

**This Stewardship Testimonial was given in Church by Neil Sanders on November 20<sup>th</sup>.**

Good morning everyone. Let me begin by thanking the Stewardship Committee for inviting me to speak in support of the current pledge drive, to talk about how important FPC has been to me and my family over the years, and--picking up on this year's theme--to spotlight the many connections this has led us to make during that time.

Ingrid and I first came to FPC back in 2001. We had previously been attending a Quaker meeting in West Concord, but unlike Baltimore where we had been members of a large and very active Quaker meeting, there had been only a smattering of people every Sunday in West Concord and even fewer children. So we decided to do some church shopping. On that initial visit to FPC, we began by dropping off our two children in RE before going into the Sanctuary. We had barely got inside the door of Fellowship Hall before a bunch of kids came running up to Olivia and Graham, excited to see a couple of their Acton-Boxboro schoolmates. Well that sealed the deal! Although I do have to say that the welcome Ingrid and I received was pretty warm and welcoming, too. And we've never looked back.

So, the first key connection we made at FPC was through our children. And we owe a huge debt of gratitude to the Religious Education program here at FPC. Not only did Graham and Olivia attend classes from 3<sup>rd</sup> grade until high school but they also went through Our Whole Lives and Coming of Age. Ingrid and I like to think that they benefited from having received a firm Quaker grounding but we have no doubt that their ultimate shaping into the mature adults they have become is in no small part due to the values and beliefs imbued in them here at FPC. I suspect many of you with children have had a similar experience. That connection alone is worthy of our financial support.

Another connection that has really reverberated with me during these past 20 plus years is the social action opportunities FPC has provided. Coming from a Quaker background with a long tradition of advocating for social justice and a strong emphasis on the inherent worth and dignity of all individuals—what Friends refer to as “that of God in everyone” —I have felt right at home. Not only have I been able to indulge my passion for peace but I have also seen a hearteningly steady increase in the number of social outreach activities taken up by members of this church. It is wonderful to see so much incredibly hard and valuable work being done by an ever-growing number of task forces dedicated to such a diverse group of social justice causes. Here, too, is a connection that is hugely worthy of our financial support.

I also feel privileged to have served FPC in a variety of volunteer capacities—on the Board, as President, and most recently as Chair of the Worship Committee. Let's not forget that volunteers are the life blood of churches like ours. When it comes to stewardship, it's not just our financial support that enables FPC to continue to prosper but it is also the countless hours that so many of you lovingly devote to making this church such a warm, friendly place, such a force for good, and such a spiritually uplifting community. There's probably no greater feeling of connection than being one of a great many cogs that together enable an infinitely larger wheel to keep turning.

Finally, I have made a great many friends at FPC since coming to the church. These are the personal connections that have enriched my life and deepened my love for FPC. Just one small example is the FPC Brew Crew. What does it say about a church that encourages its parishioners to get together and enjoy a beer or two or maybe even three! And would you believe that during one such beer drinking session a few years ago several of us came up with the novel idea that maybe we might be able to raise funds for the church by holding a Beer Festival at which even more people could gather together to celebrate the delights of God's own beverage! And so it came to pass! In all seriousness, I'd like to note that one of the prime benefits of what we can now refer to as the First Annual Assabet Craft Beer and Food Truck Festival is the connections it can facilitate with so many people in Stow, Acton, and other neighboring towns who have never before set foot on our church grounds.

I'm sure that many of you can point to similar connections that keep you coming back to FPC. If so, I implore you to support everything that goes into establishing and maintaining those connections by being as generous as possible in pledging your support during this stewardship drive. Thank you!