

March 18, 2012

## **Carrie Pericola – Stewardship Committee Chair**

Today we are kicking off the Stewardship Celebration. We have decided it is an annual event that should be a celebration as it is a way for each of us to grow closer to God and to become more generous and loving.

When I was asked to chair the Stewardship Ministry this year, I declined. Bruce Weaver was persistent though and kept asking. I talked with my husband and decided to listen to the voice in my head--God's voice. It happened that the day I agreed to it was a day the sermon was about answering God's call and I truly felt like it was aimed at me.

The next thoughts I had were: What does Centre Church mean to me? Why do I come here each week (or at least almost each week)? Why does this matter to me? And of course, what does stewardship mean to me? As I explored the answers to these questions I realized that what I have been missing lately. I was missing a part of the personal side of the church. I love our church community but sometimes feel like we are missing the why we are the way we are.

It was only five years ago when I first visited Centre Church. I was recently married and had moved to the North Shore from Metro West. Living in Saugus we had visited the congregational churches in town--there are two, one is a UCC and the other is not. The UCC church felt like what I was use to but my main concern was the size of the congregation and did not see bring up my family there. The other church had a large, active congregation but was not as friendly or as comfortable for me. Then driving through Lynnfield (on our way to Richardson's for some ice cream) we saw Centre Church and decided to try it. It felt like home, and everyone was so friendly. Chuck Cotting was there inviting us to the first wine tasting and the Marinos had recently become members and discussed with us the church visiting process. We started coming on a more regular basis, and often I would come by myself since my husband is a member of Our Lady of Assumption.

I found Centre Church at a point in my life that I was going through a major transition. The transition into marriage with the move to another part of the state and into a house with my mother-in-law (a situation that did not last long) was rather tough and much tougher than we imagined it would be. I found coming to Centre Church helped give me the strength and calmness to get through some of these hard times. I have found such a connectedness to my own beliefs and to God when I attend it truly helps put me in the right frame of mind.

The church continues to be there for me through difficult times in my life. Steve and I will never forget when I was put on bed rest for the last few weeks of my pregnancy and having Doreen DiFillipo deliver flowers each week usually in a snowstorm. (Steve works for National Grid and was working for a week straight after the ice storm which occurred the day after I was put on bed rest.) Steve will tell you that at least two of the weeks,

Doreen was delivering the flowers before our driveway had been plowed out and he would meet her at the end of it.

Then there was having the entire congregation stand up during Hazel's baptism when Dennis asked for our family to stand up. It was such a strong feeling even it had been a mistake to feel that support. Or getting an Easter lily after Steve's grandfather (who was very much like a father to him) passed away a couple of years ago. These simple stories go on and on. I know as a member of this church there are people who care about me and my family even though we are not related. To me this is what is so wonderful about Centre Church.

Now as for what stewardship means. To me it is not all about money. Money is important because we need to be able to maintain the building, buy supplies, pay salaries, etc., but it is also about what we give to one another through time, friendship and helping one another. I am a true believer that we are all equal in God's eyes and that we need to care for one another in that way. I feel this church strives to do this. I look at the number of Heifer arks that we have hanging in the Narthex and you can see how much we care about the world. To me part of the job of the Stewardship Ministry is to remind us that we all need to be more giving and more generous so that we can become closer to God. God asks us to give of ourselves and of our possessions. (Find bible reference)

What does it mean to be a member of Christ's Church? To me it means treating other as you would like to be treated. Maintaining your relationship with God and strengthening it through your actions. Life is all about relationships, but perhaps the most important one is the one you have with God. How do you work on this relationship? For each of us it is different. I know when I come to church regularly, I definitely see the world in a better view even with the violence and sad news filling our media. It is giving of myself in time, money, and effort to help others and the church. It is listening to God's voice when you are asked to do something like chair the Stewardship Ministry Committee.

As I gathered people together to form the Stewardship Ministry Committee, I spoke with each of them about trying to personalize our campaign this year. This is what we have decided to do. Our theme is modeled after our church motto and is: Many hands. Many stories. One Church. Our campaign will be run a bit differently this year. You will notice the packets will not include a pledge card. During the campaign we would like you to think about how much you want to pledge and what percentage will go to the operating budget of the church and what percentage will go to Outreach Ministries. The pledge cards will be given out on Stewardship Sunday, April 29th and we hope you will be here to fill them out, turn them in and celebrate our church with us. In the weeks before April 29th you will hear many stories from fellow parishioners answering some of the questions I asked myself. We hope you will also think about these questions as well. What is God calling each of us to do? How are you answering?

Please stop by the library after the service to pick up your packet so we can save money on postage. And join us for a wonderful celebration fellowship time after the service in the Fireside Room. Thank you!!