

Hi St. John's!

As many of you already know, my name is Marie Campbell. Although it is May and I am entering the very last days of my internship, I wanted to finally introduce myself in public to tell you about what I have learned this year. Most of you have probably interacted with other Micah interns in the past. You probably have some idea about what kinds of activities interns get into: preaching, leading discussion groups, etc. You most likely have noticed that I have not done any of those things this year. So I am sure that you have wondered at some point, "What does that Marie do with her time?" Well, let me tell you about my year.



**Micah Interns (I'm 2<sup>nd</sup> From Right)**

When I first arrived in Boston, I experienced a lot of disorientation. Not only was I processing the transition to life after college, but also life in New England and in a progressive, inclusive church. During my first few weeks here, I nearly wept every time my program director The Rev. Noah Evans began to pray by addressing God as God of love, compassion, justice, and peace. It was a complete shock to hear God addressed this way outside of liberal arts classrooms.

I was raised in Georgia, listening to my grandmother's stories about growing up in Alabama and singing gospel hymns in our Southern Baptist church. That exclusive and conventional church did a whole lot of talking and preaching about the coming Kingdom, our duty to save lost souls, and to be righteous like Jesus so we could get into Heaven. I took it all in and believed it fervently. I went on mission trips and door-to-door evangelizing, but I kept bumping into trouble every time I tried to ask questions. In true Southern fashion, I learned to be a polite and mannered woman, to keep my mouth shut.



**Graduation from Belmont University**

As soon as I could move away, I did. I studied sociology at Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee. The more I learned and read about the world, the more my heart broke and grieved deeply for the injustice that I could see everywhere. I realized that for all the good my church at home had been trying to do, we were missing out on what was right in front of us: the present, the here and now! We were so otherworldly focused that our theology could not address the realities in front of our very eyes. While we were busy looking at the sky waiting for the Rapture, we let hate dig its nasty ways into

our hearts, blinded from the racism, poverty, and inequality that prevailed in our community. We didn't know how to listen to the needs of our own fettered hearts and to those who suffered around us.

Growing up in this patriarchal environment, all I learned about God disconnected me from myself and other people. I can say in complete honesty that before Boston I had never heard a minister talk about God the way I longed for them to. Of course, my college professors talked about a God of liberation - but I had never seen an actual congregation who embodied a liberating and inclusive Christian narrative. I came to Boston because I wondered if I could be a part of a Christian community whose heart and mind was on compassion and justice, instead of fear and burden. So heavy was my disillusionment with the church that I wondered if such a place could exist at all.

As I searched for a site placement, Noah suggested St. John's as a place that would truly resonate with me. He told me it was a community that had been a place of healing for many who had been broken by and experienced disillusionment similar to mine from the institutions of Christianity in other traditions, whether Southern Baptist, Roman Catholic, or other. He also told me that I would find a group of people dedicated to living out social justice in their everyday lives. I wasn't sure what I could do for St. John's in terms of work and service, but I knew I needed to be a part of it.



**St. John's Christmas Tree Sale**

When I first showed up in Anne's office, I couldn't get through a conversation without crying. I was in such a fragile state. I was nursing some very raw wounds that had not been given time to heal during my hectic, academic schedule at Belmont. Imagine my naïve shock when I stepped into St. John's! Anne, a pro-rights and equal marriage activist, as the parish priest! Children of gay and lesbian couples running and screaming joyfully in the aisles! Everyone, *everyone*, invited to the Eucharist table. A Black Madonna stained glass taking central architectural space in the building! You, St. John's, struck a chord in my heart and shook me to the core. I could do little more than observe this year. There has been too much to take in, to mull over, to process, and to let heal.

At the beginning of the year, Anne and I developed some learning objectives. Some of the concrete goals that we wrote down included learning the ins and outs of parish ministry and the Episcopal church and developing a curriculum or some sort of discussion group dealing with issues of diversity and racial reconciliation. After our October meeting with The Rev. Frank Fornaro, however, we realized that what was best for the parish was some Sabbath time, time for discernment and processing. Largely because of this, my interaction with the parish became less and less direct. Normally, interns work about 20 hours a week in their site placements. With no concrete tasks to accomplish at the parish, I took the desperately needed opportunity to really dig

into my own discernment, to let my journey to greater clarity about my present self and future path mirror the congregation's.

