

Stewardship Sunday 3/4 – Theme: Community

Address by PCC Member, Karen Falkner, at Evensong

My name is Karen Falkner. I have been asked to give a short address this evening about the community of St Bartholomew the Great and what it means to me.

I have been a regular worshipper at St Bartholomew's for some twelve years and I was baptized by in the Bishop of London in 2007 in the font over there in that corner of the church.

This Sunday – this day of Pentecost and Stewardship – we are all being asked in put our Stewardship Pledges into the collection plate as it comes round.

This Stewardship Sunday, is the culmination of the past four weeks where we have been asked to consider what this wonderful place; St Bartholomew the Great, means to us and what it is WE can bring IT – so that the eight hundred and ninety four years of loving worship here can continue; not only continue but grow.

I am very conscious standing here of a number of things. First, that I am interrupting the wonderful beauty and flow of Evensong, for which I apologise.

Secondly, that after four weeks of talks about Stewardship you must be beginning to feel that you have heard all that has to be said on the matter. I promise to keep what I have to say, brief.

Thirdly and lastly, I am rather conscious that some of you might just be sitting there wondering about my accent and where it is from.

I was born and raised in New Zealand; hence the accent, and came to Britain some thirty two years ago. And, if you are wondering why in all that time I haven't changed my accent, I would just like to say – this is the modified version!

I wasn't brought up in a church going or religious household and my experience of Christian worship and the practices of the Church of England was very limited. I did, however, have a keen appreciation of history and art and I was fully aware of the cultural significance of Christianity generally and the significance of the Church of England in the UK.

I started coming to St Bartholomew the Great as a place to come and spend time in an interesting and beautiful environment where I could sit quietly. I had been going through a terrible time – my husband had left, I was here in London on my own with three young children with all my other family on the other side of the world.

Like so many separated or divorced couples, it ended up that on Sundays, my children would go and have lunch with their father. It was very painful for me not to be part of it. I didn't want to sit at home feeling sad and I certainly didn't want to be out and about where there were other families all doing things together. So, I started coming to St Bartholomew's on Sunday mornings, so I had somewhere to come which was safe and beautiful, with glorious music to listen to, where I could think and be made to think about higher things. And, and this was terribly important at

the time, it was somewhere where I could be anonymous; where no one would bother me but at the same time where I didn't feel completely alone.

I hadn't a clue about what was going in the service apart from the hymns and The Lord's Prayer. I had no idea what was meant by all these terms bandied about - eg Gloria, Benedicton, Sanctuary - let alone who or what was the thurifer. I didn't understand the ritual nor did I know how the church functioned.

For example, I didn't know there was such thing as an Electoral Roll for a church and that it was important for members of the congregation to be on it.

I didn't realise that a church as old and wonderful as this had to raise all its income. I assumed that the Church of England was wealthy and that individual churches were all funded from the centre. I thought the Collection was just some antiquated ritual to encourage charitable giving.

I found trying to follow the service and what was happening when and where, a challenge.

Everything to me when I first started coming was a mystery, but over time and it was a gradual process, over time I became familiar with the services and started to feel I understood what was being said and done. And, over time, I found a faith and this faith grew. Alongside faith, I also found I was part of a community. The community of St Bartholomew the Great, of the Church of England, of the very community that exists, as we all exist, within the Body of Christ.

My involvement with St Bartholomew's has grown enormously from that time when was it was simply a place of haven for a few hours a week. Now, I am a member of the Parochial Church Council which assists the Ministry in running the Church; I am a Sidesman both at the Great and the Less, I have helped out in the Cloister Café and I have helped at Parish Lunches and other social events such as quiz evenings and concerts.

We are a very mixed group of people in this church. The eclectic nature of the congregation is an aspect of this place which I love. I have met so many different people, from different place, with different interests, and different approaches to life and to the church. I have got to know and make friends with so many people, many of whom are among my closest friends.

We are all part of this community by our very presence here in church, by coming along and attending a service whether it's every week or even just occasionally. We are all part of this community. And, and I would emphasize this, we can all call upon this community whenever we wish or need to. It is there.

Of course, not all of us want to spend more time at church or become more involved than we are already at Great St Bartholomew. Not all of us want to join in at social events or attend meetings or take on other roles in the church such as being a Sidesman or joining in in the Sanctuary. Some people might not particularly want to speak with others when they attend a service. But, we are all part of the community of Great Saint Bartholomew by our very presence here and being part of this community is special.

What we wish to bring or can bring, or even be prepared to bring to this community is an individual matter.

But all of us can and do bring something.

I urge all to consider and pledge this evening what it is you are able to do for this place which gives so much to us all and to anyone who enters these doors.

The more we can give of ourselves, the more we receive.