



ST. JAMES EPISCOPAL CHURCH
A joyful, inclusive community



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We hope you'll enjoy reading the December edition of the St. James Community Journal. For upcoming events, please visit our [website](#).

If you have questions or comments about the journal, or ideas for future articles, please contact our editor, [Peter Fish](#). For more information about St. James contact [Erazm Pochron](#) in the church office.

Many thanks,
Peter and Erazm

A Christmas Gift

By the Rev. John Kirkley

For years, my meditation practice has been on the "apophatic" side: without use of words or images. Just resting in silence. It seems to be my natural default mode of prayer.

At times, however, I've felt a desire for a deeper relationship with Jesus in meditation. A former spiritual director, Sarah of blessed memory, probably first put the idea in my head. Growing up in a charismatic fundamentalist milieu, I am allergic to affective forms of prayer, distrustful of the tendency of religion to emotionally manipulate people. Good, cerebral Anglican that I became, I am suspicious of any form of religious "enthusiasm."

Yet, beneath the suspicion there lies a desire for the kind of heart to heart connection that energizes all true prayer. My deepest yearning is to be in love with the Beloved.

So a few years ago, I pressed my small "b" beloved, Andrew, for an icon of Christ Pantocrator for Christmas. "Isn't there ANYTHING else you want for Christmas?" he asked.



I persevered, and he relented. So now I find myself meditating on the beautiful icon that you see pictured here. It is an image of the oldest extant icon of Christ Pantocrator (Almighty or All-Powerful or, more literally, Ruler of All), found in the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai. It dates from the sixth or seventh century.

Christ is holding a book of the Gospels in his left hand, with his right hand forming the traditional

gesture of teaching or blessing. The two sides of his face depict very different expressions - almost as if two different people have been "photoshopped" into one image. Some have suggested that the icon represents a theological point about the two natures of Christ, human and divine. While that may be so, I find the incongruity arresting and oddly captivating. There is something about the imperfection of the image that makes it somehow more accessible and even attractive.

Sitting with this icon is something of a risk for me. I feel SEEN as I meditate with it; not in an uncomfortable way. Rather, there is a sense of being invited to bring all of myself to prayer - my body, my sensations, my emotions, my thoughts - and just offer it all up. I am being given permission to show up as I am and allow my love for the Beloved to have full sway.

Now that is some Christmas gift.

Hospitality during Inhospitable Times

An interview with Karen Valentia Clopton about Global Interfaith Understanding and Hospitality

By the Rev. Ayanna Moore

Karen Valentia Clopton is our Chair of the St. James Peace and Justice Ministry. A member of St. James since 1993, she was the Presiding Judge of the Ecclesiastical Court for the Episcopal Diocese from 1996-2006; Senior Warden and Vestry member 2007-2011. She was interviewed by Rev. Ayanna Moore.

Rev. Ayanna Moore: Tell me about your childhood experiences with food and your multi-cultural background; I have always enjoyed your award-winning cornbread.

Karen Clopton: My middle name is Valentia, and growing up with a bustling extended family, including our Panamanian and Belizean relatives, speaking "Spanglish" was normal practice. What makes my story so interesting is that I grew up in segregated South Central Los Angeles when African Americans had limited housing options. Our beautiful block of homeowners was entirely African American civil servants, teachers, the first black firefighters, attorneys, and car dealers.

I began formally studying Spanish in school in 7th grade. My name means courageous and is on my birth certificate both in homage to our Spanish speaking antecedents and family name, but also because my mother wanted me to become a brave person. Most Saturday evenings were spent with the Jimenez Family, either at our house or theirs, making

Mexican food: tacos, enchiladas, tamales, and agua fresca. My Tio (Uncle) Frank and Tia (Aunt) Terri shared recipes with my parents and taught me how to make mole sauce with a mortar and pestle.

A.M. Tell me about your history of Interfaith Worship and Cooperation.

