

My name is Lorne Frank and I'd like to share a few thoughts with you this morning regarding our current stewardship pledge drive. My wife, Marcia, and I have been members of St. Pauls since 1991, even though we moved to Oak Park nearly 15 years ago. At the time of our move to the "burbs" we conducted your typical church "shopping spree", and we fully expected to find our new church home nestled amongst the elm trees of Oak Park. After weeks of feeling a bit like "Goldilocks in the valley of dry bones" and no one church really fitting all of our needs, we came to realize that the bar had been set so high, all other options would pale in comparison to St. Pauls UCC. It became clear rather quickly that our faith community, our church home was to remain right here . . . and it's been that way ever since. In fact, there's a rather large contingency of Oak Parkers here at St. Pauls, so many in fact, that some of us have dared to dream of our very own church shuttle. Don't worry; it's not in the budget.

Over the past 3 years I have had the opportunity to serve as the chair of the youth education committee here at St. Pauls, a position that works hand in hand with our Church school director, Sharon Phillips. When I reflect upon all the many benefits my family has received through its involvement with St. Pauls Church School Program, I have to think, what would Marcia and I do if St. Pauls was not here? Where would our children, Logan now 14 and Margot now 10, experience the same loving and supportive environment that so richly nurtures them, both spiritually and socially? Where would our children have such varied and valuable opportunities as serving meals in a homeless shelter, rehearsing and performing an annual theatrical event like *Bible Story Theater*, or taking an active role in worship service through participation in four youth choirs, an intergenerational orchestra, by leading the worship service on Youth Sunday or serving as an acolyte? Where else could they share in such a diverse, inclusive and uniquely urban atmosphere with other youth and adults from all across the Chicagoland area? More simply put, where might they begin to see the world as we see it?

Many years ago our daughter, Margot, asked Pastor Henry if he was St. Paul. Though he was probably flattered at the time, I think Tom assured her that he was far too young to be St. Paul. Years before that when our son Logan was 3, he asked his then Sunday school teacher, Edith Gunterman if she was Jesus. Now, I'm not certain as to her reply, but I would guess she was a bit surprised at his confusion. But what does this really tell us? What does it mean when our children see the images and works of our saints and savior reflected in the faces of our pastor and teachers?

St. Pauls offers an amazing and comprehensive faith journey to nearly 250 children, from the early primary grade levels, through our unparalleled confirmation program and continuing on through our high school grade levels and mission trip experiences. Did you know there are 45 children ages 1 and younger who will be joining our Church School Program in the very near future? Everywhere you look, day in, day out, St. Pauls is laying the groundwork, building the foundation if you will, for the spiritual growth of our children, our church family, and this would not at all be possible without the financial support of this congregation.

Throughout this past election cycle, we began to hear more about “renewable resources” and how we as a nation must begin to find new ways of living a more sustainable, eco-friendly existence that will protect our world for generations to come. Well, I consider St. Pauls a renewable resource as well. We are a community of faith, making a joyful sound in this city and beyond, through our voices, our actions and the voices and actions of the smallest amongst us. I ask you . . . is this sustainable? What is our legacy to be? What will our congregation look like 10, 15, 50 years from now? Take a look at our youngsters in the balcony, or gaze upon the small faces in the pews next to you. This is who we are now, and this is who we shall become.

As we make our offering this Sunday and every Sunday, please take a moment to consider how we may continue to make St. Pauls a great place to grow, not just for ourselves but for the generations that follow. I urge you to faithfully embrace this opportunity, renew your commitment to the ever resourceful St. Pauls UCC, and may the chant from this crowd not be “Drill, baby, drill” but “Pledge, baby, pledge!”

Thank you.