

Wally's Testimonial - October 26, 2025

This morning when I walked in, my friend James McNutt, who was here at nine o'clock, said, 'You've got a hard act to follow.'

It was 26 years ago when I first walked in the doors of this place, and it's one of the best walks I've ever taken. I'm amused by Father Daniel's comment about people in the middle, because 26 years ago, I was a lot younger than I am now, and my life was not in particularly good shape. I'd gone through some nasty stuff, some of it of my own making, and I was working, God bless, with a wonderful therapist, and I knew I needed more than that. So, a friend of mine who lived here in Norwalk - I did not live in Norwalk at the time - said to me, 'I really think you should try St. Paul's on the Green'. So I did. And it was, simply, an enormous gift, and that gift continues to give to this day.

What I remember was a warm welcome; what I strangely remember is one of the images that Father Lang used in his sermon that day, which was comparing church to a field hospital as a place of healing. And then I think one of the things that just surprised me, because it was 25 years ago, 26 years ago - it was such an unusual thing - that when the time for Communion came, the invitation to anyone who was moved to come to Communion to do so, and that included children. A quarter century ago, if there was an invitation at all, it would be something in the order of 'All baptized Christians are welcome', but that usually did not include children, who were not admitted to Communion until they were confirmed. So that was an incredible revelation to me, and what I think of, as I thought of what I wanted to say, is what I experienced at St. Paul's that first Sunday I was here is what I experience to this day: that this is a place of hope, this is a place of healing, and this is a place of profound hospitality. And I'm not just talking about Sunday Social hospitality, I'm talking about the hospitality of the Table of the Lord, and our welcome there. And it was in those early years here where a member of the congregation quoted her mother-in-law who, in a conversation about St. Paul's - and some of you may have heard this before - she said, 'Oh, St. Paul's on the Green, that's that place that will take anybody'

Thank you, yes! And that echoes that quote that has been used here also, the criticism of Jesus: He welcomes sinners, and eats with them! You can almost hear, 'How disgusting!' And that is the great gift: hope, healing, and a rich hospitality. It is a pleasure for me to say I give as generously as I can to this place because it means immeasurable things to me. I cannot imagine my life without it; I cannot imagine my life without being part of this fascinatingly quirky, wonderful community of human beings who have, in so many ways, supported me through so much. A few years ago I had bypass surgery, and the kind of pastoral care I got was fantastic, and the kind of support I got from just friends, who would just help and take care of me, was just amazing.

I want this place of hope, healing, and hospitality to be strong for us who are here today. I want it to be strong and vibrant for that person who's going to walk in the door as I did and discover something they may not have even known they needed. And when my ashes are out here in the back yard which, as Mike Mushak likes to remind me, is so convenient to Stew Leonard's, I want it to be here as a vibrant community of hope, healing, and hospitality for all those years to come.

Thanks very much.