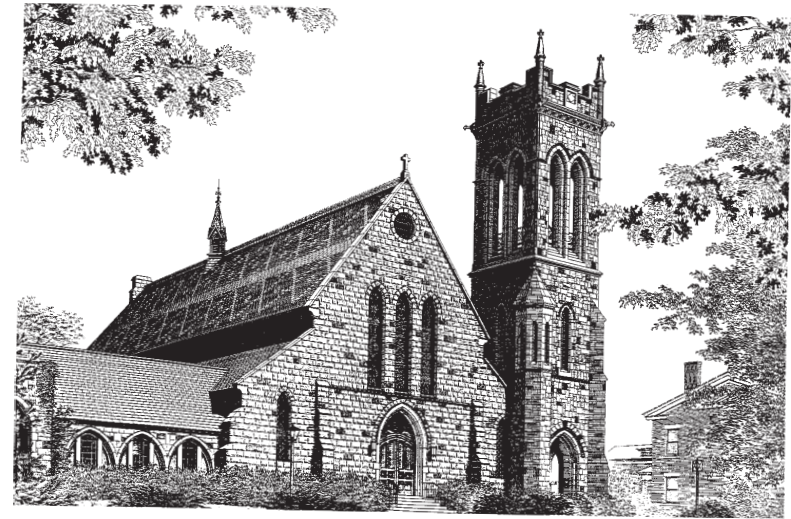


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Cross Currents

A Journal of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church



COMING HOME TO
SAINT ANDREW'S

CrossCurrents is written by clergy and lay persons of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church to aid in reflection on the meaning of faith in light of contemporary life. Copies may be obtained at the church, on our website, or by mail on request.

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COMING HOME TO SAINT ANDREW'S

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

from *Four Quartets*, "Little Gidding," by T. S. Eliot

Coming Home

by Bryant Dennison

Coming home to St. Andrew's is the theme for this issue of **CrossCurrents**. Our authors explore various ways in which religion and church generally, and St. Andrew's in particular, represent *home*.

Lionel Richie has a song called *I'm Coming Home*. In it he says,

*I've been through love
(I'm coming home)
I've been through some pain I know
(I'm coming home)
Changes in my life
(I'm coming home)
Now I know what's meaningful
(I'm coming home)*

Love . . . pain . . . change . . . and meaning. Home is where we learn to love. Home provides a context and an environment in which we find out how to deal with pain. We discover what it means to change. And in home we find meaning.

For the last five years I have been an *interim* pastor. I have been something of a church gypsy and have had no permanent church home. St. Andrew's is my home for a while.

In the four churches I have served during this time:

I have experienced love and have loved the people of these parishes—
I have lived with the pain of people in the midst of grief and loss—
I have lived with people in times of significant transition and change—
I have found rich depths of meaning.

In each place I have been home.

I am sure you will appreciate these essays and reflections.

The Rev. Bryant Dennison is the Interim Rector of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church. His email address is <bdennison@standrewsaa.org>.

In Response to Four Lines of T. S. Eliot

by Benjamin Acosta-Hughes

My arrival at St. Andrew's was in some senses the end of one journey and the beginning of a new one. I am a cradle Episcopalian. I am a direct descendent of Samuel Seabury, America's first Episcopal bishop, whose consecration in Scotland we commemorate each St. Andrew's Day. And I am a gay man.

I left the Episcopal church for many years, not intending to return, on a road of spiritual experience and discovery that had little to do with the Anglo-Catholicism of my youth. The church we attended was St. Luke's in Evanston, Illinois; our priest, whom I greatly admired and who was a constant source of support in my difficult early teen-age years, subsequently became Bishop of Northern Michigan. I left the Episcopal Church around the time that my mother, after suffering a near-fatal car accident, lost her faith. In retrospect many of the reasons to which I attributed my disenchantment with the faith of my childhood were superficial, or unfair, or both. Among these were what I perceived as a certain social exclusivity, a lack of racial and cultural diversity, and at times excessive Anglophilia. Now I think that, like many young people, I was searching for a spiritual strength that was already there, but I did not see it in front of me. And, in retrospect, I had to leave, in order to return. I resonate with Constantine Cavafy's poem *Ithaka*, where the poet poignantly exhorts the hero, Odysseus, to "Keep Ithaka always in your mind. Arriving there is what you're destined for...Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey. Without her you wouldn't have set out." Even more relevant to my experience is T. S. Eliot's "Little Gidding" (see title page of this CrossCurrents issue), where a return necessitates a departure, and recognition is contingent upon absence. I regret my departure from the Episcopal Church. I rejoice in my return.

The high Anglican tradition in which I grew up was a place of great aesthetic beauty; the language, the colors, the music, the incense ("you can smell it down the street," my father, a lapsed Mormon, was fond of saying) all contributed to a sense of the sublime and of a higher order. We rehearsed the motions of genuflection and crosses with our mother before Sunday Eucharist; in looking back I see that ours was a very family-centered faith. My mother had been confirmed while in graduate school at Oxford (the Seaburys, both in Virginia and then in Texas, largely fell away from religious belief in the course of the later 19th century); and for our family religious experience always retained a faint tinge of an almost indefinable Englishness.

Being a cradle Episcopalian has some interesting attributes. Being a member of the Seabury family, a southern family whose history was deeply permeated by the Revolution, the Civil War, and the complex race relations of the Jim Crow South, provides, if nothing else, a sense of American history and the conflicted *miasma* of a slave-owning family. Being a gay man continues to be both a challenge and a source of pride in asserting one's honesty. My personal engagement with the Episcopal church as an institution is an ironically split one, arising from both historical entitlement (Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, for example, is named for my forebear) and potential marginality (I am one of those abhorred by the conservatives of my faith). My engagement with the Episcopal Church as I know it at St. Andrew's is simple. Sharing the sense of spiritual need and religious awakening, of exploration and return, is what makes me a member of the St. Andrew's community.

