

Good morning, friends. I am Robert DeKalb and I offer this reflection.

In past reflections you have heard stories about how folks were looking for another church and they came upon St. Peter's and found it to their liking. This says a lot about our parish.

My story is a little different. My parents were members here and so I have been a member all my life. I was baptized and confirmed here, attended Sunday school and even played floor hockey in the undercroft during services. I didn't get much out of church because I didn't put anything into it and at the ripe old age of 17 I decided that I didn't need church and I rejected organized religion and God. I spent many years in a spiritual wilderness, but it was OK because I was fortunate to fall in love and marry my beautiful wife Carole, and we had two lovely daughters, Sandy and Ellen. I started a successful career and for a while it was enough that I was a productive member of society and had a good family life. At some point I ran into some problems, a midlife crisis if you will, and I realized that there was something missing in my life. I was lost, but I was blessed to have an awakening, to go through a transformation that helped me to find St. Peter's again. This all sounds pretty cliché but it is true.

There are a couple of reasons for this. The first one is rather simple. Even in my years in the wilderness, I was a "C&E" guy, and I would come on my Mom's birthday and things like that, and I always felt good when I was here, so why not come more often? Secondly, I saw what a positive impact the church had on my daughters through the Rite 13 and J2A programs. Finally, with the influence of Ruth Kirk, our Rector at the time, my parents, and of course, Carole, I came back into the fold and quickly became immersed in church life. I feel like St. Peter's saved my life, spiritually.

After about a year of returning full time, I was asked to join the Vestry, and I was honored. I want to stress this, because if you are ever asked to serve the church in this way, please consider it an honor. At our first meeting, Ruth asked us to go around and tell each other what we thought we could bring to the Vestry. I answered a different perspective. I don't know if this was true but it was clear that I now had a different perspective on life, helping me in my spiritual growth.

Shortly after that, I became reaffirmed in a confirmation service, officially renewing my Baptismal vows. And then, Ruth announced that she was leaving us. I remember speaking to the congregation after that announcement, reminding everyone that we were going to miss her terribly, but we still had each other. I was blessed to be a part of the search process that brought us our beloved Emily, and I continued to serve in different ministries, including the Altar Guild. Shortly after I joined, my Mom passed away, and doing this became a way of honoring her and her wonderful legacy of years and years of service. This is a ministry that is really, really, rewarding.

Aside from our warm and welcoming nature, two things stand out about our church, continuity and willingness to change. And these two things go hand in hand; you don't thrive for 140 years without changing with the times. We were a pioneer in welcoming female clergy by calling Ruth in 1993. We were also a leader in embracing diversity, with, using a term I love, "radical hospitality". Over the years there were disagreements and controversy, but they were largely met with humor and love.

If you want to know what St. Peter's means to me, just look around you. I am often struck by the beauty of our congregation, both individually and collectively, and you are all a blessing in my life.

And so, with the help of our Interim Priest in Charge, and we're praying for you Barb, our journey continues. For another 140 years...? I think it's entirely possible. Thank you.