

On Stewardship

This coming year marks my 15th year anniversary as a member of this church community. Now I know many of you will say that's nothing – around here you're still considered the new kid on the block. But for me it is a big deal. You see, I've never been a part of any community or institution for this long - not even close.

Before moving to Salisbury and joining this church I'd moved over 40 times between 27 towns and cities, in 14 countries on 4 continents. Then little over 15 years ago as Cristin and I were packing our bags to relocate yet again from New Delhi to Katmandu she looked at me and said "I want to be part of a community". Honestly, I had no idea what she was talking about.

But I do now. Largely thanks to all of you here today in this parish. You have provided me with a remarkable gift I've never had or frankly ever envisioned - a community filled with warmth, faith, fellowship and love. And even after 15 years it still hits me with the open eyes and thankful heart of a young convert. For the first time in my life I feel blessed to be walking with a community – this community on a path of faith and fellowship for not days or months but years, decades and a lifetime.

I have felt especially blessed by all of your support and love this past year as you know I lost both my Dad to cancer and my twin brother to suicide.

Is this path always harmonious- of course not- but whatever our differences and disagreements we actively acknowledge that we are all grounded in and by God's purpose and grace.

But I do at times worry that I and many of us can easily become complacent living in this wonderful community. I often forget it takes hard work, commitment, faith and yes, financial contributions to keep our church thriving.

I have vivid images of my grandfather's last churches in his twilight years- as interim minister for several Presbyterian Churches in CT and NY. Changing demographic wreaked havoc on these churches. They were magnificent crumbling edifices with only 2 to 3 dozen parishioners and without the resources to move out of the decaying inner city. These were wonderful people and my grandfather was a remarkable Minister – who was on the forefront of desegregation in the south for four decades. We often think people are enough to create a vibrant church but financial resources or the lack thereof do make a difference. Without solid resources it is difficult to maintain strong fellowship, outreach and community.

Another worry of mine is that we can forget about those so less fortunate than ourselves by living in this idyllic corner of CT. It is easy for us all to forget or ignore that there are over 10,000 families homeless in CT this year, that close to 10% of those wanting to work in America can find no employment, that 20% of this world's population goes to bed hungry every night and that over 1/2 billion children have no access to education nor adequate health nutrition. Are we doing everything we can or only enough to feel good about what we are doing? I can only speak for myself - I too often only do and give what is easy- and no more. I certainly can and need to do far more, especially in these difficult economic times. I, and hopefully many of you, are willing to say we must do more, far more and what better place than with and through our church - to connect

directly with our own community and the wider community in our town, our state our nation and our world.

Yes, we are very fortunate to have a strong endowment in this church- but that can often be a double edged sword. In India I worked with the Ford Foundation in creating a national water rights association. We were charged with determining out how big an endowment to create for this organization. The right answer was not a fully 100% endowed organization - not even close. In their research the Ford Foundation found the most robust and sustainable organizations had endowments that covered 15-20% of the operating expenses. They found that organizations, and churches were no exception, very often become complacent and directionless with large endowments. And I might suggest that with our healthy endowment - used largely as a means to keep us in a nice and comfortable edifice - that just as Jesus turned over the money lenders tables in the temple he might be frowning at our financial stewardship as being at the very least spiritually complacent and somewhat self centered. So I urge you all to be active financial participants in this wonderful church and that by doing so you purposely engage this church to do far far more with the tremendous resources we have on hand. First and foremost send in your pledge cards, and second - if you possibly can- please stretch your comfort zone by giving more than you have given in the past. I do truly believe that by wholly vesting ourselves financially in this church it will help to move us collectively on a path of creating an energized and, dare I say, radical and disruptive force for love and kindness and goodness throughout our communality and beyond.

Whatever each of you can give financially, we Trustees thank you for together creating, building nurturing and sustaining this incredible community of faith, love and fellowship. We are truly a blessed church.

David Rich: November 10th, 2013