

New Rector at St. Thomas - Aptly Named

By Elizabeth Bennett

One hundred fifty year old historic St. Thomas Episcopal Church has called a new rector. The Rev. Rebecca Justice Schunior is known as Justi, and she is well-named. As a child, she thought that war was a bad idea, and she should work for peace. As a teen she volunteered at Headstart, a homeless shelter, Amnesty International, and worked with an anti-gun-violence group.

Her parents were civil rights activists (her mother was kicked out of college for her activism) and Rev. Justi credits her parents for having "raised their children as little adults," and encouraging them to get involved. "We care...and we show that by who we are and what we do."

Rev. Justi's father was a labor organizer. She grew up talking politics and believing that people could make changes, make things better. "As a teen, I believed that the world was broken, and we needed to do whatever we could do to be healers. I wanted to save the world."

She went to St. John's in Annapolis for college and loved their great books program. "I love to read, and I love to talk...the small discussion groups were great for me. I'm a bit of a Renaissance woman and loved the enormous variety of subject and authors." *Middlemarch* remains her favorite book. "I'm not Dorothea, but like her, I long to find ways to use my life and my gifts in ways that will serve God and my neighbor."

Rev. Justi also loved *Pride and Prejudice*, *Howard's End*, *Invisible Man*, and said that Toni Morrison's *Beloved* was a life-changing book for her. "Reading creates empathy. Even as a child of progressive parents, my mind and my heart needed to grow. My inheritance is as a southerner, and a daughter of activists. My job is to grow beyond them. There is no cause I care about more than race relations."

She continued writing letters through Bread for the World, lobbying, and expanding her areas of social concern to include apartheid, LGBTQ equality, and more.

Rev. Justi went to Candler School of Theology at Emory

University in Atlanta and was ordained in 2009, and served in several historical churches "where George Washington had planted his boots..." She felt constrained by a culture where "inclusion meant not making people upset," and went to a church on Capitol Hill in Washington DC as Associate Rector.

She credits her husband Andrew with teaching her how to have fun and a lighter heart while working to change the world. She works hard on work/life balance, and takes



The Rev. R. Justice "Justi" Schunior

time for golf ("I'm pretty bad.") A tap dancer for twelve years, she and Andrew love to dance and burn up a dance floor swing dancing. As a native North Carolinian, she is an avid Tarheels fan and loves college basketball. Her aura of serious clergyperson is leavened by "killer shoes" - she delighted the St. Thomas congregation with red stilettos for Pentecost.

A friend who knew her well suggested she look at St. Thomas because of its history as a social justice church. St. Thomas went through an eighteen-month search process, attracting candidates from all over the U.S. Rev. Justi is the youngest rector in the church's history.

"I have strong ideas about what it means to follow Jesus and make changes," she says. St. Thomas is a multi-generational, multi-racial church, with an active LGBTQ membership and a tradition of fine music, including traditional Anglican, spirituals, and gospel.

During the summer, a single Sunday service is held at 9:00. In the fall, the double service schedule resumes, 8:00 and 10:30. Newcomers are welcome!

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