

August, 2022

Becoming Beloved Community

“The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.” (Luke 17:20-21)

Dear St. Michael's,

I write full of excitement and hope about the next phase of our communal life. While I do not mean for this letter to sound overly formal, I'm writing with the intention that we might all be on the same page with the start of a new program year in September. We're in the endemic stage of living with COVID, with uncertainty as to what that might look like, but clarity that our world is forever changed. I'm hopeful that the summer months provided space for respite from all that has happened, and restoration for the next chapter of our journey. After a time of separation, great uncertainty, followed by more uncertainty still, many are still grasping for meaning and wondering about the place of faith, or communal religious life, in the midst of it all. The reason for my invitation is that we still need one another on this journey.

The invitation is this: let us commit to Becoming Beloved Community. A lengthy explanation follows, but the presenting purpose is simple: How might our commitment to form God's people in Christ's image shape all that we do? This is not unlike much of the work we have been doing together. We've been on a journey to grow in kinship as a community and with our neighbors. This is simply our next step, an expansion of our understanding of community, and a new phrase for talking about our commitment to this kingdom work. You're going to be hearing lots about it this year, so I write with an overview and invitation to Become Beloved Community.

This framework describes the many ways in which you will witness and experience our community being formed in Christ's image. You will find entry points into a labyrinth that guides our journey towards Christ and one another. The phrase is not mine, but one deeply embedded throughout scripture, and recently in use by the leadership of the Presiding Bishop's office in the context of calling on the church to recommit to the task of seeking racial justice, healing, and reconciliation. As part of the Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement, we will do our part to live into this calling.

It is a life-long quest to **Become** who God created us to be. Everyone gets to begin this journey exactly where you find yourself. The commitment to becoming is that we remain aware of our own spiritual growth, no matter the phase of life in which we find ourselves.

Beloved is the identity that God bestowed upon each of us at birth. We reflect the very image of God. And, we must learn to see this same belovedness in one another, and all of our neighbors. A major component of owning our identity as beloved, is reconciling the many ways in which we have failed to acknowledge the belovedness of all God's people.

Community is the sum of all our component parts. Reconciling the selfish patterns of our society and our world, with our faithful commitment to the whole of God's creation requires a dramatic shift in perspective. This work of becoming beloved will permeate our communal life

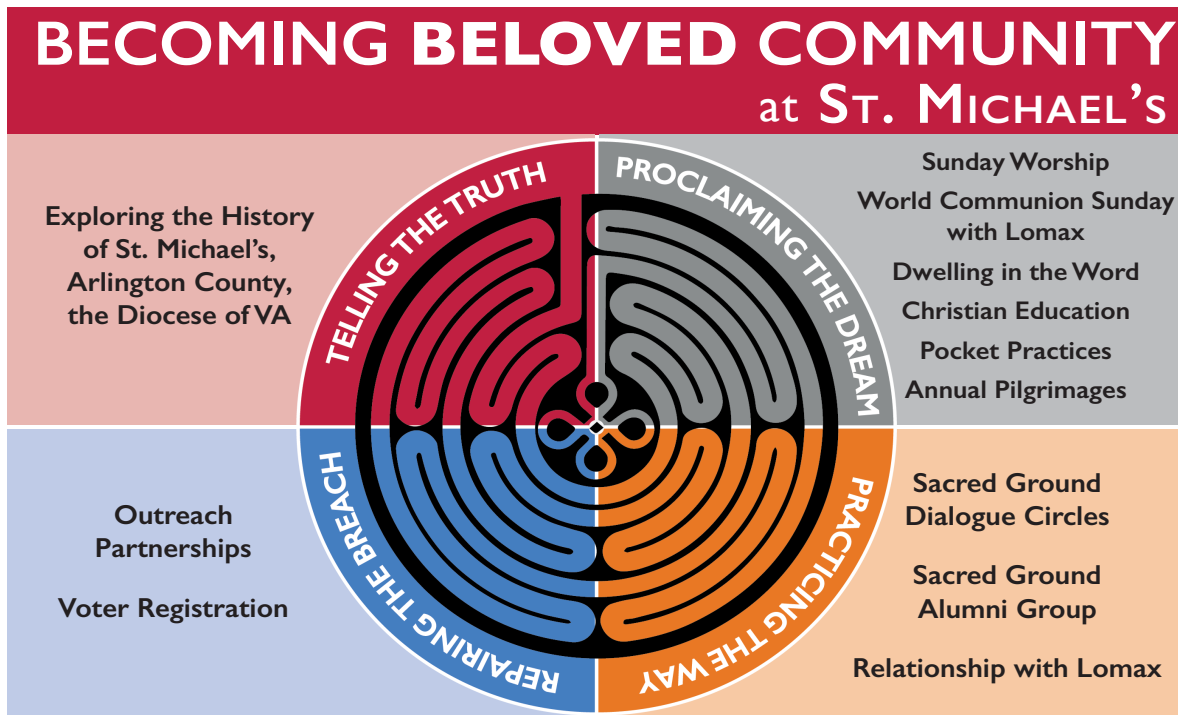
in ways that are obvious, and ways that may go unnoticed. Spiritual practices, educational series, dialogue circles, pocket practices, a commitment to composting, our parish retreat, and other elements of our communal life will thoroughly reflect our ongoing commitment to Becoming Beloved Community.

My hope and prayer for each of us, is that we might have the courage to step out in faith and commit to this process of being formed in Christ’s image. On the next page, you will find more of an explanation from the authors in the Presiding Bishop’s office of the Becoming Beloved Community vision, as they do a beautiful job in conceptualizing this journey that includes action, reflection, and prayer. The path toward justice, healing, and Beloved Community covers four interrelated areas of engagement and commitment. In the coming season of life together, we will provide many different entry points and experiences for spiritual growth that all point towards Becoming the Beloved Community. Together, let us recommit God’s mission for the church: building God’s Kingdom in our neighborhood.

I am grateful to the lay leaders at St. Michael’s who have committed to co-leading us in this work. Our life-long commitment to being formed in Christ’s image is markedly strengthened when we walk this journey together. I hope you will prayerfully enter this season of formation with curiosity and openness to all that God has in store.

Faithfully,

The Rev. Beth Franklin
Rector, St. Michael’s



A Long-Term Commitment to Racial Justice, Healing, and Reconciliation

The Bible's most important commandments are: to love God and love our neighbors, in whom we see the face of God. *The vision for Becoming Beloved Community is the community that loves as God intends: where truth is told and hierarchies of human value are dismantled, where each person and culture is protected and honored as an equally beloved part of the human family of God, and where we counter human selfishness – the true root of sin and racism – with the selfless love of Jesus.*

When we speak of “Becoming Beloved Community”, we are not referring to a curriculum or a one-size-fits-all path. The Becoming Beloved Community vision, presented by the Episcopal Church's key leaders, is a practical and theological framework guiding Episcopalians into racial healing, justice, and reconciliation. It is a positive and biblically based ideal – a dream toward which we strive, and not just something we are against. It is the end toward which the Jesus Movement points.

Because this is lifelong spiritual formation, and not simply a training or program, we recognize the intention that the vision for Beloved Community shapes our whole life. It may be helpful to imagine a labyrinth as you consider where you are being called to act, reflect and pray. After all, on the road toward reconciliation and healing, we travel around corners, make sharp turns, pass fellow travelers, and double back into quadrants we have visited before, each time discovering a fresh revelation or challenge. Having come to the center, we discover we are never truly finished, so we stand and return to walk the path yet again.

<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/beloved-community/>