



Sharing the Good News!

Penn Northeast Conference of the United Church of Christ

Hey, you didn't put anything in!

by Alan C. Miller Conference Minister

A number of years ago I was worshipping with one of our congregations that was on the verge of closing. The membership had dwindled to approximately two dozen people and there were only twelve to fifteen members who still attended worship. Just about everyone remaining was past retirement age, except for the five year old girl who came each Sunday with her grandparents. Each week she watched with a sense of awe as the pastor led the service. One day she told the pastor that she wanted a part in the service and the pastor responded by making her the usher. The pastor told me: "It's the best idea I ever had." I was intrigued and blessed as I watched this beautiful child come forward to take the offering plate from the pastor. Then to my surprise, instead of passing the plate through the congregation, she went through the pews and stood before each member until they put something in the plate. The pastor told me after the service that this little angel had increased giving by a couple percent. Apparently the very first week she took the offering she did not understand that sometimes husbands and wives give as a couple, so if only one of the pair put an envelope in the plate she would yell at the other: "Hey, you didn't put anything in!" The embarrassment of being "called out" by a five year old always caused the other member of the couple to reach in their purse or wallet and make a contribution.

October and November are the usual months that many congregations conduct their annual stewardship drive. They are also the months that I hear members complain about "the pastor's annual money sermon" or pastors agonize over the fact that they "hate to ask for money." If you are in either of these two categories, then you haven't gotten it yet.



Stewardship is not a budget campaign that happens once a year, nor is it the offering time of the worship service. Stewardship is a way of life. Stewardship is the realization that everything we have comes from the graciousness of God, and we are called to be stewards of all these good gifts so that others might also learn of God's graciousness. To be a steward is to live with a sense of calling, purpose, hope, and graciousness. Sometimes stewardship takes the form of giving money, sometimes it takes the form of serving, and sometimes it takes the form of living each moment of our lives so that others might see and meet Christ in and through us. At its best, stewardship is all of these expressions of faith, rolled into one.

That precious little girl was so awed by the worship of God that even at five years of age; she sought a way to serve. Perhaps God is using this child to challenge all of us --- "How much of our lives are we giving to God?"

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