



# THE CALL

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## Our Life's Purpose



The Rev. Adrian Robbins-Cole

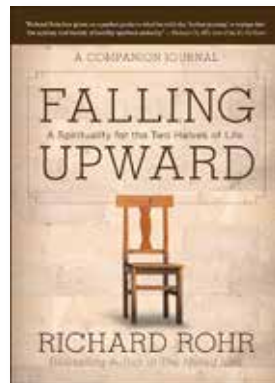
**R**ECENTLY I'VE BEEN READING a book which has made me think about the theme for this edition of *The Call*, which is "Acts of Selfless Service." If I am honest, my first reaction to this theme was that it sounded very hard and demanding! However, the book I have been reading argues that the development of a service-oriented outlook is a natural path for us and it leads to a fulfilling and meaningful life. The book is *Falling Upwards: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*. It is written by a much-loved writer on spirituality, Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest.

In the book Rohr says in the first stage of our lives, we are called to do the necessary work of establishing ourselves—of building up our identity, recognizing our skills, establishing our careers, creating families, and relationships. In spiritual terms, the work of the first half of life is about learning a sense of religious identity by belonging to a religious community and by absorbing ethical rules about the difference between wrong and right. In psychological terms, the

first half of life is about building a "healthy ego."

However, Rohr argues there is a danger in thinking that the business of the first half of life is the business of our whole life. If we make this mistake, the building of a healthy ego can become corrupted into a diseased life of greed and egoism.

Interestingly, Rohr argues that even if we mistakenly think the business of the first half of life is the business of our whole life, the fact that we have the image of God imprinted in our souls, creates a sense of unease and dissatisfaction in us if we think life is just about power, possessions, and



ego. This might reflect some of the unease and dislocation we see in our increasingly secular society.

So, what is the business of the second half of life? Rohr writes that once we have built a healthy ego in the first half of life, we are called to share what we have in the second half of life through service to others. If we use our gifts and possessions to serve God and our neighbor, we find meaning and purpose in our lives.

While Rohr speaks about there being spiritual tasks for the two halves of our lives, he says he does not mean this with chronological literalism. In fact, it is *both/and* rather than *either/or*. While in the first half of our life a lot of energy goes into building a "healthy ego," we are also called by Christ to acts of service during this period of our life. Likewise in the second half of our lives, we are not called to necessarily give away everything we have built up in the first half of our lives. Rather it is about recognizing the primary importance of serving others in this second act of our lives and keeping a healthy tension between the two.

Rohr argues that it often takes a failure or a crisis to push someone into second-half-of-life spirituality. A crisis like the death of a loved one, a health crisis or a job loss can make one question a life dominated by first-half-of-life concerns. Such a crisis can open us up to the voice of God in our souls, which is saying to us that true fulfillment in life is through second-half-of-life spirituality focused on serving God and neighbor.

And if we look at the thrust of Christ's teaching, it is about awakening us to the importance of serving others, without us having to have a crisis to bring this about. It is about trying to wake up people from just having first-half-of-life concerns to see the bigger picture that a life worth living is a life involving service.

Yours in Christ,

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## Warden's Message

### Into the Heart of God



Will Nystrom, warden

**M**ERRY CHRISTMASTIME! I am so grateful for our St. Andrew's community and the joy we experience worshipping together in anticipation of Christ's birth, singing carols full of good cheer, and celebrating in our beautiful church.

And in this, my last appearance as warden in *The Call*, I want to recommend to you a gift that is super impactful, but also pays you back one hundred times over, and that is to volunteer here at St. Andrew's. Walk into the church on any given day, and you will see activity. We are literally a 24/7 parish, buzzing with energy.

Whether it is a committee meeting, a Bible study, a youth retreat, a Christian learning event, volunteers cleaning the kitchen or packing lunches for those less fortunate, altar guild getting ready for a special service, our sextons keeping our building in ship shape, a wedding, a memorial, a baptism (my personal favorite!) or our clergy and staff doing the day to day work of tending to the parish, St. Andrew's is a bee hive of activity. For sure it is powered by love. But it is also powered by scores and scores of volunteers.

