

Union Congregational Church of Groton, U.C.C.

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Rev. Gail L. Miller, Pastor

Stewardship Message 2014

Dear Friend:

We read in the Bible, "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). We, your Stewardship Team, wonder how much joy each of us feels in our giving. This is not a simple throw-away question. Last spring we invited the entire congregation to read *Giving to God* (by Mark Allen Powell) and to join in one of several book discussion groups. Throughout the course of those discussions, we talked with more than 30 people in our church about how joy-filled their giving is, and we got a wide variety of answers. Since then, we have been really thinking about this idea and are excited to share some of our insights and discoveries with you!

We have found it helpful to think about giving to God in this manner:



We have discovered that some people give out of duty or obligation, some out of habit. Some describe sincere guilt and give to alleviate it. Some people give to support the church, to feel like they belong, to do their portion. There are also those who give because they are so grateful for what they have. Others describe giving as a way to return to God what He has first given us; and some describe giving as a way to *worship* God! As best we can tell, these attitudes around giving were not necessarily linked to the size of the donations. However, this last group of people (giving as a way to worship God) were the most animated and excited to tell us why they give and how they feel about giving. This level of joy is available to all of us and we want to invite you to know that “cup runneth over” joy, if you're not there already!

People's perspectives on stewardship are typically formed in childhood. We watch our parents and those around us; we decide with Legos, dolls, and matchbox cars whether we have enough or whether there is scarcity. We then learn a variety of ways to rationalize and justify maintaining these views and keeping them private. What the Stewardship Team wonders is this: How many of us had a mature, developed relationship with God when we formed our ideas on stewardship and giving? How many of us have gone back and really questioned our motives, our rationales, our experiences of giving since then? Do you know that the spirit of your giving can change and become more joyful?

Try thinking about it this way: Recall that feeling you have when you've picked out just the right gift for someone you love. You go to their house, eager to give the gift to them. You just can't wait until they open it and see how wonderful, how perfect it is! Your giving to God can be like that. You can have that same eagerness and joy as you make your pledge to the church and as you give your offering each week. **Giving is an act of worshiping God.** It is giving a gift to Him; it is giving a joyful gift to Him. Now, this doesn't happen without some effort on our part. Just like finding the perfect gift for your friend takes time, discerning what is a joyful amount will take prayer, thought, and even some quiet time listening for God's guidance.

This sort of giving is joy filled; it is an act of worship! Imagine singing your favorite hymn in church – voices strong and the organ filling the sanctuary such that you're sure God Himself must be singing along with us. That feeling is pure joy! That is the spirit we hope you will discover and know more fully as you consider your gift to the church for next year.

And so, this year we are not asking you to raise your pledge by x%, we are not asking you to give the total church budget divided by the number of givers, we are not asking you to tithe. We are asking you to **find your joyful number**. Whether you have a little or a lot, God knows that; pledge and give a joyful amount. God does not want us to give foolishly or to be in debt. God wants us to be in a deeper relationship with Him, and His son, Jesus Christ.

Giving a joyful amount is a powerful way for you to grow closer to God. It is not powerful because we are buying anything; it is powerful because it is a way that we show what we value, that we show God a piece of our heart. Remember, He knows what each of us has; after all, He gave it to us, and He will continue to provide for our needs. What God wants is for us to be cheerful givers – to give joyfully – to come to Him with our gift and for us to know that He will be so happy when He receives it.

May you know the steady drip of joy that comes from giving in a worshipful way over and over and over again!

Your Stewardship Team

Bob Goudey, Liz McQuillin, Gail Miller, Halsey Platt, Craig Smith

Be Inspired! Share The Joy!

Pledge Sunday

November 16th

(Pledge Cards will be available in worship.)