

LONG ISLANDRELIGION

By Jim Merritt

Asking the Clergy: How do the stories of Sts. Peter and Paul inform your practice today?



From left, the Rev. Kevin O'Hara of Lutheran Church of Our Savior, the Rev. Earl Y. Thorpe Jr. of Church-in-the-Garden, and the Rev. William McBride of Brookville Multifaith Campus. Credit: Rev. Kevin O'Hara; Interfaith Community Religious Education Program; Church-in-the-Garden

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On June 29, Roman

Catholics celebrate the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, two apostles of Jesus Christ who are also venerated in Protestant faiths. This week's clergy discuss how the biblical Peter and Paul have influenced their ministry.

The Rev. Earl Y. Thorpe Jr.

Pastor, Church-in-the-Garden, Garden City

As an American Baptist church, we strive to model and embody the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our daily actions. We equip ourselves with the Word of God to inform and aid us in our living a spirit-led life.

In the New Testament, Peter and Paul play prominent roles in extolling the belief in Jesus Christ and furthering that message through their authentic writings as well as writings attributed to them in sacred texts. Many of the Scriptures used in worship services on Pentecost Sunday (May 31 this year) detail Peter's boldness in speaking and actions in faith through the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter's ministry becomes an integral part of the spreading of the Gospel message. All of Paul's epistles in the New Testament had an outsized influence on the development of the early Christianity movement and church protocols. The witness of these apostolic giants undoubtedly points us to Jesus.

When you travel and see a sign telling you your destination is just a few miles away, you do not stop at that sign and set up camp. You press toward the goal. On our faith journeys, Paul and Peter are signs and instructions to Jesus. They inform our faith practice and formation.

The Rev. William McBride

Religious director, Interfaith Community Religious Education Program, Brookville Multifaith Campus

Sts. Peter and Paul often come to my mind when I am juggling my bills and wondering how "to rob Peter to pay Paul." This phrase, taken from an actual historical dilemma of paying the church tax of St. Paul's in London or that of St. Peter's in Rome, refers to the predicament of choosing one thing over another in the face of limited resources. It also gives us a clue as to how we might celebrate the feast.

Peter represents the choice of continuity and stability while Paul represents enrichment and expansion. By placing both together, the church is challenging us to pay both Peter and Paul — to pay attention to both stabilizing and expanding forces of faith in our lives. A force in the lives of both Peter and Paul that describes this unifying power is love. The resurrected Christ moved Peter by asking three times, "Do you love me?" Then Peter was challenged to expand and feed others with this love. Paul, in his classic letter to the Corinthians, reminds us that the best way to build community is love. This feast

associated with the martyrdom of both Peter and Paul demonstrates that this type of love is worth giving your life for.

The Rev. Kevin O'Hara

Pastor, Lutheran Church of Our Savior, Patchogue

In 2017, during the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, I remember hearing a sermon highlighting this time as “Peter vs. Paul” theology. Peter had been seen as insular and focused on vocation and tradition. Paul, patron saint of Lutherans, was an evangelizer to the outsider and elevated doctrine above experience. Finally, after years of infighting, many were willing to put these differences aside to seek God’s voice in this age.

In Scripture, Peter and Paul argued several times, and Paul even wrote in Galatians against Peter’s views. But the truth is, we need both Peter and Paul (and Mary as well to add a female voice to the mix). Instead of one, there seem to be many Christianities today, all professing to follow Christ but all facing differences about how to live it out. Like everything else, our faith communities are severed in many ways. Five-hundred-plus years of reforming has not fixed that problem.

But 2,000 years of dialogue between Peter and Paul has kept one thing true: God is still speaking through various disciples, if only we can hear, acknowledge, and ultimately be changed.