

By Elise Copley

My name is Elise Copley. I am a Vestry member and the 2012 Stewardship Chair. I volunteered to be the stewardship chair even though speaking in front of people terrifies me because I believe in St Mark's and its priorities – liturgy & music; children & youth, and outreach and because of the people in this parish who make it all possible. Because of St Mark's priorities, giving of my time and financial resources to this church is important.

I returned to St Mark's after 20 years of not stepping foot inside of a church because people and endless activities could not fill the emptiness inside me. When I first came here I sat alone and left immediately after the service before anyone could speak to me. I would put a check in the offering plate and never think about what it meant.

Gradually, I began volunteering with St Swithin's, a guild that ministers to the homeless, and met and became friends with others who were also involved. Becoming more active in St Swithin's made me more aware of other ministries at St Mark's and of the work that is done by so many people here for each other and for those who we do not know. Eventually, I realized that our ministries took not only time – but money.

I prefer to volunteer at St Mark's because everyone is allowed to help, whether we are at the top of our game or not. We do so with love and respect for each other and with love and respect for those we serve.

Starting an ongoing financial commitment to St Mark's opened up a new dialog between my husband and me. What did we want our priorities to be and why? What priority did we want to give to God and religious commitments? How would this mesh with his religious background which differs from mine?

We decided to commit to proportional giving. When we began our practice of proportional giving our financial commitment to God moved to the front of the line instead of what was leftover. Somehow this increased our awareness and gratitude for all that we have. Over time we increased our pledge to St Mark's. Unfortunately, with the economic downturn the dollar amount of our pledge has decreased. However, we remain committed to the practice of proportional giving out of continued gratitude for all that we have and our growing understanding of God's role in our lives.

I stay at St Mark's because this place matters to me. I like the beauty of our church and worship service, how the prayers of the people can be the same and yet new each week, and how it is possible to bare one's self to Fr Mark and Deacon Susie and still feel welcomed here.

My dream, as I look at our parish ministry tree and all the ministries we have to offer, is that with the support of all our members we will be able to continue to offer and grow all of them to more fully answer the call that God makes to us.