



I can never out give God

by Pat Wilshusen
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I have been a lifelong Episcopalian and, once on my own, I continued to attend church because that is what one does on Sunday mornings and I put a few dollars into the plate because I knew that was what was expected.

When I was 28 years old, Bob and I bought our home in Newport Hills and I came to St. Margaret's. It was here that I made my first pledge. It was a modest amount but I reasoned that that was OK because only I and our 11-month-old daughter Amy were attending. As a family with a new mortgage we were watching our pennies but I gave to help with the church expenses. From this tiny seed, my journey of faith in and gratefulness to God began to grow.

My first invitation was to help with Sunday School and I said "yes." With two pre-schoolers to keep up with, God stretched my time. As our girls grew I had more discretionary time to volunteer at the church and all kinds of ministries opened to me. Each time I stepped out and said "yes," God provided all that I needed - in skills, time and support. I found joy in serving and was blessed with the friendships of fellow parishioners. During this time I was also studying God's word daily in Bible Study Fellowship and was more attentive to and grateful for how God was working in my life. Each year I increased my pledge as my commitment to God's work in my life and in this place grew.

Parenting is a joy but can also be challenging and I am so grateful that our daughters had the parishioners of St. Margaret's as their extended family. It was here they learned more about God and are still, at the ages of 34 and 37, best friends with several of their Sunday School classmates. They learned the joys of helping others during mission trips, got to know and be loved by other families during parish activities and camping trips, and participated in the liturgy as member of the family choir, serving as ushers and as an acolyte. They've both been married in this church and we've celebrated two family baptisms here. My pledging increased in gratitude to God for all of his provisions and blessings.

I personally have been blessed by the fellowship of St. Margaret's parishioners. Many of you stood by us as we lost Bob's great aunt, both of his parents and our family dog in a 6 month period in 1989, when Bob was given a 50% chance to survive 5 years due to cancer in 1993, and again when he was a pedestrian hit by a truck while on business in the Bay Area a few years later. Presently I am dealing with elderly parents. Each time, the church family has been there for me - through Stephen's ministers, prayer support, cards and an occasional meal. Experiencing God's abundant care, my pledging increased in thanksgiving for each of you and for God's work among us.

With the girls grown and on their own, I am back to being a "household" of just one parishioner, but in addition to continuing to increase my pledge, I give when God shows me a need. When the Spirit's "still small voice" nudges me, I joyfully make extra contributions and have supported outreach ministries including the Mission to Seafarers, Christmas giving tree, backpacks for kids and items for babies, Nets for Life, and so many other wonderful projects.

I'd always thought it would be wonderful to be a philanthropist but, like most of us, I lacked the millions of dollars I expected it would take. I have learned that in God's economy it's the heart attitude that makes the difference and He returns the generosity of whatever we've given, pressed down and running over. God has stretched our family funds (even in retirement) to be able to be generous and still meet our needs and then some.

I also give for the future. I've been a member of this parish for 36 years now and we are grandparents to three little boys. I want so much for these young men and all children to grow up in the Christian church and in their faith so I continue to volunteer and pledge and Bob and I have made bequests to St. Margaret's in our wills so that the church which we inherited from the early St. Margaret's parishioners will be here for the children and grandchildren of future parishioners.

My growth through the various stages of the stewardship of my time, talents and treasures has been not a conscious, planned strategy but a response to God's love and leading and one that is more obvious to me looking back than when going through it.

My experience is that I can never out give God. When I put Him first in my time and finances, amazing things happen and I find my time and money stretch and grow in ways I'd not thought possible. I have found fulfillment and joy in serving in the church and providing for its needs and in helping to enable our ministries beyond these walls. It gives me a sense of peace in knowing that when I'm no longer alive, some of God's resources that He'd temporarily lent to me will continue to provide for His work here at St. Margaret's for those who will come after us.

Most of all, I celebrate the way God has changed my life and brought me into an awareness of abundance. As I continue to draw closer to God and respond in gratitude, I can only imagine what He might have in store for me in the future. Whether pledging this year will be a first step for you or whether you've been on the journey for sometime, I encourage each of you to join me in making a commitment to return to God a larger portion of your time, talents and treasures this next year. Trust Him enough to make the commitment and be ready to be greatly blessed and pleasantly surprised each time God surpasses your expectations.

With this added step of faith, may we each experience a life of abundance, filled with gratitude and joy.

Giving with Gratitude