On Sundays, I took on the role of observer, which is exactly what I needed most at the time: to watch, let sink in, and to learn. The past nine months have felt like a crash course in Anglicanism. Nearly everything about a liturgical service was new to me and I learned so much just by letting the rhythm of it all become part of my faith practice. Experiencing the liturgical calendar and seasons for the first time was more challenging than I would have thought. The thing about liturgical traditions is that they cover enough biblical literature, historical figures, and theological themes throughout the year to make it near impossible to escape the specific parts of the faith that had come to sit ill with me. I really had to reacquaint myself with Jesus, to many scripture readings, and let new, refreshing interpretations of the narrative take the place of old ones. Slowly, I made peace with those vestiges of the old, destructive Christianity of my childhood.

My meetings with Anne proved just as challenging. Through them I have been deeply challenged to come to terms with my capability for leadership and to own my truth with sincerity. Before entering this program, I had a profoundly deep insecurity in my own ability to know and perceive truth. I also lived with a confusing sense of instinctive leadership capabilities that were restrained from cultivation and growth by a lack of significant and authoritative female leadership to look to for guidance (Remember, I am a recovering Southern Baptist. In this church, women are still not allowed to become ministers). This program has provided space necessary for me to grow into my own skin and to further prepare me to take on more responsibility as a bold leader, inspired teacher, and a more centered and grounded human being. I have Anne to thank for her daring and unapologetically "transgressive" model of one woman's ministry. Her frankness and boldness have offered necessary examples to a way of being that has given me permission to truly be myself, to be authentic, to say exactly what I mean without censoring myself, and to own my experiences as valid.

During the rest of the week, I had time to think. I spent time looking over my past, watching as patterns emerged and gifts that I've always possessed begin to show themselves again and again. I listened to my life through prayer, meditation, and reflection. All of my seemingly scattered interests began to come together. Being in more solitude than I've ever experienced was at times brutal but allowed me to gain clarity and vision.



**Bee School Graduation!**

I had a lot of help with this. I worked with a therapist once a week, talking about my family and my background. We worked through the delicate details of understanding how my family and the community that raised me could embody so much hate and violence. I also met with a spiritual mentor bi-weekly to cultivate a spiritual practice that

would help me embody my faith more, to get into my experiences and to pay attention to my body. We talked about what it means to be women in and out of the church. We explored prayer and meditation practices. I took a yoga class at the Boston University FitRec Center and an introductory bee-keeping class in Norfolk County (see picture on previous page!). Slowly, she helped me begin to know truth, my truths, with my own senses and intuition, a movement from head to heart center.

I also worked part-time as the assistant to The Rev. John de Beer who served as interim chaplain at Boston University this year. I made the dinners and hosted Wednesday night community time and Sunday night coffee hour, filed paper work, and created the bulletins for our Sunday night worship. In this job, I learned a lot about hospitality and found myself creating community centered around healthy, environmentally conscious meals.

I also was able to volunteer with a couple of organizations. I worked every



**Boston University Chaplaincy**

Friday afternoon at the Haley House corner store. Haley House is the most amazing non-profit I've ever seen. Their slogan reads: Nourishing our community while fostering economic independence. It would take pages for me to explain everything that they do. To read more about Haley House, visit [www.haleyhouse.org](http://www.haleyhouse.org). By working in the store and getting to know the live-in community that runs the soup kitchen I got to experience socially-engaged spirituality in a very real way and to further explore what it means to live simply. So many of my interests came together: sustainable community building, bridging gaps between class and race, economic development, simplicity, all centered around wholesome, organic food. To me, the Haley House community embodies what it means to seek wholeness in body, mind, and soul. I am so inspired by them and plan to take what I've learned to Nashville with me - as of now, there are no intentional communities that engage social problems with sustainable models. We'll see what I can do about that.



