

When I walked in to St. Andrew's for the first time almost 6 years ago, I was struggling. I left church after high school and never really looked back. I was just fine with that, and I looked out into the world and saw Christians in a pretty negative light. Then my world felt a little like it was cracking around me. I was in my early thirties, and life wasn't going quite the way I imagined it would. My personal demons were engulfing me. At first, I thought maybe I just needed a community or a practice, I thought maybe I could be a Buddhist, or a unitarian, but after trying a few things on for size, I realized that I needed God and Jesus in my life in a way I never thought I did, at least I kept looking until I found them. When I came to St. Andrew's I stopped looking. I knew this was what I was seeking without knowing it.

I loved the liturgy and the music, the loving messages that came from the pulpit, but it is also where I started to know God, maybe not right away, but overtime.

This is where I found grace and let go enough to realize we are broken and blessed, it was here that I could bring my suffering and meet a God who suffered with me. It was here that I met a community that loved me even though as a single person, no kids, I was probably not exactly the demographic they were looking for. It was here that I saw our mission as the Church working as we feed the community and gather every Thursday, no matter what. Thursdays at the Community Café sometimes feel like what the church should look like, and when I get a little jaded, I think about working behind the counter, and sitting and talking with strangers—something I would never do if it weren't for that place.

Then it was here that I found God working with the youth, something I never thought I wanted. When I was asked, I tried really hard to ignore it—I don't think I'm the only one. But when I stopped trying, I heard the call and felt it pulling me. Over three years and one pilgrimage to Arizona later it is easily the best thing I ever did. Sometimes it is easier to see God in that work, because I have to lay down my own stuff, I have to see the message of the church outside of the typical framework. And, if you've met them, and I encourage you to if you haven't, it is very easy to see God in these youth.

I've been profoundly changed by these experiences and by this place. I don't think I am alone in that. It isn't just about having a community or the loving friends I've made here, though that has been huge. It is that I realize that the more I am involved and invested, the more I am broken open, the more I see God in the work we do, and the more I value St. Andrew's as a place that catches me when I think I'm falling.

I'll admit, to start off here, in the beginning I saw myself as more of a time and talent person. My financial giving has been an ongoing conversion. But time and talent are very important parts of the stewardship equation. When we ask ourselves how we are being good stewards of the resources entrusted to us by God, our time and talent cannot be on the back burner. How can we be integral parts of the mission of the church? How can we not just be members of this church we love, but also disciples of Jesus in the process—those are active roles, not passive ones.

Pledging was not something that I always did or knew to do. Part of my conversion over the last six years has been about seeing my money as not just mine, but as God's. I'm not all there, I might never be, but with each year, this place has become more and more important for me. When a place is constantly saving me, I want it not just to survive, but to thrive. Putting my financial resources toward this place at the beginning started small—smaller than I wish to admit, but it was a commitment that I'd never made before, and making it felt big at the time. It has taken a breaking open of my own heart to see how we are all part of this together, and that we are, more than ever, in part responsible for keeping our mission alive, and providing a foundation for the community that many of us couldn't do without. I'm still being converted in this way as I think about my pledge for 2020.

Not very many people would be surprised to hear that the stewardship liaison is not the most popular position on the Vestry. But, there's something about learning the nitty gritty, that can be both disheartening and very inspiring and empowering at the same time. These are not times of great church endowments, and our church is not the church it was a hundred years ago, but then again that church was very different from the church we started out with 2000 years ago. I've realized over the last two years that while we are not living in 1919, and our mindsets cannot be stuck there, the boots on the ground, participatory reality that we find ourselves in today makes for a stronger community that might just look more like discipleship and the mission of the early church anyway. This realization continues to work on me as I think about how I am blessed by this place and how I share my resources to keep it thriving, at a time where the world needs it.

As you are filling out your pledge cards this week, the Vestry and I invite you to consider the place that St. Andrew's holds in your life, how it nurtures you, and how it has changed you. We invite you to think about the place you want it to be for the future, and ask yourself how you can be a part of that. Through your financial gifts, through your gifts of involvement, through your innovative thinking. You needn't wait for the leadership to create something, or invite you to participate. The best ideas may not fit on the pledge card, but we are excited to hear them. We invite you to consider your pledge carefully, thoughtfully, and prayerfully, joining the Vestry in a goal to give intentionally, proportionally, regularly, and faithfully. When we all put our pledge cards in the plate next Sunday, remember, we are all in this together.