

Stewardship Sunday 2/4 – Theme: Service

Address by Tracey Braddick at Evensong

Recently the opportunities to volunteer at St Bartholomew's have increased considerably and I have felt inspired to become far more involved in serving our community.

My husband Steve and I started worshipping at St Bartholomew the Great during the last interregnum. And for a long time, a very long time, that's all I did. I turned up to the Eucharist once or twice a month, enjoyed the music and the liturgy, handed over some cash in a gift aid envelope and left.

There was no opportunity to socialise after the Eucharist back then, so I didn't get to know any other members of the congregation. But at the time that suited me. Part of the problem for me was that I had come from a church with a very small congregation and almost as soon as I started attending I was on the PCC and reading lessons and being a sidesman. I had only just been confirmed, and it was all a bit overwhelming. So coming to a church and being anonymous was rather appealing. But in doing so I was missing out on an essential part of Christian life in that I wasn't a part of our community and I wasn't fulfilling my Christian duty.

Without being preachy about it, the New Testament is full of examples of how Jesus and others served those in need. In the book of James it is written, "Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." (James 2:15-17)

We are lucky in that there aren't many, if any, in our congregation who are poor and destitute, but perhaps some may be lonely or ill. If we are a true community we should make an effort to be there for one another in times of need.

In taking the service of others but not offering anything myself, I was not living my faith.

Over time, I tried to get more involved. I registered on the parochial electoral role. There was a questionnaire about how I could help. I completed it, but I wasn't contacted with any opportunities to volunteer.

Eventually, largely through one or two parents I knew at my daughter's school, I found that there were vacancies on the PCC. I was elected and served from 2004-2007. Around that time I also started stewardship contributions and, at the suggestion of Ian Kelly, became a sidesman. Then in 2005 and 2006 I managed the church fair. With the advent of the Cloister Cafe the church fair stopped and, as there were no other opportunities to volunteer and I was at a particularly busy time in my life, I didn't stand for the PCC again.

For several years, I continued to be a sidesman, until, in January this year, in one of Fr Peter's first sermons here he challenged us with, "how are you going to serve"? It happened to be at an opportune time; I was between contracts so had time to give more of myself. So I volunteered to help sort out a backlog of music that needed filing. Then, thanks to a conversation with Fr Jeremy, I found myself volunteering (or was it volunteered?) to start up the church fair again which is being held on November 11th in case you don't know and there's still plenty of time and space for you to help. I'm also back on the PCC where I've volunteered to write a digital strategy and I read the occasional lesson at the Eucharist.

At the end of this stewardship campaign, you will have been asked to indicate your talents and will be given an opportunity to volunteer. There are plans afoot to follow up on all responses, so you won't be left like I was waiting to be asked to help.

There are many varied ways you can serve our community such as by joining the serving team or Rahere singers, participating in the ministry of welcome as a sidesmen or by serving coffee, reading lessons and helping at the church fair. I'm sure there'll be lots of other opportunities in future. You may even have your own ideas of how you can serve based on your own unique talents.

Other people's service to me led me to the place I am now and I'm very happy to repay by giving of my time and talents (such that I have).

If, knowing that by serving you are living your faith is not enough of an incentive, studies indicate that opportunities to serve others result in a stronger sense of purpose and meaning in life, leading to better mental and physical well-being. This does not mean that serving others is necessary for a strong sense of

meaning and purpose, but such engagement generally helps contribute to gaining this sense. Volunteering together with others enables the creation of strong social bonds, which adds further to a sense of meaningfulness. I know I get a lot more satisfaction out of giving an hour of my time than I do in handing over a stewardship envelope.

The two churches in our parish have served the wider community for nearly 900 years as a place of sanctuary and prayer and when the Cloister cafe was open it also provided sustenance. It not only needs money for Great Projects and daily expenses, but it also needs you; your time and your talents.