

Good morning, everyone. My name is Sarah Victorian. My husband Quincy and I have been members at this church for a few years now. Thank you to the stewardship committee for allowing me to share why Quincy and I pledge to the church each year.

When I was reflecting on why we pledge, several thoughts came to mind.

The first reason being that we love the folks that work for the church and want to support them as much as we can as they support us, including our pastors and church staff.

Another reason is that caring for this land and these buildings is important.

Just like my home which has had to have many costly repairs, the building that we are in now and that we use for so many things such as Sunday School, now a Day School, concerts, picnics, and so much more will continuously need maintenance and repairs so that it can be a place of worship and fellowship for years to come.

The third reason being the most important reason, which is how is this church choosing welcome and choosing to be the hands and feet of Jesus beyond this building?

I have enjoyed many nights out at drag shows having the time of my life, but now the country we live in is telling us that a joyous expression - such as drag is criminal. Our LGBTQIA+ friends are constantly hearing that the way they love is something that should be hidden or banned and is bad for our children - instead of something that should be celebrated. Here at St. Phillip, we have conversations with children about love during Pride, we gather and fellowship while attending the Pride parade as a group.

In our current climate in this country, and especially this state, our trans friends have to constantly hear about how their feelings are invalid, gender affirming care is being halted, they are in danger just for who they are. At St. Philip, we welcome our trans friends with no difference than we would anyone else. We hear sermons about caring for our trans friends, we sing hymns about how much God loves all of us, and I have heard Pastor Keatan many times pray for our trans friends.

The leaders of this country are posting AI generated memes mocking our foreign neighbors. Supporting the evils of nationalism, and worse Christian nationalism. ICE is kidnapping people off the streets, separating families, and many people in this country are going out of their way to mock and spew hate to immigrants, but at St. Phillip, we are constantly reminded that we need to care for our neighbors. This message is spread not only here in service on nearly every Sunday, but I have seen it be told to our church children during the "conversations with the children" and at VBS days that Pastor Omar plans. We have invited folks from other countries to come speak with us at the Duerr Lecture Series and during Church and Society.

In our country, TikTokers praised as right-winged activists, have spewed sexist ideas. They have made racist remarks which have been deemed misunderstood. At St. Philip, we celebrate how God celebrates the importance of women. We have book clubs and real conversations about the dangers of racism, our youth go on racial justice pilgrimages.. And through all of this, our pastors have reminded us to also love our neighbors who stand on opposite political and social sides of the aisle because we should always choose welcome.

As many of you know, Quincy and I are excitedly awaiting the arrival of our first baby come February. We want him to grow up in a place where even in a state that historically is unaccepting of people who have differences, there is a home here where we consistently choose welcome. At one of the very first services we attended at St. Philip, Pastor John said that Jesus said he loves all y'all, not just some of y'all. Here at St. Philip we do not ever choose who that y'all is made up of, we understand and celebrate that Jesus loves all y'all no matter who that is. This is why we will always make an annual pledge. We care about our staff, our buildings, and most of all we care about the ways that St. Philip is welcoming and continues to be the hands and feet of Jesus.