

Good morning! My name is Sarah Hogan and I have been a parishioner at St. Andrew's since 2007. I don't know about you, but since childhood, I have always been a very curious person, always wanting to know WHY. I love to learn and I am fascinated by people and their stories. Whether you have known me for ten years or have never met me before, perhaps you are curious about my story and about why I attend St. Andrew's.

I was baptized Roman Catholic in 1981 and there really was no way around it, as I'm Italian on one side and Irish on the other! The Catholic faith was strong in our household. My father had previously been in seminary to become a Catholic priest and both of my parents led the folk group at church. I could practically sing some of those songs before I could talk!

When I was almost 4, my parents divorced and moved out of state, and interestingly, both found their way to the Episcopal Church.

When I was 9, my dad remarried in an Episcopal Church in New Jersey, and years later, my mother was received at Palmer Memorial Episcopal Church in Houston. When I would visit my mom, we would attend Palmer together. At the time, I didn't like the "thees" and the "thous" and the music seemed so foreign to me, but I recognized that much of the service was the same as the Roman Catholic mass. As I got older, my siblings stopped attending on Sundays, but for my mom and me, going to church was "our thing." It was our bonding time. Just the two of us.

In high school, I lived with my grandparents in Quincy so that I could attend The Woodward School for Girls. I was preparing to be confirmed in the Catholic Church with my childhood best friend, Angela. Over a

period of months, my mom tried to make a case as to why I should be confirmed in the Episcopal Church instead, but I refused. The Roman Catholic Church was familiar to me and, honestly, I thought that it would be flaky to change denominations at a time when I was supposed to be confirming the faith that I grew up in.

Fast forward to graduate school, when Angela and I were singing weekly in the choir at St. Joseph's Catholic Church where we were confirmed together. Despite my attendance at church and my dedication to the choir, it was starting to feel like it was no longer a fit, but I wasn't sure what to do...

Months later, and quite by accident, my younger brother came out to me as being gay. I was the first person in the family to know. And despite knowing me as his constant supporter for his entire life, the first thing he said was, "You hate me now, right?" I said, "What?" He said, "You're Catholic, so you hate me now, right?"

This was a turning point that truly made me question my membership in the Roman Catholic Church. How could I consider myself a card carrying member of a church that would not accept my very own brother? Luckily, I had the opportunity to receive some counsel from Mary Beth Conroy who was serving at Trinity Episcopal Church in Boston, but whom I previously knew from Palmer. The ideas she presented were valuable in helping me understand the spiritual direction I wanted to take, but I wasn't quite ready to make a move.

In March of 2007, one of my best friends, Ryan, bought a house in Pembroke and our friend, Joe, and I moved in. With Ryan being a police officer and Joe a paramedic, my mother joked that all I was missing was a firefighter! My new commute had me driving Rt. 53 to North

Weymouth every day. Occasionally, I'd look over at St. Thecla's Catholic Church on the way, but I felt no energy. No pull. However, every time I passed by "The Episcopal Church Welcomes You" sign on the side of the road, it called to me. Nagged me even. I knew it was only a matter of time. One day after work, I finally followed the sign to find this charming, white church building that all of a sudden felt like home. I checked the service times to make sure that I'd still be able to sleep in and make it to church, but I still didn't go.

On Mother's Day, I woke up early and thought of my mom (and felt the nagging of that sign...) and figured it would make her happy if I went to church. On my first Sunday here, Ama Beth read "I'll Love You Forever" and the children gave a flower to every woman, not just the mothers, and I cried. And I knew I'd be back. I became very involved at St. Andrew's right away: I joined the handbell choir and attended a workshop with Beth on how to perform a hip hop mass, as she and I worked on a plan to reach more young adults and teens. I actively participated in Rosie's Day, the auction, and the Christmas Fair. Despite being one of the few twenty-somethings, I definitely felt a part of this community.

