

Stewardship Testimonial – Sunday, March 26, 2023 – Brian Harvey

Good morning. My name is Brian Harvey. I grew up in Chicago as a Methodist. As a twelve-year-old, there were some teachings that I accepted as bedrock and I still do today: 1) Love thy neighbor - as described by Jesus's parable of the Good Samaritan, 2) the Golden Rule – do unto others as you would have them do unto you, and 3) something left over from Cub Scouts – wherever possible leave things better than you found them. By the time I was eighteen, I saw organized religion as a force that divided people more than it united them. I decided I would live my life as a spiritual independent and let my own moral compass be my guide.

I met Sherry Manetta in Chicago in 1980. We shared a love for outdoor activities, strong feelings about personal social responsibilities and an ambivalence towards religion. We married in 1984. We followed our careers by moving to New York City and then six years later to Connecticut. Twenty years passed. I enjoyed my work and once a week volunteered as a math tutor in the Hartford Public schools as part of a program that my employer sponsored. Sherry was very engaged in her career, but still found time to volunteer as a board member for various social justice organizations around Hartford.

At the same time, I was now in my early 60s. I had some health issues and retirement became the sensible option for me. I would need to find some new social and intellectual connections away from the workplace. For the first time, I became concerned that we lived so far away from our families and close Chicago friends. Who could we turn to if we needed some support with health or other issues? I knew this was the traditional territory of living in a church community – and I also knew both of our positions on religion. I needed to make a shift.

I had done some research on Unitarian Universalism. I was familiar with the 7 principles. They aligned with my own beliefs of loving thy neighbor, respecting a person's right to follow their own moral compass, and exercising social and environmental responsibility. These words sounded great. But did that translate into a caring and supportive community? There was only one way to find out. Sherry and I did some church shopping.

When we landed at USH, we were struck with the sermons, the hymns, the rituals, and ...the welcoming. We were encouraged to test the waters and participate in all the church activities. We attended a Small Group Dinner series, Pizza and a Movie, a potluck dinner – do you see a pattern here? We now knew a growing circle of people at USH. In May of 2010 we became members. We joined the Sunday Welcome Volunteers, and I joined the Membership sub-council. There I worked with others on strengthening USH's social connections through activities like pancake breakfasts, new member potlucks, the annual picnic, and the Festival of the Season.

I felt far less vulnerable dealing with whatever unknown life situations Sherry and I might encounter. I resumed my 4th grade math tutoring through an interfaith group that included

USH. I broadened my spiritual horizons both through programs offered at USH and through conversations with other members about their experiences, books and articles they read or recommended. Where before I was working on my own spiritually by myself, I was now part of a network. Sherry served two terms as the board president and has followed her passion for Social Justice work – here at USH, in collaboration with GHIAA and other Hartford based organizations.

Just as Sherry and I have grown from visitor, to newcomer, to member, to leadership roles in the church, we have also grown through the annual stewardship drive. By using the fair share contribution guide, we can review our giving to check what level is commensurate with our income and our commitment to USH's mission. For years we paid our pledges with quarterly bank withdrawals. Now we take advantage of using a Qualified Charitable Donation from our IRAs.

Stewardship is defined as the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care. As stewards of this community, we support what we believe in with gifts of time, compassion, vision, and finance. Simply put stewardship translates to using our resources to – Love our neighbors, search for spiritual meaning and hopefully leave our community and world a better place. I encourage you to support the activities and mission of this community by investing generously through the 2023 Stewardship campaign.

Thank you.