

August 22, 2021 | **Letter from the Wardens: A Time of Loss and a Time of Many Gifts**

Dear People of Grace,

For many of us, this past year has been a time of loss: we've said goodbye to familiar faces, and we've sent our beloved priest on to a new church elsewhere. It would be easy to feel discouraged when we once again put up our masks, but we do it because we love and want to protect each other. It is inevitable that these losses would sometimes weigh the spirit down. We wonder, "What's next?"

We are writing you today to look at the gifts of this time, not the silver linings, but the golden light of good that warms us. We noted, as Wren left us, that the gift of her time here was to leave Grace changed—changed for good. We discovered that the simple act of seeing and being with each other, praying together for our friends, families and the world, on screen or "for real," has sparked joy right in the center of our hearts.

Last summer, on a cloudy June day, we welcomed "our" Stephen with flowers, balloons, gifts, and a car parade, at a distance, with our customary Grace graciousness. And he has been a gift, brought to us through a legacy gift from a parishioner and the support of the Diocese.

Anyone who has watched Stephen lead us for the last weeks and heard him speak, understands that he has deep skill and experience. For nearly ten years, he served as an ordained deacon in Washington and Virginia churches. During his academic time leading to ordination as a priest, Stephen briefly became the deacon in charge, a *de facto* priest role, for a parish in Virginia.

Stephen has significant experience in keyboard and choral music. He also worked for nearly twenty years as a psychotherapist. He is an organizational-development specialist and trainer working with the Diocese of Olympia College for Congregational Development and the Congregational Consultant Network.

Of course, there's more to know about Stephen. And we are here today to celebrate the gift of more time to discover his gifts. Last Wednesday, the Vestry had a discernment conversation with Stephen about being our Interim Rector. A while ago, after he and his husband Andrew Stone had thoroughly considered whether Stephen might be willing to be "our" priest, Stephen said jokingly that he felt like a guy waiting to be asked to the "prom," and he thought he would say "Yes." We asked Stephen and, thanks be to God, he said "Yes!"

Effective September 1, Stephen will officially become our spiritual guide and liturgical leader, a role he will fulfill for one to two years as we step through the transition process. Next weekend Stephen will take a "breather" Sunday off, and then he's all ours. Please join the Vestry in welcoming our new Interim Rector, Stephen Crippen.

In peace, love and gratitude,

Daphne Davies and Luke Yoder, Wardens

A Summary of Stephen's Experience:

A native of southwest Minnesota, Stephen Crippen is a graduate of Augsburg College (Minneapolis, 1992) and a Lutheran parish musician who came to the Pacific Northwest in 1997. He received the Master of Arts degree in Marriage and Family Therapy from Pacific Lutheran University (Tacoma) in 1999, and worked until 2017 as a couple and family therapist in clinical settings and (for ten years) in solo private practice. Stephen and his husband Andrew Stone were confirmed in the Episcopal Church in December 2005, and Stephen began discerning a call to the diaconate. He received the graduate certificate in diaconal studies at Seattle University and was ordained to the diaconate in October 2010, going on to serve as the parish deacon at St. Stephen's, St. Mark's, and St. Paul's, all in Seattle. In 2017, Stephen's discernment of a call to the priesthood led him to Virginia Theological Seminary, where he received the Master in Divinity degree with honors in May 2020. During his seminary years, Stephen was the deacon at Immanuel Church-on-the-Hill (Alexandria, VA) and then the deacon and interim associate rector at St. Andrew's (Burke, VA). He has also worked in the Diocese of Olympia since 2010 as a trainer in the College for Congregational Development, working on training teams in Washington, Oregon, northern California, Chicago, central New York, and Vancouver, BC. He also works as an organization-development consultant for congregations in the Diocese of Olympia. As his final year at VTS drew to a close, Stephen was informally in charge of St. Andrew's (Burke, VA) when the interim rector left, just before the start of the pandemic. Since his ordination to the priesthood in June 2020, he has served as the curate at Grace Episcopal Church, Bainbridge Island. Stephen and his husband Andrew live on the western slope of Queen Anne hill in Seattle, just above Interbay, with their dog, Hoku ala. Stephen is a fitness enthusiast, a long-distance runner, and a seasoned dog walker.