For myself, on leaving the Episcopal Church, there followed years of spiritual experimentation (California is a good place for that), and further disenchantment. I was aware of an unfulfilled need for a spiritual home, but never thought to look back to the faith of my youth. I never lost my faith in God, but looked for Him elsewhere, sometimes thinking that I had found Him, only to be disappointed. And then my partner, a convert to the Episcopal Church, took me to Grace Cathedral. At first I hesitated; my memories, now somewhat dated, did not seem to cohere with contemporary life in San Francisco. But I was wrong. The Episcopal Church had changed. While still a place of great aesthetic beauty, it also had come to encompass a variety of faith practices, and a variety of people. And in the process of returning I realized that I had changed too; faith is not really something that one goes out and "finds." It exists within, but needs to be known, to be recognized, perhaps to be "arrived at."

My arrival at St. Andrew's occurred at the time of my mother's sudden death, days after I came to Ann Arbor as a new professor. At a time of great personal grief and confusion I found a family in this place. My union with my partner was celebrated here in a religious ceremony, and my son knows this church as his home. Once in a long while a familiar hymn or prayer brings back the memory of the high church setting of my youth; and I am grateful to have arrived back.

Benjamin Acosta-Hughes is an associate professor of Greek and Latin and of Comparative Literature at the University of Michigan. He and his partner Jesús and son Carlos reside in Ann Arbor. Ben is a member of the Greek Bible study group at St. Andrew's.



Home and Family...

The Episcopal Church

by Metta T. Lansdale, Jr.

This is a personal story which I think describes why the tradition of this church serves family, supports family, reflects family, and indeed *is* family. At the risk of sounding a little melodramatic, I see coming to church on Sunday as coming home. It is coming home for dinner on the weekends. It is coming home like the prodigal son after a rebellious youth returning to his roots for comfort and solace. Church is there; it will always be there. Paradoxically, the Church does evolve but it doesn't change fundamentally. Here in this university town where so many have come, leaving families in their home towns, we are centered by means of the Church and its traditions.

I see the Episcopal Church, its rituals and the *Book of Common Prayer* as home, even as hearth: warm, comfortable, familiar and fussy. The Church is a tradition which links us to each other many generations deep and across the continent. Its published, participatory rituals unite us as a family with dependable language, pattern, and cycles. When we use the *Book of Common Prayer* in Ann Arbor, you can hear – if you try – congregations all over the country saying the same words; even if they argue over the two versions of the Lord's Prayer, both versions are there.

I think of my sisters in Omaha or Salt Lake or Maryland or Portland, nephews in Red Lake, Minnesota, and Pittsburgh, and how we all know these rituals and phrases. I also think of my parents, now gone, and their parents, who served in the choir, altar guild, vestry, church school and canvass through the generations. My parents in their final days held hands when the local priest brought communion to my mother in her bed. I was struck by the comfort they took in these rituals: their lamps were lit, their bags packed, they were ready to go. I think of them when we read scriptural passages or sing the hymns reminding us to keep our lamps lit.

I have a large family but we live far from each other. In truth you could consider us a Lansdale Diaspora, and that dispersion of family is now a multigenerational life pattern, accepted and expected in three generations that I know about. My grandfather Lansdale's family originated in Pennsylvania, but after the Jamestown Flood some of them went south into rural Maryland, around Annapolis. My great-uncle's initials are carved in the brick on an Episcopal Church in Davidsonville, Maryland to this day.

As a very young man, my grandfather struck out on his own and went west. He got involved in the construction of the early railroads in Colorado and then wound up in California, supervising the laying of the tracks for the Southern Pacific Railroad around Los Angeles and up and down that coast. My grandmother came from Kentucky but she settled with Grandfather in California, where my father was born. As Grandfather rose in his company's ranks, the family moved to Houston, Texas. In every place my grandfather settled, he was active in the Episcopal Church, serving on the vestry in each parish to which he belonged. My parents met in Houston and were married at Trinity Episcopal Church in Houston by Bishop Clinton S. Quin, assisted by the Rev Thomas N. Carruthers. Bishop Quin, the third Bishop of Texas, served that Diocese for 37 years.

Mother and Father then moved to Cleveland where Father, like Grandfather, served on the vestry and the every-member canvass in his local Episcopal parish; he was instrumental in significant fundraising there. Mother was a textile artist; working in gold metallic thread she embellished the priests' vestments and the pulpit hangings with ecclesiastical embroidery. When she was taking her turn on the altar guild, I remember her fussing with the priests about their stoles, making sure the gorgeous designs were centered perfectly at the backs of their necks. She sang in the choir and was also committed to the United Thank Offering program of the Women's Auxiliary, the leadership group for Episcopal women in those days.

When I was growing up with my four sisters, we all knew the regular routines of church school, mite boxes, the Boar's Head Festival, and choir. I remember cutting school to attend service on Ash Wednesday, being part of the junior high group serving at Lenten dinners, and occupying an entire pew with parents and sisters right down front.

When we reached high school and were considering colleges to further our education, we were instructed to leave Ohio. It was probably Bishop Quin who influenced my parents' opinions that their children should be educated outside of their home state. Bishop Quin had sent his own son Bob from Texas to the Episcopal High School in Alexandria, Virginia, because, as the Bishop's daughter put it, "although my father loved Texas, he thought it was important that we experience life in another state". My parents held the schools in Ohio in high regard, but they agreed that it was important for their daughters' education that we go farther afield. So we dispersed.

When we were all out of the nest in Cleveland, my parents "retired" to Maryland, the family home, making a full circle. In the meantime, my sister Chloe was on the vestry in a large suburban Philadelphia parish and later in a small church on the eastern shore of Maryland. Here at St. Andrews, I have served on the vestry as well as in the choir.

