

What does Incarnation mean to you and what does Incarnation look like in your life?

The Incarnation is God within each living thing in creation, including me. It is a gift freely given by the Creator by taking on human form and dying on the cross. It is the best gift I've ever received. I walk around with the sense that such an enormous gift needs to be repaid somehow. I know, not lofty theology, right? That's OK; try as I might, I never get even with God, anyway; but the terminology works for me. Even though the Creator's gift to me is so much bigger than anything I can return, I'm not excused from trying.

Realizing that I carry the spark of God within me and I cannot repay that gift, the question remains: what **should** I do about it? This image of the Trinity helps me: It was God the Father who planted the spark, and the spark whispers in my heart and mind, "You need to do this!" I'm pretty sure that is partly why God took on a human form, Jesus, to be a visible example of how to live as a God carrier. And, as I move along the path to ordination, I become more aware than ever of tasks that looked daunting at the outset, but happened with ease. My only explanation is the Holy Spirit working through me. The Incarnation really awes me: God within me, God showing me, and God assisting me as I try to repay by loving the rest of his creation.

Stacey, Thanks for writing about your light and dark. You reminded me that the God spark is always there, even in the dark. I'm sure that surviving the dark probably makes the light brighter.

My most dramatic example occurred to my husband and I during the Viet Nam era. My husband was drafted just days before his 26th birthday (when his eligibility would have dropped to an unlikely level). It was a major upheaval in our lives; we had settled into a community and careers. After nearly a year of basic and radio repair school, he anticipated going to Nam. Then, by a very dark miracle (a U.S. military plane with 39 aboard was shot down by North Korea), his orders were recut for South Korea. After two or three months in Korea, he learned of a way I could join him and I did. While we were always grateful that we could be together, living on the South Korea economy in the late '60s was primitive and hard; we were miserable without the comforts we'd grown up with. But what I remember most is how lonely we were for family, our parents and siblings. We wrote frequent letters and were blessed to hear their voices via cassette recordings, but we longed to be together. Some 40 years later, I'm working with African refugees. I see my younger self in them and I feel such empathy; I hear that same longing when we talk about their families in Sudan, or, Eritrea, or Somalia. The improved technology of cell phones, connected by satellites, does not change the longing. I'm convinced my bright, joyful connection to these delightful friends is enhanced by the darkness of our Korean experience.

What are your spiritual practices, why do they matter, and why do you do them?

As long as I can remember I've arrow-prayed. No matter where I am or what I'm doing, if I'm struggling with a task, or I think of another person who is in need, I mentally send up a "please help" to God. It serves two purposes: Just in case, I forget when it's time for formal prayers, it's been mentioned, and it actually helps me remember to include the matter when I do formal prayers.

I read morning prayer everyday except Sunday. I began this practice about two years ago. A friend had suggested I should be a deacon. It was a bolt from the blue, but it wouldn't go away. It kept me awake in the night and haunted me while I did daily tasks. Finally I began to ask others, including my

husband and rector. They were encouraging, but I was skeptical. It occurred to me that an ordained person ought to have a specific time for prayer. So I challenged myself. Lo and behold, it wasn't that hard. Now it's a need and an important discipline in my life.

I also try hard to be a positive person. I hope the folks I work with see me as a positive personality. Don't misunderstand. Not everything thrills me, but I like to think I can make lemonade out of lots of situations. It's a "do unto others" thing. That's the kind of person I like to work with.

What practices create and/or sustain your communities of faith?

My primary faith community is St. Andrews in Des Moines, Iowa and Sunday Eucharist is our primary spiritual and sustaining practice.

Hospitality and inclusiveness are high on our list of sustaining practices inside and outside worship. For Sunday morning Eucharist, we seldom open the prayer book. Instead we use a printed booklet, often with material from approved alternative sources with more inclusive language and all the music. We believe an "everything-you need" booklet is more user-friendly for newcomers than the prayerbook/hymnal shuffle.

Our is one of those post WWII churches, founded in a then fast-growing part of the city, but has since become a much more working class neighborhood, and challenged us to change.

