

Why I pledge to St. Bartholomew's - To make the world a better place

When I was asked to talk today about why I pledged to St Barts, I remembered about a time when I was a little boy, I once asked, "Why do people put money into the plate? The answer I received was simple. **"To make the world a better place"**. At the time, I didn't understand the answer, but as I learn of the power of a strong congregation, I have come to appreciate the importance. A recent study showed that despite only about a fifth of Americans attending church or synagogue on a weekly basis, almost 40 percent consider themselves to be very religious. I believe those that consider themselves religious and don't go to church are missing strong congregation like ours can provide. Today, I plan to share some personal examples of how a strong congregation can **make the world a better place**.

I grew up in a parish that was located outside of Washington, DC during a time when we were divided over politics, civil rights and a war. In 1968, Dr Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Coalition launched the "Poor People's Campaign". The goal was to highlight and find solutions to many of the problems facing our nation's poor. The campaign culminated as thousands converged with the "March on Washington". Because of events like this, I grew up thinking it was normal that there were beds in churches and that families had sleep overs with total strangers. Like our family, the parishioners in our community opened their homes to those who made to the March on Washington. To this day I remember how total strangers educated us on how their faith, their hope, their love, and their place of worship had helped them get through some challenging times. Our Parish bringing diverse people together under a common cause was an example of how a congregation can **make the world a better place**.

Another example of how a church's congregation can make an impact was at the age of two, doctors informed my parents that the likelihood of my surviving the winter was not good. Thankfully I had an incredible doctor, and my parents had a supportive church community. For many years, people involved in our church would stop, and remind us of the story of my being sick, how a community came together and how the power of prayer had saved my life. The actions of that congregation **made the world a better place for my family**.

As I think about both of those events, I am struck by how the people of that congregation made a difference. The trait of a strong congregation is what led me to once again be active in my involvement in our church. A strong congregation is what attracted me to St Bartholomew's. As a member of the Vestry, I see the impact of our congregation and I am inspired by the countless hours people volunteer. I believe we have a lot to be thankful for! I am thankful to be a part of a community that **is making the world a better place**.

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I want to tell you of two events at St Barts, where this community made the **world a better place** for my family. When my father was dying, this congregation supported us in many ways- the phone calls, the support in planning his funeral. The dying process is an emotional experience but sometimes there are little things that can slip by unnoticed that can bring comfort when you are experiencing this with someone you love. I will never forget my father sitting in his wheelchair taking solace in his St. Bart's prayer blanket as he came to grips with what was happening. My family will always be grateful and appreciative of support we received from this congregation. Your actions and your prayers supported us in so many ways. **You made the world a better place for my family.**

For a while, my name was included on our prayer list. For years I thought I was invincible and a little over a year ago I was faced with an illness that changed my life.. Thanks to our medical community, your prayers and support, my cancer is now in remission and I no longer have the need to be included on the prayer list. The actions of this congregation reminded me of my childhood when members of our congregation would tell me the story of my being sick and how the power of prayer had saved my life. The difference is that today I appreciate their kindness and how a congregation like ours **can make the world a better place.**

As I experienced in my childhood, we live in a period of history where we are divided in so many ways. My childhood congregation was a strength for our Parish. The people of that community made the world a better place through their actions. This week I ask you to think about the many ways that the congregation of St Barts makes the world a better place. The Pastoral care committee, fund raisers like the lobster bake raising money for the community, our parish outreach and yes, the comfort of a prayer blanket. I pray that those that are spiritual but are not a member of a community like this will someday experience the power of a strong congregation. If that innocent little boy were to ask me today: "why do people put money into the plate" I would answer by saying "to empower a congregation like ours **to make the world a better place.**"

Arthur Woolverton

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