

REFLECTIONS ALONG THE WAY

Dear friends,

On March 31, 2014, I put on the only tab-collar clergy shirt I owned, and drove to Antiochian Village, the Orthodox camp and conference center in Bolivar, Westmoreland County. My first official day as Executive Minister of Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania had originally been scheduled for April 2, but it seemed wise that I start a little bit early to attend this important event.

Upon arrival, I found Bishop Kurt Kasserow, who had chaired the search committee that called me, and my predecessor, Pastor Don Green. They were the only two people I knew in a vast crowd who had convened from across the continent. Metropolitan Philip, beloved longtime leader of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese, was being laid to rest at the camp he had founded.

I had never attended an Orthodox worship service in my life, and I was fascinated, intimidated, baffled, and awed by the rites I observed: the many hierarchs in elaborate vestments, the chanting and bowing, the prayers recited in unison that everyone else knew by heart, but that I had never heard before. Finally, someone said, "Our Father ..." and—thank goodness! I thought to myself, I know this one!

The Holy Spirit surprised us both, and opened up pathways to ministry that we could never have imagined.

It was clear how much I had to learn. That night, I wrote in my journal: "I feel like I have been appointed ambassador to Namibia, and my only previous experience has been running a small consulate office in Belgium."

A decade has passed since that day, and much has changed. I have more gray hair, own more than one clergy shirt, and I can make my way through a Divine Liturgy with only a few furtive glances to see if it's time to sit down yet. I've learned so much: not only about the cultures and practices of the diverse churches Christian Associates serves, but also about the beautiful faithful people who

compose the Body of Christ in this region, and about all our terrific civic, community, and interfaith partners. Today, when I arrive at any event, I can trust that I have friends in the room: perhaps some of the many, many people I've met over the past decade, or perhaps strangers who will turn into friends very soon.

In retrospect I'm impressed by the audacity I demonstrated in 2014, imagining that I could do this job as a 33-year-old newbie who had only ever served as a part-time pastor of a little country church. I'm equally impressed by the risk the Council of Bishops took in taking a chance on me. The Holy Spirit surprised us both, and opened up pathways to ministry that we could never have imagined.

I am so grateful for these ten years we've spent together, and for all that I have learned along the way. I'm grateful for you: your encouragement and patience, your forgiveness for my errors, your support and engagement, have been a rich blessing in my life, and have made my ministry possible. And I'm grateful, always, to God: for the ways this call on my life has deepened my faith, enabled me to serve, and brought so much joy.

God willing, I'm nowhere near finished yet. Here's to the next ten years!

Your sister in Christ,

The Rev. Liddy Barlow
Executive Minister
Christian Associates of Southwest PA



Rev. Liddy Barlow at her tenth anniversary celebration on April 11. For more photos from the event, see page 4.

10 years