

Stewardship Minute Testimonial

2022 Every Member Pledge Campaign
Immanuel Church-on-the-Hill



Good Morning, Church!

by Doug Onley

Good morning, Church!

When I was in East Africa several years ago, that is how every priest or layperson in every Anglican church I visited – “Good morning, *Church*” – addressed their congregation, with “church” added at the end. Last week, you might have noticed that Randy welcomed us to worship with that very phrase. The word “church” is from the Old English *cirice*, [*Seer-a-see*] meaning “the body of Christian believers, Christians collectively.”

“Good morning church” always strikes me as embracing those attending worship in an immediate togetherness, inviting us at the front end of our experience into relationship with God and with each other, welcoming us into a group home of sorts. As I reflected about Immanuel Church-on-the-Hill’s pledge campaign for 2021 – “God is with you *wherever* you go” – the greeting I heard in Africa ... the invitation I heard from our rector just last week ... returned to me over and over.

I cannot say that Kameran and my journey to Immanuel was the result of any deliberate search for a place to worship as a couple, though for Kameran it was a deliberate decision to begin worshiping in an Episcopal Church, since she’d been raised Presbyterian. For myself, I’m a cradle Episcopalian, and In fact, I attended services here occasionally in the early 1990s when I was a single guy living in Del Ray. Rev. Bob Trache was the rector here at the time.

Back then, as I’d done in every place I lived since leaving for college, I sought out an Episcopal church to attend services occasionally on Sunday mornings. I found my way here at my mother’s suggestion to that “congregation that is part of VTS,” as mom phrased it, since both my grandfather and great-grandfather had attended Seminary here. But I was not really part of this congregation in the early 1990s,

except as an itinerant. I've told this story before, but back then I didn't even realize that the church had its own property across Seminary Road! I just came on occasional Sundays, assuming of course I didn't have something else to do.

Then in 2002 Kameran and I became engaged. We were living in Arlington, and I was actually going to St. John's downtown at Lafayette Square. But whether the parish office there never called us back – or the fact that St. John's doesn't have a center aisle for the bride to actually walk down – it was quickly off our list as a suitable church in which to get married. But I remembered Bob Trache's powerful sermons, so I suggested we visit this church over in Alexandria I used to attend.

And as so many others I've spoken with over the years experienced, once we got here we felt right at home. We remember especially the warm welcome from Jane Temoshok, whom the parish lost recently. As we walked into Zabriskie Chapel for worship that morning, Jane showed Kameran this little red book she'd never seen before [the Book of Common Prayer]. We met Doug and Wendy John, and Sam Faeth, who married us 19 years ago in the Seminary Chapel.

What we felt from the start here – what Kathryn Haskin last week phrased so well as the “intangibles” about Immanuel – was like an invitation to someone's home. And to be in community here with you, our Immanuel family, is why we – the Onleys (now three of us) – pledge.

We have watched with amazement as the entire congregation turns out year after year to unload and sell pumpkins for Outreach. We marvel at our clergy's craft as they translate and transport the lessons of the Gospels and our unique faith heritage into meaning in our distracted, modern lives.

Kameran and I delight especially as our daughter is embraced and encouraged and even challenged by her church moms and her church dads. And Sydney is only one of the many youth here at Immanuel who knows this congregation's love and support. This is her church home where she has explored Christ's teaching through Godly Play and Church School and is now continuing her own faith journey through confirmation classes. In addition, you have all taught Sydney's *parents* much about Christian parenting, as evidenced by your own children's obvious affection for you ... in this place ... with the people you have chosen to worship, learn, reflect and have much fun with.

I also thank you for at times your frank admissions about moments of challenge and let-downs when it comes to your own kids. When I stumble as a parent, I know I can depend for support on our Immanuel family ... our church home ... and the role models right here, the good, good people Dodd Simms referred to a couple of weeks back when he spoke about “actual saints.”

We made our first pledge in 2003, and we've continued to give in gratitude – and to increase our financial commitment to Immanuel – every year since. As we have moved stewardship season-to-stewardship-season, pledging has ceased to feel transactional ... it's become transformational. I could honestly say – and I cleared this with Kameran and Sydney so I could speak for the entire family this morning – that giving has invited us into a closer relationship with God ... and with all of you here assembled and out there as part of Immanuel's virtual congregation.

So today on Commitment Sunday, I say in short that we pledge – our family pledges – because we are home.

Good morning, Church!

*Delivered on The Feast of Christ the King and Commitment Sunday
November 21, 2021*