The Episcopal Church rituals are like family traditions: they are what we do together, and sometimes what hold us together. Ritual doesn't change but it can evolve. In the 1970s and 1980s, churches all over the country brought their altars forward for welcoming accessibility. In time, we affirmed the

Eucharist by bringing that “forward” too, by sharing communion every Sunday, instead of just monthly. Like families waking up to face the reality that our diversities are to be celebrated, not pressed into conformity, the Episcopal Church was and continues to be in the forefront, affirming women in roles previously restricted to men, and welcoming our gay and lesbian family members rather than making them run away or hide. I remember my cousin Charles, the confirmed bachelor, welcomed frequently for dinners at the farm, and welcoming us in visits to his apartment in Baltimore. Homosexuality was not an issue and was never mentioned. It wasn’t relevant to his being a part of the family. Growing up, I eventually figured things out. I am proud to be a member of my family just as I am proud to be a member of my church.

Like family, articles in the popular press notwithstanding, the Episcopal Church is unified and is ever accepting. How is the Church unified? Where is the acceptance? My view is that the Episcopal Church is unified by its liturgy, specifically by virtue of its universal use of the *Book of Common Prayer*, which guides the liturgy of all parishes. In addition, the rite of Baptism and the Eucharist are both central and critical to the liturgy of all Episcopal parishes. Sitting down to dinner together forges strong family spirit that does not disappear, despite our interpersonal differences.

The rituals of the Episcopal Church reinforce this with language. In 1979, the *Book of Common Prayer* matured with new language, reinforcing and strengthening my sense of family and home. The Nicene Creed now states our shared faith by affirming that “We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty... We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God... We believe in the Holy Spirit...” Our belief makes us one. Because we believe we are family; because we are family, we believe. This liturgical ritual makes me feel warm, accepted and part of something really significant every Sunday. This is family. This is home.

In the Baptismal ritual, while we welcome new persons into the fold, figuratively wrapping our arms around these children, we are both encouraging each other and asking God to give them an *inquiring and discerning heart*. What powerful language the *Book of Common Prayer* has given us. What a magnificent song! My family pushed me out into the world to learn and seek, not to be constrained by all that I had grown up with, but to develop my best judgment creatively on the strong foundation they had given me. Similarly, the Church leads us to take what we see not at face value but to look freshly at the world in the light of its teaching, *and to teach our children to do so*.

It is too bad that so much has been politicized with a schism threatening this foundation of openness and support. Yet I am not worried. Why? My sense of the Church as a home and a hearth is so strong that I don’t see how the Church can fail to survive. The values that gave us Katharine Jefferts Schori as Presiding Bishop and Gene Robinson as the openly gay bishop of New Hampshire are the same values that were taught to me by my parents and grandparents. I am concerned, however, just as I am concerned for my sisters. Like any large family, mine has distances between us that are emotional as well as physical; we have differences and difficulties that keep us apart. I

am very sad about this. It hurts, but I can’t change my sisters, and I won’t try, and they won’t try to change me. But I let them know, every chance I get, that they are and always will be my sisters. If they ever need me, I will go to them; I know they would come to help me in my need. Underneath our differences we are still family. The Church is a family in this sense, too: underneath our differences we are still one. I believe the Church will resolve its family quake. If some members leave, they are still family. The family will always be here for them, evolving, but still home.

Metta Lansdale has been an Ann Arbor resident since 1970, when she came to the University of Michigan School of Library Science for her Master’s Degree. She has been a library director for medical and public libraries since that time. She is currently Director of the Royal Oak Public Library. A longtime member of St. Andrew’s, she sings in the choir and has served on the vestry.



On the Path to Faith: Memories of an Ex-Catholic

By Esther Lara

My earliest memories involve my mother taking me to a beautiful church in Mexico City. The church was an immense stone building always filled with the wonderful smell of incense, and giant vases filled with gladioli always surrounded the altar. I did not understand the service, but I loved going. It was the atmosphere of love created by my mother, I believe, which caused the good feelings about going to church. I remember being very small, and feeling protected there. I felt calm, and loved, and cared for. An overwhelming sense of well-being came over me on these visits. My prayer was little more than blind repetition, but the beautiful words seemed an echo of my inner joy.

We moved to Brussels, Belgium, and joined a church which had no building, but which met in different locations and offered a Mass for Children. The priest was friendly and always smiled. I remember how loving and honest his face was, and how true his happiness seemed when he spoke of serving God. We children loved him. The women who organized this church were always kind to us. For my First Communion preparation, a woman from the congregation held classes at her house for several months. She hosted about five of us, and we wrote and drew pictures in a fun little booklet. She fed us delicious pies (rhubarb and peach are the ones most clear in my memory), and she also fed us her warmth, her love, and her caring. The day of my First Communion itself was very exciting: I had been asked to read a poem during the service, and this was great fun. Prayer was alive and real in our community. It was out loud, in the open. For a few years, happiness and calm filled my young heart whenever I went to this church. Then my family moved to a different city, and I never saw those people again.

When we moved back to Mexico City, I began to have a different experience. I started going to a religious school where verbal abuse was the order of the day when it came to teachers dealing with children. The teachers were cruel and mocking. The school was rife with bullying. The playground was a dog-eat-dog world. Prayer was daily, and so were religion classes, but there was no happiness in me anymore. My prayers became a more immediate plea — for less bullying, or to spare me the wrath of someone or other. I missed my old town and my old church. I believed in God very much, but the feelings of comfort had disappeared. Unfortunately, these years did a damage to my faith which would take years to repair. I no longer associated religion with happiness.

Slowly, I became an atheist. The more I saw religious people of all faiths carrying out actions that seemed repellent to me, the more I blamed it on faith itself. The more I learned about world history, and the evils committed in the name of God, the more I wanted to be disassociated from God. I began to have opinions on politics, and to become very liberal in my thinking. Going into my adolescence, at a secular school now, surrounded by young people who equated faith with stupidity, and aided by my own disappointment, I little by little stopped praying to God. I remember the last time I went to church. I was fifteen, already an atheist, and went, one last time, on Easter Sunday, as a sort of farewell to my childhood and to my religion.

