

October 29, 2017 – Why I Give

Matthew 22:34-40

At their September meeting we asked the members of our Church Council to respond to the question, “Why do you give to First United Church?” The members were invited to respond both verbally and in writing. Some excerpts from their responses are included on the letters that you are receiving today from our Stewardship Committee.

But as I pondered the question and listened to their answers, I realized that my own response was somewhat superficial. I wasn't ready to put my answer in writing. This was a question that I needed to be able to answer fully. This was a question that needed a deeper exploration. Why do I give to First United Church? Do I give out of guilt, to pay my own salary, to fix the roof or feed the homeless? Do I give because I like the people in this congregation? Do I give because I've been a part of the United Church since I was born? Why do I give?

In order to answer this question I went back and thought about my history in the church. I grew up in a small rural congregation in southern Ontario. My parents brought me and my seven siblings to church every Sunday from September to June, rain or shine, snow or sleet. I remember taking nickels and quarters as Sunday School offering. I remember watching those coins as they fell out my hand, rolled along the floor and down the large grate at the front of the church. I remember my father filling the offering envelope every Sunday – one side for local, the other for M&S. Of course I have no idea how much my parents gave –

money was never discussed in our house. And I don't really know why they gave; but I do know that, for my parents, giving to the church was important.

Then I thought back to my late twenties when I came back to church after about a ten year hiatus. I was living near the Beach in Toronto. I was a young professional working for IBM, making close to a six figure salary. I had more money than I knew what to do with. But I was lonely. I had no sense of belonging. And because of trauma I had experienced as a child I was hurting in ways that I had barely even admitted to myself.

At Bellefair United Church I found a place of belonging, a place of safety, a place where healing and personal growth were possible and even encouraged. At the church I was introduced to healing touch and guided meditation. In that church I found love and acceptance. Eventually I came out as a lesbian woman and I **learned what it means to love myself.**

I joined study groups, meditation groups and discovered a sense of connection to God, a spirituality that I had never known before. I came to realize that God is not some being who lives in the sky but is instead The Ground of my Being, an integral part of who I am – that part of me that is sacred, that is holy. I let go of my Sunday School perception of God as a white-haired father figure in the sky and began to explore feminine images of the sacred. I began to feel more connected to this Spirit God that was a part of all creation and I opened my heart to a God that is the essence of Love. I began to understand what Jesus meant

when he said, **“You must love God, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind.”**

But I think the most wonderful thing that happened when I came back to the church was that I found a place where I could offer the gifts that I have been given. Within a year of walking through the doors at Bellefair United Church I had become a full member of the congregation, I was teaching Sunday School, and I was chairing the Christian Education Committee. I still remember how honoured I felt when the minister came up to me and asked me if I would be interested in taking that position. I had never even been on a church committee and here she was offering me a position of leadership. I began to spend a lot of my free time at the church helping in any way I could, and I started to understand what Jesus meant when he told the Pharisees that the second most important law was to **love your neighbour** as yourself.

So when I experienced my first Stewardship campaign at Bellefair United Church I gave out of gratitude:

- gratitude for a place where I felt a sense of belonging;
- gratitude for a place where I felt safe, became whole and learned to love myself;
- gratitude for a place where my spirituality was nurtured and I learned to love the Ground of my Being;
- gratitude for all that life had given me and for the fact that I was able to give and give generously.

And I gave because I believed in what Bellefair United Church was contributing to their congregation, to the Beach community and to the world. I loved that The United Church of Canada offered mission to other countries through partnerships, I loved that Bellefair was an inclusive church that welcomed new ideas about God and a wide variety of people. I loved that Bellefair was an active congregation that reached out to help those in need. I believed in the mission of the church. I believed in the importance of **loving God and loving our neighbours as ourselves.**

Now, nearly thirty years later, my connection to the church has grown in ways I couldn't even have imagined. But I realize there is one thing that hasn't changed: I still give out of a sense of gratitude and I still give because I believe in the mission of this church:

- A mission that includes being a **caring community of faith.** First United is a place where we gain a sense of belonging.
- A mission that includes actively pursuing **spiritual growth.** First United is a place where we learn to love ourselves and especially that part of ourselves that is the sacred.
- A mission that includes actively pursuing **compassionate outreach.** First United is a place where we have many opportunities to demonstrate our love for our neighbour.

So that's **why I give** to First United Church.

Why do you give?

I invite you to go on a similar journey of discovery. Think about how your life has been impacted by the church. Think about the ways that you have been able to offer your gifts to the church. Think about the many ways that the church impacts the lives of others. And if you believe in the mission of this congregation then I invite you to give generously

- so that we can connect with even more people in this community who are seeking a spiritual home, a place where they can learn to love God;
- so that we can connect with even more people who are looking for a safe place to learn to love themselves;
- and so that we can connect with even more people who are looking for new ways to love their neighbour.

Why do you give?