

Stewardship Reflections

From Chrys and Steve Hahn

We're new to this community, and the Vestry thought you might want to hear from us because at a Zoom meeting I blurted out that I don't know if you all can imagine just how unique St. Bart's is.

If NJ and Massachusetts represent the states of our births and upbringing, Maine is our chosen state. Indeed, we agree that the only thing we wish is that we could have moved here sooner.

Still, a move from the mid-Atlantic to New England is no small thing. We moved hundreds of boxes of books after letting go of an equal number. We retired from rewarding careers we were weary of doing but left people we never tire of seeing or hearing from. And we left a little church in Ridgewood that had become quite the focal point of much of our life.

The books back on shelves (for the most part), and new acquaintances evolving into what we hope will be friendships, the hardest part of the relocation was finding a church. We attended many. Then, as Lent approached with eleven months of Pandemic behind us, we began exploring churches again—this time online.

The online presence of St. Bart's was remarkable, and after a lot of reflection, we think we know why.

The first thing we noticed was the simplicity of the church. Clear glass let lots of light shine in, wooden rafters spoke of physical and spiritual strength, and the altar was tastefully adorned but not ornate. Why should this matter?

Recently, we had our first experience at the pig races at the Cumberland County Fair. As I gleefully recounted what we'd experienced, our

daughter paused on her way out the door to say, “Isn’t it funny how the simplest things are the ones that make us happy?”

The simplicity of St. Bart’s makes us joyful. And that seems to be what God wants for all of us.

The second has to do with a congregation that was able to pick up the pieces after the previous rector left.

We’ve lived through rector searches at two churches and in neither did the congregation step up the way you at St. Bart’s did. Instead, they relied heavily on interim ministers to do the heavy lifting. Your ability to step into the breach suggests that YOU are the church. And that seems to be what Jesus intended.

Last, the congregation at St. Bart’s exhibits the kind of courage that is warm and true. When I emailed Barbara Barhydt to ask if we might join the online social justice discussion, she did not ask who we were, where we were from, or why we wanted to join. She simply welcomed us. So, too, have many of you as we have begun to gather in person. And services here are not boiler plate. Reflections by members, personal or in the form of poetry, seem to suggest a willingness to allow the Spirit in.

And none of this would be possible without the time of talented parishioners...(Chrys)

I would just add to Chrys’s comment on the perception of the virtues of simplicity and courage among our first impressions of St. Bart’s, that of integrity.

And the sense that whatever challenges might arise, they can be met not just with the ingenuity or the will of the people, but as it was clear to us, that each person we talked to spoke of faith in God as the source of wisdom and guidance, rather than themselves alone.

As a writer and professor of literature, who likes to think about the history and context of the words we use, I am reminded of the often-recited words I have heard in one version or another over the course of my life in the church:

It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves. (Psalm 100: 3a)

Those words have always been important to me internally to my self and facing the world. Simple words, worth contemplating.

As are the words related to them that we say at the Offertory, taken from the prayer attributed to King David and the building of the Temple in the First Book of Chronicles:

But who am I, and who are my people,

That we should be able to offer so willingly as this?

For all things come of Thee, O Lord, and of Thine own have we given Thee.

(1 Chron. 29: 14)

That is a long tradition of Faith to rely on, and one that speaks of a sense of community set apart by its blessings and its response to God, maintaining a place of worship and community.

We give thanks for having found what we think is such a community.

We give thanks for the years we have had to grow together, along with our daughter, in a family of three strongly individual persons, and for the blessings and challenges we share.

It is with a renewed sense of being “able to offer so willingly as this” that we are answering the call to pledge from our resources to the work of St. Bart’s. (Steve)