

November 13, 2016

I had a beautiful speech all written about a week ago, about how St. Francis was like a second family to me, complete with more crazy aunts and uncles than anyone could ever want. It was beautiful and sappy and you all deserved it, both the good and the bad. But then I woke up on Wednesday, and somehow wanted to say something else, so that speech will sit in an envelope and wait for another day.

Mark asked me to kick off Stewardship season by saying a few words about What St. Francis means to me, and I'd like to state it as simply as I can. St. Francis is my bedrock foundation – this community, you. This is where I turn when I feel weak and frustrated and beaten down. You may not know it, but you restore my faith in humanity. You nurture me back to sanity and give me confidence to walk back out into the world and try to do just a little bit better every day.

How can you do all this, without even knowing it? When I wake up on a Wednesday fearing that almost half of my fellow Americans don't share our fundamental Christian value of loving our neighbor as ourselves, I take comfort in knowing exactly where to find the other half.

- At St. Francis, we don't ban Muslims, we break bread with them when they end their fast at Ramadan.
- We don't bully or denigrate those who are different from us, we welcome them with open arms and include them in our community. Because as it says on our letterhead, Diversity is God's idea.
- We don't have a glass ceiling – we have wonderful female leaders in our Wardens, our Deacon, and our Vicar setting a beautiful example for our sons and daughters.
- And most importantly, we don't build walls, we build bridges in our community through our outreach programs. Many of these programs need us now in unimaginable ways.

As many of you know, during the Discernment process we established a formal mission statement which emerged from a long series of cottage meetings and consultation with virtually everyone in this room. It is a living representation of our shared values. The final line of that statement is as follows: ***[Our Mission is] to engage with our community and live as Jesus taught: seeking and serving Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves and respecting the dignity of every human being***

Regardless of who you voted for, we have common ground here at St. Francis through this shared purpose. I am proud of this community and our aspiration to live as Jesus taught. For me, St. Francis is nothing less than the foundation upon which we can build the type of world I want to live in.

That is what St. Francis means to me, and I ask you to join me in two things.

First - find your strength here, as I do. We can all be healed here. We can make a bigger difference together.

Second - support St. Francis. Now more than ever, the world needs places like this. And people like you to sow peace and love in the face of division and hate.

Thank you.