

If you're sitting here this morning you are part of a very clear minority population ---that is, people who are attending church this Sunday. There are lots of statistics about church affiliation and attendance, and some of them are conflicting, but without a doubt the number of people who attend a church service on any given Sunday is definitely a minority. I've seen the number 20% but I suspect it may even be lower than that.

So, WE are all people who, for whatever reason, think that a connection to a church is important, and we each have different reasons for that. I'd like to tell you a little bit this morning about why church is important to me, and in particular, why St. Francis church is important to me.

In thinking about this, I've divided it into three categories. First is why St. Francis Church is important to me at this point in my life. I have been a Christian all my life and it is important for me to have a place to profess and to think about my Christian faith. I like St. Francis church because I can do that in a way that is personal and flexible.

Being part of a community is also very important to me. I've been a member of several other churches where I felt anonymous, but it is difficult, if not impossible to be anonymous here.

And I am proud to be part of a church that does not shy away from talking about controversial issues. For example, joining with the interfaith community in August to take a public stand against the hatred and violence demonstrated in Charlottesville, VA

I was also proud to be part of Miles for a Mission, which raised money and visibility for Building One Community, an organization serving immigrants, many of whom are feeling very frightened and disconnected these days.

The second reason St. Francis is important to me is because I want to be sure that I have a faith community to turn to when I face adversity. I have seen the wonderful support that we all give each other during periods of hardship and sorrow, and I trust that if I am ever in need of that support, I will receive it. An example of that is how the parish responds so generously to any personal crisis. Having organized a few receptions after funerals, I always so moved by how many people jump in to help.

Another example is last December, when Maria Mills daughter died suddenly. Although Maria and her family have cleaned the church property for 20 years, many of us have never met her. But within 2 weeks, we had raised \$1350 to help with funeral expenses.

The third reason St. Francis is so important to me, and perhaps this is the most important, is that it is such a welcoming community. We are always trying to find new members, and the reason isn't simply to get more people to make donations. I hear people say so often that we have something very special here, and that we need to share it. I think that is true.

Which brings me to the reason that I encourage each of you to be as generous as possible during this stewardship drive. You know we've had a tough few years, and have had to make some painful cuts, but through it all, I think we have never lost sight of our core values. I think it is critically important that we continue to thrive and be strong, so that we are able to continue to be a force in the community, and as important, a beacon for anyone who is searching for something in their life.