



INVESTING in HOPE: Building a Sure Foundation

a rambling reflection by Kristi Baranko

As we approach this Easter season, we (as a church) are still in a transition period - more specifically, a period of reflection as we are actively seeking a new Rector. As being a member of the Search Committee and engrossed in this process of discovering who WE are, I feel compelled to share my story of how I became a member of St. Patrick's Episcopal Church – more importantly, an actively engaged member.

When I was six years old, my sister and I attended St. Patrick's as guests of our neighbors, the Carter Family. As children often do, we recruited (repeatedly nagged) our parents to come, too. Our mother fell in love with the liturgy and the services so, naturally, our family joined the church. By my seventh birthday, my sister and I were baptized and within a few weeks after that, so was our dad.

By the time I was confirmed at the age of twelve, the population of youth at St. Patrick's relied on roughly five families. By the time I was fifteen, we were down to two teenagers that attended regularly. That being said, traditional Sunday school for youth did not really exist – but fellowship did. I was a part of a wonderful church family that embraced one another, which became VERY important at that time of my life.

At this point in time, my family, too, had begun to drift away from the church, and St. Patrick's could have easily dwindled down to one teenager, but I was lucky. We lived on Stuart Avenue, and this allowed me to walk to church – and I did. I needed to be there. I needed the prayers. I needed the fellowship. I needed **HOPE**.

In my early teens, my sister and I had come to conclusion that our parents were not happy in their relationship. I noticed that instead of turning to the church, they both turned inside themselves and became even more miserable. I knew that I needed to turn to my church. My St. Patrick's family gave me the hope that life can have a constant and loving sense of stability. This family offered me the hope of answered prayers, the hope of God's love and Jesus' light, the hope of spiritual growth and guidance, the hope of a greater community and, most of all at that time, the hope of smiling faces. My St. Patrick's family gave all of this to me, and many of them never even knew it.

Fast forward a few years: I moved away, made mistakes, graduated from college, got married and moved back to Albany at the age of 25. I maintained my membership while I lived away. Quite honestly, I never found another church that gave me the same feelings of hope like MY church family. I was happy to be back, but was uncertain as to how to be an adult member in this, my church family. So I watched everyone. I watched everything. I was watching, learning, and hoping to be the kind of church adult that could nurture a growing Christian.

At the age of 28, God blessed my husband and me with our son, Bobby (although he prefers Bob these days). I always thought that once I became a parent, that the 'you-are-a-real-adult'

switch would flip. In many ways it did, but in the ways of my Christian formation and my participation in the church, I still felt like a child. But, the cool thing about this, is that I am growing, in my church and Christian life, alongside Bob; learning things better in order to explain them to him and listening to him as he explains (quite matter-of-factly) his perspective. (By the way, Bob's perspective is pretty simple: follow the Golden Rule and everything works out.)

This task of shaping my child in his Christian faith has not been tackled alone- many of you have had an impact on him. Whether it has been by playing cars with him in the pew, allowing him to roll around under pews during the sermons, or just plain allowing him to be a child of Christ and not shushing him when he would hurry down the aisle and wave to Jesus and say, "Hey Jesus!" you have had an impact. Again, watching you interact with my child (and our other wonderful children) has instilled hope in me – the hope that people still value their overall community – the hope that people still abide by the old adage "it takes a village to raise a child."

Since the birth of our son, we have experienced losses; our mom in 2009, our dad in 2014 and our granddad in 2015. During all of that, I found comfort and hope through my church family. Your visits, prayers, support and kind words have had a lasting impact. Shortly after our dad passed, I found myself reflecting on my life at St. Patrick's and realized that many people (our parents included) sometimes leave this world without ever knowing how direct of an impact they had. As I have mentioned, I learned to be an adult in the church by watching others. In this period of purposeful reflection, I wrote letters to a few of my church elders to let them know that I value their roles and activities in our church. I let them know that I had been watching them and used them as benchmarks on how to be an adult within our church. Most of them were surprised, as they didn't realize that anyone was watching-but we are. Our children are watching. Our young adults are watching. People like me (trying to figure out if I am an adult yet) are watching. Our elders are watching.

I am proud to say that we are building the foundation of Christ's message of love every single day. We are providing hope to our outreach ministries through food, necessities, gifts and prayers. We are purposefully learning about "us" as a parish, as we look for ways to incorporate "Invite. Welcome. Connect." into our way of life. We are spreading the message of inclusion to our community. We've reached out and opened our doors to our Lutheran sisters and brothers to provide both a gathering place and support (and this model is being duplicated elsewhere within our Diocese). All of this, coupled with the future of a new Rector that will fit our renewed congregation with a new perspective, gives me an un-measurable amount of hope and optimism about what we can achieve together in the next 5, 10, 15 years.

I love my St. Patrick's church family. I love the thought of what we can accomplish. I love that we are not complacent. I love that we continue to grow spiritually. I love that we embraced the Lutheran Church of Our Saviour family when they needed hope. I love that LCOS became our Lutheran church family and that we work with them to create hope for others. I love that we **INVEST IN HOPE.**

I end this rambling with one question: In this season of new life and renewal, what investment of HOPE do you wish to make?

*Happy Easter,
Kristi*

