

Shabbat Shalom. Andrea and Jim, thank-you so much. I am honored.

When I was informed about this award, my thought was that I have received much more from ST than I have given. My family has been nurtured and raised here; I have been pushed out of my comfort zone w social action; I have learned both to receive and to pray; and I have been allowed to practice my great love of teaching.

When my family first joined ST in 1994, I was looking for a place where my kids could be Bar Mitzvahed. I also had a secret desire- that I could learn more about Judaism and possibly even get involved in the Congregation. Neither my former wife nor I had much of a background in Judaism. Though I was Bar Mitzvahed, we never practiced any rituals at home. My mother had converted and my father was a secular Jew.

So suffice it to say that I was surprised at being at ST. I was shocked to see people wearing kippot and tallitot and praying in Hebrew. And I loved it.

And so did my kids. They felt so at home here, sometimes too much at home as they'd be running around the building. They really learned about social justice, fighting for what they believed in and Tikun Olum. In short, ST is an important reason why my kids are now amazing young adults.

I also have been stretched by this Schul in social action. I was a NY Times liberal when I first came to ST. I read a lot but didn't get involved. Several years ago, ST began its Day of Caring. Someone needed to be a host for making breakfast at the Simpson House Homeless shelter . The only problem was that it was at 4am. But I decided it could be an adventure , so I volunteered and got a bunch of 6th graders and their families to join me.

Six years later, I have participated in scores of meals and several evenings of sleeping in a box for Night on the Street. ST has helped me learn about what it's like to be homeless in Mpls and given me the opportunity to introduce many of our young people to this issue. It's amazing at how many B'nai Mitzvahs I've been at that the kids have spoken about these experiences. What a gift!

Personally, I myself have been the recipient of ST's "Radical Hospitality". Several years ago, I had a major life crisis that shook the roots of my foundation. I was not sure how I was going to get through it, but ST was there for me. The clergy were so loving and caring and then there were all of you. Until then, I had given a lot to ST, but I had not really made myself open to receiving from others. At that time, I had nothing better to do on Friday nights other than to feel sorry for myself, so I started to come to services. I began talking and sharing w others and just let myself be. And you were incredible. I received so much love and caring. I now know that ST is the one place where I can be myself and be accepted and nourished.

Since I was coming to services anyways, I decided to experiment with prayer. I had always had trouble praying. It never felt natural. I found that if I shut my eyes and listened to your beautiful voices singing, I could be moved. Sometimes I would be in pain while other times I was moved to tears of joy. I still do this practice when I come to services and it is a staple part of my worship.

And now I want to thank-you for the most precious gift I have gotten from you - the chance to teach. I had always wanted to be a teacher, but things happened and I ended up in sales. I got my chance when my eldest son was in a wild ST kindergarten class and the teacher needed a helper. That was 20 years ago. I had no formal training and barely knew more than the kids, but ST stuck w me. And over the years, the clergy took me under their wings and taught me how to be a good teacher.

Sometimes people ask me why I teach. My answer is that teaching feeds my soul. I get so much back from the kids. Each year they teach me something new and they make me laugh and smile. I adore teaching your kids and I thank you for the opportunity that you have given me.

This is my love letter to all of you. You have given me a place to call home and so much more. This is where I want to be for the remainder of my days.

Shabbat Shalom.