The late Bishop Tom Shaw, SSJE, wrote about this idea during his battle with brain cancer:

"You know, time, too often in our culture, is perceived as a problem; all of us, at some point, feel we don't have enough of it. Yet, because of Jesus the Messiah, all time is now God's time. It is part of the unfolding of God's glory. We are invited into it as an experience of the presence of God. I believe that is where our prayer, where our life together in gathered community, where our participation with God in making all things new is taking us: into the heart of God."

I can tell you that I never once regretted my decision to serve as warden. To the contrary, it has deepened my faith immensely. And it has provided me with the opportunity to connect with so many parishioners and to learn so much of the radical love which Jesus showed us all, and that we in turn owe to each other.

So, don't be shy! I certainly felt my share of imposter syndrome, and "I don't know what I'm doing" syndrome, and "but others are more qualified than me" syndrome. But I was wrong.

I saw a bumper sticker the other day that read "The world is ruled by those who show up." So true. It takes ten seconds of courage to sign up as a volunteer here at St. Andrew's in one of our endless opportunities. Please speak to me, or Megan Burns, or any of our clergy and we will help. You will be paid back one hundred fold in faith, joy, and fellowship. I promise.

Merry Christmas, my friends! It's been an honor to serve as warden. And St. Andrew's will continue to thrive with your love and support.



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**PARISH OFFICE:** 79 Denton Road,  
Wellesley, MA 02482-6404  
781.235.7310 | FAX: 781.235.0067  
standrewswellesley.org

**PUBLISHER:** Dan Dent  
**EDITOR:** Katharine Clark,  
Parish Administrator  
kate@standrewswellesley.org

# Are You a Selfless Giver?



The Rev. Margaret K. Schwarzer

IT SEEMS OBVIOUS TO SAY that most selfless givers wouldn't identify themselves as "selfless givers." Many extraordinary selfless givers view what they do as their vocation, or even as "normal."

We are humbled by people like Mother Theresa or Bishop Desmond Tutu who give of themselves and their talents selflessly, facing down hatred, death threats, callousness, and despair over and over again, to make a difference for good. In saluting these people, we recognize that profound selfless service may be at the core of true sainthood.

Even so, we can't let these extra special saints distract us from our own opportunities for selfless giving. Acts of selfless giving are on a continuum; each one is both good for the world and good for the souls who act, regardless of the size of the act.

As a professor of mine at Yale Divinity School liked to say, "When it comes to selfless acts, practice makes perfect." The more we do, the more (and larger) acts we are likely to be ready to do.

I sometimes challenge myself to find secret small selfless acts to do to "keep my hand in" acts of Christian kindness—just little things like putting more quarters in the meter than I need so someone has 20 free minutes at the meter later on, or buying a stranger a latte, or giving

a dollar to someone in the grocery line who has come up short.

But daily tasks count too. In a different way, most parents I know practice selfless giving every day. Especially new parents, who get a crash course in putting their needs last as they tend to their newborns night and day.

I remember the first parents in my twentysomething friend group telling all of us that they were both so tired (each with a full-time job and new parenting work) that they flipped a coin to see who would have to go out late at night to buy toothpaste when they ran out. We single twentysomethings were staggered. We couldn't imagine being that tired.

I do believe that seeing the world through the lens of selfless giving gives us much more to see.

Our pilgrimage in England this past year gave us several models of selfless giving. In particular, I found myself grateful to a man I never knew, Mr. Godfrey Allen, Cathedral Surveyor of St. Paul's Cathedral, London. He was charged with

keeping St. Paul's safe from aerial attack during World War II—a seemingly impossible and extremely dangerous task.

During the London Blitz, when bombs fell like rain for many nights, he signed up 102 volunteers. They posted a 24/7 watch of the cathedral by climbing the stairs and standing on the roofs of St. Paul's all day and in the pitch-black nights, armed with only a fire extinguisher and a flash light, determined to save the beloved London icon at all costs.

Even at the cost of their own lives over and over again, they risked their lives to serve the greater good. Once an unexploded bomb landed on the roof and once a smaller bomb blew up in a courtyard, but no real damage was done to the beloved Christopher Wren cathedral of 1675.

Where are you already performing selfless acts? Where are you being invited to do more? Blessings in your discernment around these questions. You will be making the world a more abundant life-giving place.



St Paul's Cathedral during the great fire raid in London, December 29, 1940.

