If you have been to our church website lately, you have discovered that our Stewardship theme for this year is “Joy and Generosity Come Together”. That theme has been reinforced the past few weeks by some very thoughtful remarks from members of our congregation. We have listened to the eloquent and compelling testimonials from Lisa Bohne and Jeff Phillips who have shared their thoughts with us.

I have been asked to add my voice to this conversation. The challenged I face this morning is to formulate a statement that adequately captures how my connection to Countryside inspires joy and generosity.

My partner, Tim Walsh, and I first came to Countryside almost twelve years ago in search of a spiritual home that would make room for us, and allow us to continue on a journey of truth seeking in a way that did not compromise our commitment to reason and conscience. We were also looking for a spiritual community that reflected the values and principles that we hold as sacred; the dignity and worth of each individual, the interconnectedness of all life, and a commitment to social justice that inspires deeds of mercy and kindness.

It was here that we found a rational, and creative community that honors the integrity of the individual, which accepts people as they are, values the past out of which we have come, but finds its focus in the future, in the unrealized possibilities, in the richness which results from honoring diversity. We found here a community of renewal, open to the possibility of transformation and joy.

Countryside has offered us the opportunity to weave our lives together into a rich and vibrant fabric in which our individual differences, and our
peculiar visions, and our idiosyncratic qualities enhance and enrich each other making us a community that is greater than the sum of its parts. Our search brought us to a community that fills me with joy and wonder.

A joy that is different from happiness. As we have learned from recent conversations and classes facilitated by Bruce Bendix, happiness is usually based on some external circumstances. On the other hand joy transcends emotion; it is a mindset, an attitude of the heart. Joy is something that is bigger than you and I, and our current circumstances. Regardless of what is happening in our lives, it brings us peace and the assurance that we are connected to something larger than ourselves.

I have discovered that joy results in a generosity of the spirit. It liberates us to be fully human, and to share our gifts with others in an authentic and unselfish way.

We are a community that has much to offer; to each other, and to the wider world. My decision to support Countryside with my time, talent, and dollars is a manifestation of the joy that I experienced from my connectedness to a religious community that honors me just the way I am, and that nurtures a mutual covenant to seek the truth, to serve humankind, and to dwell together in peace.

When you discover that joy in your life, and cultivate the quality of gratitude, generosity will follow.

May you dwell here in peace and joy.