

Jill DiGiorgio

April 29, 2012

Good morning. My name is Jill DiGiorgio, and I'm going to share my story with you. I grew up in Lynnfield, right across the street from the Deckers. I was so young when I became part of the Centre Church community that I have no memory of not coming here on Sunday mornings as a child. Some of the things I remember from my childhood here are the type of things that one would expect any child to remember from the church they attend....things like going to Sunday School, placing the offering envelope in the plate, getting to hold "real fire" during the Christmas Eve service, and keeping busy during "all that talking" by coloring in the bulletin with the tiny pencil next to the hymnal. So, yes, I do have memories that are shared amongst many children that go to church. The act of learning and practicing religion can be done at any church. But where ours differs, and where my memories differ is that they go far beyond the standard and generic. I'm going to tell you a little bit about some of my other memories, to help make this concept much clearer.

I remember the excitement of receiving my Unicef box during Sunday School that I then assembled and so proudly walked around the neighborhood with, collecting change. I remember learning about and taking part in Heifer International projects, then experiencing the amazing feeling of "truly making a difference." I remember being part of the youth choir when I could barely read the words, never mind the music. We were the first youth choir at the church in many years, and even though I was very young at the time, the congregation's reaction to our first performance was so powerful that I still remember the day as if it were yesterday. We stood up in front of the congregation and sang the sweet words of "Simple Gifts." I remember the faces of people sitting in the pews. They were smiling at us, watching us intently while we sang. Everyone was looking at us as if we had the voices of angels, even if we did not. When we finished singing, the congregation cheered and clapped more enthusiastically than I had ever witnessed before. During that moment, and during many others after that day, the Centre Church community instilled in me a powerful sense of accomplishment, pride and pure happiness. You see, these memories are all examples that shed light on the culture of our church...back then and still today. Even as a young child, I witnessed and experienced the very respect, caring, support and unconditional acceptance that our church is all about. Some other words come to mind when I think of the Centre Church community are: empathy, passion, integrity, kindness, humility, appreciation.

As some of you know, I drifted away from attending church once I left for college and life got so busy. Naturally, one would then wonder why I made the decision to come back during one of the busiest times in my life. My husband, Michael was traveling several times a month for work, we had just finished a year-long major house renovation, and I was only starting to get accustomed to having a newborn baby. So there I was - relatively newly married with our firstborn child and a beautiful new home...almost a complete puzzle. But something was missing. Michael and I brought our son, Cameron, here for a Sunday service a little over a year ago, and I found what was missing. I'm not exaggerating when I tell you that the second I walked into the building, I was pulled back into these childhood memories I have been telling you about. To make the experience even better, the unmistakable scent of blueberry muffins baking in the oven was wafting up into the narthex. Since that day, I have enjoyed becoming more involved in the Centre Church community than I have ever

been. In a world where so many horrendous things happen and sometimes things just don't make sense, I am so grateful that I can walk through these doors and feel safe and supported. I can feel at home.

Looking back, I see that this church, along with the people in it, has played an important role in shaping me into the person I am today. Growing up here, and now being part of the community as an adult, has taught me life lessons that created a caring attitude and a strong desire to help people. Of course, my parents also fostered these values, however, no matter how much we teach our children in the home, it needs to be supplemented and supported in the real world. That's a difficult task to achieve these days for any organization, group or community. Thankfully, the Centre Church and its community is up for the challenge. The youth of our church clearly are caring, giving and loving individuals who have a desire to help those in need.

My son now has the chance to experience life here at Centre Church and grow up in this powerful environment. I truly believe that Michael and I have been given a gift as parents to have Cameron surrounded by loving, accepting, giving and supportive people who share and teach many of the same values that we strive to teach him every day. My hope is that Cameron and any other children we are blessed with will have the opportunity to be a part of the wonderful Centre Church community for many years to come.