



ASCENSION PLEDGE 2012

The annual stewardship campaign continued Sunday, November 6, with parishioner Doug Mose sharing with us why Church of the Ascension is important in his life to the end that his remarks, and those of three other parishioners, will prompt us to ponder why this Church is important in our own lives. By the Feast of Christ the King, November 20th, the Treasurer hopes to receive your pledge card which expresses your commitment to make a tangible offering of support for the work of this Church in 2012. Doug Mose's remarks follow.



Four years ago, I was done with God—and I thought He was done with me.

I had settled into a comfortable atheism that meant Sunday mornings were for the *New York Times* and long breakfasts, Christians were for making fun of, and the Church—well, the Church wasn't good for much of anything at all.

I had arrived at this contented impiety by a well-trod path.

The short story is that I am a former Lutheran pastor—and that I am also a gay man. And, up until two years, those two things didn't mix.

The ELCA (the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America of which I was a member and a pastor) has since changed its position on gay and lesbian clergy, but that change didn't come early enough or quick enough for me.

And so, instead, I struggled—I struggled with the church's teachings, with my place in the church, and with my own overwhelming loneliness. Finally, that struggle became too much, and I left the church. And, in the process, I also lost my faith.

I became what Dostoevsky has said is the most spiritually dangerous of combinations: a man with seminary education and a complete lack of faith. I knew a lot about Christianity: enough to attack its weak points, to mock its failings and undermine the faith of people around me.

And I was happy about that ... for almost 10 years. More than once during that time, someone would say to me, "I don't think God is done with you yet." And I would think to myself ... "Oh, what a fool."

But something funny happened.

It was a Sunday morning in December, 2007. It was cold and we had had a blizzard the day before. But the sky was clear, and there hadn't been enough traffic yet to "dirty-up" the snow. I was done with the *Sunday Times* and the city looked beautiful – it made me want to do something "Christmassy."

The stores weren't open yet—it was too early to go shopping. But I remembered something I from my seminary days down in Hyde Park—there was an Anglo-Catholic church that had a good choir somewhere on LaSalle Street. Going there would be the perfect holiday concert.

So I did a little Googleing, and found the Church of the Ascension: LaSalle Street—check; Anglo-Catholic—check; good music listed on the website—check. That was the place and Mass was at 11:00. Perfect, I had a half-hour to get there.

When I walked in the door and picked out a seat in the very back pew, I made a few rules for myself: I wouldn't sing. I wouldn't pray. I wouldn't talk to anybody. And I certainly wouldn't take communion. I would just sit and watch and listen.

And so I did.

Gaudete Sunday, 2007—I still remember it: David's organ prelude, and then silence and a bell. And everyone standing, and an Advent hymn and the procession coming through St. Michael's door ... beautiful rose colored vestments... the rood screen gate ... the high altar ... incense and holy water... kneeling and praying ... the Host and the Chalice at the elevation ... and reverence and mystery everywhere.

It was beautiful. And so I came back—first one Sunday and then another.

And slowly, slowly, Sunday by Sunday, my little rules fell away.

The back pew? I moved up a little closer (although not too far—I still like it there in the back).

No talking to anybody? Cliff Green and Jim Drury made that hard to do.

No singing?—How can an old Lutheran resist all the German chorales David plays?

No praying? Once you're singing the hymns ... the prayers come pretty quickly.

And no communion? Eventually that rule fell by the wayside too, and I received the Sacrament for the first time in many years kneeling at this altar rail.

Around that time, Fr. Fertig asked me if I wanted to join the parish—and I told him he would have to be patient with me. And he was ...and about year later, I officially joined the Church of the Ascension.

You know, my friends, it turns out that I was right—but not in the way that I thought. All those many times someone said "God isn't through with you yet" and I thought "Oh, what a fool"?—There was a fool in the room. But what I didn't know then, and I'm happy to say now, is that the fool was me.

The power of God's Spirit had not given up on me, even when I had given up on Him. The Holy Spirit, as he so often does, was patiently waiting to work again upon my heart.

Why is the Church of the Ascension so important to me? Because it was through that pew, and that organ and that choir loft ... and this pulpit and this assembly, and that altar that God came again into my life and brought me back to the Faith that I love.

And that's why I'm happy to stand here on a Stewardship Sunday—and to say how special this place is. Holy things happen here. Lives are changed. Souls are saved. People are brought to God.

It happened to me—and I know it can and does happen to others.

That's why I support the Church of the Ascension with my pledge and my offerings ... and not only with my money, but with also the time I volunteer here at Church. And that's why I have the sheer nerve to stand up here this morning and ask all of you to do the same.

The ministry that happens here is important. And it relies on you and me – it relies on our financial support and our active involvement, demonstrating the difference God has made in our own lives, and the same difference He can make in the lives of others.

Who knows when the next person – hungry for God and not even knowing it—may walk in those doors?

It could be this Sunday. It could be today.

What sort of a welcome will he or she receive?

Will they experience the quiet dignity of the 8:00 AM Rite 1 Mass? The cozy familiarity of the Sung Mass at 9:00? Or the beauty and glory of the 11:00 Solemn High Mass?

Will they experience the love and Christian community we show for each other? The opportunities for study or service that we make available?

In other words, will they, too, experience God in this place?

The answers to all of those questions are up to us.
