

For the past few days, I've been scratching my head and asking the question, "Who am I to be speaking about stewardship?" I mean I'm just an ordinary member and sometimes not a very good member. My husband and I practically spend the summer at the beach and rarely make it to church. And I'm nowhere near as involved as I used to be. But maybe that's the exact point of this year's campaign theme, which is about Ordinary People who have Extraordinary Gifts and become extraordinary saints, called "Extraordinary Generosity."

I have been a member of Hayes Barton United Methodist Church for over 50 years. In those 50 years I have made best friends with some of the most amazing ordinary people and I have been touched by life-changing extraordinary experiences. I joined this church when I was 14 years old and one of the first extraordinary saint who touched my life was Casper Holroyd. And the extraordinary young leaders of the JOY Class at that time were Wes and Janet Chesson.

My children also grew up as members of this church and attended pre-school, the JOY Class and Youth programs here. I had the opportunity to serve as a leader of Appalachian Service Project and experienced that ministry with my kids. Two of the veteran leaders of this mission trip were extraordinary saints, Will Bynum and Dickie Thompson.

I was very involved in the ACC Sunday School Class and had the opportunity to lead that Class with another extraordinary member, Ronnie Harrell. My Disciple One Bible study was supposed to be a one-year program but we loved the group so much that we continued to meet and expand our Bible studies for the next five years. There were many extraordinary members in this group who I learned so much from, such as Mike and Jackie Abbott, Kara Manooch and Stephanie and Scott Dannenberg. I volunteered on at least 5-6 Women Build homes with the Hayes Barton United Methodist Women and built next to another extraordinary saint, Joanna McMillan. Now, I am currently a member of Circle 12 and can honestly tell you they every member is truly one of my closest friends, including extraordinary people such as Meghann Adams, Jan Woodard, Cindy Jones, and Beth Russell.

These extraordinary individuals that I have mentioned shared their talents, faith, time and leadership with me. This church community has given to me over and over and over again. And I have taken every time and been inspired, enriched, educated, and humbled by each interaction.

So, I'm going to ask you to think about when this church touched you with an extraordinary experience or person. Take a moment to think about it.

Was it...

*An ordinary Sunday and you heard a beautiful musical performance by Stephen Aber or other musicians? The kind of performance where you have chills running up your arms and spine. And when it's over, you think "WOW! That was extraordinary"*

*Was it serving a Thanksgiving meal to a family in need?*

*Was it another ministry such as a mission trip?*

*Was it a speaker from a Wednesday night program?*

*Was it seeing your child or grandchild sing in the choir?*

*Was it at Dix Park, where you felt in harmony with God, nature and fellowship?*

*Was it a Christmas Eve service or Easter Sunrise service?*

*Was it visit from a Stephen Minister?*

*Was it a funeral, wedding or baptism?*

*Or was it something no one knows about, such as the time your heart was troubled and you sat in the Sanctuary and one of our pastors stopped what they were doing to pray with you – it could have been Laura, Molly, David, Matt, Luann, Jesse, Rick or any of our wonderful pastors, past and present.*

I only touched on a few of the opportunities and ministries our church offers it members. There is something for everyone, right? But here's the reality--- and I have a long history of working in Development for non-profit organizations, and so I am a "bottom line" person. Here's the bottom line: Our church cannot offer these programs, services, and ministries without having lots of time to plan them. Planning a Habitat Build or the delivery of 100+ Thanksgiving meals or a service at Dix Park or sending our youth on Appalachian Service Project or offering Wednesday programs and meals for children and adults takes months.

And you can't plan without having a budget. It's impossible to plan any type of event, service, meals, etc. without a budget. And this church cannot create a budget without pledges and gifts. We want every member to be a part of giving with heartfelt generosity. Wouldn't it be extraordinary if we could say that every single member of this church gave a gift to our stewardship fund? Not just the wealthy members; not just the leaders of the church; but every single ordinary member, like me.

**Commitment Sunday is October 29** and we can't wait to see and feel your extraordinary generosity.

**Melanie Rankin**