Photo: Imperial War Museum, Public Domain



# Awake to the Needs of the World



The Rev. Sarah Robbins-Cole

CAUGHT THE TAIL END of a story on the radio the other day. The radio hosts were talking about something that had happened the week before. They had attended some event during which it had started to rain. One of the hosts said that she went over to a food stand to purchase a hotdog because she was hungry. However, despite her hunger she was not looking forward to eating a hotdog

with a bun that would very quickly become soggy in the rain. As she was standing in the queue for food and thinking about this, she realized that she was not getting soaked by the rain anymore. So, she looked around and realized that it was indeed still raining but the woman behind her, without telling her, had stepped one step closer to her back and extended her arm toward her so that she could share her umbrella with her. It was meant to be an anonymous act of kindness.

As I thought about this story, it made me think about how our ability to perform selfless service is dependent on our ability and effort to be self-aware. You cannot hold a door open for someone if you are completely consumed by your inward thoughts. You cannot listen to someone in need if you are overwhelmed by your own worries. You will not think about sharing the protection of your umbrella

with another if you don't notice a person in front of you getting soaked. Selfless service requires at some fundamental level an ability to be aware of our emotions and our physicality, so we are awake to the needs in the world.

I was talking to a member of our congregation recently who undertook the happiness experiment last spring. She said that she tries to be a kind person in her life, but she realized that tipping well, holding doors open, and letting people cut in traffic was a deeply ingrained habit. However, after practicing acts of kindness as a part of the experiment she continued doing those things, but she made an effort to connect with those people by looking them in the eyes. In other words, she allowed connections to occur between her and the recipients of her kindness. She noted that these connections made a positive impact on her level of happiness throughout the day.



Photo: Adobe Stock

# Parishioner Reflections

## Acts of Selfless Service

**F**OLLOWING ARE REFLECTIONS from our fellow parishioners on selfless service. Their stories are a testament that service can take many forms. What prompts a person to put aside personal wants, needs, and feelings to serve others? In a culture

centered so much on transactional relationships, what calls us to give our personal presence to help others? Our writers explore that willingness and celebrate it.

## Lessons Learned through Service



Caroline Condon

**I**N THE EMBRACE of our cherished community, I find myself reflecting on a journey that spans ten years—a journey marked by laughter in the junior choir, the resonance of harmonies in the senior choir, and the profound sense of belonging discovered through church school,

Rite-13, and confirmation class. I am Caroline Condon, a first-year student who has found not just a church, but a family that accepts me for who I am.

As a member of Wardie's choir, I've experienced the transformative power of song, where music's beauty intertwines with the bonds of community. The weekly blessings in the form of shared beliefs and collective growth have become the heartbeat of my spiritual sanctuary.

Yet, beyond the enchanting notes, St. Andrew's has instilled in me the values of service and stewardship. The Lenten outreach project during my confirmation class, dedicated to supporting those grappling with cognitive disabilities and mental health, became a pivotal moment of selfless

service. It was more than a project; it was a lens through which I saw the broader community around me, a community in need of compassion and understanding.

In a culture often immersed in transactional relationships, it was this experience that prompted me to put aside personal wants and needs. Witnessing the impact of our outreach project on lives struggling with unseen challenges opened my eyes to the power of personal presence in making a difference.

As I navigate the challenging waters of high school, St. Andrew's remains my unwavering anchor. The warm embrace of this community continues to shape my spiritual compass, and the lessons learned through service deepen my faith in both God and the people around me.

## Working in St. Andrew's Garden



D.D. Alexander

**W**HEN I RETIRED, I decided to focus on three things that I loved to do: teaching, horticulture, and faith. Lucky for me, all three intersect while working in the St. Andrew's gardens. I find peace in quietly weeding while listening to bird song, hope while planting daffodil bulbs, and satisfaction while teaching Boy Scouts how to prune. Rather than a grand commitment, I look for small opportunities to serve.



Photo: Peter B. Lull



## Change the World. One Selfless Act at a Time.



Betsy Millane

**S**ixty *Blades of Grass* is my book based on my family's experiences in the Dutch Underground during World War II. They were brave, committed, and full of fear. I often wonder, would I be able to risk my life to serve others, as they did?

In this excerpt, Rika, a resistance fighter, has discovered her once safe-haven, home is no longer safe. Her sister, Liesbeth, has created a closet in which to hide the Jews. Rika confronts her sister:

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"Liesbeth," I hiss. "What are you doing with that closet? Don't you know what kind of danger it puts us in?"