Some twenty years ago, we decided to be what was then known as an "open-door" community, and have evolved from simply welcoming LGBTQ+ persons who "wandered" in, to being deliberately inclusive; learning to encourage and invite those who may have been previously excluded by their sexual orientation; and participating with a booth at Pride Fest and being in the parade. Recently some of our members created a "kit," outlining our experiences to share with other churches in our diocese who want to increase their involvement. Both our rector and the interim rector who preceded him have same-sex spouses.

Like many churches founded in the 1950s, our membership expanded and contracted so our building is really larger than a congregation our size needs. We choose to share it. There are now AA meetings in our fellowship hall four nights a week. A PFLAG group and a chair yoga class use the "Gathering" room. Wednesday mornings are filled with the sound of a free preschool music class, which is also a foil for stay-at-home parents to socialize. We currently offer ESL, sewing, and computer skills classes to refugees.

At the same time as we began growing into LGBTQ+ inclusion, we began to work with resettlement of Sudanese refugees. We became involved with a group of Lost Boys, who, as small children escaped war by leaving their families and walking first to Ethiopia, and then to Kenya (a distance of more than 1,000 miles) in search of refuge. These young men (and a few women), Sudanese Episcopal Christians from the Dinka tribe (now part of South Sudan, an important distinction to them), wished for a place to pray in their own language. Initially they used our chapel, but they outgrew it and now hold their service after ours. We now refer to them as "former Lost Boys," or just the Dinka community. They are all married and have families now. While many in our congregation could not name a single member of the their community, many others like myself, have been blessed with friendships among their

members and we all admire the way their faith has survived.

Eight or ten years ago, we came in contact with refugees from the Darfur region of Sudan. They asked for advice about a place to hold gatherings and pray together. As it happened, we had recently closed the preschool that utilized the original two-room building of our church. This was a little more difficult decision. The Darfur people are Muslim. I personally wondered if there would be pickets on our front lawn. We knew it was right to share the gift our building is, so we did it. The Darfur Community has also enriched many of our lives with friendship. They have taught us about their faith. And so far, no one has said a critical word when I tell them we share our space this way.

Patricia, It excites me to hear of another parish taking on a sewing ministry. I led a sewing class my congregation offered to various refugee groups for over 10 years. I think of it as my first step toward the diaconate. My favorite memory of those years is the look on so many women's faces when they first sat at an electric machine and pressed the foot pedal. (In much of Africa, men do all the sewing on treadle machines.) If I can be of any assistance, let me know.

Blessings,
Eve Mahr

Hillary, This is really interesting! My other CALL class this term is the Diaconate. Your response to this question fits right into the conversation we are having about separate orders. The answers posted by several of us in this who are on the path to being permanent deacons focus on the ministering to the world beyond the church building (as deacons should do) while you and others who are discerning the priesthood emphasize the community and rites within the church (as priests should do).

Mary, Is this congregation not involved in outreach of any sort?

How does your spiritual practice invite or push away community?

I think the answer for my parish is: our welcoming all practice both pushes away and invites. Our community has seen some loss because of our evolving stance on welcoming and including LGBTQ+ persons. But we didn't take this stance in order to grow, we took it because we felt a Biblical calling to be inclusive.

A number of traditional members were uncomfortable and left when we first decide to be deliberate about inclusivity. More dramatically, we were touched by the deeply held aversion of many African Christians to allowing LGBTQ+ people to participate in the life of the church. In the previous question, I wrote about the former Lost Boys; they exhibit a live and let live attitude. In contrast, another sizable group of Dinka families began attending our worship in the early 2000s. We quickly learned these were young people whose families had the means to send the away when war broke out in southern Sudan; most went to Egypt and eventually emigrated to the United States. They were better educated and had more financial resources than our Lost Boys. Several of their leaders confronted our Senior Warden and gave her an ultimatum: We would have to reject our LGBTQ+ stance or they would leave. It was painful to watch so many young families go, but we reaffirmed our commitment to inclusiveness.

Eventually, that commitment has meant some growth in our numbers, our involvement with Pride Fest, and helping other congregations "open" their doors. During the summer, we had a church-shopping