

Stewardship Campaign '10

When Gina and I moved back to St. Louis in 2005, we knew right away that we wanted to live in Tower Grove. For all the obvious reasons, TG allowed for the kind of way of life we wanted. The parks, the markets, the restaurants, the chance to teach, the ease to public transit... There were many issues we did not take into account, however. Choosing a church was one of them. We knew, where ever we lived, we could find a place to worship God. For a variety of reasons, theologically and practically, we wanted to choose the closest Episcopal Church near our home. St. John's was that church.

Lucky for us, St. John's has become more than just the Episcopal Church in the neighborhood. We can walk here. We get to read the prayers together here. We meet fascinatingly intelligent and interesting people. We have people as concerned about Eva and Will's spiritual upbringing as we are. We have a parish community that gives Gina and I, and Will and Eva a chance to serve the people in our community. We have a Church whose members have become true and dear friends. Because of the openness and commitment of the people in this parish, because of your willingness to serve this neighborhood and this city, because of your willingness to open up your lives to us and allow our lives to be blessed by you, because of the care and commitment to the parish by first Teresa, and now Teresa and Jon, St. John's is home.

Many of you know what I'm talking about. Muffin, where else could we find a church that is theologically open enough to be accepting of marginalized people AND be orthodox enough to still believe that God heals through prayer? Scott, where else could we find a church that was committed enough to serve meals to the people in our parish but still astute enough to sing good choir music? Bryan, what other place can you imagine would be powerful enough that even though work is what brought you to the neighborhood, when that same work tried to take you away, you chose to extend your train ride rather than leave it? Many of us know why St. John's has become home. Many of us have our own St. John's stories.

But, St. John's Church is not a St. Louis institution. Yes, it's history is long and rich. Yes, it's influence has been deeply felt by generations of St. Louis people and St. Louis families. But, that's not what I mean by 'institution'. By 'institution', I mean a entity of people with so much power and so much history in St. Louis that its existence in this community will probably survive whether we support it or not. None of us needs to buy A-B beer in order for the brewery to continue to produce beer in Soulard. None of us needs to enroll our children at WashU or SLU in order for those colleges to make ends meet. And (tongue in cheek), many of us could not even pledge in the two annual KWMU pledge drives in order for our public radio

station to continue to teach and inform us. These are the sorts of institutions I have in mind. St. John's Church is not such an institution.

Without the time, care, and support of all of us here, St. John's Church would cease to exist. This Church parish ceases to be a church when the parishioners are no longer here. And this is just as God would have it. God is not such a God that he/she needs his/her institutions to be preserved. God is not such a feeble God that in order to retain his/her goodness/power/or knowledge, she/he needs human institutions to keep his statues in place. God's Church is what it is only through the grace of God working in the lives of real people in real time in real places. God's Church is what it is only through the grace of God working in our lives, right now, in Tower Grove neighborhood, St. Louis.

And so this is our vocation, as a Church. If we want St. John's Church to remain one of God's Churches, if we want St. John's Church to continue to be a place of worship and service to man for God's sake, then all we have to do is to be the Church. If we want St. John's Church to remain here for the foreseeable future, all we as God's people living in this parish must do is act like the Church. All we have to do is bare each other's burdens. All we have to do is ensure that every age in our congregation is spiritual taught and is teaching. All we have to do is come and worship together. All we have to do is come and serve together. All we have to do is make sure the Church is financially stable and sustainable.

For me, this is the heart of each year's Stewardship Campaign: an annual reminder that if St. John's is to continue to be God's Church. I, for one, believe God has a calling for St. John's. Part of that calling demands me to make financial commitments to it.