

St. Peter's Reflection by BJ Wanlund

As I look back on the nearly eight years that I have spent here at St. Peter's, one word comes to mind: Family. We all have our own families, both with us here inside these four walls (either physically or in our hearts), as well as outside. But I am talking mostly about *chosen* family, the kind you want to spend time with. A few of us who are in this building right now are LGBTQIA+, and as such, we as a St. Peter's family understand the concept of chosen family a whole lot more than most.

When I first came here as a visitor before I moved up here in September 2014, I had an almost immediate feeling of "home". I felt so very welcomed here at this church, and I chalk that up to not just Emily, but everyone who was here at the time. I also chalk that up to the church's Believe Out Loud efforts, and other efforts regarding diversity and inclusion that the church (as well as the Diocese of Pennsylvania) have been engaged in.

And on that topic, there are so many stories about not just my time here at St. Peter's, but of my father, Warren Wanlund, and of my stepmother, Bridget Burless, but I will select just a couple of them for this reflection. As some of you might know, my father and stepmother went on a Journey to Adulthood (or J2A) trip to Guatemala with Linda and the late Rev. Frank Toia, as well as Alex Stevers-Radke as well as a couple of other kids.

That trip was very cool the way my dad described it, and I think there were two things that stuck out to me as I was being told about that trip. First are our siblings in Christ at Upavim, who give women and children safety in Guatemala City and the Upavimas have the space in order to make beautiful crafts that we can enjoy here with the various craft sales we have. The second was San Lucas Toliman, with the water filters and the coffee (especially the coffee, as Dad very much enjoyed drinking that coffee until he passed away last year).

And the second story that I wanted to share was also related to Alex. As you probably know, my dad and stepmom came right as Alex

was being adopted by the Stevers-Radke family, my dad was here watching that day as his adoption was being blessed by Emily. And the first thing that came to his mind was “We are not in South Carolina anymore!”

And for me, I felt a sense of belonging and inclusion from the very start, whether I was helping with our old pumpkin patch ministry, or with various rummage sales, or singing in the choir, or now helping PJ and Mike on the Tech Team so we can stream our services.

In conclusion, I have always felt like I have a home here, even when I was in the deepest throes of my grief about my dad, and all the various hospital stays in the last couple of months of Dad’s life, this place was the best possible place for me to cope, and later to grieve. This place wrapped its arms around me so tightly after that happened that I am beyond grateful to have this church in my life. And even if I move out of where I currently live, this church will always be home to me. I will conclude with a quote from The Wizard of Oz: “There’s no place like home.” Amen.