A Stewardship Sermon
By Candy Walker

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Good morning St. Paul’s family

Let us pray:

Loving God, we thank you for the rich abundance in our lives. Open our eyes to see that, in being so blessed, we can, in turn, abundantly bless others. Open our hearts to feel the powerful generosity of your Spirit and let go of our fear and judgment. Open our ears to hear the needs of this church and community. Open our minds that, whenever called, we offer the world our measureless love, our generous time, our unique talents and treasure. Quicken our hands to your service, breathe your Spirit into us and touch us with the life of Christ. Amen

I am honored to have been recruited by the Stewardship committee to deliver the sermon today. How to identify the relationship of my involvement with St. Paul’s and why I give an annual pledge is a bit of a tall order.

I must say I chuckled at the weekly email where Chris spoke of me as a long-time parishoner and not as an “old” member. I know I’m not old, but I did just celebrate a significant enough birthday which has allowed my imminent retirement from the Bedford Schools, so in one way I am an “old” member.

Many of you fellow long-time parishoners do know my “How I Came to St. Paul’s” story, but many of you don’t. It almost shocks me when I say out loud the number of years I have been a member --35 this coming April!

Just before the birth of our first child, my husband and I made the decision to ‘return’ to our Episcopal roots, having been away from the church following college and living the young married life of no commitments. It was Palm Sunday and Rev. Whitaker asked the Hectors to be our guide for the day. Once Casey was born, baptized, and reached the one year mark, we became relatively active members. I joined the ranks of the crafty and worked on the Advent Fair, which was a big “hook”. The fellowship was a welcome draw to this stay at home mom. During my second pregnancy, my mother was diagnosed with cancer. Just two weeks after Catherine was born, I took my children to Va. Beach to be with my dad and to have some last moments with my mother. When we returned a month later, this church family embraced us in ways I never expected. The love and caring was overwhelming and welcome. You see, I am an only child, so the parishioners of this church were truly my family.

Throughout these last 30 or so years because I so love St. Paul’s, I have participated in teaching Sunday School, done more Fair work, served on the Vestry multiple times, been a Warden, organized rentals for the Parish Hall, was on search committees, attended retreats, became a Lay Eucharistic minister, a counter, participate as a member of the Outreach Committee, organized meals for the needy, worked on many stewardship committees, and support the nursery school as a board member. This long list is not meant to brag, but it is how I have given to St. Paul’s with some of my time and talent. I have also regularly given monetarily over these many years. Some years were more lean than others, as I was that stay at home mom for 11 years before going back into education and then a single mom for awhile.

I remember the very first Capital Campaign in which I participated. I pledged $5.00 a month *above our* yearly pledge. As small as it was, it felt so right and so good to be a part of the project. I have continued to pledge as I am able each year and for those big ticket Capital campaigns.

St. Paul’s is my worship community where I feel love and deep caring and concern for my well-being and that of my family. I have a relationship with you, the members of this parish. Each relationship has its own personality dependent upon how well we know one another. Looking at one another and knowing we are here to embrace our faith and to share in the Word of the Lord , creates an intimate relationship different than what we have with our co-workers and the greater public.

St. Paul’s is a true home for me. I have relationships with you as brothers and sisters, parent figures, acquaintances, and children I would gladly call my own.

PAUSE

I came across this interesting quote while doing some stewardship research:

“Seek joy in what you give not in what you get.”

Well, I do get joy from what I give here at St. Paul’s ! In return for my giving and being a part of this gracious and giving community, I receive personal joy in what I get in return from each one of you and what we do together in our community of Bedford and the greater world.

Only people have stewardship, this wonderful gift from God. I have learned that God loves us…unconditionally. His direction leads us to do his will. We are encouraged to **love one another** & **to love our neighbor**. Whatever we give is to be considered a gift from God. We give to our families, our community, the world around us, and to one another; and here, especially, as a parish family. It is said, “What we give will be returned ten-fold.”

STEWARDSHIP involves our response to God’s blessings. How might we thank God for all he has given us? We can return some of our gifts through Time, Talent, & Treasure.

Time is actually the gift of life He has given us. We should return some of our time back to God in our thoughts and in our deeds.---however & whatever we feel we can meet.

Talent is the special gift He has given each of us-albeit we are all different and have different talents. Use your particular talent to serve God. Again, in a small or large way, your talents will not go unnoticed.

Treasure is the measure of the wealth or material things we have collected during our life. A portion of this treasure can be offered to God as our thanks for his gift of our creation.

**Today** is the time to remember our giving to others, how we pay our bills, and the need to create and sustain a balanced budget for St. Paul’s. Many of us have pushed deep into our pockets to make our most recent improvements possible, but we cannot forget the everyday needs that St. Paul’s must meet.

 **Pledging**, which is crucial to our programming and budget, also reflects our prayerful response to God’s call to be good stewards of our material possessions.

The **size** of your pledge is less important than your **willingness** to commit a definite amount towards the support of God’s work at St. Paul’s.

Giving to the Church **is more** than giving money. We all know that money/our treasure, pays the bills and helps sustain many projects and the overall plant, but what is always needed the most, is human involvement. Time and talent, your time and talent are cherished gifts given to sustain our loving spirit. As children of God, we are called to account for the many gifts which we have received. We are called to exercise stewardship.

Dear friends and followers of the Holy Spirit here at St. Paul’s, your stewardship// How you give of your time, talent, and treasure, // is a **personal** decision.

Let us reflect upon this portion from the 2nd letter of Paul to the Corinthians:

“Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.”…….”You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us…”

I am so very thankful for this parish, this family, our worship, and our fellowship.

Thank you for listening and considering your pledge to St. Paul’s for the year 2014.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote “Give what you have. To someone it may be better than you dare to think.”

Please give as you are able. Thank you and Amen.