

Stewardship Moment October 8, 2017
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The church of my childhood in Chicago was a United Church of Christ/American Baptist denomination, though at the time, that did not mean anything to me. My memories of that time are something that I feel more than just remember. I remember the church basement where we would have Sunday school, where we would change into costumes for the plays we put on at Christmas and Easter, where we would transform the space into a haunted house at Halloween, probably not the norm for many churches. I remember church retreats where we would race around finding secret staircases and hidden rooms, where we would put on talent shows and once did a rendition of Edgar Allan Poe's The Tell-Tale Heart. I remember the red sandstone that we would scrape off (until we were caught) and use to make houses for ants and roly-polies. I remember the children's message before we would go off to Sunday school, on the steps, much as we do here, where children would say surprising and sometimes funny things. As youth, we were given the chance to participate in the service, and we raised money for Heifer project, and even went to the farm run by Heifer International, in Perryville Arkansas. I remember it as a place where children were more than tolerated – we were welcomed and valued and asked over, indeed continue to be asked over, by people who had known us our whole lives.

When we moved to Raleigh, 12 years ago, we were without a church. My husband, previously an altar boy in a Catholic church, had very little desire to ever return inside the four walls of a church. Intermittently, I would visit a church or two, attend a few services, but never found a spiritual home. When my children were born, I tried again – I wanted them to have the kind of experience that I had, and I would go, alone or with one of them, and while many were lovely, none of them spoke to me. It was luck that brought me to UPUCC, and it only took one visit to understand what a special place it is. A place full of people working for good and justice and change in our world, a place where questions are encouraged rather than brushed off, a place where faith allows for doubt or worry, and yet remains strong. A place where a child could feel safe to ask the questions that they have. Somehow Doug's sermons provide exactly what I needed to hear or to ponder.

So, I came back. I brought my kids. Even my husband comes on occasion. I became part of the children's committee and a teacher in the church school. At first, my involvement was brought about by my daughter, whose shyness is a more outwardly visible version of my own. She would not stay in church school without me, and was not exactly quiet if remaining in worship. Since I wasn't going to get to hear the meditation either way, I began to attend, and then to teach in the children's church. One of the things that makes this place so special also made me worried about teaching. Who was I, with all the questions I had, to teach children about a spiritual path. I realized that my role was not to provide answers, but to allow a space for questioning. As part of the Children's committee, I have been able to see firsthand the time and care that go into what and how we teach the children. With the leadership of Kate, and Betsy, and Peg, I have seen the dedication and generosity of time and effort that make the classrooms the welcoming places they are, where every child has a space. The work that goes into finding

the best curriculum, and the striving to make the lessons relevant, grounded, and engaging. When Kate left, I was fortunate enough to be part of the committee tasked with finding someone to fill her rather large shoes. Even though my kids are young now, I was particularly interested in the youth ministry, as that seems to be a time where the way questions of faith are approached and answered, and the way the youth involved and valued makes the difference in whether they stay engaged members of the church, or check out. We have been so incredibly fortunate and blessed to have Anne join us. The youth of this church are among the most poised, thoughtful, and industrious group I have met. And we are working for more opportunities to engage the youth with the younger children.

For me, the Children's Committee and teaching in the children's church are how I try, in however small a way, to give back to this amazing place. It pushes me to think and to listen, and reminds me to focus on the fun. To listen to the way that children approach their faith and how they understand the lessons we try to guide them through. I am grateful for this opportunity for stewardship, and I encourage any of you to join us. Truer here than anywhere I have been, all are welcome.