



2023

ANNUAL GIVING CAMPAIGN

St. Stephen and the Incarnation
Episcopal Church

Stewardship Statement from Liz Foster:

When I first came to SSI, I had been actively avoiding church for a couple of months. I grew up in the church, as a small town pastor's oldest daughter in the Midwest. I never belonged at school, but I did at church, and spent a lot of time hanging out with church ladies a generation or two older than me, and church was one of the best parts of my childhood. But I had spent the past 15 years in West Africa. I spent a lot of time with the missionary community and local churches -- communities much more evangelical, charismatic, Pentecostal than me. I received wonderful hospitality, and was challenged in good ways, and my conception of God and God's works was expanded, but I never really belonged. For many years we attended a catholic church in Freetown, which was wonderful, but as I was not Sierra Leonean and not catholic, I was always just a guest.

And I didn't like any of the churches in America I knew. My parents went to a very nice affluent suburban Anglican church with very professionally produced worship and well run children's programs. My sister went to a much cooler, younger, more contemporary church, also with very professionally produced worship of a different style. The Lutheran church I had attended as an undergrad was now filled with people I knew from the young adult group who had married each other and settled down in Boston and now bookended pews of little blond children in matching outfits and had become much more conservative. And while the church I grew up in had been mostly good for me, it and that community had been harmful or even fatal to those I cared about, and was no place for me as an adult or my children.

So when we moved suddenly to Washington DC in January 2022, finding a church was one item on a long to do list, but I had very low expectations. And then I walked into the church across the road from where we were staying, and found the church I didn't know I needed. A church where I fully belonged, where my kids could belong, where we as a family belonged. Moving to the US after so long, I had no expectation that it would feel like coming home, and mostly it hasn't. But SSI is the one place that unexpectedly, wonderfully, felt like coming home. But SSI was struggling at that time, and is not yet out of the woods. But there are advantages to joining a struggling church. First, they will let you do anything. As I said, I was quite a pet of the church ladies as a child, but I was never allowed in the sacristy. Here, if you express a willingness to MC, they will just hand you a key, even if you are not an Episcopalian and don't know the difference between a paten and a lavabo. What you can contribute really matters. Every \$5 that is put in the offering plate makes those of us on the finance committee sleep a little easier at night knowing that at least plate offering is up and helping to keep the lights on

for another day. And most important, you see best the true character of a church and the people who comprise it in times of trouble. You see who is still at a church after a crisis, and how are they trying to pick up the pieces and put the church back together.

So why do I support SSI? Because I don't take for granted what a blessing it is to have found this place. This small congregation in this beautiful rickety old building is the keeper of a particular tradition and revelation of the kingdom in this city, a very precious treasure in a very fragile clay jar. And I want to help keep that treasure, and fan back into flames that gift, both selfishly for myself, because gathering around the altar here for communion is routinely the best part of my week, but also out of gratitude and honor to those who made this church what it is, and kept it going throughout everything, and also so that those others in the DC area who need this church can find it and find a home here too.