



By Keara Ette
 Sunday, April 29, 2018

*Remain in me, as I remain in you.
 Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own
 unless it remains on the vine,
 so neither can you unless you remain in me.*

This week, we celebrated a great man who lived life so fully that it seemed that he lived the equivalent of five lives in one lifetime. Roger Hughes - often referred to as 'the man behind the curtain' at Old St. Pat's - was a testament to being a person of service and living abundantly.

I remember years ago, our staff was having a discussion about "the signs of the times": we were trying to listen for where God was talking in our context and what God was saying. Roger, who had been serving as the financial and organizational leader and partner to pastors Fr. Jack Wall and then Fr. Tom Hurley, would always say to the staff of ministers and theologians as we would gather for formation conversations: "This is your stuff ... but if you don't mind, I like being there and learning from all of you." And, without fail, Roger would be more than a 'fly on the wall', but would instead ask critical questions, challenge us to think of what one of the 'regular Catholics' would think or understand about an issue.

That particular day, Roger was sharing his frustration with our universal church for too often thinking too small. For being a church of "no" and a church that hung a sign on the door that included a long list of qualifications for entry. He stretched out his hands and asked with passion, "Isn't this how Jesus died on the cross? With arms open? Isn't that how the guy would also welcome people?"

I remember smiling and telling him that he was forbidden from ever again claiming not to be a theologian. "Roger," I said, "You ascribe to a theology of abundance."

As I have reflected on the life, the gifts, the beauty of this great character of Old St. Pat's over these past two weeks, that idea just keeps coming up. He was a guy who believed that first and foremost, God was a God of abundance. And if we at Old St. Pat's were going to try to proclaim, bear witness, and really act like the children of God, we needed to act with an attitude of abundance and not scarcity. Now, Roger would watch our bank reports and budgets like a hawk. He would sit for hours and hours with different members of our accounting, development, and special events staff and work through the line items and overall trends on our Sunday giving, our fundraising events, any capital campaigns, etc. He patiently planned, waited, worked, networked, and negotiated for over 15 years to accomplish the dream of getting a great space and perpetual parking rites for members of Old St. Pat's in that space on the southeast corner of Adams and DesPlaines. He brought us from a place of vibrant ideas (but barely enough money to pay a few staff members) to a place with a renewed campus with worship spaces, meeting spaces, and spaces for organizations who

share our mission for social justice. He was far from frivolous and often pushed us to find better deals on the things that we needed for our ministries.



But when it came to the way we did church: Roger was a child of the God of Abundance. When the idea of doing something bold and trying to do and be church in a way that bespeaks kinship with our neighbors in North Lawndale, Roger was the first to say, "The question is not whether or not we should do it ... because the 'yes' is obvious. The question is then, how do we make it happen and how do we do it in a way that is faithful to the mission of Old St. Pat's and would make the people who support Old St. Pat's proud."

At his funeral on Tuesday, Roger's children and grandchildren were able to share some of the stories and reflections about their father/grandfather. I cried and smiled through every moment, for it was so beautiful to see the evidence of Roger's life planted deeply within each of them. Their love, their wit, their generosity of spirit - all are evidence of the love and life that Roger and his wife (his "bride" as he always referred to her) poured into them and into the world.

And, when we are at our best (another "Roger-ism"), I think the community of Old St. Pat's reveals that we are children of the God of Abundance that so deeply rooted and inspired Roger Hughes. When we work hard to say "how can we make this happen?" instead of "sorry - that's not been done before;" when we keep raising the bar so as to measure ourselves by the standard of God's mercy and not simply 'what other churches do;' when we refuse to let the sadness or darkness of the world paralyze us, but rather respond with more light and more joy ... when we do these things, we will live as Children of the God of abundant love and endless mercy.

Roger Hughes was deeply bound up in "the Great Love Story" of Jesus, and from it he had the joy, the determination, the passion, the creativity, and the energy to lead "the business of church well so we could do the work of church exquisitely" - in his home and family, in his community, and at Old St. Pat's. Roger was faithful to the call to remain on the vine for a lifetime, and because of that, he spent his entire life exquisitely pouring out love, humor, generosity, and hope. We've got this, and we'll keep it rolling, Uncle Roger.

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