community of St. Stephen's Church is growing stronger by the day and unfolding just as it should.

Sincerely,

Gary D. Jones, Rector