

From the Clergy Assistant

The following column appeared in the September 2010 edition of The Tower.

This summer I received a beautiful, hand-written note from the Rev. Lu-Anne Conner congratulating me on my ordination to the transitional diaconate on June 5 and saying how pleased she was to hear that I had accepted the Clergy Assistant position at St. Elizabeth's. Not only was I impressed by her beautiful, **neat** penmanship, I was very touched by her thoughtfulness and sentiment. How many new "employees" ever receive such a beautiful note from their predecessor? And each encounter I have had at St. Elizabeth's has affirmed this special quality of thoughtfulness and the value of relationships.

In the Rev. Cn. John Hartnett's introduction of me in the church bulletin, he noted that I had recently served with the Rev. Diana Clark at "St. John's, Montclair (a parish not unlike St. Elizabeth's)..." Although St. John's may differ from St. Elizabeth's in size and other respects, I see both parishes grounded in a deep spirituality and commitment to relationship and community building. Growing up as the youngest daughter in a very strong, close-knit Irish Catholic family of seven girls in Brockton, MA, a city in which my grandfather, father, and uncle ran a funeral home (and which two of my sisters continue to run today), I can fully appreciate the importance—and responsibilities—of good relationships and community building. In our home we had *one* full bathroom and *one* time for supper at *one* kitchen table... And as my sisters and I each worked at the funeral home in varying capacities from planting flowers and weeding on the grounds to cleaning or assisting in the office, we interacted with many different people in a wide variety of situations. Working at the funeral home also gave us the opportunity to see our father in a "pastoral role" as he engaged very thoughtfully with grieving families. The importance of building and nurturing good relationships in various sectors of daily life was quite apparent.

This past summer brought changes in many of my relationships. At the end of June, I said my farewell to the wonderful community of St. John's after serving as a seminarian there for two very rich years. (Prior to my time at St. John's, I had served another rich year as a seminarian at St. Alban's in Oakland/Franklin Lakes, having to leave St. Alban's upon Prince Singh's election as Bishop of Rochester. Christian Formation for Children had been the particular focus of my ministry in both parishes, but I also had the opportunity to serve in all aspects of worship, pastoral care, outreach, parish life, and program development.)

At the end of July, I also said my farewell to the vibrant community of St. Peter's, Essex Fells and its rector, the Rev. Stephanie Wethered, after serving as Parish Administrator there for four years. This position not only allowed me the flexibility to attend seminary while working, but also provided me with a wealth of invaluable experience in the daily workings of a parish office in a very active parish. Stephanie served as a tremendous mentor as well as supervisor. The opportunity to serve with these dynamic pastoral leaders in such diverse parishes over the years has been a tremendous gift.

This past May I received my M.Div. degree from Drew University Theological School, having taken a number of classes at The General Theological School. I must admit that it was quite sweet to have my daughter and son in attendance at *my* commencement ceremony—a slight reversal of roles. My daughter, Elena Muñoz, graduated from Fordham University in May 2009 and has been working as the Aquatics Director at PS 11 in Chelsea and in Membership and Visitor Services at the Morgan

Library and Museum. After living at home with me for this past year, she recently moved back into the city. My son, Hector Enrique (who goes by Quique—pronounced “Kee-Kay”—the diminutive of Enrique), is beginning his senior year at Rice University in Houston. I am very grateful to both Elena and Quique for the tremendous love and support they have given me throughout my journey towards Ordination and now in my ministry at St. Elizabeth’s.

Having moved to Denville from Denver, CO in late 1993, my family joined Church of the Redeemer in Morristown in January 1994, and became actively involved in various parish ministries, particularly outreach, pastoral care, church school, and worship. I am very grateful that Elena and Quique grew up with such positive, nurturing relationships in the extended family of Redeemer.

I am now especially grateful to be called to serve with you here at St. Elizabeth’s. Everyone has been wonderfully welcoming. I look forward to working with the acolytes and assisting with the children and youth ministries and Confirmation, outreach, pastoral care, and worship. I greatly look forward to meeting you all and learning from you how St. Elizabeth’s actively engages in the building up of the Body of Christ. I look forward to joining you all in this work of the building and nurturing of relationships which calls us ever beyond ourselves, yet ever more deeply into our relationship with God.

The Rev. Joan Conley