

Good morning.

October 29, 2017

When I was asked to speak today it was simply suggested that I talk about what I like about St. Francis Church. I'll tell you one thing is the insightful sermons, like the one we just heard here today, that I so appreciate. Week after week, Mark and Deborah help us contextually apply the New Testament teachings of the Bible to our 21<sup>st</sup> century world.

We all know what stewardship means. Every nonprofit organization must raise money. Ramona and I pay a participation fee every time our kids play a sport or do a musical or dance a ballet. Jewish temples have various membership fees. Many churches suggest a 10% tithe based on your wages. I was in a Southern Baptist church many years ago, and it was the stewardship drive, and a congregant asked "Is the 10% tithe on our wages before or after taxes?" The preacher didn't miss a beat and said "Before; because it was God who blessed you with the money to pay those taxes!"

I'm sure you all know that things are tight here. We have cut back nearly to the bone in most departments. But the reason we need to care for and grow this church goes much deeper than maintaining our music program, which I am so proud of and would like to see grow, or expanding our outreach, or supporting so many of the other programs we'd like to see flourish here.

But stewardship also means "The careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care, something of great personal value or importance."

As I have heard many other members say as they stand here, I will simply repeat: We need to steward this church because of the message that it brings to this small corner of Fairfield County, and to the world.

I am very excited to currently be doing a show in Norwalk right now. What a joy to see these wonderful actors wrapping themselves up in these imaginary characters and bringing them to life on stage. It reminds me why actors tend to be so liberal in their thinking: Because they are constantly walking in the shoes of other people, always trying to make sense out of and understand humans that are not like them!

The people and clergy here at Saint Francis are very much like that- trying to understand, nurture, respect and love EVERYONE.

That is incredibly important to Ramona and me, especially as we raise children in this dynamic and frustrating time.... And the fact that we had Girls, we wanted them to know that, as women, they have the same opportunities in this world as men; that they can be whatever they want to be. That is another one of the

important messages of St. Francis. Equality: Women, Men, all races and cultures, LGBT, are all welcome here. That is the true message of Jesus of Nazareth. That's why we come here. That's why we invite our friends to come here.

...Because it is strikingly clear that over the past few months it has become almost fashionable to be intolerant, tribal, racist, xenophobic, nationalistic, exclusionary. ... and the list goes on. These attitudes didn't appear overnight, nor can they be blamed on any one particular politician.

The responsibility of *stewardship of a nation* belongs to the people of the nation.

So we need to ask ourselves: what kind of a nation do we want to be?

The nation that the people here at St. Francis want to see is the nation I want to see. That's what I love about this church.

I have an old high school friend who is a conference minister (like our Bishops) in the United Church of Christ. We have been in touch over the last few months, mostly discussing the current problems our country is facing. He told me that his daughter was on her honeymoon, and that she and her new husband were in the hotel next door to the Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas on the night of the shooting there. He said they were safe, but they heard and saw the whole thing.

So now, because big money lobbyists control many politicians and don't want to regulate guns at all; for the rest of their lives, this young couples honeymoon will be about that tragedy.

And that's just one unhappy topic. We can pick so many issues that most of us here are concerned about in our society, and the bottom line always seems to be- where the money is.

So what can we do?

...we can support, nurture and grow this church: this church full of dignity, compassion, inclusiveness and love. Ramona and I are so glad that our children have gotten the foundation of their faith from Father Mark and this congregation.

So give what you can. Invite your friends to services, or a concert, or a midnight run or a book club.

I believe that this congregation has the power to make a difference.

Every one of us here has the power to change lives.

Don't ever forget the son of the carpenter, who was never elected to an office, never invented anything, never held a title, didn't start a corporation, and the only crown he ever wore was one of thorns, and yet he changed the world.

Jesus didn't come here to start a church, but to remind us that the power of peace, forgiveness and love, starts with each and every one of us: That we must care for ALL our brothers and sisters.

That's what Saint Francis Church means to me.

That's why, on behalf of my family, I thank you for past and continued support.

Thanks

Frank M.