

Legacy Stewardship Recognition Sunday

SPIRITUAL ANCESTORS OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

Today we acknowledge all those faithful souls who have planted generous seeds that continue to bear fruits in our time. We give our special thanks for their legacy that has been bestowed upon this community of faith. Over time many people have remembered this parish in their wills, and left bequests in support of the ministries of this parish. If it were not for the legacy of these faithful parishioners of the past, this parish would not be able to exist today. These gifts, in their generations, were intended to ensure the life of this community for future generations.

Even though it has been many years since this parish was founded, we still face financial struggles. We strive to keep the weather outside and the heat inside the building. Yet we are the spiritual descendants of all those who have given their blood, sweat, and tears ... along with their resources ... to worship God in this corner of God's vineyard.

I want you to look at the pews on which you are sitting. They show signs of wear and tear that occurs over time. Some people might point to this wear and tear and complain about the condition of this sacred furniture. But take a moment to consider why it is in the shape that it is. The pews are old and cracked because people have been sitting in them for many, many years. The kneelers are lumpy because of the thousands upon thousands of prayers that have been said upon them. And the cushions are worn from all those who have fallen asleep during the many sermons preached from this pulpit.

This space has been blessed by baptisms, and confirmations, and weddings, and funerals. It has held the prayers of countless Sundays and weekday services. People have celebrated birth and life in this sanctuary, and people have grieved death and loss in this sacred space. No doubt there has been rancor and discord displayed here, but also forgiveness, reconciliation, and redemption. The place where you are seated holds the spirits of all those who have sat there in generations past ... and you are blessed by the prayers they have left behind ... prayers for healing, and acceptance, and strength, and openness, and thanksgiving for recovery from addictions, and peace in their hearts, and safe return of loved ones ... all the same prayers that you pray from week to week, and month to month.

Quoted in the bulletin insert this morning, listing many of the legacy donors to the parishes in our diocese, is the rubric from the service in our *Book of Common Prayer* for the *Thanksgiving for a Child*. It reads:

The Minister of the Congregation is directed to instruct the people, from time to time, about the duty of Christian parents to make prudent provisions for the well-being of their families, and of all persons to make wills, while they are in health, arranging for the disposal of their temporal goods, not neglecting, if they are able, to leave bequests for religious and charitable uses. (BCP p. 445)

One might ask why this rubric appears here, in the service for the *Thanksgiving for a Child*. It is because that our blessings also come with responsibility, as any parent knows. Yes, we in this parish have been blessed by our spiritual ancestors ... indeed we stand upon their shoulders. But with that blessing also comes the responsibility to those who follow after us.

And so, as part of our stewardship in this generation, I encourage you to not neglect, "*if you are able, to leave bequests for religious and charitable purposes*" ... including this parish. Include the church in your will. Designate this parish as a beneficiary on an insurance policy, or even of your 401(k) plan. Leave the parish an appreciated asset such as stock, or art work, or even your home, and you may just do your heirs a favor by reducing the inheritance tax on your estate. And no amount is too small. And you will be remembered in generations to come.

Yet ultimately this isn't about money, this is about our faith and what we can leave behind for those who follow us. It is the impression of our knees on those kneelers ... or the scuff marks of our shoes for those who now stand for their prayers. It is the incense of the candles that burn each week that carry our prayers to heaven and leave soot on the ceiling. It is the cries of our babies and the tears from our own eyes ... tears of joy and tears of sorrow. It is the gentle acts of prayerful kindness welcoming strangers; it is the openness to listen to another's troubles and the gift of awkwardness and impotence in response to problems beyond our control. These are the ways you, the people of this parish, have prayed over the years, offering comfort and solace, humbling oneself in forgiveness, and praising God in moments of joy.

Today, on Legacy Recognition Sunday, we remember the heritage and legacy that has been bestowed upon us by those in past generations. Remember, you are the spiritual ancestors of future generations of the faithful who will call this parish their home. Amen.

[We are grateful to The Rev. Ted Voorhees, former Interim Rector of St. John's, Northampton, for letting us share this edited sermon as an inspiration or "sermon starter" for others to use in sermons and homilies on this Legacy Recognition Day 2010.]