As a young adult, little happened to change me. God was far away and had nothing to do with my career, my personal life, or my long-term goals. I remained an atheist for many years. My life seemed to have nothing to do with God. I tried to attend churches several times, but the atmosphere felt unwelcoming, and I suppose I did not really try, or want to try. I wanted there to be a God, but I had made myself a non-believer, and so I could not have the rewards that believers had. I felt spiritual emptiness, but was unwilling to fill it with what I saw as hypocrisy and dishonesty. Most of my friends were atheists as well, and we comforted ourselves that we knew the truth, and felt sorry for the masses with their opium, which we vowed never to touch.

After a few years, my son was born. Feelings of love, comfort, and happiness that I had not known were possible welled up in me from a hidden place. It was similar to the happiness of my early youth, but with full awareness, and full understanding, and full appreciation. A little creature had come into my life and filled it with such intense feelings of delight that it left me stupefied. I was astounded that a baby could cause such overwhelming happiness. Waves of dreams, spirits and transformations filled my life during his infancy. The spiritual became immediate, the ethereal became tangible. Things that seemed impossible unfolded before my eyes. Miracles happened every minute of every day. Lost in the sensory experiences of nurturing a baby, I became a child again, a mother, a guide, and a protector. More than anything, an increasing joy that seemed to have no end filled me all the time. Without knowing it, I had found God again. Or, maybe, without my noticing, God had decided to bring me back.

Although I had no religious intentions, I was ready. My son grew out of his glorious babyhood and became a wonderful little man. Once, when he was small, he asked me about God. At that moment, I knew God was real. I could feel Him, floating around us, as I chatted with my son. It was a tangible comfort, an enveloping sensation, a calm. I never was certain of anything like that before. I knew God was real just like I knew I was real. I knew then that I could not bring up a child without religion, without God.

I began to search for a place to call home. Of one thing I was sure now, and that was of the presence of God. But years of living without religion had left me skeptical; I did not know where to

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I began to search for a place to call home. Of one thing I was sure now, and that was of the presence of God. But years of living without religion had left me skeptical; I did not know where to turn. Although I yearned to embrace religion again, I knew I could not go back to my old denomination. Even though my early memories told me there must be good congregations to join, my politics had changed and I had changed. I was ready to find a new home.

It was during this search that I found St. Andrew's. John Nieman, the rector at the time, told me something I will never forget: "Here at St. Andrew's, we do not require that you check your brain in at the door. If you are working on your faith, that is fine." I thought that fit me very well, and decided to visit the services. Here was a huge stone church, with the fragrant smell of flowers, and, at the pulpit, an intelligent, compassionate person talking of God and love, and with a liberal sermon! Here were all the religious traditions I had known as a young child, with the politics I had grown to embrace as an adult. And here God manifested Himself — in the people I began to meet. The congregation was very welcoming — for years, I have only seen friendly faces. People at St. Andrew's create that feeling that I had known as a young child: the warmth of a community where God is present. For my son, St. Andrew's has meant goodness from beginning to end. I look forward to him holding fond memories of going to church as a young child, and being surrounded by warmth and love.

I am still working on my faith — I wonder, and question, and try to discover. I do not have a specific goal, but I am not homeless in my journey anymore. Our interim rector summed it up in a recent newsletter: "Whoever you are and wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here." Here, I have found warmth from a loving community. When I am in St. Andrew's, joy and well-being fill my heart. I feel loved, and protected, and taken care of. And now I am old enough to know that the comforting atmosphere, the calm that surrounds me here, just as it did when I was very small, is God.

Esther Lara spent most of her growing-up years in Mexico. When she was seven, she moved with her family to Europe, where they spent three years living in Brussels and Oxford, before returning to Mexico City. She came to the U.S. to go to college and stayed to do graduate work, get married, and have a family. She loves reading to her son and playing with her dogs.



Born Again

by James Wessel Walker

My grandmother was born in 1878 in Tutuila in the Samoan Islands, the first child of Congregational missionaries from the north of England. When grandmother was eleven the family accepted a call to missionary work in South Africa, where great-grandfather established a network of Congregational Churches that still thrives.

I do not know what took my grandfather, a Scotsman, to South Africa, but he worked all his life as a teacher and lay preacher in schools that served the non-white population. He met my grandmother in what was then Britain's Cape Colony in South Africa, and their daughter, my mother, was born on a mission station there. I too was born and raised in South Africa. With forebears like these I should have grown up religious but did not. Granny was pious and strictly Temperance, but my mother was neither. I suspect that my father, also a Scot, who had come to South Africa as a mining engineer, had led her astray. He went away to war before my first birthday and was killed in Italy in 1944, so I never knew him. I can remember one or two songs from a Methodist Sunday School, so I suppose mother was taking me to church regularly, but I do not remember any practice of religion at home. From time to time I used to spend holidays with a friend just my age in what was then called Southern Rhodesia. Den's parents were even more secular than mine, but Den had fallen in with evangelical neighbors who took us both to Crusader Camp. We had a wonderful time out in the bush, both declared for Christ, and resolved to save our parents. I still have my Crusader Bible. From the inscription I see that we were eleven years old. I put the whole experience out of my mind as soon as I got home, but Den is made of sterner stuff and has been involved in evangelical ministry all his life. His parents ignored his efforts to save them.

I went off to boarding school just before my eleventh birthday. Life at home for the only child of a working, widowed mother was too lonely. Mother chose for me what I have always believed to be the best boys school in South Africa, though I suppose the old boys from other schools might disagree. After two years of cramming at a preparatory school in Pietermaritzburg, I entered Michaelhouse, an Anglican school in the green, hilly country of northern Natal.

