

Pat Steinbrueck asked me to speak this morning about Stewardship. Typical me, I panicked, but responded: I'd be honored. Not knowing, though, what to say, I looked for ideas and it seemed helpful to scan through this week's *Coracle*, searching for ideas to guide me. What struck me as I did so is the varied styles of giving offered in the Body here at St. David's. From this week's *Coracle*:

- Faye Jacobson sang praises of the annual St. David's Auction mentioning Newt & June Smith's auctioneering skills,
- Information was posted about participating in the Annual Christmas Parade next Saturday in Downtown Sylva, and
- Yoga in the Parish Hall with Susan Kaagan,
- The Congregation's decision to go ahead and build a New Parish Hall
- Jere Anis and Alice Mason's healing and recovery from major surgery,
- All the way across to Jeff Neff's witty exposé detailing how to increase car mileage and save the planet . . .
- Followed with photos of those able to work last Saturday clearing up the Nature Trail and Church Grounds
- Not to mention Pat Steinbrueck's Texas Caviar recipe and Betsey Hamlett's Pecan sale and Nicole McRight's Operation Easy Adopt program sponsored by the WNC Social Group
- Did I mention this information, i.e. *the Coracle*, is put together and sent out weekly by Maggie Bowles and Margot Wilcox?

"Giving." That has always been a challenging word for me, full of ideas and images most of the time comfortable, but when not so, more of a personal indictment, but that's me.

I was baptized in infancy as an Episcopalian. Not b/c my parents were practicing Episcopalians, by no stretch of the means is that true. As best I can tell, my father leaned toward the Baptist church - when he went; and my mother, ran from the Catholic Church. Perhaps, she found it safer to cover the necessary Baptism by avoiding the Catholic Church, and instead, having me baptized Episcopalian in an inner-city church somewhere in Brooklyn, NY.

Although I'd always been drawn to spirituality and believe that I belonged to God, it wasn't until Woodstock in 1969 that my spiritual journey began in earnest. I was too young to attend, didn't have my license, but was enraptured by newspaper headlines in the Augusta Chronicle of "Peace, Love, and Understanding in Upstate New York." Music was already the driving force in my life, and long before then had music taken over my interests. And with the Vietnam War at its peak that year, like so many young people my age, I wondered, Could peace truly grow out of a music festival? I wanted it to . . .

Along the way in my spiritual journey, I hooked up as a young man with Fr. Bruce McKennie Williams, an Episcopalian Army Chaplain, for whom I was a chaplain's assistant. We became very close, and remain close today many years

later. And by the time my military years were finished, I found myself living in the Mid-west, attending a large, influential Charismatic Christian church that was heavily involved in the early Christian music scene of the 70s and 80s. And still is today.

Throughout those years, giving was a topic that often came up in discussion, in message, and for me, in lifestyle. I determined early on that “giving” had far more to do with living than it did with money. Like many of us from my generation, I rebelled against the status quo, and in many ways, still do. But giving has remained a constant in my life.

For me, mostly, it has had to do with serving and helping and attempting to make myself and talents available to further the ministry and the Church. Yet, up until last year, I had never committed a dollar amount for a stewardship campaign to any church that I attended. I’d given money, of course, many times and amounts, and for lots of reasons and projects and programs and to meet needs; but have truly never felt the freedom to commit and give a set dollar amount. And do it consistently.

But last year, as I sat and listened to many of you all speak, read the handouts about giving, considered how the St. David’s community has supported and encouraged so freely both Norma and me, I began to hear the gentle voice of conviction, *patiently prying open a part of me that does not open easily*.

One of the first, of many, kind acts of giving I experienced here at St. David’s was when the church chose to hold a study group and read through Mary Oliver’s book of poetry, *Thirst*. I went to get my copy at City Lights Bookstore, but none were available, they’d been sold out. Somewhere along the way, I don’t remember who, but somebody told me that Margot Wilcox had bought several copies and knew Norma and I wanted one and would have it for us at the first meeting. Wow! That blew me away. I went, and there was Margot, and she, indeed, had got copies ahead of time to make sure we, and I assume others, would each have one to use for the study group. Am not sure I ever paid her for that . . . did I, Margot? The list of St. David’s giving to not just me, but so many others in our Sylva community and surrounding and extending is long and full and rich and life-changing.

Now, here we sit one year later, and the Stewardship discussion is upon us, the needs are here, the New Parish Hall is going to be built, and that, with a minimal amount of debt that is more than manageable, and it has come about because so many have given and continue to give. We are surrounded by givers. Take one second, look around our congregation, what do you see? I see Givers. B/c of this, I am thankful to not only renew my pledge to St. David’s for 2013, but to increase that amount as well, and do so with great appreciation for all this group of Givers has modeled to me. Thank you very much.