

The Deacon's Forum by Eileen Harvala

Trinity Episcopal Church, Anoka, MN

I am Deacon Eileen Harvala. I was ordained in 2013 with a group of dear friends and colleagues—the first group of deacons ordained after a multi-year hiatus in our diocese. What an experience as we knelt before Bishop Brian Prior in the sweltering Breck fieldhouse with others being ordained that day. I still feel his Spirit-filled hands on my head.

I was raised up by St. George's Episcopal Church and spent a few years there, including when it was going through a priest transition. But, as happens with many of us, the Spirit called, "Time to leave. You're needed elsewhere." So, I went to Trinity Episcopal Church in Anoka, where I am starting my fourth year of serving. I remember this because one of my first sermons at Trinity was after the election in 2016. Kind of left it on the floor that day. What a way to get to know your deacon?

My passions are servant ministry, liturgy leadership, and pastoral and healing ministry. Trinity has long been engaged with the community on discerning God's call to service and responding. Until COVID, it was one of the churches in the Anoka area that held a monthly community meal. After "Family Table" was suspended in March due to COVID, Trinity distributed food to its members in need. Last year, it also began supporting Family Promise and continues to do so, although we can't spend a week with the families in person right now. Since COVID, it has been financially supporting Family Promise and the local food shelf. Organically, these and other ministries are led by the strong lay leadership in the parish. People are always thinking of inventive and effective ways to engage people in contributing to the food shelf. We work on some initiatives with the active multi-denominational ministerium.

Trinity is a praying and healing ministry parish. People are drawn to prayer organically, genuinely, and meaningfully. Before COVID, there was always a prayer group at the altar on Sundays, we conducted quarterly healing services, and at least one team of lay eucharistic visitors went out every Sunday. What a pleasure to work with people so receptive and so engaged. It is with only the greatest of humbleness that I have come to believe that my charisms include pastoral and healing prayer.

I am fortunate to be working in partnership with the Rev. Phillip Boelter. We seem to naturally work in tandem with each other, exploring liturgy, mission opportunities and discernment about what Christ is already up to in our community, and meeting the pastoral needs of our community. There have been many over the past year. Sometimes, we have rolled from one death to another. It has been extremely hard and has, sometimes, made us weary. While our own hearts have been filled with grief, we have done our best to guide people through. As you know, it is not easy in a time of COVID when it seems like everything is so much harder, particularly pastoral care. I'm not sure that some of it would have been possible without our trust in each other and our friendship.

In addition to my work with Trinity, I serve on the Commission on Ministry and am a mentor for the deacon cohort in the School for Formation.

I will be retiring from my job as communications coordinator for the Chemistry Department at the University of Minnesota in January 2021. I am looking forward to spending a little more time as a deacon at Trinity before my husband retires in a year or so and we move to our beloved Oregon.