

Stewardship Minute — Shawn Whitman –November 24, 2019

Worship, praise, fellowship, forgiveness, love, peace, community. These are all words I associate with Immanuel.

My wife Kristin and I brought our family, Lauren and Katherine, to Immanuel Church-on-the-Hill several years ago. We had been attending another church in the area for some time. We had gotten married in the church, had friends who attended there and enjoyed the sermons and the music program. It is a great church. However, something just did not feel complete about our experience. The church has a very large membership and we often felt lost in the crowd.

I grew up on a cattle ranch in Wyoming, attending a small church where my family was very active. My dad was a deacon and on the finance committee. My mom ran the kids' Sunday school. We attended worship, church events, gatherings and were often in other church member's homes. Kristin also grew up in small community worship settings. These experiences from our childhood created a sense of community, a sense of purpose, a focus and provided a network of believers.

We ultimately figured out that this feeling of church community, of belonging, was the part that was missing for our life. We decided we should visit another church and Immanuel was first on the list.

Preparing for our first Sunday at Immanuel we put on our "Sunday best" so we could create a good first impression. When we walked in, we were greeted by people wearing sweatshirts, old jeans, t-shirts with big smiles and warm hearts. We had no idea that we had arrived on Pumpkin Sunday and all the church members were excited about filling the front lawn full of pumpkins, pies, soups and confections.

What an odd bunch, what a crazy bunch, what a band of misfits. We were hooked. We thought, these are our people. A family of Christians focused on worship, fellowship and mission outreach – and pumpkins. A church built on love, respect and kindness toward one another.

I share these thoughts as an insight of what Immanuel means to me, to Kristin, to our family. It's also why we have made the choice and the commitment to pledge to Immanuel. These pledges are a demonstration of support for the church leadership and the mission at Immanuel. It's not the size of the gift, but it is the spirit of giving back that should motivate each of us.

During this time of Thanksgiving, each of us has the opportunity to evaluate all we have to be thankful for. I personally feel blessed beyond measure, but I feel mostly blessed by God's grace. My parents instilled in me long ago that giving back to the church is part of our commitment to God. It is an important way to give thanks. These gifts and offerings are part of being a Christian. Making financial commitments also provide dividends of joy.

I promise you that whatever you can pledge, God will give more back in dividends of peace and joy as he has for me. **Psalm 112:5** says, "Good will come to those who are generous and lend freely, who conduct their affairs with justice."

"Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." These are not my words, they are the St. Paul's, from **2 Corinthians 9:7.8**