

*The following was shared by Pastor Jenn with the congregation as a stewardship testimonial on October 22<sup>nd</sup>.*

## **Getting into Hot Water**

Today marks the beginning of our annual stewardship campaign (*Journey to Generosity*), when we begin to plan our budget for next year, and talk as a church about why it's important to give generously, so that we can do more of God's work and do it better than we've ever done before.

As a church, we get a little rent money, and we get some proceeds from fundraising efforts, and we get a little income from investments, but it's your willingness to share some of what you earn each week that really makes this community tick.

If you've been around MCC a while, you are used to me saying a quick sound bite every week in worship about giving right before we take an offering. But the time has come for me to get a little deeper into the fray.

The leadership of this church has been talking for months now about promoting greater transparency and openness in our giving habits. We, as a church, are healthy in so many ways, and this is one way we can be healthier: to give up the shame and secrecy about money and charitable giving.

Each week during this campaign, a different person is going to stand up in front of you and tell, as they always do, why they give. But this year, our speakers are also going to tell you something about what they give. And I decided to go first.

I came to this decision with a little fear and trembling. After participating in 11 stewardship drives at MCC, I've never spoken about my families giving until now. What if, in your eyes, I give too little... and then I feel ashamed? Or worse... what if, in your eyes, I give too much... and then you feel ashamed?

If we are ever going to get beyond our shame entirely, we must move through it; and if I'm going to ask you to be more open with me, then, it stands to reason that I need to be more open with you. Because that's what leaders do. So here goes...

In 2017, my husband Clark and I plan to give 9.6% of our take-home pay away. About 2/3 of that goes towards our church pledge, to the faith community that we love, the Monroe Congregational Church. This amounts to about \$96 a week, or \$5,000 a year. So, if you are looking at your handy dandy bulletin insert, you can see that puts the Gingras family in the "Voyagers" category along with eight others.

The other third of our charitable giving we have available for other important causes we support, like the Center for Family Justice, Hurricane Relief, the United

Way, Silver Lake, the American Cancer Fund, One Great Hour of Sharing and many others.

In 2018, we'd very much like to become tithers and give away 10% of our after tax income. Because we want to give until it feels good. So I'm planning on increasing our pledge to MCC accordingly which moves us into the "Sojourners" category. I think another \$500 a year will bring us to 10%, so I'm placing a pledge card for \$5,500 in the plate today.

Is it hard to do? To be honest, it has taken a few years for us to get to almost 10%. What helped for us the most was paying our pledge electronically. We became accustomed to giving every week, and not having to remember an envelope helped us stay on track. So that the church could count on what was needed. Because that's important.

The way I see it, pledging is kind of like taking a hot, hot bath. Maybe it's a little shock to the system getting in, but if you take your time and step in gradually you realize it's the most amazing feeling.

And here's the thing, saying YES has become not only what we like to do, but what we LOVE to do. It feels so good that even when Clark was between jobs and money got really tight we stepped out in faith to complete our pledge – our promise to this church that we love. To do otherwise would have been a decision based in fear, not in faith and love.

Why do we give? We give because God tells us to, but we also give because we know it's not really ours to begin with. We believe profoundly in the people we are giving to: This church, that is so full of visionary people, loving people, servant people, changed people, people who can be brought to tears when they talk about the place that this church has in their hearts.

I hope that what I've shared with you today doesn't get me in hot water. Or maybe I do? Because the water feels too healing, too beneficial, too right to want to do otherwise. If you are ready to get into some hot water with us, and join us on this stewardship journey, simply complete a pledge form and place it in the offering plate. Pledge cards can be found in your pews. Stewardship season has begun, so let's celebrate this journey that we are taking together, and the hope we have in what God is doing in this place.