Religion was taken seriously at Michaelhouse. The school had been founded by a clergyman, Canon James Todd, and many of the headmasters, who were called Rectors, had been clergymen. We sang Matins before breakfast and Vespers before bedtime. On Sundays we were turned loose to roam the surrounding countryside, but we had to be back in school in time for Evensong. Holy Communion was infrequent, and only the older boys, who had been confirmed, were allowed to take it. Like all the other boys, I prepared for Confirmation when I was the right age, studying under

Chaplain B. B. Burnett, a very holy man who went on to become Bishop of Natal. In due course I was confirmed after struggling through the ordeal of Confession. We were supposed to confess before each Communion, but only this one time did we have to confess out loud to the Chaplain.

I had a wonderful time at Michaelhouse in spite of being no good at games. I was good at maths and science, however, and so won a scholarship to Yale. Religion must have been for me strictly a school thing. I never entered an Anglican church in South Africa other than the Michaelhouse chapel. At Yale the only people I knew who worshiped regularly were Roman Catholic. As it happened, the woman I married during my senior year had been brought up Episcopalian, so we had our children baptized as Episcopalians. Baptism seemed like the right thing to do, perhaps for the sake of the children, even if it took place in a church we saw only once. It was not that we believed or did not believe. We just weren't religious.

If we had been religious, perhaps the marriage might have endured. Be that as it may, soon after we moved to Ann Arbor in 1980 my wife decided she would be happier with another man and moved out. I was left with ten year old John and six year old Kate. My mother, who had an apartment in our house, was able to help with the children, meeting the school bus and keeping them company when I was working.

John was a Cub Scout for a short while. I don't remember how he got into Scouting or why he dropped out, but his brief enthusiasm changed our lives. I was fetching John from his second or third meeting when the scoutmaster took me aside and told me that John must have a religion in order to be a Scout. It was a requirement.

It came to me in a rush. I knew at once and with overwhelming certainty that I should be taking my little children to church. What was I thinking? I needed all the child-rearing help I could get. To tell the truth, cast adrift after more than twenty years of marriage, I needed spiritual and emotional help for myself as well. Why was I ignoring a significant part of my upbringing?

The very next Sunday Kate, John, and I were in a pew on the left near the front at St. Andrew's. After church we enjoyed the warmest possible welcome from Reverend Susan McGarry. We had not been attending St. Andrew's for more than three or four weeks when Nancy Heusel appealed during announcements for teachers for what she described as a class of delightful children. Once again, the Holy Spirit told me in no uncertain terms what to do. Nancy was quite right. The children were delightful. I had, moreover, been welcomed to the Tuesday (or was it Thursday?) morning Eucharist that still followed the old prayer book, using the language I had grown up with. I had come home.

We had been regular churchgoers for a month or two when the church secretary, whose name I have forgotten, gave me a packet of pledge envelopes and told me what to do with them. That is

how I became officially a member of the congregation. Not long after that an older lady in tweeds took me aside after church and asked me to serve on the Christian Education Committee. I wish I knew who this kind lady was, because it was in the Christian Education Committee that I found Donna, who in due course became my wife. Donna believes that the Rector, Gordon Jones, arranged for us both to serve on this committee in a deliberate effort at matchmaking.

Both Susan McGarry and Father Alex Miller officiated at our wedding. I was dressed in Scottish finery, so Father Alex wore a kilt under his vestments. He said this was the only time he had done this.

I have been continuously active in church life, Bible study, church school, dramatics, youth programs, vestry, choir, and committees, since the day John's Scoutmaster spoke to me. He was from India. I like to think that he was Hindu or Moslem. His message for me, coming straight from God, brought me home.

James Wessel Walker is Professor Emeritus of Atmospheric, Oceanic and Space Sciences, Geological Sciences and Environmental Studies at the University of Michigan. He is active in the St. Andrew's Choir, the UMS Choral Union, and the UM Gilbert and Sullivan Society.



Searching Out the Pathways

By Kerith Lee

I came to the Episcopal Church by way of a Christmas pageant and stayed there to sing in a choir.

My path to the church began later than most. I didn't grow up in any kind of faith tradition. My parents gave my brother and me the freedom of choosing our own way, as they didn't wish to choose a religion for us.

Some well-meaning friend of our parents gave us a Bible – to be specific, the Golden Children's Bible, for which I still have a soft spot. My brother and I were voracious readers. Books surrounded us, and I spent my childhood searching out the pathways therein, even to the point of searching for hobbits while riding my bicycle. Any sign of religion in my life showed up in books. I took these encounters for granted, realizing that somewhere, someone believed these things. It never occurred to me I could believe; yet I feel certain I was a seeker even then. Each story I read went into some catchall in the back of my mind and stayed there until needed. I just didn't know I would someday need it – and none of this was deliberate. Laura Ingalls Wilder, Beverly Cleary, J.R.R. Tolkien, even Judy Blume each contributed their clues, even more so than that Bible.

My parents took me to see *Godspell* at the local dinner theater when I was nine years old. We saw a lot of shows that way and I knew many a show tune. I also grew up listening to the original cast album. I remember coming home in a daze, completely enthralled by the music and the story, and trying to find it in that big picture Bible someone had given to my brother and me. This experience, too, lodged itself into the back of my mind. I thought about Jesus for a long while but didn't know what to think or what I was feeling.

The only other time Jesus showed up in our household was at Christmastime. We had a wealth of Christmas and Advent music in our home. We celebrated in that secular American way: with presents and Santa, a baby in a manger and all those songs, some of which sounded religious (but we didn't really pay much attention to that). I came to know the songs by heart. They stayed there, not making much sense, but biding their time until such a day as I would need them.

When I got to high school I discovered I could sing, and a whole other world opened up to me. To this

I added the stories and the clues, the songs and family traditions. I opened my heart to learning more music, whatever the choir was singing that season, and each piece we learned added to the cache of mysteries in my heart.

