

Stewardship, by Maria Acuna-Feldman

Oct. 29, 2023

Good morning. I'm Maria Acuna-Feldman and I consider St. Martin's my spiritual home and feel fortunate to have you all to be part of my extended family. I grew up in a Roman Catholic family, and I remember my father handing my siblings and me money to put in the basket that was passed around during Mass. As I think about that, I realize that my understanding then was that putting money in the basket was similar to attending other local events—you bought a ticket to attend a festival or see a movie; you paid to enter the stadium to watch a basketball or football game. But that was entertainment... and church was not. So, why did my parents think we should put money in the basket when we went to church?

It was many years later, when I was attending St. John's Episcopal Church in Oakland, that a couple from the church, in explaining the stewardship drive, taught me that supporting our church is not an exchange of time and treasure for programs or services provided. Rather, we contribute to the best of our ability in gratitude for the gifts we've received from God, including this church and all the ministry it inspires in the community and in the world.

There was a paragraph in the Stewardship letter that struck a chord with me. Neil wrote, “This year marks the 70th Anniversary of the founding of St. Martin’s. We are able to celebrate this milestone because of the *faith and dedication* of the countless past members who established the church and worked hard to help it grow and flourish. Our task is to walk in the footsteps of those past members, continuing their work, so that generations yet to come can one day walk in our footsteps.”

It was 1981 when Tim and I were welcomed to St. Martin’s by Father Bill Burrill who had agreed to marry us in this sanctuary. That was before these beautiful wooden pews were here; before this amazing pipe organ was installed; long before the narthex and the baptismal font were a dream. There was no labyrinth, no lych gate, and no columbarium (that I remember.) I tend to take these things for granted now, forgetting that it took generous parishioners, dedicated efforts, and plenty of love to make this place of worship and spiritual growth happen. Thank you, Neil, for that reminder.

St. Martin’s has come a long way in its 70 years. So, today I appreciate and honor that history. I, too, believe that it’s up to each of us to support and continue St. Martin’s work, so that this campus, this holy

space, will be here for future generations. And, I wonder, and pray for, how much more this church community can accomplish.

From the First Epistle of Peter (4:10), I quote: “Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.” Thank you.