

St. Peters Reflection
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Good morning.

Twenty-six years ago, this coming October, Audrey and I moved to Abington with our three children. Lindsay was a sophomore in high school, Lara was in 8th grade and Alex was just starting first grade. Audrey and I were long time members of Emmanuel Holmesburg at that time, in fact Audrey was the head of our Sunday School for many years, as Emmanuel was a place for children to grow and learn. In fact, Audrey and I met and began to know each other when we were teens in the Young People Fellowship at Emmanuel.

Prior to moving we began searching for a church in this area to be our church home. We visited many local churches but kept being drawn back to St. Peters. It was and continues to be a welcoming, family-oriented congregation. In fact, one of the many things that attracted us was the friendliness. I recall that after our second visit to St. Peters, during the service we were asked to stand and introduce ourselves; which actually was a little embarrassing but we were warmly welcomed. The following day Audrey received a phone call from Doris DeKalb asking if she would be home and could Doris visit. A half hour later there was Doris on our front porch, thanking Audrey for visiting St. Peters, asking Audrey if she had any questions about the church, inviting us to become members and presenting Audrey with a loaf of fresh home baked bread as a token of welcome. That simple act of kindness told us that St. Peter was to be our new church home.

Christian education and faith formation was and still is an important part of what we want for our church. All three of our children experienced Christian education at St. Peters. Godly Play, Elementary education, Rite Thirteen, Journey to Adulthood; serving and performing in the Shrove

Tuesday Pancake Dinner and Talent Show, car washes to raise funds for missions, acolyting and serving at the altar, Easter Egg Hunts, church picnics with the annual softball rivalry game. And then for adults; EFM, Book Studies, Retreats, Listening Circle; Adult Forums, Intergenerational events; all these provided for our children and for the both so us as adults, the opportunity to grow and challenging us to continue learn about God's words and love.

I would like to illustrate how the lessons taught and the programs that we have here at St. Peters have such a lasting impact on our children and youth.

It was my honor to be able to work as a leader with our teens as they experienced Journey to Adulthood, known as J2A. This is a two-year program that focus the youth as they explore the areas of Spiritually, Service and Self. With a culminating experience, as they travel with support and prayers from the congregation on a "holy pilgrimage". During the two years they evolve into a cohesive group, becoming almost as a family, brothers and sisters and the adult leaders become less as leaders a but as fellow companions in their family. And then our group decided to travel to Spain for their pilgrimage. So here we were, traveling 3659 miles, four adults with ten teenagers, to back pack and walk 130 miles in six days on the Camino Santiago de Compostela (the pilgrims' route to Santiago) in northern Spain. We began walking in the beginning of July, with daily temperatures in the mid to high 90's under a sunny, cloudless sky and carrying all of our possession on our backs. Oh, and did I mention that we had no reservations for any hotels, or restaurants along the way. No, we traveled on faith alone that God would provide, arriving in small towns and villages, seeking evening refuge in a hostel, albergue or small hotel; finding someplace to eat, or the youth finding a market and buying what we needed and then preparing our meals. It was quite an experience for the youth and the leaders, being in an uncomfortable place; not fluent in the language and finding our way across northern Spain following the trail marked only by little yellow arrows painted on walls, on the streets or

paths, sometimes on the trunks of trees, one place just painted on the dirt of the path. There are many stories to tell, but let me tell of one in particular. Everyone walks at a difference pace. So, it was with our group. Usually, it was the boys walking fast, leading the way, then myself, usually walking alone, then Ruth Kirk and Laurel Mosteller with most of the girls and following the entire group usually was Diane Barnes and one of the slower walking girls and yes there were times we were separated and one day we even lost the youth.... but that is a story for another day.

One day after a long grueling, very hot day that hit 101 degrees, and having walked up one of the highest hills of our trek, I was the one who was lagging behind; being the last of the group to arrive at our destination; a hostel in Palas del Rei, where we would spend the night. Finally, I arrived exhausted, dusty, thirsty and looking forward to just sit and rest. But there was no Ruth, no Laurel and I was told that there was no room in the inn, the hostel was full, out in the middle of no-where. The kids were with Diane wondering where I was, waiting for me to arrive, Ruth and Laurel having disappeared in hopes of finding someplace for us to spend the evening, so that hopefully we would not have to sleep on the ground, with no dinner, under the open sky. To say the least I was not in the best of moods, tired, cranky, thirsty and thinking to myself at that moment "Why did I come on this pilgrimage? What am I doing here?" The kids were all irritable, tired, picking at each other, beginning to whine and argue, just as in any family in a stressful moment, wondering what would become of them and all that was happening around them. And I just had a meltdown. I used a walking stick as I trekked the Camino and in a moment of total frustration, screamed at the top of my lungs to the group "STOP IT AND BE QUIET" or at least that were the words I think I said, they may have been a little stronger and harsher, and driving my walking stick into the ground.

Now each of every one of them could have distanced themselves from me, walked away, avoided me and let me stew in my own emotions. But that is not what they did. Instead, they all gathered around

me, helping me to sit down and relax, some patting me on my back, some giving me water to drink, others telling me in calming voices that everything would be okay and that I would be fine. They comforted me, and that is what all of our time together, teaching and learning from each other, enabled them to do at that moment. Giving me the giving support, compassion and comfort that so I needed at that moment.

Oh, and yes, God did provide. Ruth and Laurel found a wonderful farmer and his wife who opened their home to us, cooked a delicious dinner for us, provided us with warm showers, comfortable beds and even a pool to swim in; while the youth kept checking to ensure that I was okay. In the evening after prayers and our nightly worship, when we took a moment to reflect on the day and we could laugh, they told me that when I exploded, I looked like Moses parting the waters of the Red Sea.

Those simple acts of kindness and compassion, drawing from their years at St Peters, experiencing what they saw, learned and lived while being part of their Christian Education and Faith Formation classes along and their life in our congregation at St. Peters, gave them the capacity to help, console, and love their fellow pilgrim at a time when it was most needed.

And for that I was, and continue to be thankful. Amen