



*The Episcopal  
Diocese of Olympia*  
The Episcopal Church in Western Washington

Sunday, September 7, 2025

To the Members of Saint John's Parish, the Vestry and Father Michael,

I am writing to extend my most heartfelt condolences on the terrible loss of your friend, fellow parishioner, and partner in mission, Sheila Stanton. Sadly, I did not know Sheila, but I understand that she was encouraged to run for Vestry and was to serve as a delegate to our next Diocesan Convention. As I consider your great loss and the shock and grief of her sudden death, I also find myself filled with a deep sense of gratitude and comfort in the story of her life and ministry among you as relayed to me by Fr. Michael.

I have heard so much about the magnificent Community Dinner program and partnership with the IMAN Center that Sheila spearheaded. This initiative was so much more than a monthly meal; it was a sacred gathering, bridging two religious traditions and making a place of hospitality where community was forged, dignity was affirmed, and mutuality was celebrated. The care of every detail—from the use of linen cloths to the handmade centerpieces—was a tangible expression of Sheila and Saint John's conviction that every person at every table is worthy of being treated with dignity to enjoy a fine dining experience.

Sheila's ministry extended far beyond the walls of your parish. As a recognized leader in the community, I learned she was recently reappointed to the African-American Affairs Commission by Governor Ferguson and received commendation from the city of Kirkland for her anti-racism work, including organizing the city's inaugural Juneteenth celebration. She was a servant in the truest sense, a person of deep faith whose work was a living testament to the Gospel message.

What I find most moving and encouraging about Sheila's life is how she found in Saint John's—a predominantly white parish—a home and a base for her powerful ministry. What Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. observed 60 years ago is still too often true today: the most segregated hour in America is 11:00 am on Sunday morning.

In your community, this faithful woman was given the authority and the opportunity to share her gifts, and in so doing, she found a deeper and more faithful way of living out the Gospel. The mutuality she cultivated at the community dinner most certainly inspired a spirit of generosity and neighborliness throughout your parish and, I suspect, the city of Kirkland.

As you grieve the loss of Sheila, know that I pray that you will hold fast to this truth: God used the Parish of Saint John's as community in which Sheila felt safe, secure, and strong to advance her community work. She found belonging with you, and that belonging empowered her to do the ministry to which she was called.

In these days of uncertainty, may you also come to know of Jesus' presence with you. He promised to be with us always, even to the end of the age. He remains with you now. And I also pray that Sheila's legacy of reconciliation and mutuality will continue to guide and inspire you and your parish in the days and years ahead.

Faithfully,

The Rt. Rev. Philip N. LaBelle  
Bishop