K.C. My junior year in high school I fell in love with my first boyfriend, the late John Hartenstein. The Hartensteins introduced me to Yiddish, Persian food, the Jewish holidays, delicious latkes and Challah, and the concept of being culturally Jewish. John gave me my very first Mogen David, which I still cherish, to wear to Vassar College so I wouldn't forget him.

When I moved to San Francisco permanently in 1986, I joined the First Unitarian Church and worked on an inter-faith team with Temple Emanu-El and Rabbi Kirshner to address the burgeoning homeless population and the AIDS epidemic. We shared the same mission as Congregation Emanu-El, including communal prayer (*avodah*) and the performance of compassionate deeds (*g'milut hasadim*). I also had the epiphany that our mother church is indeed Judaism.

I was very pleased and proud that St. James was able to provide a temporary home to Congregation Beth Sholom during the construction of their new temple at Clement and 14th Avenue. We all learned a lot about the difference a change can make to the openness of our worship service. Again, this experience demonstrated the importance of interfaith cooperation and hospitality. Several close friends belong to Sherith Israel and I have cooked for Shiva to help with mourning and helped cater Kiddush after Bar and Bat Mitzvahs.

The importance of hospitality guided my chairmanship of the President's Task Force on Intergroup Relations in 2002 at San Francisco State University when there was conflict between the Palestinian and Jewish student populations. The 42-person task force met several times and each time I arranged for lunch to be served and to include Kosher, Halal, and other options. Breaking bread together helped us to reach agreement on the Task Force's agenda. I also researched the efficacy of combining Kosher and Halal kitchens on college campuses, including at Wellesley. The world religions and peoples have much more in common than apart.

A.M. How do you use hospitality in the workplace?

K.C. In the 90's several of us, mainly lawyers, working in the financial district would have lunch with Rev. Peter Lawson, then Rector of St. James, and Rev. Whitney Roberson, once a week. We would discuss moral and ethical dilemmas in the workplace and end with a centering prayer. I have carried this through to my work on the State Bar's Committee charged with reviewing and revising the ethics rules for lawyers. I have also applied the principles of hospitality to my management leadership roles: providing food for meetings, hosting monthly birthday celebrations, and personally catering quarterly traditional afternoon "high" teas for all of my staff. Food is a wonderful way for colleagues to get to know each other and to build strong, cohesive teams.

I also think it's important for us to help those who are less fortunate. As a result, I partnered with the cafeteria in my building where I work to provide gift certificates for the lowest paid employees. Several years, we have donated our family holiday budget to contribute to these certificates. Just asking the cafeteria to help in this way opened up so many possibilities to serve others, including providing turkeys and take away meals for families as part of the gift certificates.

A.M. How did you get started with your global ministry, regularly opening your home to others?

K.C. My experiences as a student living abroad influenced my desire to “give back” and open my home to others for a similarly fulfilling and welcoming experience in the United States. My children, Olivia and Julia, attended the French American International School and our first experience was providing a home to an International High School student from Togo for her Junior year. We then regularly participated in exchange programs with both of my daughters with students from France and Tahiti.

We have housed international soccer team coaches and players, teachers, and students through our school. We have also regularly opened our home to foreign students learning English, since 2008. They have come from all over the world, including the Arab Emirates, Colombia, France, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Taiwan, and the Netherlands. Sharing meals and conversation with our visitors from around the world has broadened our social network, fostered enduring friendships, and encouraged understanding and acceptance of human differences. We have converted our kitchen to a Kosher one when welcoming Orthodox Jewish young women and learned about prayer rugs and the Hijab from our Muslim guests. Food is indeed the universal language of love, nurture, and hospitality.

A.M. I want to bring us back to the beginning of our conversation as we close. What part does food and hospitality play in your role as our Peace and Justice Chair?

