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Pledge talk November 5, 2023

I could just say, as a cradle Episcopalian, that I pledge because I was raised that way, even giving 25 cents per Sunday at first – then I could just sit down.

You aren't getting off that easily, though.

My sister and I were DROPPED OFF, at a church that showed films that traumatized me with films that showed graphic images of the crucifixion.

We all know the church is far from perfect: as a female Lay Eucharistic Minister (one of the first) some people refused to receive from me, and left the rail.

AND as a single, welfare mom of three small kids, I was refused entry into a Lenten Soup Supper because I didn't have the dollar it would have taken to let the four of us in.

So: what am I doing here? Now?

So many reasons NOT to be here, but writing and speaking helps me to clarify MY beliefs: And my pledge puts action into the "thoughts and prayers" we hear so much about.

As time went by, I learned to sit still in church. And I learned to read music. Sort of. I probably learned a lot more, too: workshops, retreats, things I didn't know the church was paying for. Simply by showing up every Sunday, I eventually learned to serve others in almost every capacity available to a layperson; from singing in the kids' choir to attending vestry meetings and church conventions, even to becoming Senior Warden and taking charge of a parish when we lost our rector to cancer.

Even back when I had no "treasure" to share, I offered my "time" and "talent" to the church. Before Incarnation, when I was that single welfare mom in Los Angeles, I did all my shopping for my home and family at thrift shops of various sorts, I promised myself that I would work in one when I could. When I moved here, I chose Incarnation, partly BECAUSE of Heavenly Treasures, where I volunteered for a few years.

Maybe not everyone will agree with me here, but it was in serving others that I gradually understood what it means to contribute to my parishes, including the Church of the Incarnation, as well as to the larger Church.

Nowadays, as an artist, and someone who practices Contemplative Prayer, I am kind of used to doing things that aren't or don't seem to be very practical.

But, in some mysterious way, I continue to discover something about myself and my own spirituality by having those practices. Pledging is like that: sometimes, I think my little bit makes no difference to anyone – but I believe my OWN life is better for having the commitment to them.

One other thing that IS more tangible: our parish is part of a larger group of parishes, the Diocese of Northern California; because the Diocese is able to collect funds from all its member parishes, our money goes to building some pretty interesting programs that we could never fund by ourselves. I am happy to see a bit of my money going to feed hungry and homeless people in Northern California and around the world, to celebrate and encourage young people to explore their own spirituality, and to provide relief when the inevitable disasters happen. And we get to figure out what we DO believe, through our discussions of various issues.

Something else about our Diocesan Convention – which occurred yesterday and the day before: It is a place where a bunch of Episcopalians – not necessarily like-minded – get together and figure out how those famous “thoughts and prayers” can be put into action. It happens here at Incarnation, too, by the way – but there’s something special for me about being around the people who, even total strangers at first, at some level, at least, understand where I am coming from when we have conversations - people, who share some sort of kinship with me. I realized that, whenever I got on the hotel elevator, (and you all know what it’s like to be on an elevator full of strangers) for instance, there was always some other friendly person to share with – maybe just “good morning”, - or maybe just some kind of Episcopal inside joke – or perhaps the start of a serious conversation.

And maybe that’s enough.