

## **Journey to Generosity – D Walker stewardship testimony 5 Nov 2017**

Friends, I stand here not as your Moderator nor as the reader of another comedic scripture lesson, but because this week it's my turn to talk as a member about stewardship: or, the Journey to Generosity, to invoke our theme.

I've done talks on this before, and you've heard it before. For several years now, it's been our tradition to invite various members to share their stories about their life at MCC, to tell why our church is important to us, and why we support it. But then we customarily stop before we get to a key point, about money.

We don't like to talk about money – at least, not our own, and not at church. It makes us uncomfortable. It seems like it should be a private matter – and ultimately our financial support for this church is, at least, an *individual* decision. We don't want to feel like we're being judged for how much or how little we're able to give, and we don't want to make anyone else feel uncomfortable.

I don't want to make you feel uncomfortable either, but we do need to talk about this. Because ultimately, the health and the future of our church depend on our financial support. Of course we all contribute our time and effort, as best we can. That can mean a lot of different things: serving on boards or committees, being a PF leader or advisor, teaching Sunday school, working on our many Outreach projects or in the Mustard Seed shop.

Some people adopt a favorite cause or a job around the house, like being ushers to greet everyone at the door with a smile and a bulletin and a warm handshake; by making music; by making sure we've got flowers in worship and coffee ready to share afterwards. There are other jobs where a lot of us pitch in from time to time, like the work day yesterday; and pretty much everyone turns out to work all weekend at the Strawberry Festival.

These are all vital contributions that tie us together as a congregation, and make our church experience possible. But it's not enough: we still need money to operate. I'm not here to talk about the budget; we have other time set for that, and we all know that our programs and the life of the church, our professional staff and our monthly expenses, all cost money. I'm here to ask you, to ask yourself: am I doing my part, doing what I can, to support our church financially?

And I want to tell you what we're doing, Susan and I, and I want to tell you about our journey. In our household budget, we commit somewhere between 9 and 10 percent of our income to donations of various kinds. Some of those would be called charities, some are more like advocacy for causes we believe in or for the arts and education or for services we enjoy ourselves, like public radio. But the largest part, around 7%, goes to MCC.

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We know that we're very fortunate to be in a position to do that, and of course we know not everyone can. We weren't always able to do that, either. When we joined MCC in 1994, I think our annual pledge was about \$40 a week, or about \$2,000 a year. Our budget was pretty tight. We were raising kids on one income, and our mortgage was bigger than I wanted. But here at church we saw that some families were giving more, and as the church became a more important part of our lives over the years, we wanted to do more. So we increased our pledge by a little bit year over year, in dollars and as a percent of our income. As we gave more over time, that weekly offering never felt like a big bite. It felt good to be making a difference.

There might have been some years where we could not increase our giving, when our expenses grew faster than our income – and some years where the increase was a little bigger. But on average we increased our weekly pledge by \$10 a year: 24 years ago it was \$40, and for 2018 we just turned in a pledge card for \$280 a week.

If we're lucky enough to retire in maybe another 10 years or so, maybe we won't be able to sustain that level of giving. Or for that matter if I got downsized out of my job, which can happen to pretty much anyone any time, we might have to pull back from that right now. But knowing not everyone can do this, knowing we may not always be able to continue like this, makes it feel even more important to *do what we can, while we can, because we can.*

We have a few families who contribute financially but don't pledge. Those contributions absolutely do help, but to make a budget and plan for next year we need commitments we can count on. So if you're contributing, can you make it a *commitment* with a pledge card today? Every pledge is important, even if it seems small. If you *are* making a pledge, can you see your way to make it a little bigger, by maybe \$10 or \$20 week?

Again, we all realize not everyone *can* do that. So if you can't, know that your church is grateful for what you do and for your presence among us in fellowship. At the end of the day, knowing that you're doing as much as you can, whatever that may be, is a surprisingly good feeling. I want to invite you and encourage you to join Susan and me in moving one step up the path on a mutual journey to generosity.

I hope you'll consider that as you fill out a pledge card this week. Or as the preacher might say, may it be so, and may it be soon. And may God be with you in your prayerful financial deliberations. Amen.