That December, I made the decision to move to Texas. My sister was pregnant and I missed being near my mom. At my last service, Ama Beth presented me with a pen and ink drawing of St. Andrew's that I carried with me on multiple subsequent moves and that hangs in my dining room today. My nephew, Jaxon, was born in Houston in July 2008. Later that year, we planned to visit Quincy for Christmas and decided that we should have Jaxon baptized then and that St. Andrew's would be the perfect place - both for my heartfelt connection to the church and the proximity to both sides of the family in Massachusetts

and New Hampshire. I contacted Beth, and despite it being Advent, she was open and accommodating to perform the baptism as requested. And it was everything we hoped it would be.

After a couple of years living in Texas, I moved to Seattle. I continued to visit family on the South Shore and my church family at St. Andrew's, and sometimes, my mom would come, too. She loved St. Andrew's for all the same reasons I did.

In 2012, my mom was diagnosed with Stage 4 cancer. Her condition was serious, but we were all hopeful for a life-saving liver resection. I left everything behind in Seattle to take care of her full-time during treatment. When she was diagnosed, she immediately said, "I want to go home and be by my ocean." So after five months of chemotherapy, when the scans revealed that her condition was not operable, her oncologist encouraged us to travel to Boston and spend time with family.

She and I arrived in May of 2013 and had two wonderful weeks of visiting with family, including attending church at St. Andrew's with Jaxon, until she had a complication which required surgery and prevented her from having chemo or scans for two months. I immediately got in touch with Ama Beth, who came to the hospital, and continued to visit my mom, and offer support to me, throughout the summer. That summer not only meant caring for mom, but also returning to Seattle to move out of my apartment and retrieve my dog, and finding housing locally, while both of us were on leave from our jobs. Ama Beth and other friends at St. Andrew's surrounded us with support during a very difficult season, and when it came time to bury my mom in September 2013, it meant so much to me to be in the

church that she and I loved so much, with a rector who had gotten to know her personally and a music director who was willing to customize the service according to her uncommon wishes.

Because church was “our thing,” it was nearly impossible for me to attend a Sunday service without ending up in tears. Everything reminded me of my mom. So I took a break for a few years, attending occasionally when I felt strong enough. During that time, I was thankful to have the continued support of Ama Beth and other church friends. I knew that I would be welcomed home to St. Andrew’s with open arms when I was ready. When I found out that Ama Beth was retiring last fall, I decided that it was time. And I was, in fact, welcomed back with open arms.

A few months later, Bill asked me to join the Vestry (with only a little arm twisting) and this fall, I volunteered to be a member of the Rector Search Committee and to teach Church School. I am so happy to be back at St. Andrew’s full-time after a journey that started ten years ago. I am thankful for the opportunity to see my nephew participate in baptisms at the same font where he was first welcomed into this church family. I am committed to preserving the history, strengthening the present, and the building the future of my church home – the community that has remained constant for me, despite geography and life circumstances.

So that is my WHY:

Why I drive from Quincy to Hanover every Sunday, even though there are parishes in closer proximity

Why I serve on the Vestry and the Rector Search Committee

Why I volunteer my time and creative energy to teach Church School

Why I bring Jaxon here to help shape his spiritual development

Why I give as generously as I can as a single person to the Annual Stewardship Campaign

As a fundraising professional at the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory, I know first-hand the reasons why people don't give: they think that the greater organization, in this case the diocese, is giving more financial support than it actually is; they think someone else will do it; they think they can't afford it; or they think that what they have to offer is not valuable enough.

What IS true is that diocesan support is only a small part of the puzzle; other parishioners are giving, but we need the participation of all church members; AND, most importantly, EVERY gift is valuable, no matter the size, when it is given in faith and with love.

During this season of giving, I encourage you to think about your WHY, to be prayerful in your discernment, and to be as generous as you can in your giving to St. Andrew's, when you consider all that you receive from this blessed place.

As of today, we have received \$75,000 in pledges - which is wonderful, and we thank all of you who have already sent your pledges in - but it also means that we will need an additional \$40,000 to reach our goal.

As you are making your Holiday To Do List, filled with decorating, shopping and spending time with loved ones, I encourage you to add "Make my annual pledge to St. Andrew's" to your list in the next couple

of weeks. The pledges that we are able to count at the end of this calendar year will significantly inform our budget planning for 2018.

Thank you for your time, thank you for your generosity, and thank you so much for being part of my WHY. God bless.