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## *Please Won't You be My Neighbor?*

**By the Rev. Canon Lauren Holder, Canon for Community and Education**

I have a friend in town who pastors a church called “Neighborhood Church” and they use a lot of familiar Mr. Rogers speak when talking about who they are and what they are about. I listened to this friend give a talk on “neighborhooding” a couple of years ago and loved the way she turned that word into a verb. Neighborhooding is not passively living in your home alongside other people living in their homes, occasionally waving to each other when you take your trash to the curb. Neighborhooding is actively connecting “with the people that you meet when you’re walking down the street, it’s the people that you meet each day...” (That little ditty is actually from Sesame Street.)

Well, I have been actively neighborhooding this summer — partly after being inspired by a book our “Word to Your Mother” group discussed early on, celebrating what can happen when we live in our front yards instead of our back yards — and partly out of necessity.

Some of you know I was solo-parenting all summer while my beloved was in Tokyo working at the Olympic Games. And while we missed the silliest member of our family considerably, it still somehow managed to be the most fun summer I can remember. Why? Neighborhooding. We got to know our neighbors in new and deeper ways. One neighbor designated Monday nights as a weekly play-date for kids and parents. One neighbor offered to watch the kids one afternoon, which then turned into several afternoons, so they could complete a costume design project start-to-finish. One neighbor responded to a last minute “help” text when I thawed more home-made meatballs than we could eat. And with summer drawing to a close, I’m connecting with neighbors while walking to/from our neighborhood school each day. Strange faces have become familiar and I’m learning the stories of the people I share this little patch of the planet with.

The result is that I feel more at home in my home than I have since we moved here. I feel connected. I feel a sense of belonging. All it took was letting my neighbors into my daily life a little more than before.

The Cathedral is a lot like a neighborhood. It is a church, yes... but it’s also a school, a farmers market, a bookstore, a senior living facility, a counseling center, a lovely place to walk. It is a place where people gather and connect. And when we do connect, we find that sense of belonging. We find that we are home.

My invitation to you this week is two-fold. First, as we continue this Homecoming 2021 celebration, come home to the Cathedral of St. Philip this weekend and connect with people in worship and at the Ministry Fair between services. Practice neighborhooding at church. Consider how you might connect more deeply this year with one of the many ministries that make this sacred community so vibrant and vital in the larger Atlanta community. And second, walk around your own neighborhood with intention. Practice neighborhooding at home. Load up on bug spray and drink your coffee in the front yard in the morning or eat dinner there in the evening. You might strike up a conversation with someone walking by, you might silently pray for them, or you might just notice them. Over time, you will grow to appreciate and perhaps even love them.

Fred Rogers once said, “I believe that appreciation is a holy thing – that when we look for what’s best in a person we happen to be with at the moment, we’re doing what God does all the time. So in loving and appreciating our neighbor, we’re participating in something sacred.”

Come participate in something sacred in the neighborhood where you live and in the neighborhood where you worship. Come and see how neighborhooding might transform you and transform us. Please, won’t you be my neighbor?

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