Stewardship Letters

St. Martin-in-the-Fields, Lumberton NJ 08048

**Diane Todd**

My name is Diane Todd. I’m 92 years old, and a widow. I’ve been a member of St. Martin’s for about 10 years. My husband and I originally came from Philadelphia, where we attended a large Episcopal Church as youngsters. We were involved in all the youthful activities of the Church – Sunday School, Choir, girls friendly, acolytes, etc. When W.W. II ended and 1our1 young men came home, we formed a Young Adult Group, about 24 of us. We helped with bazaars, dinners, Vestry, etc. We held weekly dances, bringing in the young people in the Community. This is how I met Charles. He was 6 years older than me; we dated, then married and when the children were born, were Baptized there. When we moved to New Jersey we attended several Churches while the children were growing up. When they left home and marred, we went back to our Church in Philadelphia, becoming very active and more involved for many years, until Charles’ health deteriorated. One Sunday we attended St. Martin’s, two gentlemen, John and Mike, saw me helping to get Charles out of the car, and came out to help, and did so every Sunday that we were there. We sat through that one Sunday, listening to everyone as they gave their reports about what was happening at St. Martin’s. We were very impressed and decided this was what we were looking for. A Church where everyone was involved, both in the Church and the Community. It was a family Church, and we became part of the family. When Charles passed away, my children were very concerned for me, and I remember Mother Powell, Deacon Mickey and Marsha telling them “Don’t worry about your Mother, we’ll put her to work,” and they did. It’s a true saying “When the Lord closes a door, He opens another.”

My personal feelings about Stewardship are very simple – to me it’s really just another word for helping, caring, giving in whatever way you can – your time, talent, and tithing. It can mean sitting with a sick friend, sharing a problem, enjoying looking at family pictures, sharing the good times with he bad. There were many times when the children were growing up, and money was very tight, it was a struggle for us to make our 10% tithes, so we tried helping in other ways. I don’t think I can put a time on when we started practicing Stewardship. Even when I was younger, I was involved somehow. Sometimes I would go to Church with my maternal grandparents. They were Charter members of an Episcopal Church in Olney, Pennsylvania. One of my Uncles played the organ and sang in the Choir.

Now that I am older, I feel an even deeper obligation to give my 10%, just as I feel an obligation to help when needed at the Church. I pay my apartment rent and other necessary bills for services rendered, and they don’t come near to what I have received from God’s Grace. I have been blessed many times over the years, when problems seemed insurmountable, my prayers were answered – maybe not always the way I had hoped, but in the knowledge that I felt God was listening and leading me in the right direction. I Thank Him every day for the Guidance that I know comes from Him. My family calls me constantly with “Will you put so-and-so on your prayer list.” They know I have a time set aside every day for talking with Him, have a time set aside every day for talking with Him.

When my daughter was alive, she was very active in Church, my younger son and his wife are active in their Church in Harleysville, Pennsylvania. Now the other two boys do not attend regularly, but I’m comfortable with what they do. Charles is a Navy Veteran and is active at his V.F.W. Post and cares for his wife, who is somewhat handicapped. Paul lives in Pennsylvania farm country and helps his neighbor delivering milk and cares for the animals and young calves while they travel, participating in farm shows. Paul makes beautiful stained-glass windows, sometimes taking two years to complete. The profit he makes goes to a foundation in Tyler Quinter’s name, a little boy who died with numerous heart problems.

# Merrill Hunter

13 years ago the only thing I knew about St. Martin's Church was that it had a pretty red door and looked like the picture postcard version of a church. I didn't know about the hoagie sales, rummage sales or any other wonderful ministries that make up so much of our collective time, effort and joy. Within that year before I came to St. Martins, I started researching different religions. With two small ones and a new appreciation for single moms, I wanted to find a place for socialization and spiritual growth. I'll admit, I never thought I would find a family. Having done my research correctly, and leaning a little on the Catholic tradition I had decided to follow in college, along with a sprinkling of early church knowledge, the red door still spoke to me, and so did the Episcopal Church. So I tried it out. I came to a late morning Sunday service. There were 5 people there. We all came up as close as we could in order to hear better. Afterwards there was coffee. And a priest who was a Trekkie? I came back again the next Sunday with my daughters, and somehow never stopped coming. The people at St. Martin's became my family. Not only did I love spending time at St. Martin's, as a bonus I felt such a recharge every Sunday. Like I could take on the next week. Soon enough, I was persuaded to help out making hoagies. Boy that was fun! Now I am spoiled for any other hoagie except a St. Martin Hoagie. Soon I wanted to participate in more and more ministries. It felt great to help others and to have fun doing it. St. Martin's does so much good especially for its diminutive size. I think even many larger churches are hard put to have as much heart as St. Martins, and as strong a sense of family. When you find a good family, you want to keep it around and keep it alive to help all those people who benefit from the St. Martin's ministries. That's why I think this time of Stewardship is so important. I think we all help ourselves just as much as the important work that we do helps others. I think the Holy Spirit has led us all here to this church, and we need to do our best to make sure St. Martin's keeps reflecting the love and kindness and magic that we have always held dear.

