

Hello. I am Jim Venneman.

Ellie and I joined USH about 35 years ago, when our son was three. We adopted David at the Village. In fact, the building where we received David is the one you see through the door to my left. Coincidentally, the Village is the recipient this month of USH's Good Neighbor Offering. Derek Slap will discuss its current mission in a few minutes. We jokingly say we chose USH because this building is the first one, we saw as we came through that blue door at The Village, but the truth is a little different. A coworker was a member of the Simsbury Fellowship. The Garvais' hosted a luncheon at USH for members of the Hartford area fellowships immediately after a Sunday service each March. That way my friend learned about the fine religious education program at USH, so he recommended we try this church. The Sextons also found out about USH through this friend and joined soon after we did.

For more than ten years Ellie and I led the pre-kindergarten class, which was then known as the polliwogs. I held various positions on the Board throughout the nineties. Ellie and I also helped with many other USH projects over the years – especially the Festival of the Seasons. As all of you know, you get more out of USH the more time you spend helping. There are many volunteer opportunities for all of us. You make new friends by volunteering. Now, many of our closest friends are people we met through USH.

Carolyn Carlson is running stewardship this year, which is a very big job. She asked if I would help, which of course I agreed to do. Each year, the annual stewardship drive provides over 75% of the money needed to make USH the vibrant institution it is for all of us and the greater community.

I can explain the importance of this stewardship drive for our church by comparing USH to a brick building. In my example, the bricks are the building, and the mortar is the money supplied by your stewardship, which of course is what holds the building together and lets it meet our needs. Our forebearers and special fund drives provided the money for the original structure and subsequent enhancements, including the rugs, solar array, and these lights. We can think of those funds as providing the bricks. While those gifts provided the place where we and the greater community meet today, the more important gifts are those we raise each year during the stewardship drive. The stewardship money can be thought of as the mortar that lets USH thrive today, for it holds everything together. Stewardship provides the funds that let us pay our staff, maintain this building where we meet, provides funds for new initiatives like the ZOOM connection which lets those not in the sanctuary today enjoy the service from home or at a later time via the USH website, provides funds for social justice projects, outreach to our members and others in time of need, etc. Yes, as mortar holds the bricks of a building together, the funds you will provide through this stewardship drive truly will be used to build this community together and let it thrive.

I am always surprised by how few know of the wonderful tax advantages of gifts made as Qualified Charitable Distributions. If you were born before July 1, 1953, and have money in a pre-tax IRA, you can make a gift directly to a charity from the IRA. Such a gift avoids federal and Connecticut income taxes, enabling one to give generously at less cost to the donor. The gift can also be used to satisfy part or all of a required minimum distribution from your IRA. If any of you wish to learn more, please contact me after the service.

I will close by asking that all of us, both we in the sanctuary and those attending via ZOOM, return your pledge cards as soon as possible, for we aim to end this stewardship drive two weeks from today.

Thank you.