

St. Luke's Episcopal Church welcomes new Rector

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Elizabeth Brooks Harden always knew her life's mission would be to minister to others, she just didn't know when, where or how. From the age of 12 Elizabeth called Ogden, Utah her home, worshiping in the town's Assembly of God Church. "My dad was active duty Air Force and we moved around until I was 12 and our family settled in Ogden," said Elizabeth. "I felt called to ministry from a young age but couldn't visualize what that would look like. I felt a calling and I wanted to respond to that calling, but it didn't have focus or clarity."

But with time and maturity the clarity Elizabeth was seeking unfolded. "While in college I met my husband, Ian, who was Episcopalian, and it was through him that I entered the Episcopal faith," said Elizabeth. It was the First Sunday of Lent when Elizabeth took her first steps through the traditional red doors of the Episcopal Church and began to learn about the Anglican tradition. "I joined the church choir on Palm Sunday and have continued my faith journey ever since."

Elizabeth went on to graduate Weber State University with a Bachelor of Science and Master of Arts in English Literature, married Ian, and had their two children, Henry who is now eight, and six-year-old Adelaide. "About the time my son was born I began discernment, which is the process of looking and listening for a true understanding of God's purpose in one's life," said Elizabeth. "Coming to the Episcopal Church allowed me to see what female leadership looks like, it opened my eyes. This time, the call to ministry had focus and clarity, and I said yes to God's calling."

Saying yes to God's calling is what eventually led Elizabeth to St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Brockport. But first she had some more work to do. Elizabeth, with family in tow, headed to the School of Theology in Sewanee, Tennessee to begin her seminary education. That was in July 2016. Elizabeth knew she was well prepared for the challenges ahead. "I'm a learner and I see this as a strength which has helped me to move into new areas and embrace them, and to be open minded, secure and explorative."

Elizabeth graduated from the School of Theology with a Master of Divinity this past April, was ordained a deacon in her home Episcopal Church in Ogden and accepted the call to pastor St. Luke's. Elizabeth and Ian continued their adventure by buying a home in the Village of Brockport – sight unseen.

Elizabeth's first Sunday at St. Luke's was June 4. In six months, as is the tradition in the Episcopal Church, Elizabeth will be ordained as priest with the authority to carry out all rites and responsibilities of the office.

“This will be my first call as a priest, and I have as much to learn as anyone. I hope that I will have a space where I can learn from my mistakes as well as learn from what goes well. I have already received an abundance of warmth and generosity and I believe this continued support will give me the space where I can grow into myself as a priest and to experience the fun of being a part of a church and village community.”

Elizabeth and her family are excited about the road ahead. “The Village of Brockport is much like Ogden; it has the same vibration. And what’s more, St. Luke’s is about the same size as my home church. My family and I are looking forward to becoming a part of the St. Luke’s Parish and the Village of Brockport.”

When asked what being a priest meant to her, Elizabeth had this to say. “Being a priest is a call from the church to serve the church. I see my ministry as one that nurtures and equips the body of Christ to do their ministries in the communities and in the world, to interpret the scriptures, to stand in that place where people receive grace in the form of the sacraments so that they are ever more connected to the grace and love of God. I think a priest should always be looking for ways to see the movement of God’s grace in the world and help people be more aware of that grace in their own lives.”

Elizabeth also believes in the healing grace of laughter and looks forward to celebrating God’s blessings and having fun while fulfilling her pastoral responsibilities. “I think there is a good fit between my propensity to love and nurture people and the spiritual needs of St. Luke’s right now. There are already so many wonderful things going on at St. Luke’s. I want to bring depth to the worship and to be a presence in the life of the church. I want to provide spiritual and pastoral leadership. It seems to me that the people of St. Luke’s have been doing incredible work in their ministries during this time of not having a priest. It is my hope that I will be able to bring spiritual renewal that may have been a little dry over the past year, which would be a normal outcome of the church being without a regular pastor for so many months. Everyone needs the constant flow of spiritual nourishment to continue to give up oneself as the people of St. Luke’s are constantly doing.”

When asked what nurtures her own spirit, Elizabeth said, “What nurtures and supports me is ongoing spiritual renewal, which starts with prayer and includes spending time with my spiritual director, sharing in the sacraments just like everyone else, as well as sacred music. Singing is something that really gets my soul into a different space and is very reviving to me. My family is important to my well-being. My husband and children bring me so much joy.”

Elizabeth’s message for St. Luke’s and the greater Brockport community is this: “I’m here. I’m here for St. Luke’s and for Brockport. Come see me and let’s see the love of God moving in this place, together.”

Sunday worship, Eucharist and children’s Sunday school are at 9 a.m. throughout the summer. In September, services will begin at 10 a.m. For information, contact St. Luke’s at 637-6650.