I'd always believed in God, a God who was out there somewhere, I think. It just wasn't until my junior year of high school – a year of severe highs and lows, amazingly deep friendships, and first love – that I woke up and paid attention. I do know it was the music that woke me up, that woke me to a world full of wonder and beauty to be explored. Perhaps – and this is what I think – God knew the only way I would hear the Word was through music. If only God can convert, or there are people only God can convert and I was one of those people, then God needed to do that for me with music.

My first church service at St. Alban's Episcopal Church in Annandale, Virginia, was a blur of music, nervousness, pleasure, curiosity (but only dim as of yet), and frustration. I was only there as a guest, well, as a performer, actually. I'd been asked to sing alto in a small Madrigal-style group at the Christmas pageant. We sang "People Look East", an expectant four or five verses about the coming of Jesus, not that I knew it at the time. To this day the song remains a very special one for me. I was also assigned a verse from the hymn "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" which I actually knew quite well. The tune was one of my absolute favorites played in my house during the month of December. I knew this one from my parents' recording of a huge orchestra – no voices, no text. The color and timbre were darkly beautiful and shot through with light. I loved it. It moved me, put me somewhere in time far from the worries of the present day, made me wonder things, think of distant lands and of ancient longings. While the complex orchestrations on our record were hardly authentic, I could hear and sing hymn 56 during that pageant and *know*. Know a moment of recognition, of home.

That service following the pageant was the beginning of something very new, though the memory of it remains a hazy and somewhat uncomfortable experience. I vaguely remember a lost, left-out feeling. One would think I would have wanted to avoid such a situation, but it wasn't long before I went back to St. Alban's. Back, and then back again. Something drew me back and overruled my discomfort and frustration.

That following spring we sang Schubert's *Mass in G* in our high school choir. We were blessed with a choir director who insisted we sing classics, rather than show tunes and the popular music of the day. We sang those things too, but also everything else from plainsong chant to Italian madrigals, from folk songs to great works like Handel's *Messiah*. The *Mass in G* is a beautiful simple setting of the Latin Mass. I've never sung it since, but that spring we sang it every day, and then every Sunday I went to church and listened to the Nicene Creed being recited. Eventually I realized Schubert's setting of the *Credo* and our Nicene Creed were the same. The music helped me break through my discomfort and discover faith. This was a fundamental clicking together of something, of words to music. I am a singer and a word person. Sometimes it takes both, and to this day I believe the third movement of Schubert's *Mass in G* major is what brought me to God.

It did take me a little while to figure it out but I began seeking in earnest. Something was at work in me and this time I acknowledged it. I went to church with friends (Presbyterian, Baptist, nondenominational evangelical), with my grandmother (Methodist), I began asking questions, and I continued to sing.

But I fell in love with the liturgy of the Episcopal Church. I began to go to St. Alban's every Sunday. I went up to the rail and crossed my arms and received a blessing. Those blessings really added up. I listened to the words of the Nicene Creed. I had the alto part of the *Credo* from Schubert's *Mass* memorized (I still do). And so, on May 31st, 1987, I received the sacrament of baptism. I was 16 years old. The following spring I was confirmed in the Episcopal Church.

I don't have a clear memory of how or when I came to believe I was a Christian. It wasn't that one day I didn't believe and the next day I did. It also wasn't that I sat down one day and invited Jesus into my heart – no, I just realized one day that he was there and I wanted him to stay. Looking back, I don't remember any clear steps leading to a statement of faith. I only remember singing, and that done in community, in an ensemble – leading me to another community, wherein I found something completely unknown yet that called me back, and back again. It seemed almost as if I had been a believer all along, and had forgotten, and certain pieces of music came to me for reminder. The music continues to remind me.

I've belonged to the Episcopal Church ever since. It never stopped being home, even the year I spent as a staff singer at Queen of Apostles Catholic Church. Everywhere I went I sang in the choir. The choir has always been an extension of my church family for me. Music is where I found God, and where God found me, though I suppose I was never really lost. I think, as long as I can sing, I never can be lost.

Kerith Martin Lee grew up in Virginia. She is a children's book buyer for Borders Group Inc. She has attended St. Andrew's for more than eight years and lives in Ann Arbor with her husband Mike, in a house full of books. They are hoping to travel to China this year.



The Richard Dawkins Delusion

The God Delusion

by Richard Dawkins, Houghton Mifflin, 2006

Reviewed by Michael A. Walters

It was with a little trepidation that I volunteered to review Richard Dawkins' new book, *The God Delusion*. (Dawkins is an evolutionary biologist from Oxford University who rose to prominence with his 1976 book, *The Selfish Gene*.) Since he has suggested that there will come a time when it will be a great embarrassment to admit to a belief in God, I suspected that my faith and beliefs would take a beating at Dawkins' hands. However, the inclusion of a review of this book in this edition of *CrossCurrents* is purposeful. The editors thought it would be enlightening to examine this highly controversial new work by one of the world's most passionate atheists, someone who moved away from the Anglican Church and has found a home without God. The book brought back memories of my own coming home experience. And far from being beaten by the words of the author, I feel that *The God Delusion* is worth a read, but probably not for the same reasons as the author intended.

My own coming home experience was precipitated by what I will call a semester of "too much Plato." I was raised a devout Roman Catholic and lived devotedly within that faith until I started asking questions. In that respect, I suppose I was like many American Catholics who tacitly profess allegiance to Rome but do not dogmatically follow the rules of the Church. For me, this tension between what I openly professed and what I practiced was just too much to reconcile. In college, which I have heard is a common time for self-evaluation, I began to question what I really believed. The semester of "too much Plato" was a time when I was challenged with the appeal of the realm of ideas and ethics in several classes at the same time. Time has dimmed my exact recollection of the events, but I believe I was reading the Platonic dialogues in three classes at the same time. The confluence of the questioning of my Christian faith, the rational approach to ethics and ideas offered by Plato, and my involvement in scientific inquiry as a science major at Hope College (a Catholic in a den of Calvinism) led to a close brush with atheism and an even deeper confusion as to what to do with my faith life. Over time I began to reconcile my views about science and religion with the help of H. Richard Niebuhr's book *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture*, but it wasn't until I was introduced to the Episcopal faith, with its three-legged stool of Scripture, tradition, and reason by my

soon-to-be-spouse, Stacy, that I felt like I had come home. Here was a Christian faith tradition that encouraged questioning!

