

# St. Giles' New Priest Explores Modern Issues and Looks to the Future

By Cathy Dausman



Reverend Justin Cannon

Photo Cathy Dausman

The Reverend Justin Cannon is easy to spot in a crowd. The 6'6" bearded redhead with glasses and the Roman collar is the newest leader of St. Giles Episcopal Church, a "church without walls" which meets in the chapel of Saint Mary's College in Moraga, as it has since 1982. Cannon says he would like to "encourage people to explore modern issues," while remaining a respectful guest of the college. Religious inclusivity is important to him.

"For me it has to do with being faithful to Christ," he says, quoting Matthew 11:28: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." Cannon is the author of *The Bible, Christianity & Homosexuality*, and editor of *Homosexuality in the Orthodox Church and Sanctified*. He founded Holy Hikes, a Bay Area eco-ministry supported by St. Giles parish, and Inclusive Orthodoxy, an

organization that "seeks a revitalization of faith grounded in the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ – a message of love, a proclamation of hope for the oppressed, an invitation towards all regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation," according to its website.

Asked whether the homosexual community feels ostracized by mainline churches, Cannon replied: "I cannot speak for the LGBT community, so I'm not sure. One of the hurdles LGBT people face is that so many feel they have to choose between their faith and who they know themselves to be. Since we cannot change who we are at our core, so many LGBT people give up on faith, which is quite sad. My call is before all to seek and serve Christ and my neighbor... gay or straight."

He says a local congregation like St. Giles can help by offering "a community where anyone can come – re-

gardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, or disability."

Technically "Father Justin," as he prefers to be called, is a part-time "Priest-in-Charge," beginning his first post-ordination call to serve a community through the Contra Costa Deanery of the Episcopal Church. Cannon is a 2009 graduate of Berkeley's Church Divinity School of the Pacific. His assignment to St. Giles began June 16, and will last three years, at which time the parishioners have the option to extend his stay. "St. Giles has asked for my presence, and Saint Mary's has welcomed me," Cannon says. Although he has no official school role, St. Giles' rents an office space on campus and Cannon has been invited to make himself available to students when they return, in collaboration with campus ministry. He will be introduced at the school's fall Eucharist service.

Reverend Salvatore Ragusa, Chaplain for Saint Mary's calls Cannon "young, energetic, and passionate about the gospel of Jesus Christ." He says the college has been "blessed with wonderful and pastoral priests from St. Giles and Father Justin will build on those relationships."

Ragusa and Cannon have already spoken about finding ways to bring their faith communities together for prayer and service. Ragusa even hopes to "have time to plan our homilies together." The largely Lamorinda-based St. Giles congregation numbers 30 to 40 members on any given Sunday. Cannon says it already "feels like a family."

"While our core tenants unite us as Christians," Cannon says "the saddest thing is that we isolate our-

selves." Cannon is already practicing inclusivity, reaching out to potential congregants by updating the St. Giles website and adding Twitter and Facebook accounts to attract 20- and 30-

something aged congregants, whom he calls "the church's future."

For information, you can visit the St. Giles' website at [www.stgiles-moraga.org](http://www.stgiles-moraga.org)

## Local Authors

# Lafayette Author Pens Exciting & Informative Summer Read

By Cristina Kim



Author Linda Riebel Photo provided

"I didn't set out to hobnob with hairy apes. Well, maybe some of my past boyfriends might qualify. I just set out to help a colleague. Given what I do for a living, that happens a lot, but it's usually more tame and civilized." So begins Linda Riebel's novel *The Lie-Catcher in the Primate House*, written under the nom de plume Lindsay Crane. Full of intrigue and excitement, Riebel's thriller about endangered animal smuggling is also an intimate portrait of her heroine and narrator, Julie Heidebrecht. An effervescently energetic voice, Dr. Julie Heidebrecht is a UC Berkeley professor of psychology who is a specialist on human deception and a veritable "lie-catcher."

Capable of reading people's body language, physical ticks and voice patterns, Julie, as she insists everyone call her, becomes part of a government task force that aims to stop poachers and smugglers from bringing animals into the United States. Although she is at first hesitant to become involved, Julie becomes a passionate animal and human rights advocate as she learns more and more about wild

animal trafficking. Traveling around the world, from the Bay Area to Uganda, Julie learns, and subsequently informs readers, about psychology, primates, the international illicit animal trade, and even the Lord's Resistance Army's Joseph Kony.

As a professor and professional the novel's heroine admits, "I also have a passion for precision... I drill students about this, insisting that they must use real evidence." Riebel, a Lafayette resident, takes after her protagonist or vice versa. The local author, who has advanced degrees in human psychology and has traveled extensively around the world helping to rescue wildlife and habitats, clearly draws from her own life and experiences in the novel. It thus comes to no surprise that due to her own professional training or perhaps as a nod to her heroine's exacting personality, Riebel culminates the novel with a note that directs readers to journal articles on deception studies and information on how to help save endangered species.

*The Lie-Catcher in the Primate House* is a thoroughly researched and plausible, if fantastical, novel that provides readers with real information regarding the state of the world's

endangered animals. Although both academics and professionals have a reputation for dry and pedantic writing, Riebel's writing is quick, witty and reflective of the chaotic pace of life. Her personal passion for endangered animals and the preservation of natural habitats resonates from each page in a persuasive manner that inspires

readers to think about wild animal conservation in a new way. For instance, Riebel invites readers to ques-

tion what truly differentiates animals, particularly primates, from humans and therein frames ongoing debates on animal testing and habitat conservation in a new, thought provoking, light.

At its heart, *The Lie-Catcher in the Primate House* is undeniably a conservation novel that aptly positions a local, Bay Area heroine within a web of international intrigue and mystery to show the need for wild animal conservation. For those already interested in such issues this Lindsay Crane novel will undeniably resonate and for those readers who have not really thought about conservation, the novel provides an entertaining introduction into some of the dangers facing exotic animals today.

As August and summer weather finally arrive in Lamorinda, *The Lie-Catcher in the Primate House* is the perfect summer read. The loveable sleuth, exciting plot, and informative prose will keep your fingers turning the pages until the very end. The novel is currently available at Amazon.com and Barnesandnoble.com as both a paperback and in electronic form.



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