# Steve Alexander

A lot of events will mark anyone’s time if you stay around long enough. We came as a family; Carin, Emory, Kaelyn and I to St. Martin’s on the same morning that the beloved Denny Green had passed away. The church was suffering from a great loss, and we had no idea what had transpired earlier in the day. But later that day, Mother Powell made a call to our home, to introduce herself, and to assure us that we were very welcome at St. Martin’s. Our family, and the church’s family grew that day.

We were looking for a new church, at which to have Kaelyn baptized, and decided on St. Martin’s because of the words of John Powell to Carin and I when we were both attending Grace Church in Merchantville. There’s a nice little church in Lumberton you should try, he said, and I highly recommend the rector there! From my friendship with father John in 1994, through a wedding and baptism of Emory, our path led to St. Martin’s.

It is hard to imagine just how vibrant and alive St. Martin’s was back in those days; All Parish Retreats every year, a Senior and a Junior Youth Group, a full Sunday School, There were dinners a few times a year, and a modest little hoagie sale every month. We sent a group to the Acolyte Festival every February. The youth group organized outings, and even made us become a ‘Green’ church with re-useable plates and cups for Coffee hour. The youth group even was a driving force behind the now 14 year + tradition of feeding the homeless and hungry at St. Paul’s Camden on the last Sunday of every month.

Even a 1000 year flood could not hold back the worship, ministry and vitality of St. Martin’s! We set up a tent up the street in Lumberton to worship. We relocated our Hoagie sale to St. Paul’s Lutheran church in Hainesport. With volunteer labor and a lot of donations, we renovated the Parish hall, kitchen, and part of the rectory.

We got some very positive press coverage, and Hoagie sales skyrocketed to over 1400 sandwiches a month. We were packing the chapel frequently. There was a large committee for Outreach, named after our benefactor, Virginia Rudolph. We thought we were unstoppable!

The engagement of a parish development consultant was sponsored by a group of parishioners, so that there was minimal funds needed from the church. It seemed like a grand idea, to have guidance to take the church through growth, to a next level. In retrospect, I see it was not a good fit, and most of the task forces were more or less forced to press their agendas for competing resources. The heart of St. Martin’s was not really into it, and we started to see some people distance themselves.

With the illness and retirement of Mother Powell, another crossroads was approached. St. Martin’s dutifully followed the Diocesan program to call a new Priest. It was arduous, and we were very disappointed in the thin level of support and guidance from the Diocese. Through it all, we grew as a member of the body of the church by cultivating Worship Leaders to give us morning prayer services, during our search and the supply clergy, thanks to the vision of Mother Powell to empower us. God blessed us regardless, and Father Eric was installed as Priest-in-Charge both here and at his home parish.

Then, after a few years under the mentorship of Lou Blum, it was my turn to step up to the role of Hoagiemeister. I remember Geri with a big smile, saying “You’re the Hoagimeister now!” I knew I couldn’t say no. In the interim between first coming to this church, I have been a lay reader, and acolyte, Eucharistic Minister and Worship Leader. I have served on the vestry twice, and even took a turn as treasurer.

I’ve told this story because these are all opportunities open to anyone. There are 100’s of things that we do in the Name of God, that need people like you and me. And my latest adventure is in the School for Ministry. By the way, the school is open to anyone, it exists for the purpose of empowering people who want to enter ordained, or lay ministry, with educational training. And it’s pretty economical too (but enough advertising). My message here is I have been given gifts, by the people of this church, who are my family, by this Diocese, that is my community, and by my Lord and by the Holy Spirit.

Where your heart is, there will be your treasure, is what I’ve heard. All of the things I’ve talked about take effort, and yes, they take funding. We can all give out time, talent, and treasure. And we can see these multiplied by the grace of God and our faith community.