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St. Francis Episcopal Church
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A love letter to St. Francis

I briefly attended a Presbyterian Church in Orange California and at 16 was baptized. Even then I was looking for meaning. My mom liked to say it didn't take, because shortly after the ceremony, I stopped going. No special reason—I simply didn't think, feel, or act any differently; and I thought, what's the point?

In my twenties, I moved to the high mountains of Colorado. The majesty of the Rockies stirred me, and at times I could feel the spirit; but it remained shrouded—hidden by the material world and my own wants and desires.

Enter my thirties—Don and I married and began our family. A couple of years into motherhood, and my occasional foray into finding my higher purpose, became an urgent quest. I wanted for them what I lacked—a concrete moral framework to buttress them as they grew. A lapsed Catholic, Don half-heartedly suggested Roman Catholicism. I countered by saying any faith that wouldn't allow females to become priests was no place to raise a child. But what about a different church, I thought? Now there was an idea I hadn't really considered. So I did what I always do when searching for answers, I read to help me collect my thoughts and I talked to friends. Terry Murphy was one of those friends and she understood immediately. "Come to St. Francis," she said. "It's progressive," she assured me. "The message and the community are very welcoming. They like kids," she explained. And the clincher, "We have a few Roman Catholics. Donald will feel right at home." During those early years, the St. Francis community and Richard Mayberry's sermons became my lodestar as I navigated the vagaries of motherhood. Then about ten years in, I experienced my own burning bush moment. Maybe it was God talking, maybe it was an epiphany, but I heard as plain as day someone say,

Don't worry about the kids. It's you I'm after. I'll take care of them in my own good time.

One might say I entered the next phase, but honestly, it was more like the journey began that night. No longer was I attending church because that's what a family should do. Now I needed it. I listened, observed, absorbed, read, and emulated. I tried on ideas, discarding them as too parochial, supernatural, or harsh, until I came to see Jesus as the embodiment of love. Love in the face of tyranny, power, and hatred. Love when it was hard to love. Love when everything screams for a different response. I no longer cared whether the sea parted, or the Jesus' birther stories were true. Like all great fiction, the underlying message was more profound and real than any accurate historical recounting of

events. With new insight, I took stock of my life and slowly began to alter my course—aligning my work and activities with a new understanding of how to live into my values.

Then Don died and my world turned upside down. I was bereft, lost, and afraid. Like a boat on a stormy sea, I was tossed into mind-numbing grief. Into that vortex stepped God, in the name of St. Francis, who showered me with love.

You fed me when I couldn't feed myself. You stood me up when I couldn't get out of bed. An army of friends cleaned, boxed, and carried away 34 years of accumulated detritus. You sent love letters, texts, emails, phone calls, and books. You made room for Don in a Columbarium that had no space. And you collected money. Enough money to allow me to pay for Don's funeral.

In short St. Francis saved my life.

More than that, it showed me what God's love looked like in action. It has become my roadmap, my moral compass. Because I will never be able to repay the debt I owe St. Francis, I concentrate on mirroring that love so that one day I might become someone who deserves such grace. And when I fail, which is daily, I remind myself that even in my darkest moments I am loved.

Thank you St. Francis. And thank you Mark, for your guidance, strength, intelligence, kindness, resolve, and commitment. You have been a friend and mentor, not only to me, but to all who call St. Francis our spiritual home. We are truly blessed by you.

With love and gratitude,

Julia Wade

PS: Please to apply this check to reduce the church's 2018 outreach contribution.