

I once heard an acquaintance say “We don’t do philanthropy” and it left me speechless. I realized that I don’t see this as an option. People who are blessed give back. Luke tells us “To whom much is given of him much shall be required.” And we know that you don’t have to be a church go-er or a Bible read-er to understand the concept of sharing, of reaching beyond ourselves to help others with our own gifts of treasure, and heart, and time. It’s common for people who are talking about giving back to say “I get so much more than I give. Doing this work, supporting this organization, has given purpose to my life.”

So, assuming all of us in this congregation believe deeply in sharing our blessings, and I think that’s a valid assumption, the actual logistics of figuring out how to parcel out our gifts gets a little trickier. Most of us have some sort of system for determining what organizations will receive gifts each year. We consider what amount we have to give, which may be smaller right now than we would wish. We look at our past giving and at our current organizational commitments. In other words, we take a logical, deliberative look at our philanthropy.

But I would propose another approach, at least in part. Instead of asking “what have I given before?” or “what do the organizations on whose boards I serve expect as a minimum give or get?” or “what can I get away with giving to my brother’s pet cause?” I suggest asking “What matters in my own life on a day to day basis?”

I am involved in a lot of organizations and I understand my financial commitment to each. I don’t resent that obligation. I know that what I give helps keeps the lights on, the services provided.

But what I give to First Presbyterian helps keep MY lights on. I come to church on Sunday for community, for renewal, for inspiration. And that’s just for starters. After a Sunday service, I feel as though a life line from the church follows me home, guiding my thoughts about the sermon, keeping a hymn tune humming through my day, or reminding me to pray for someone who asked for help during our sharing of joys and concerns. My connection to the church doesn’t just happen when I attend worship or a meeting—it’s there whenever I need it, and even when I don’t know that I need it. . This place is where I found a faith that guides everything I do.

First Presbyterian Church is not just another philanthropy on my list. It is a renewing presence in my life. I often say that I am a better talker than a listener although I try hard to be both. But it is here, in this place, where I learned what listening to God means. And I will be ever thankful for that. My gifts to First Presbyterian are part of the way I express this appreciation.