



2020 STEWARDSHIP CAMPAIGN

WE ARE... ST. BRENDAN'S!

Stewardship Talk
Tom Waseleski, Sr. Warden
Sunday, November 10, 2019

Two men were marooned on a desert island surrounded by sharks. They were out of food and water. One man was worried and scared, and he paced back and forth. The other man leaned back against a palm tree and just sunned himself.

After a while, the first man couldn't stand it. Out of frustration, he said to the second man, "How can you be so relaxed! Aren't you afraid that we're going to die?"

"No-o-o-o," said the second man. "I give faithfully to my church every week, and it's Stewardship Month back home. They'll find me!"

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Yes, this is a talk about stewardship, but it's not really a talk about money. What I have for you instead is a love story, and it goes like this. Thirty-two years ago, in 1987, St. Brendan's Episcopal Church was founded.

That's it. I could easily say, *end of story*, except for two things: The story's not over and I'd be leaving out some wonderful details.

Details like, did you know St. Brendan's sent a caravan of people to Ground Zero after 9/11 to give comfort and aid to recovery workers? Details like, did you know St. Brendan's had a Habitat for Humanity chapter that went out each month to build houses for people who couldn't afford one? Details like, did you know our teenagers took pilgrimages to New Mexico, New York City and other places — pilgrimages that brought them face to face with human need while helping them to grow spiritually?

This is all part of the love story, the story in which **we are ... St. Brendan's.**

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On Rochester Road hundreds of drivers pass by our building each day and, if all they see is a church that's busy on Sundays, they would be very mistaken. Sure, the parking lot is packed for two morning services, Sunday School, occasional adult studies and the ever-popular hospitality hour. But visit here on a weekday or a weeknight, and you would be just as amazed at the number of people here.

Some of them have no religious connection at all. Neighbors trying to break the grip of alcohol. Overeaters getting on the road to healthy living. Indian culture groups teaching dance and language to children.

Others are Brendanites seeking God in Bible studies, OR discussing the ways of the modern Episcopal Church, OR rehearsing the music that is the choir's gift to the congregation. Others are volunteers teaching English to immigrants. Parishioners growing vegetables for the food pantry. Members picking up and delivering the monthly meal made here for homeless women. Then there is the youth group. A book club. A hiking group. Knitters, for goodness sake!

Last June, 30 Brendanites marched in the Pittsburgh Pride Parade downtown. We showed up with signs, carried a banner, handed out fliers and stickers. As we started down Fifth Avenue, where most of the spectators stood, a huge roar from the crowd went up. It was a reaction to the fact that our church was publicly proclaiming that God loves them and they are welcome here. One of our members, Bill Graham, leaned over to me and said, "I cannot believe that I'm part of a church that is doing this." Well, you can believe it, Bill, because **we are ... St. Brendan's.**

This church is also special for things you won't read about in the Little Log or the ministry guide. Many of you call St. Brendan's "family" and, while that may sound a little cliché, it's still true. Just ask those who have been helped through heartache by a friendly visitor, or who have gotten a boost during illness from a meal maker. When someone has no way to get to critical medical appointments, we set up a drivers' rotation to deliver him there. When someone's hands are crippled with pain, we go to her kitchen to help cut vegetables. This is all part of the love story, too.

Last spring Saundy and I had an eye-opening visit with two elderly friends in Buffalo. Debbie is in declining health and husband Jim is doing his best to hold things together. He still works to support the household and does all the cooking, cleaning and laundry. He also cares for Debbie, whose mobility is more and more limited.

Jim and Debbie have no nearby support from family or friends. They belonged to a church once, but that was decades ago. Now, except for Jim going to work and the supermarket, they are practically shut-ins – locked away from both help and hope. It was sad to see and a sad ride home for us. One thing we both realized, though: Our friends' lives would not be in this state if they were part of a caring congregation – like this one, where **we are ... St. Brendan's.**

At times like these I wish I could pick up this place and share its blessings with others far away – and yet we do. We have parishioners who help each month with Trinity Walk-In Ministry downtown, where some of the city's poorest people receive clothing and other essentials. We all help through CRIES Advocacy, in which 10 percent of our parish income is sent outside, to groups that address human need across the country and around the world.

While it's gratifying to know that St. Brendan's has a footprint larger than this building, it's also necessary at stewardship time for each of us to think about where we fit in. What can we do with the time and talent God gave us? What can we give from the bounty we've all received? In the next three weeks you will see bulletin inserts and emails with information to help you answer these personal questions. Father Regis, the vestry and I hope you will take the time to read it. You will also see pledge cards.

We hope you will take one of the cards, sign it and enter the contribution level that reflects your love of and commitment to St. Brendan's. Then drop the card in the collection plate, OR the pledge box in the narthex, OR the church office. All contributions, regardless of size or frequency, are welcome and gratefully received. All contributions are kept in strict confidence; only our parish administrator knows. When you pledge, however, you give the vestry more certainty on how to budget for next year, the 33rd year when **we are ... St. Brendan's.**

I said this would not be a talk about dollars and cents, yet I know some of you want numbers. You want to know if costs will go up in 2020 and whether your level of giving should change. As always, St. Brendan's budget is open for members to see and you'll receive a copy in your coming stewardship materials. Till then, here are a few new numbers.

This year, after seeing the influx of young families, the vestry decided to step out in faith and hire a youth ministry coordinator for our Sunday School and teen programs. The move will raise next year's budget by \$12,000, but it's a necessary commitment to bring our young people to God and to support parents who want a Christian upbringing for their children.

Another new number for next year is \$4,300, the amount that our mortgage with the diocese will increase. Years ago when times were lean, the diocese stood with St. Brendan's by providing relief on our debt. Now it's time to resume paying what we owe and make good on our word.

How do we do this? By increasing the number of pledges and by pledging as if our mission matters. Jesus said, "I have come to give life – life in all its fullness." St. Brendan's mission is the realization of this fullness through: worship of God, service to the world, active concern for each other, and education to expand mind and spirit. So, yes, our mission matters!

Here's my last set of numbers. Last year the vestry set a goal for 2019 of 60 pledges. You responded with 73! This time our goal is 80 pledges, and I have no doubt that we can do it. If you pledged last year, please do so again. If you are new, please commit to St. Brendan's with a first-time pledge.

I grew up in a church where a basket, not a plate, was passed around on Sundays. Parishioners looked inside their wallets or purses before deciding at that moment how much to give. While those contributions helped, they were not thought out in a way that put God first or put the church mission first.

The St. Brendan's of today means so many things to so many people! And that means thinking and praying about ALL the ways we give so that the work of God continues. Matthew 6:21 reminds us, "Wherever your treasure is, your heart will be also." And so, in that spirit, may our hearts show we are committed. May our hearts show we are thankful. Most of all, may our hearts declare that **we are St. Brendan's!**