K.C. Thank you so much for this opportunity to think about and share my interfaith journey and some of my experiences interweaving food, hospitality, and peace and justice goals. The most obvious is our several decades-long support and active participation at St. Martin de Porres Hospitality House. Rising early, preparing food, and serving a meal to our often very hungry and homeless guests in a clean, pleasant, and inviting environment has been extremely rewarding; including my daughters and their friends throughout their young lives in this small gesture has been extraordinary.

It has been a great joy to bring the exchange students to St. James and introduce them to our welcoming parish family. I also connect together communion, the Peace and Justice Prayer Circle, and coffee hour; all sharing sustenance, love, and hospitality in our sacred space. As we think about hospitality in our homes, our church, our lives, let us also expand to welcome the stranger into our midst.

"Small Things"

by Anna Kamieńska

It usually starts taking shape
from one word
reveals itself in one smile
sometimes in the blue glint of eyeglasses
in a trampled daisy
in a splash of light on a path
in quivering carrot leaves
in a bunch of parsley
It comes from laundry hung on a balcony
from hands thrust into dough
It seeps through closed eyelids
as through the prison wall of things of objects
of faces of landscapes
It's when you slice bread
when you pour out some tea
It comes from a broom from a shopping bag
from peeling new potatoes
from a drop of blood from the prick of a needle

when making panties for a child
or sewing a button on a husband's burial shirt
It comes of toil out of care
out of the immense fatigue in the evening
out of tear wiped away
out of a prayer broken off in mid-word by sleep
It's not from the grand
but from the tiny thing
that it grows enormous
as if Someone was building Eternity
as a swallow its nest
out of clumps of moments

Anna Kamieńska (1920-1986) was a Polish poet, translator and literary critic. Much of her later poetry takes as its subject matter Christian faith.



Reflections on Spiritual Defiance:

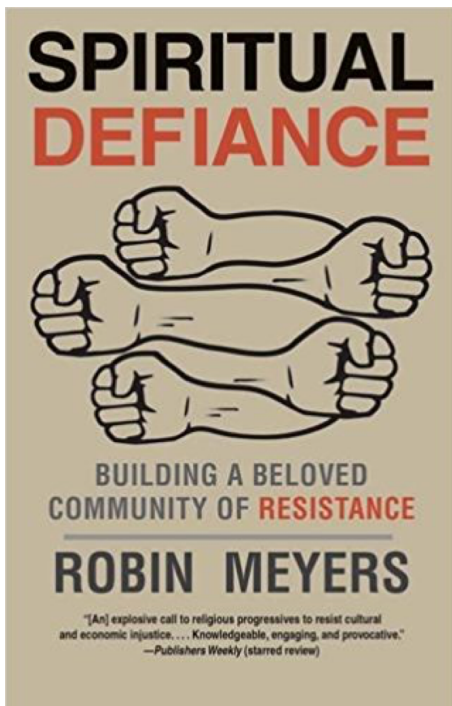
Building a Beloved Community of Resistance

By Sandra Dratler

The Way of Jesus is the way of resistance. Reading the gospels through this lens, Jesus' role as a radical resister becomes clear and the promise of the book, ***Spiritual Defiance: Building a Beloved Community of Resistance***, rings true. The author, Robin Meyers, a pastor at Mayflower Congregational UCC Church in Oklahoma City, defines this resistance as "a form of direct or indirect action opposing anything in the dominant culture that brings death and indignity to any member of the human family, or to creation itself." A small group of us took up this book for study during Advent. Our discussions were deep and lively. The book is an easy read, interspersed with humor, that gets to your spiritual core without preaching.

The author calls on us to resist ego, orthodoxy and empire. While the book is primarily addressed to clergy, the call can be heard as well by engaged laity who are critically looking at the church, its role in today's world and its survival into the future. For it is we, the laity who make up the Beloved Community writ large and here at St. James.

