



Jim Bracciale
Stewardship Testimonial
3 November 2019

Good Morning.

About a year ago I walked through the doors of Epiphany for the first time. I entered with some ambivalence and a feeling of vulnerability that I hadn't experienced in years. Having been raised Roman Catholic, I was straying from the only church I had known.

What brought me to Epiphany was a longing to belong to a spiritual community. I once had that feeling of belonging as a member of the Jesuit Urban Center in Boston before it closed 12 years ago. It was an oasis for those of us who felt marginalized by the church's positions on sexuality, divorce, and women's equality. Ours was a vibrant parish, much like Epiphany, that reached out to serve those most in need. At that time, we were a parish committed to helping those living with or affected by HIV/AIDS. As dark as those days were, I found hope and solace in my faith and community.

Since that time, I've tried to recreate that sense of fellowship and connection that I had at the Jesuit Center. I sampled several Catholic churches in the area hoping I might find a place where I was comfortable and greeted warmly. No matter the church, I felt like an outlier trying to break into the inner circle. I felt invisible.

What brought me to Epiphany was a conversation I had with a friend about a year ago. Discussing my experiences at these local churches, she offered that some Catholic churches are "accepting." I probably said the same in the past, but I heard it differently coming from her. "Accepting," sounded more like "tolerating" or "willing to make an exception." As a gay person with no greater agenda than to belong and to contribute, it prompted me to find a spiritual home outside my Catholic faith.

So, let's go back to that November day when I first walked into Epiphany. I quickly learned by the end of that first service that "Ah-men" was preferred over "Ay-men," that kneelers aren't attached to the pews, and Episcopalians add a few lines to the Lord's Prayer.

It was at the end of the service that I met Thomas for the first time. Being who he is, he recognized I was new to Epiphany, and he quickly introduced me to Miriam and just about every other parishioner in the receiving line. He asked me to sign the guest book, and he soon reached out with a welcoming email that was followed by a breakfast conversation about my spirituality and faith history. For the first time in many years I felt visible.

He made me feel special as he did to so many of you. It's not that I wanted to feel special as much as I just wanted to belong. The welcome and hospitality that's been extended to me by our clergy, our wardens and by so many of you have been heartening and overwhelming. Perhaps, most grateful to me, I want to thank, Joan O'Connor, who offered the simplest of gestures by inviting me to sit by her at service, and by introducing me to her wonderful circle of friends. The smallest of gestures can have the greatest impact on a newcomer to Epiphany.

Over my time here, I've come to understand that building a welcoming church doesn't start and end with the official greeters at our services. Each of us has a responsibility to make everyone who comes through our doors feel welcome and appreciated for all that they are, no matter where they are on their faith journey. No one should feel like they're invisible in God's house, and I thank you all for seeing me.