**Haley House**

In addition, I spent some time with MAB Community Services, an organization that creates opportunities for people with disabilities. I had the great privilege to visit with a lady who lives without the ability to see with her eyes and lives in a group home with a few other women. Sometimes we would stay at the house and just chat about the week. Every now and then, we'd go out for coffee or a meal. The time I had to spend with her kept us both in very good company. I was able to learn how to better care for people with different kinds of needs and was stretched in my capacity to be attentive to those needs.

On top of this, our intentional community life was designed to take up about 10 hours a week of our time. We wrote a rule of life together at the beginning of the year which required us to eat a certain number of meals together a week. I worked with Arrington Chambliss and the diocese to plan the spring Brian McLaren event, as well as a Dance Party at the Crossing, which benefit the Maseno Mother's Union in Kenya.

All of these activities, coupled with the gracious time to process them, led me to incredible clarity about my vocation and myself. This is the only way that I was able to write the Statement of Purpose essays necessary for graduate school applications. I applied and was accepted, with a full tuition award, to my first choice- Vanderbilt Divinity School. I feel sure that pursuing scholarly work is the best next step for me. I eventually hope to teach in higher education, though no matter what I do my whole life is about building community. Community is all I think about. I dream about ways that people, isolated and alienated by their daily mundane lives, can be drawn into togetherness in ways that are sustainable, authentic, and inclusive - those that challenge the dominant cultures of patriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism, and heterosexism that we participate in daily. It is because of these social realities of oppression that I also dream about how the tools from our religious heritages can be pulled from their destructive frameworks and gathered into a spirituality that is socially engaged. The communities that I am a part of will engage society at its deepest ills, we will listen, and we will respond however radically to the needs of all individuals in our global community.

The experience with this community has not halted my disillusionment with the Christian tradition like I thought it might. Instead, it has been a vehicle for the continuation of that process. This community has held me while I've faced the many ways that the Christianity of my childhood deeply wounded me, ways that I did not have to time to process and deal with in the busyness of college life. Because I have had time to reflect, to look back at my life to see the patterns that exist, to let it speak and begin to make sense, and the more I've become involved here, the more I feel myself stepping away, again, from the Christian tradition. This time is different, though. The first time I stepped away, it was out of complete disorientation, anger, and resentment. This time I have made my peace with the Christianity of my childhood and am backing away as a natural and organic response to where I am in my journey. The spiritual life is a process, a journey. And at this point in my journey, I feel released for once from the Christian faith, free and given permission to define myself apart from it, to experience truths about the divine life as I see fit, without having to consent or submit to orthodoxy. I would not be where I am now, as empowered and centered in my own body, without the powerfully affirming support of this community.

I can't explain to you how affirming and encouraging St. John's has been to me this year. I have felt held by you and strengthened. Being actively a part of the services, watching Anne preach, standing with her and Steve at the table looking up at the Black Madonna stained glass, holding the cup of water at Eucharist, these are the moments when I felt the church alive inside of me. I felt how the Christian church can truly be a place where affirming and inclusive community happens. I can't tell you in words how encouraging this has been!

Your example this year has truly given me permission to say yes, to affirm my journey, to affirm the beauty of a diverse creation, and to love others and myself boundlessly. At St. John's, I found the link between the liberating Christian narratives I fell in love with in college and real life. With the inclusivity of the liturgy, your hospitality, your support of Anne's activism, and your commitment to social justice and the liberating work of the Spirit, you have saved the church for me. I mean this with all the sincerity I can muster! St. John's has given me hope for a revitalized, creative, imaginative church - an invaluable experience for me to see first hand. I feel ready as ever to return to the South, more healed than I was nine months ago, more fully myself and fully ready to meet the broken places in our world with radical compassion. Thank you, St. John's. Please let me know if you have any questions or comments about what I've written!

Sincerely and with so much love!

Marie Campbell