There is not very much questioning in *The God Delusion*. It is a rambling, vitriolic diatribe against God and religion. While many scholars have written excellent responses to this book, and I can offer neither the theological nor the philosophical depth of these other rebuttals, I do believe I can offer a fresh perspective on what the book pretends to be about and why it just might be worth reading.

The God Delusion is provocative in that not only does Dawkins claim that God is dead (“it” never existed might be a more appropriate description of his beliefs) but also that religion is evil and that we are essentially perpetrating child abuse when we indoctrinate our children with religious beliefs. Since Dawkins admits that he cannot prove that God does not exist, he employs a probabilistic argument to show that it is very, very, very, unlikely that there is a God. And even if there were some almighty being, the evil done by religious folk in his or her name makes belief in this God an abomination.

Here, of course, Dawkins falls into the trap of setting up a straw God and then proceeding to knock Him down. He takes great pains to avoid this trap, but since his whole argument hinges on his definition of God, he can’t help succumbing to it. Do you believe in an omnipotent, omniscient, personal God who sits on a throne in heaven above listening to your prayers and personally attending to your needs? Doesn’t exist. Do you believe in a God that can only be generally defined in human terms, that works through human agency, that was somehow manifest in Jesus Christ? Sorry, that’s not a real God so you don’t really believe, anyhow. Since he has a finite number of pages within which to work and is not given to nuance, Dawkins cuts to the chase, lumps all believers into the same basket, and throws the whole lot of us out with the holy water.

Dawkins follows his attacks against God with the assertion that religion is evil because of the myriad atrocities (war, inquisitions, jihad) that have been committed in its name down through the centuries. Since religion is evil, we are guilty by association; we are responsible for corrupting our children when we foist our beliefs upon them, even if we don’t commit atrocities. Dawkins seems to forget the atrocities committed by non-religious dogmatic movements such as Nazism and Communism. However, what he is really railing against is fundamentalism, literalism, and absolutism; “isms” all too commonly associated with religious fervor, but really present in any narrow-minded group. While his target here may be correct, his focus is too diffuse. His straw-religion, like his straw-god, is too easy a target to knock the legs out from under. Ironically, with his passionate upbraiding of this straw-religion, Dawkins fails to escape these “isms” and succumbs to a god-less fundamentalism, absolutely sure that he is correct, and literally believing that all people of faith are living a delusion. It is noteworthy that other atheists have suggested that Dawkins tone down his rhetoric a bit for fear that his umbrage will stifle their cause by creating an anti-atheistic backlash.

It is in this examination of what is wrong with religion, however, that Dawkins develops the themes that make *The God Delusion* worth reading, albeit if only as a strongly cautionary tale. Dawkins pulls down those who would have religion exclusionary, those who see religion as a safe haven for intolerance and hatred, and those who would set their god against the gods of others. In his own way, Dawkins expresses a kind of rallying cry for those of us who feel that our beliefs have been co-opted by fundamentalists and literalists, yet who sit by and do nothing. At least Dawkins has the courage to write and say what he believes to be true, not letting religion or personal faith be a kind of mystical fog that cloaks a myriad of sins. However correct he might be in his charges, I think that we need a more Spirit-filled champion than Dawkins to lead this revolution.

While decrying both God and religion, Dawkins does offer an interesting take on the importance of churchly traditions, including those associated with Anglicanism: “I have probably said enough to convince at least my older readers that an atheistic world-view provides no justification for cutting the Bible, and other sacred books, out of our education. And of course we can retain a sentimental loyalty to the cultural and literary traditions of, say Judaism, Anglicanism, or Islam, and even participate in religious rituals such as marriages and funerals, without buying into the supernatural beliefs that historically went along with these traditions. We can give up belief in God while not losing touch with a treasured heritage” (p. 344). This is certainly an odd admission of sentimentality for someone who is so fervently godless. He can’t really expect to maintain the “treasured heritage” without the depth of religious experience that informs the very basis of these traditions. His cheap religion of tradition in the absence of that which forms it is a hollow proposition.

The God Delusion pretends to be about the absence of God and the evil of religion. Yet Dawkins predictably sets up science as his religion and the *absence* of any unifying One as his god. He is a fundamentalist and is as pious as the rest of us; his delusion is that he is neither. I’ll take my God “delusion” any time.

Michael Walters and his wife Stacy attended St. Andrew’s in the 1980s and have recently returned after living in New Hampshire for a number of years. Their daughter attended Sunday School here as a young child, and their son was baptized by Father Alex Miller. Mike is active in the Men’s Spirituality Group and was co-chair of the 2006 Stewardship Campaign. He works for Pfizer as a medicinal chemist.



Confessions of a Jewish Priest: from Secular Jewish War Refugee to Physicist and Episcopal Clergyman

by Gabriel Weinreich. Cleveland: the Pilgrim Press, 2005.

Reviewed by Donna Wessel Walker

Gabriel Weinreich, a long-time friend and former member of St. Andrew's, has written a beguiling book that is at once a memoir of a particular life and a meditation on faith in modern life. Gabi, as he is fondly known, describes the journeys he has taken along the various intertwining pathways of his life: physically from Vilna to New York to Ann Arbor; intellectually from a curious child in a cultured, polyglot household to a respected physicist at the University of Michigan; and spiritually from atheism to Christianity and a profound trust in God. Gabi's memoir celebrates the many paradoxes such journeys involve: the very subtitle of the book makes it clear that this memoir will not try to solve all its puzzles. In the telling of his story, however, Gabi expresses the hope not just for an "empathetic understanding" of his own life, but for clarification within his readers of their understanding of their lives. Such understanding and clarification come as the reader follows Gabi's discoveries and reflections as he describes them. Reading this book is like being in the company of a friend whose fascinating story and ideas give insight into life and the struggle of faith.