[Liesbeth] squeezes her hands together, starts to speak, stops, and shifts in her chair. I sit back. She tries to speak again. Finally, she finds her voice and begins.

"You should know that a family came into the bank a few weeks ago. A Jewish family, with a baby. They wanted their money."

She spreads her hands on the table. "The Germans say we can't give it to them, they have frozen all Jewish accounts. The parents started to argue with my boss, Mr. Erlicht, and the baby began to fuss. He asked me to hold the baby while he took them into the back room to talk."

She takes a deep breath and drops her hands in her lap.

"That baby! Rika, you would have fallen in love with her. She was a joy to hold. Dark black eyes, a tiny nose, red rosy cheeks. She held my finger."

"When they returned from the back room, the Jews thanked my boss. They took the baby from me and left. I asked Mr. Erlicht what he had done, and he asked me to meet him after work, in the park."

"He told me that he helps hide Jews. The group he works with

needs places to hide the Jews and I told him I would help, but we have nowhere to hide anyone here. He sent the workmen this week, and soon he will send me people to hide until they find permanent places to go underground. I know they cannot live here, but I can keep them safe for a day or two."

I shake my head hard at her. My naïve sister!

"You have no idea how terrible this idea is. You must tell your boss no."

Liesbeth looks at me, her brow furrowed, her mouth pressed together. Is there something she knows that I don't? Her face changes, it's gentle yet, at the same time, transformed into something radiant, good, appealing.

She reaches for my hand. "Rika, when I was holding the baby it came to me—it would be an honor to die for such a child." Liesbeth looks me in the eyes, her face suffused with feeling.

"And Rika, I know that you feel the same way."

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Change the world. One selfless act at a time.



# St. Andrew's Acts of Selfless Service



Photo: Via Facebook video

St. Andrew's Stitches sent baby clothes to Ukraine.



Photo: Courtesy common cathedral

common cathedral, a worship & food ministry on Boston Common.



Photo: Camn McCormick

Packing 10,000 dried meals to donate to the United Way.



Photo: Courtesy El Hogar

El Hogar ministry with school children in Honduras.



Photo: Courtesy Family Promise

Volunteer staffing at Family Promise Metrowest homeless shelter.



Photo: Courtesy St. Stephens

Various ministries with St. Stephen's, Boston.

## St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Officers, and Staff

**Warden** Will Nystrom [wardens@standrewswellesley.org](mailto:wardens@standrewswellesley.org)  
**Warden** Megan Burns [wardens@standrewswellesley.org](mailto:wardens@standrewswellesley.org)  
**Treasurer** Harry Condon [treas@standrewswellesley.org](mailto:treas@standrewswellesley.org)  
**Clerk** Peter Lull [clerk@standrewswellesley.org](mailto:clerk@standrewswellesley.org)  
**Rector** Rev. Adrian Robbins-Cole [adrian@standrewswellesley.org](mailto:adrian@standrewswellesley.org)  
**Associate Rector for Adult Formation and Membership**  
 Rev. Margaret Schwarzer [margaret@standrewswellesley.org](mailto:margaret@standrewswellesley.org)  
**Associate Rector for Youth and Families**  
 Rev. Sarah Robbins-Cole [sarah@standrewswellesley.org](mailto:sarah@standrewswellesley.org)

**Parish Administrator** Katharine Clark [kate@standrewswellesley.org](mailto:kate@standrewswellesley.org)  
**Pastoral Associate** Rev. Karen Vickers Budney [revkar7@comcast.net](mailto:revkar7@comcast.net)  
**Music Minister** Helen Ward Mannix [wardie@standrewswellesley.org](mailto:wardie@standrewswellesley.org)  
**Financial Administrator** Joanne Butler [joanne@standrewswellesley.org](mailto:joanne@standrewswellesley.org)  
**Christian Learning Coordinator**  
 Susan Jackson [susan@standrewswellesley.org](mailto:susan@standrewswellesley.org)  
**Sexton** Stephen F. Killeen [steve@standrewswellesley.org](mailto:steve@standrewswellesley.org)  
**Assistant Sexton** William Clover



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Photo: Peter B. Lull

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