In resisting ego, we are called at a personal level to draw forth our own truth from within, to repent from our illusions, to let ourselves become our true selves and to walk the Way of Jesus. The author repeatedly reminds us that we need to fall off of our horses, to be stunned, to face our reality.



As he takes up resisting orthodoxy, the author calls on us to move toward Christianity as a “very unorthodox way of being in the world.” We should shatter our own illusions about faith, not accepting faith as an absolute but embracing faith as wonder.

He contends that without faith as the basis for our actions, our church will become like any other interest group or social organization in the community setting about to do “good works”. In resisting orthodoxy, we become a counterculture, challenging the norm if it is not based on the values Jesus teaches us through his own acts of resistance.

Finally, the author takes on resistance to empire. Our current situation is the Roman Empire of Jesus’ time. The tensions are the same – economic, cultural, military – just at a different, fearsome scale. The author calls us to question where the church fits within this current empire - complicit or resistant? Jesus formed a community of resistance against the

empire of his day. What might we do to resist? Can this possibly be the world God intended?

The author laments the spiritual fatigue he sees in a weary church shrinking in size and influence. His call is to become socially responsible as a body, to undo the current state of our egos, our orthodoxy and our relationship with empire.

The book can be uncomfortable as we are confronted with some hard truths. It pushed our thinking as the St. James group discussed it. But these kinds of discussions help to move us forward to think about the relevancy of our church and ourselves in the world today.

Christmas Memories

"Santa Drives a Ford Station Wagon"

By Blake Hallanan



Pittsburgh, PA, 1960. Christmas Eve Day. Huge snowstorm. No mail deliveries possible anywhere—but frantic residents are invited to come to the main post office warehouse on the edge of town to look for all those presents from around the country from grandparents, aunts and uncles, distressed at thinking their precious presents won’t be under a tree. After Christmas Eve dinner late into the night, my father heads over

in the Ford wagon to see if he can locate any of the packages for my two brothers and me. As he walks the aisles in the chilled night air searching for our name on the labels, he keeps seeing familiar names on the packages, of neighbors, friends, schoolmates. He starts piling up the station wagon with all the treasures, cramming in as many as he can. For the next several hours, he drives all over town leaving packages at the front door,

sliding up and down the snowy hills, and arriving home safely with a few still left in the back seat.

Christmas Memories

"Desert Christmas"

By Peter Krag



In 1984, the second year I was studying in Colorado, I flew to Los Angeles to visit my aunt in Encino for my Christmas vacation. After a few days there, my best friend from undergraduate days, Rob Strong, drove in from his home near Palm Springs, picked me up, and we headed to Mexico. First, we met some of his fiancée's family in Mexicali, and then went west and south across the desert and eventually up into

the sierra. We camped for six days at a fairly primitive hot spring – there was a decent concrete tub and some benches, but we were in our tents –about a dozen of us at one point. It rained pretty much the whole first three days, but we had tarps up and the hot spring and plenty of good food; then it turned nice. Rob's future mother-in-law brought along bags & bags of fresh wool, some sheep, some goat, and we had a whole production thing going. Some folks carded the wool, some folks spun yarn, and someone at the end did the knitting. Such a happy time; if only I knew where that magical place was!

Christmas Pageant

By E.A. Nelson



"Mommy, I know this part. I know *all* the parts."
- Five-year-old performer, too frequently prompted

Tidings of joy: the show can go on.
The angel knows all the parts.

If the shepherds forget to be astonished
or the sheep forget to bleat and graze,
the angel will cue them.

If the star forgets to shine
or the wise men forget to adore,
the angel is ready to prompt.

In a pinch, if the baby forgets
to wake and refrain from crying,
the angel could fold her wings tight

and slip inside the swaddling clothes
and play that part too, leaving the glorias
to the rest of the heavenly host.

It is one reason that Mary and Joseph
look so peaceful as they sit there mute
behind the manger, a pageant flowing around them:

They know they can trust the angel.
The angel knows all the parts.

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