The book does not lay out the story of Gabi's life in a straight-forward chronological pattern. Instead, it begins with his ordination to the Episcopal priesthood in 1986, connecting that event, surprising in itself, with Gabi's childhood discovery that because he can divide the four fingers of his hands by twos into a V-shape, he carries the pedigree of the ancient priests of Israel. Not that Gabi's completely secularized family put any stock into that fact: on the contrary, they dismissed it as superstition. But Gabi sees in that moment the first inkling of the direction his life would take, so that when he does become a priest, and a believing Christian, those steps are neither a departure nor a betrayal, but a return to a center, a rediscovery of what he always has been.

Gabi's life journey began in 1928 in Vilna (in Poland when Gabi was born, now the capital of Lithuania) in a family of secularized Jewish scholars. Not that the family was assimilated to Gentile culture: his father ran a research institute designed to bring Yiddish language and culture into full membership in modern academe; Gabi and his brother went to a Jewish school; they encountered anti-Semitism of the casual, daily type and on the horrific scale of the Holocaust. Indeed, it is a

warning to those of us who hope to wage peace by increasing human understanding through the study of languages and cultures that Gabi's very multi-lingual, multi-cultural childhood in eastern Europe ended in 1941 when they narrowly escaped the bloodbath then underway. Gabi's father and brother went to the U. S. on an academic visa; Gabi and his mother followed them by traveling east, on the trans-Siberian railway to Japan and then via ship to California and train to New York. The tales of Gabi's childhood and the voyage to America are among the most endearing in the book. Only 13 when he arrived in New York, Gabi pursued his fascination with how things work, both in mechanisms and in music, ultimately earning his doctorate in physics; his academic career brought him to Ann Arbor.

Gabi's journey of faith is even more unusual and paradoxical than his life journey. A secular and decidedly atheistic upbringing and a modern scientific education are not unusual for European Jews who came to America, but it is highly unusual that a man with such an upbringing could go to church, join the priesthood, and come to Christian faith. None of those steps involved abandoning or overturning his heritage or his education, however. Gabi, like many other Jewish Christians I know, insists that in becoming a Christian he did not stop being a Jew. He did not turn away from Judaism to Christianity: rather he sees his Christian faith and practice as an addition to his life as a Jew. Nor does he see religion in contrast with science. Rather, as a scientist he has come to see with ever-greater clarity the "parts of the universe we don't understand" that are beyond the reach of scientific inquiry. Gabi has a profound respect not only for what science can do, but also for its limitations; this is not merely an inadequate "God of the gaps" theology but a recognition that there are realms of experience that are simply not addressed by the scientific method, and that we can approach those realms only on the path of religion.

Both of these journeys (a Jew becoming a Christian and a scientist embracing religion) would make for interesting reading, for they are fairly unusual if not completely unheard of. What makes Gabi's story highly unusual, and perhaps unique, is his entry point upon the path of religion, and the direction he took once he embarked on his religious journey. For Gabi did not begin with intellectual inquiry, become convinced of the truth of theism and then of Christianity, and then pursue baptism and the priesthood. Rather, he took those steps in the opposite order. He was ordained before he believed in God, and came through the practice of Christian faith to accept God and to live into his faith. It is clear throughout Gabi's narrative that the experience of worship in liturgy and community are central to his faith: he describes being overwhelmed by attending Good Friday and Easter services in one weekend, and he credits the beauty of St. Andrew's building and liturgy, and the learning and wisdom of its clergy, with opening his eyes and mind to the possibility of faith. It is also clear throughout the narrative that Gabi has always followed his own lights, formed his own opinions, and figured things out for himself, even while his life and thought have been shaped not only by his own experiences but also by the communities and families in which he has lived, and even those he has lost. Because the European Jewish world in which he was raised was dead and gone, and because he had no

Jewish religion in his own or his family's life, Gabi could explore the Christian community and life to which his wife Gerane belonged: having no religion to return to, he was free to turn to Christianity.

Gabi's life has had more than its share of loss and tragedy: the loss of family and friends in the Holocaust; the destruction of his culture and home in the war; the untimely deaths of his brother and first wife; his own brain tumor that for a time robbed him of movement, speech and music. Gabi does not dwell on sorrow or tell his story sadly. On the contrary, the book is warm and filled with a sense of blessing, for Gabi has pondered deeply the meaning of suffering and has encountered God in the midst of it. Indeed, the center of his understanding of the Incarnation and Crucifixion is that God shares our suffering, and that in the Resurrection we know God still to be God having come through the suffering alive.

In reflecting upon his life story Gabi comes to a deeper understanding of himself: he realizes that, for all the many surprising turns his path has taken he has not really traveled far from the center of his own being. He is not a different person now than he was as a young boy in Vilna discovering his priestly heritage in a playground game; he has not departed from the ways of his forebears; he has not even abandoned a habit begun in youth. He tells us movingly of memorizing the 23rd Psalm in Yiddish as a 13-year-old newcomer to New York and reciting it when alone or afraid; he ends the book with the 23rd Psalm as his current favorite way of prayer. For all his wandering, this pilgrim has come home, as he puts it:

...the number of things in the world that I acknowledge *not* understanding, far from having decreased, has increased immeasurably; so that if I imagine drawing a cross-sectioned diagram of the universe today, there would have to be quite a number of blank blobs in it. Their common label is "FAITH"; and although approaching them does on occasion waken some of the familiar anxiety, the gift of my older age is that, by and large, those blobs stand as proud and steady beacons helping me through a dark, uncharted world to places that I may not comprehend or recognize, but that feel surprisingly like home.

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We welcome comments, reactions, and suggestions for other topics of reflection.

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