

Sarah Brune Stewardship Testimony

October 23, 2011

Good Morning everyone. I'm Sarah Brune, and I'm a junior at Lake Forest College. I am here to speak to you about my faith journey, and the role this church has played in my life. When John Johnson asked me to be a part of this series, I was absolutely thrilled to accept. Since my first day here at First Pres, I have been contemplating exactly how to express my intense gratitude to every single member of this congregation. I hope that these words can convey at least some of my thankfulness for this church in my life.

About two years ago, I wandered into this breathtakingly beautiful church from my dorm room, and my heart hasn't left since. I attended a Lutheran church back home in Fremont, NE, but I didn't have a car on campus and figured Presbyterians were "close enough" to what I had known as a child. Little did I know, that day would absolutely change my life.

After that first service, I wandered around the church for awhile, feeling a little lost and confused. Back home, of course, I knew many members of our congregation and was never at a loss for a friend or acquaintance. Coming here, looking into this crowd of entirely new faces, I was overwhelmed. I wasn't entirely sure I was going to come back...mostly because I felt like sleeping in every Sunday until 1 p.m. sounded pretty fun.

Then, out of the swarm of children stuffing goldfish in their pockets, appeared a well dressed, goofy, almost painfully happy woman. She began to speak. She invited me to sing in the Sanctuary Choir that Wednesday night at 7:30 p.m. (we still meet at this time, by the way.) I smiled and nodded. In my mind, I thought...no way. I'm busy and I have really important collegy stuff to do. Whatever it is. But, it's probably something. I thanked her, laughed, and went on my merry way.

Well, as luck would have it, I did attend choir that Wednesday. At the time, I really didn't know what it was that made me show up that first night, to a group of people I had never met, to sing songs I didn't know, to hear lots of terribly wonderful jokes (many of which I have heard now over 20 times.) Now, I do know what it was. I truly believe it was God working through you all to bring me exactly where I needed to be. Of course, they welcomed me that night with open arms, and have done so every Wednesday night for the last two years. That woman was Caroline Kinney, someone who most of you likely know and love. To me she is a friend who has single-handedly done for me more than she could ever know. She has changed my life. This church has changed my life.

This past year, the church has become even more important to me than ever before. Both of my grandparents passed away, and I began feeling the stress of the real-world looming in my future. Though I still miss my grandparents every day, I know I have a few sets of honorary grandparents sitting up in the choir loft every Sunday. When it came time for me to look for internships, an all-out terrifying venture from my perspective, these people used their connections to present me with more options than I ever thought possible. When I came to college, I had goals and dreams for myself that I never could have touched had it not been for these new friends of mine.

This past summer, I was unbelievably lucky enough to accompany them on the choir tour to Ireland. This was my first trip overseas, and it truly changed many of my attitudes, worldviews, and perspectives. This congregation believed in me when I had no reason to believe in myself, and I am overwhelmingly grateful for that. I try every day to be the person they see in me, and it is because of them that I have the confidence to pursue my true aspirations in life. These people have changed my life.

Over the past two years, this congregation has given more to me than I will ever have the capability of giving back. The things you have gifted to me are simply intangible. Many of them have defined my collegiate years, and have helped me achieve things I never thought possible. Sometimes it's confusing to think that everything in my life was given to me by others. From God's gift of life, to my parent's ongoing gifts of faith, a good upbringing, and education, to the way this church has shaped me as a person, I feel that I am a whole made up of great, wonderful, and amazing parts. The generosity I have experienced in my life has been tremendous. I am nothing without God and the people who have touched my life on this earth.

So, where does that leave me? I don't have much to give, especially to those here who have given so much to me. All I can do is give of my time now, and hope that someday I can pass this gift on to a young girl looking for inspiration, love, and an opportunity.

In sum, I am who I am today largely because of you. I could not be more thankful for that. I hope you'll accept this thanks and understand that your gifts are noticed and appreciated by so many. The work that you all do at this church is truly phenomenal, and I encourage you to know that you benefit people that you may never meet. I will speak for them, and I will just say thanks, because that is all that I can say. When I stepped foot in First Presbyterian Church that fateful Sunday morning, I had no idea what to expect. I never could have known that I was about to meet some of the most generous people I have ever known. On behalf of us all, thank you for everything. Keep up the good work.