

March 25, 2012

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Carrie Pericola asked me to speak as part of the stewardship talks, so I'm going to tell you a little bit about why I feel that this church is a good investment. Little did she know that I was a good one to ask because I have not always been sold on Church. In fact, I had to start by Googleing what stewardship was.

When Heather and I got married, we had to meet with the head Pastor at her parents Presbyterian Church in Lancaster PA. He asked me about my religious beliefs and I told him that, "Religion doesn't play much of a role in my life."
...there was a long silence. Then reverend McClintock said, "well you might find that could become something of an issue because Heather is accustomed to being very involved in the church."

Later on Heather said that that might have been a good place for me to lie.

What I was accustomed to was having a Dad who was a Physics professor at one of the top research institutions in the world. For him, science is religion. Non-believers are those who do not believe in evolution.

In the 70's the Moonies, a religious cult, abducted one of my Dad's grad students while he was on the way from Australia to Ithaca to work for him. My Dad had to work with the police to free him and then work with Einstein's granddaughter who was a specialist in deprogramming cult members.

My Dad seems to feel all religions are the same: similar beliefs, similar expectations of members. And the one thing that really gets him is the loss of free thought. It seems that there always is a strong inclination to control what members think. I think my Dad feels that religion stands between people and their ability to reason.

So, despite my lack of promise in this area, reverend McClintock gave it his best shot and researched to find Presbyterian churches in Massachusetts. He discovered there was the Plan of Union in 1801 where every church east of the Hudson would be Congregationalist, and every church west was Presbyterian, so he pointed us toward Congregationalist.

17 years went by during which time Heather made sporadic attempts to find a church that we felt like we could fit in. During that time, the closest we got was Grace chapel in Lexington which was a 30 minute drive and which we could not see doing on a regular basis. Very entertaining when you got there, but somewhat impersonal as thousands of people flow in and out of that church on Sunday.

When we moved to Lynnfield 6 years ago, Heather was determined to find a church in this town.

While we were moving in, Heather was highly entertained to see a flock of pink flamingos in the lawn of this church one day, and was pleased to see that this church was Congregationalist remembering reverend McClintock's advice.

A few weeks after we moved in, we took the plunge and showed up on a Sunday morning. True to form, we walked through the door right at 10:00 and the youth choir was just about to enter the sanctuary. The choir members rushed our daughter, Rebecca, and told her she should join them since she knew so many of them.

Reverend Baily greeted us and we felt at home and gently welcomed, which was good because anything aggressively friendly would have scared me away!

Afterward we had coffee and had to wait for Rebecca who had joined the choir that day and was downstairs rehearsing.

So we stayed at Centre church and kept coming back because it was the only church that the kids didn't complain about getting up for every Sunday.

After a few weeks, Doug Hodgkins found me and told me I needed to join the choir. I told him I couldn't sing. He said that didn't matter. I said I didn't look good in Blue, he said they have red robes also downstairs. I soon ran out of excuses and decided resistance was futile.

At the first practice Doug asked if I was a Tenor or a Bass. I said, "I don't know, what's the difference?" So he said I could try Tenor and see how it goes.

Heather decided to join too since she actually had done a lot of singing.

So I got started and initially was no help but slowly with the help of Phil Triffletti and others I started to feel I could contribute

But from get-go I loved comradery of the choir, loved being needed, and having a song in my heart all the time.

And as a choir we have grown and taken on difficult pieces.

This last Christmas Doug decided that we would sing The Vivaldi Gloria: one of the greatest choral works of all time. It was very challenging and Phil was no longer around to help me. As another choir member who is sitting up here said, "whatever happened to Jingle Bells?" I had my doubts, (including the rehearsal an hour before the concert where we all totally bombed. You should have heard it) but we pulled it off and in the end it sounded fantastic.

As in working on any team or organization, I've felt the work I've put in is rewarded many times over, and I don't even have time to go into the extraordinary experience of

singing in an Ecumenical service. (I also had to Google Ecumenical. Google has been very helpful in my spiritual journey)

There was even a rough patch where my company folded in November 2008 and I told Heather the only thing I look forward to is going to church and being in the choir on Sunday.

I really look forward to seeing all the choir members. I look forward to seeing the friends I've made there, and to have so much fun singing together.

At the same time we've seen our kids grow up in this church and we love to see how much the church supports our kids and their efforts. Of all activities our kids could do, we are always trying to decide what is the best way for our kids to spend their time, and here we've seen our kids develop a love of helping people and contributing to those in need.

Unlike my father's belief, it seems that our church is encouraging our kids to look around and to see what is going on in the world. Outside of the borders of our town we see people without food or without a home. And there are opportunities to help those people and do something about it. Our kids have developed relationships within the church through the pen-pal program last summer, confirmation mentorships, and numerous other activities like the murder mystery play and trivia night. Our kids have even seem to have grown a little cocky when they managed to beat us in trivia night this year, though we all know that was a fluke.

We think our time and our kids' time in this church is priceless and we look forward to continuing to build relationships here for many more years.

Thank you for letting me speak to you about Stewardship.