

The Portrait of the Rev. Gary D. Jones

St Stephen's Church loves tradition and we have many. Just last year we celebrated our 100th Christmas pageant. Every year we decorate and donate turkey boxes for Thanksgiving along with having our special community Thanksgiving service. But one long-held and very special tradition is asking our former rectors to have a portrait made of them upon their retirement. When Gary announced his retirement, our then-senior warden Allison Koschak asked him if he had a preference of a portrait artist. Gary immediately had someone in mind – Ben Long, a former parishioner of his from Charlotte and long-time friend, who had previously completed charcoal portraits of the children for Gary and Cherry. Allison asked Martha Sherman, at that time a member of the vestry, who had spent a portion of her career representing portrait painters and a long-time friend of the Jones' to work with Gary and Ben to contract for the painting and help in any way she could to get the portrait complete.

To give some background on the artist: Benjamin F. Long IV was born in 1945. He graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where he majored in creative writing, but was encouraged by his advisor to move to New York after graduation to immerse himself in the study of fine art.

In 1966, he enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps and served more than two tours of duty in Vietnam as a Marine Corps Combat Officer; during his last tour he served as Commander of the Combat Art Team, and much of his work from that period is now on display at the United States National Marine Corps Museum in Quantico.

Upon leaving Vietnam, Long apprenticed in Italy where he learned the art of *buon fresco* (true fresco). In fact, his is the only fresco by a non-Italian at the Abbey of Monte Cassino. In addition to his fresco work, Long is a portrait painter and has had works in the Royal Portrait Society in London and is represented in major collections throughout Europe and the Americas. His studio is in Asheville, North Carolina, where he painted Gary's portrait. I so wish Martha Sherman could have been here today to talk about the painting, because she has so much more knowledge about art than I, but in talking with her several important and impressive facts stand out. One, Ben paints portraits from life, not from photos. So Gary, although he was working in Texas, flew to Asheville several times to sit for the portrait. The second unusual fact is that painters rarely know the subjects they paint. But because of Gary and Ben's personal relationship, Martha notes that the intimacy of that relationship shows up in the work itself. Martha also said that the first drafts of the painting did not have Gary wearing his glasses and she encouraged Ben to add them, since that is how we here at St. Stephen's remember Gary best.

I would like to thank the people who helped make Gary's portrait a reality. The donors who wish to remain anonymous have been personally thanked by Gary and we here at St. Stephen's are grateful for their help in making his portrait a reality. Our thanks go to Ben Long for bringing the Gary we know to life. And special thanks go to Martha Sherman, who spearheaded the effort, worked with the artist, helped select the portrait's framing and is

now working with our fine arts committee to professionally hang and light the portrait in the library, where Gary will continue to inspire the Celtic service ministers as they prepare themselves for their Sunday evening ministry. Lastly, the star of the show is Gary Jones. We thank him for his many gifts that helped St. Stephen's thrive during his tenure. We are so appreciative of the legacy that he left – the farmers market, the café, and the beautiful and nationally known Celtic service. His portrait adds to the rich history that is St. Stephen's Church and I am so glad that it is finally here where we can all enjoy it.

Anne Pinion
Senior Warden, 2024-25