

Consecration Sunday
October 30, 2016

100 Years of Sanctuary

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One hundred years ago this week, St. John's came of age. On November 3, 1916, we were admitted as a Parish in the Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota. Simply put, that meant that the pledges were enough to pay the bills! Like your own children when they become self-supporting, St. John's no longer needed to have operating money from the bishop.

A few months before, the congregation had put a stake in the ground here. We committed to build a new worship space on this site. The cornerstone on the northwest of our Tower was laid on May 13, 1916, paid for by the children's Sunday School birthday offerings. The walls of our beloved sanctuary were rising.

This Consecration Sunday we're beginning a Centennial Celebration of those milestones in our history, and of the presence of St. John's as beacon of faith in Linden Hills. Some details are in the November Newsletter.

The Centennial will conclude next September with the 100th anniversary of our first service in this Sanctuary. In the meanwhile we will learn a lot, celebrate many things, share many memories—beginning with All Saints Feast next Sunday and Jane Gilgun's Forum presentation that day. For now, I'd like to spend a few minutes talking about sanctuary—including some of what I've heard that sanctuary means to you, to us.

The root word in Latin, *sanctus*, means "holy". A sanctuary is a holy place. In ancient Rome, the sanctuary was the area immediately around the altar of a Temple. A Roman Temple had a small interior space where the sculpture representing the honored pagan god was housed. Worship was conducted out of doors.

Christianity turned that inside out. We honor the God present among us in the bread and wine. Our worship is communal, the shared ritual meal; it's celebrated

indoors. When Constantine decided to build houses of worship for the newly-recognized religion in the early 4th century, the Temple plan didn't work. Needing a large, interior gathering space, he chose the basilica plan. A rectangular building like our own, a central nave with or without aisles and transept, the basilica is by far the most common plan for Christian churches still today. From a public building type used for courts of justice, the basilica became a holy space, a sanctuary.

The meaning of "sanctuary" soon took on a political and social dimension. Churches became places of refuge for people fleeing justice—a natural expression of Christian belief in repentance and forgiveness. According to Karl Shoemaker's recent study, *Sanctuary and Crime in the Middle Ages*, throughout Western Europe churches had a formal right of sanctuary for a thousand years. The practice allowed time for a bishop to mediate on behalf of the accused. The red doors on a church were a sign of sanctuary, a safe place for those seeking protection.

Today the tradition has been revived in the Sanctuary Movement to shelter undocumented immigrants in churches of the Southwest US. And the word is used for all kinds of secular preserves, like the Roberts Bird Sanctuary nearby.

What about **this** sanctuary? What does sanctuary mean at St. John's? Our nave and chapel are surely holy spaces, consecrated to the worship of God in Christ.

And they mean much more. The "more" rang through the talks given this month by our pledge-campaign speakers: four members, very different people, born in different places, and different decades. Speaking about St. John's, they movingly evoked the wider meanings of sanctuary. I'm sharing snippets from their wonderful talks, posted in their entirety on the website.

Jay Hornbacher said, like "home," St. John's is "A place of nurture....where we are fed."

Mike Walters spoke of "a place of **being**" of "quietude" where we find the "welfare" we share.

Svea McNally, who has been a member for 14 of her 16 years, alluded to her sense of safety here.

Two years ago, Sonia Toomey also found a safe place at St. John's, where she could be herself. With graceful candor, she said, "I was in the depths of postpartum depression. I came to St. John's looking for sanctuary. I stayed and I pledge because I found it. Along with the greatest community I could have wished for."

Sonia's story rhymes with those you have shared with me, and ones from decades past. It rhymes with my own experience here and resonates with our long history as a haven for people in recovery, for HIV patients, for LGBT.

Inside St. John's red doors, there is a sanctuary for the spirit, where we can be who we are, bring what we have: the beauty and the brokenness, the faith, the fears and failings, the doubts, the dependencies, the delight, the despair.

Nurtured at this communion table, fed with the love of God we find in this community, healed and restored, we can go out to try to help others heal, too.

Our pledge campaign theme is Let Your Light Shine. We know the source of that light. Leonard Cohen's verse has been running through my head: "Ring out the bells that still can ring. Forget your perfect offering. There is a crack in every thing. That's how the light gets in." **That's** how the light gets in.

On this and every Sunday we bring the imperfect offering of ourselves so that God's healing light may come into our brokenness. Then we share the light, we shine with the light that we have received.

May this sanctuary continue to be a wellspring of God's light in the coming year and far beyond. And may our reflection of God's light and love be a blessing to this divided, broken world.