

Community of St. Ninian

Annual Report

November 11, 2016

The Community of St. Ninian marked our 25th anniversary this year. It has been a fallow year for the Community. We began the year with a retreat at which we reviewed our past accomplishments, current challenges, and desires for the coming year. Although there have been challenges, an important decision was made to attempt to continue to provide transition housing at the Well after a detailed review of our policies and procedures. We felt a particular need to be proactive in following up with our guests in order to both encourage them and to set an expectation that they will take steps toward accomplishing their goals. We spent several weeks working on revisions of our guest policies, interview and screening procedures and guest covenant, and then resumed accepting guests.

During the summer there was an emerging consensus among the Community; a number of issues were leading us to believe that we could not continue housing guests at the Well. We became aware of changes in the law regarding the status of our guests as residents which called into question our practice of providing short term housing. In addition, the changing needs of and for our ministry, the significant maintenance needs of our over-100-year-old house, and the reality of what our members and associates were able and willing to do led us to the unanimous decision that it was time to end our ministry of St. Ninian's Well.

In September the Community deeded the Well over to the Carpetbag Theatre. They are very excited about having the house, and are calling it the "Lucas Artists' Residence" (after their founders). They plan to use the house as a short-term residence for visiting artists, gatherings, "porch time", and for small neighborhood events. Their mission is to "give artistic voice to the issues and dreams of people who have been silenced by racism, classism, sexism, ageism, homophobia and other forms of oppression." We feel good about passing our legacy on to them.

A service of decommissioning was held in September. It was an evening of gratitude, grief, relinquishment, and anticipation of the future into which God is leading us.

Our Facebook page and website were revised to reflect these changes.

We are now meeting twice a month for fellowship, dinner, worship and business.

In the time since the 2015 report, three persons were guests at the well. The shortest stay was 15 days and the longest stay was 58 days. In addition, we provided \$981 to assist individuals this year.

In 21 years in the Well we served more than 150 guests in our homes and at the Well.

The Knoxville Pride was held at the World's Fair Park again this year. We had a lot of visitors and assistance with our booth. A good number of people attended the Soup Supper and the Ice Cream Social. We again provided Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners at the Well, but did not offer a Seder this year.

Our benevolence funds for this year have not yet been sent, but will be sent before the end of the year. We have said that we would help Strength for the Journey, Volunteer Ministries, Interfaith Health Clinic, Family Promise, YWCA of Knoxville, and the Faith Coalition for a total of \$1000. We need to evaluate who to help next year.

We continue to be committed to each other as a community, to the LGBTQI community, and to discerning what God may be calling us to in the next phase of our life together. A retreat for the purpose of discernment, visioning and planning is scheduled for January. We give thanks for God's call and are trying to listen to where the Spirit is leading us as we prayerfully consider our ministry.

There is a story set in the times of years ago when there was little, if any, light in the countryside. No mercury vapor spotlights illuminating the barnyard, no LED flashlight to shine on the path before you. The child and grandparent are walking toward the large dim outline of the barn as seen against the stars of the night sky. Their only source of light is the covered globe kerosene lantern. The child voices the concern of not being able to see very far. The wise grandparent replies, "We only need to walk to the edge of the light, and then our next steps will come into view."

Our process has not been one of "steps taken in the dark", but we have walked to the edge of the light and we trust that our next steps will come into view. We will be in community with one another as we intentionally take next steps and reflect upon and trust the Spirit to guide the steps that are to follow.

Jan Thomas
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