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### Tower Day Story for Stewardship

When Carrie asked me to share the Tower Day story, I began to think about all the other stories that people would likely share during the Stewardship campaign. I anticipated that those stories would focus on the wonderful programs, activities, and opportunities, supported by our pledges, which help define who we are as a church. Like all those great programs, Tower Day, with its significant presence in the community, helps define who we are—a church that is committed to children and education. But, unlike other programs, Tower Day actually contributes to the positive side of the ledger. Transfers from Tower Day to the church operating budget for fiscal years 2008 through 2010 total over a quarter of a million dollars.

Tower Day School is owned and operated by Centre Church, and it began as a private Kindergarten back in 1956. In those days, cities and towns were not required to offer public kindergarten. So, some enterprising and forward-thinking Centre Church women set about to fill a need. For the past couple of years, there's been a lot in the news regarding studies that demonstrate the importance of Early Childhood education to prepare young children for success in school. It seems, back in 1956, those women didn't need studies to know that Early Childhood education was important. It all began when Faith Wyer, a church member and Kindergarten teacher approached Rev. Otto Jonas with the idea of using the church school classrooms for Kindergarten. She set up the program, hired Midge Vernon as her assistant, Barbara Ericson as the school nurse, and June Crumrine as the bus driver. Soon, 23 children were enrolled. The school continued as a Kindergarten until the early 1970's, then transitioned to a pre-school when Massachusetts began requiring cities and towns to offer public Kindergarten. But, we returned to our Kindergarten roots in 1998, when Tower Day added a Kindergarten program which is still in operation. I had the opportunity to read some old minutes from the Tower Day Board (then called the Lower Kindergarten Committee). I found that the annual tuition in 1973 for a 5 day class was \$330. In 1971, one of the teachers earned an annual salary of \$1822. Suffice it to say; those numbers are a bit higher today.

In order to be a preschool teacher, it helps to be flexible. Just ask the teachers on staff back in 1979, when the fire caused extensive damage to the Tower classrooms. Until the end of that year, all classes were moved to the parsonage on Richards Road. The following fall, until renovations were complete, the 3 year-old classes were moved to the Meeting House, and 4 year-old classes were held in Richards Hall and the choir room. I bet those teachers never skipped a beat!

Tower Day School is licensed by The Department of Early Education and Care. We go through an extensive re-licensing process every 2 years. In fact, we'll be going through our re-licensing on April 26. The staff is required to be certified in CPR and First Aid. We all know how to use epi-pens and defibrillators, and we're all required to have a number of professional development hours each year. Our curriculum needs to conform to the state guidelines and frameworks. If you were to peek into our classrooms, you might think the children are playing, and they are. But, it's play with a purpose. Children playing in the water table are learning to identify which objects sink and which ones float. Children building with blocks are learning about shapes and geometry. Children using play dough are strengthening the muscles needed for fine motor activities like writing. Those activities and many, many more are part of the state frameworks and an essential part of our curriculum.

When our licensor comes, he'll spend time reviewing the files of staff and students to make sure all the required paperwork is up-to-date. He'll check out the play yard and tour classrooms, not only to make sure they're safe, but also to make sure they provide a welcoming and nurturing environment in which to learn. He'll observe the interactions between teachers and children; he may look through a teacher's plan book....you just never know what he may want to check. Last time the licensor came, he had wonderful things to say about Tower Day-"it should be a model for other preschools, the children seem so happy and engaged, the curriculum is evident just by looking at the walls in the classrooms..."

Tower Day's enrollment for this school year is 105 students. We offer Preschool classes for 3 and 4 year-olds, a Transition to Kindergarten program for 4 ½ -5 year-olds, and a Kindergarten class. We also offer the ever-popular extended day program we call Lunch Bunch. Children come for their morning class, bring their lunch, and stay for the afternoon.

My own story with Tower Day began 26 years ago when I became an aide in a 3 year-old class. One of the children in that class had some significant language delays. She was engaging and energetic, but had very little language. I remember spending most of my time with her pointing at pictures and objects and naming them, saying things like "the cow says moo, the dog says woof, the cat says meow". Her smile was all I needed to keep mooing, woofing, and meowing.

I've been at Tower 26 years, but I am not the teacher with the most longevity. We often joke that the children move on, but the teachers don't. I think we have such a seasoned staff for a couple of reasons. Our Director, Sally MacDonald is terrific. She is well-respected by the staff and the parents. In fact, long after their children have left Tower Day, parents have come back to talk to Sally about issues their child may be having in elementary or middle school. They seek her guidance and value her advice. And,

Tower Day is a happy place to be. The children keep us smiling and sometimes laughing. I remember a day when we were having “Show and Tell” which is meant to be a language activity. The children bring in an object from home that they would like to talk about at circle time. Teachers encourage the children to use descriptive language, tell the other children what they like about the object-usually it’s a toy- and talk about how they play with it. One day, after several children had taken their turns showing trucks, Power Rangers, dolls, Silly Putty, and goodness knows what else, one little boy piped up, and with a puzzled look on his face, asked the teachers, “Do you really want to see all this stuff?”

During the Stewardship campaign, we often reflect on what those who came before us have done to make Centre Church what it is today. We think about how grateful we are for what they did, and of course, that prompts us to think about what we can do to meet the church’s current and future needs. When we have the conversation about what others have done before us, it’s important to include those enterprising women who started Tower Day School. I’m not sure they ever could have envisioned how significant their contribution would become.