

Good morning. My name is Art Nava, and I'm going to spend a few minutes telling you a bit about my journey and explain why I give to Arlington Street Church. But before I do, I'd like to let you in on a little secret about this place.

But I'm going to need your help to illustrate. If you've been coming here for 20 years or longer, please raise your hand and keep it raised. For 10 years or longer. For 5 years or longer. For 1 year or longer. Within the past year including if today is your first time here, go ahead and raise your hand too. Everyone should have their hands raised now. Thanks, you can go ahead and put your hands down.

So here's the secret: this place is constantly changing. And even though we have several members who have been here for decades, we also have many who are much more recent arrivals.

I first came to Arlington Street almost ten years ago during a tough time in my life. Like many others, I was seeking a place to heal. I found a strong congregation.

Today when I fill out my pledge form for the next church year, I will do so with a sense of gratitude for

everyone who was here ten years ago when I first arrived. I make my financial pledge to help make sure that others will arrive at a strong congregation when they need to find a place to heal.

Explaining why I make a financial contribution is the easy part. Explaining why I volunteer service is a little more complicated. My involvement stepped up only about four or five years ago.

With every team or project that I have been a part of, I've gotten to meet some great people - each of us with our quirks, strengths, weaknesses, and a desire to help and to belong.

Later in the service, we're going to recite the covenant and affirmation of our congregation which begins with the phrase *'love is the spirit of this congregation and service is our gift.'*

If love means unconditional acceptance of our true selves, then volunteer opportunities are the chance to put those words into action.

I have slowly realized that when we're asked if we'd like to help make lunch, or wash dishes, or attend a vigil for immigrant rights, what we're actually being

asked is to meet others. And through the time together, get to know each other, share our stories, and open our hearts to friendship.

We learn to love others, and to accept love as well.

That's no small accomplishment and has far reaching implications.

We got to witness that three weeks ago as we gathered and invited in hundreds from the community to the candle light vigil after the marathon bombings.

Indeed over 50,000 people from around the world viewed our Facebook page later that week as they began healing.

This leaves me with a sense of gratitude for being able to be a part of this beloved community. Thank you for your attention. Please enjoy the rest of the service.