

This Stewardship Testimonial was given by Russ Hart on December 4th

Good Morning. I'm Russell Hart. I and my wife Katie have been members of FPC since 1990. Our daughter Amanda was dedicated in this church, attended RE classes here, was fostered and nurtured in the ideals of our 7 principles in this church and was held in the spirit of those principles until she graduated from high school. I believe that embrace has continued to hold her until this day even as an adult. As for me I have either taught in RE and/or been a member of the RE committee for about 30 years.

So, it's that time of year when we get to think about stewardship, when we get to think about the value of those institutions that sustain us, that foster our connections, that support our children and support our families, that sustain our collective spirit. That brings us together in common cause toward our spiritual well-being, that holds us in community. And if you do think about it, it becomes obvious that it really is a privilege for us to be in a position to do so, to be able to worship here. Not everyone has this privilege. Look around at this beautiful structure and think about our beautiful campus. Consider that we have really good leadership. It's a privilege. So, there's the question: what are we going to do with this privilege?

The theme of this year's stewardship drive is "Growing Connections", with one of the focuses of those connections being to "deepen our commitment to our children and youth". So, let me focus some on that and my apologies to those of you who have heard this before as it contains themes that I've spoken about for probably 20 years.

I became involved in RE because it became clear to me early on that this church, this RE program, the curriculums and what they attempt to impart had great potential for helping my daughter to develop an ethical and spiritual foundation in a way I could not do on my own. I wanted that for her. And I have been willing to commit my energy and my financial resources then, and now in the present, toward that goal, for all the children and youth in this church, because this is a community that attempts to support all children, all youth, all individuals and couples and all families.

As a therapist, now retired, I've been aware that our children and youth are often encouraged to become attracted to and love a lot of the wrong things that are not healthy for them. I'm aware that they often cut off the healthy pieces of themselves in order to fit in, to belong. I'm aware that the numerous pressures on children and youth are intensely difficult in ways that we adults might not fully understand or appreciate. And those pressures begin earlier and earlier. But here at FPC, through our RE program, kids have an opportunity to develop resiliency against many of those pressures. We have an opportunity to help our youth to stay connected to the healthy pieces of themselves. To help them engage in activities that become resiliency enhancing.

Likewise, when we ask our children and youth to think freely for themselves, and to speak freely for themselves, without fear, without shame, without judgement, without fear of sinfulness we are helping them to develop emotional intelligence (and there is research that demonstrates that emotional intelligence is a better indicator of success in adulthood than grades, or where you graduated from college). We are helping our children and youth to develop empathy and self-discipline and self-awareness. This, as I've previously mentioned, becomes the foundation for responsible and ethical behavior in our children. It becomes a catalyst for our children's natural spirituality. It's what helps them to feel safe in a fast-paced tumultuous world. This is why I've been involved with our religious education program for 30 years. It's why I've continued to support FPC financially and have increased my pledge every year when asked to do so.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees and the Stewardship Committee, I'd like you to consider the privilege of being able to worship in this church and to increase your pledge accordingly to the best of your abilities.