

Jerry Melichar, Chair of the Ministry of Stewardship
The Rev. John Sampson, Pastor
Glen Ridge Congregational Church



Sunday, October 18, 2026
1 Peter 4:8 - 10

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer.

Amen.

So, today is the kickoff of our Stewardship Season, the time when we think about how we would like to support this church community in the upcoming year. How we would like to support it financially, but also how we would like to support it through a gift of our time and our presence here in this space, and out in the world.

And so this morning I have invited Jerry Melichar to come and join me in offering a reflection on this particular moment in the life of our congregation.

Jerry Melichar:

Good morning. I'm Jerry Melichar, Chair of the Ministry of Stewardship. I've enjoyed learning from, and collaborating together with, Rebecca and Dave Mitchell as I've stepped into my first leadership role on the Church Council. Dave and Rebecca have done a great job for so many years and I'm building on their efforts, starting with this year's stewardship theme.

In 2025, we Imagined Together, in 2026 we Made a Difference Together. For 2027, we're going to Do More Together. We take inspiration from Ecclesiastes 4:9-12: "More are better than one because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift the up the other. And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A three-fold cord is not quickly broken."

The theme hits in two ways. We know we can achieve more together when we weave together our treasures and talents. And we also want to find more ways to enjoy time

together in 2027. We do so much already, and we have so much to be thankful for: an amazing building, a talented and dedicated staff, and now a new settled minister. Our church is primed to do more together. Doing more requires more of our time, our talents, and yes, pledging what we can.

You are all aware that operating this church is expensive, and we quietly count on everyone to give what they can. H Bartlett Brown, also known as “Bart”, was a faithful member of this church for 74 years before he passed away in 2024. Bart was a generous pledger. He served on numerous committees, and he knew the finances of this church inside and out. He also filled in playing the organ and was key to its recent refurbishment. Bart remembered GRCC through his estate with a very generous bequest. Bart's legacy of stewardship lives on.

Thank you to all who initiated or increased their pledges in 2026 to take advantage of matches from the H. Bartlett Brown Fund. The average pledge for 2025 was almost \$3,700. In 2026, the average pledge increased to more than \$4,000. The Bart Fund matches are back, and we're doing more together with your 2027 pledges. The Finance Committee has approved a one-time match for all new pledges and pledge increases for 2027. But there's more. In addition, new this year: the fund will also match 20% of all 2027 pledges that maintain pledge amounts from 2026.

On a personal note, my family has been blessed to be able to increase our pledges every year since 2018 except for this year. I've experienced two layoffs in the past two years, and I have been out of work for almost eight months. Definitely an ironic time for me to be asking all of you to offer more.

Sharing our treasure is important, but it takes the sharing of time and talent to put these dollars into action. To this end, on the pledge card, you can share how you are able to volunteer based on your interests, your talents, and your time. We hope that everyone will fill this out and explore more ways we can do more together this year.

In addition to teaching Sunday School and rehearsing with the Bell Choir, I have participated on three Church Council committees, volunteered in the Church Office, and supervised extras from the Grown-Up Three movie - who used Robinson Hall as a holding area. I can assure you that I have benefited more than I've contributed, and I've enjoyed doing more for the church and spending more time with all of you. I'm also happy to report that I'm starting a new job next Monday.

Our pledge mailing will be going out this week and will contain your 2027 pledge card. We try to keep our list up to date, but please give the office a call if you don't receive one in the mail next week. You can also pledge online via the church website or use the stewardship QR code.

If you have any questions about pledging or stewardship, please reach out to Rebecca, Dave, Pastor John, or myself. We are here to help. If you can, please pledge by

Consecration Sunday, which is November 22nd, when all pledges and gifts received to date will be blessed by Pastor John during the service. Pledging by Consecration Sunday will really help the Finance team make an accurate budget for us to vote on at the Annual Meeting. Please consider pledging your time, talents, and resources for 2027, and let's set our sights on Doing More Together.

Thank you.

Pastor John:

So, I just want to add to what Jerry already said. I want to tell you about one of my favorite stewardship stories, and it's comes from an author and pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber. I'm not sure if any of you know her, but she is sort of a celebrity in the progressive Christian space. She started a church in Denver called Saints and Sinners. That says a lot. She's also written a couple of books.

In one of her books, she talks about a stewardship meeting she had. She gathers with her some of her congregation, and one of the people who joins the meeting is a new member, and this new member is a drag queen. The drag queen comes in and they're talking about the stewardship theme for the year. If anybody's been on a stewardship committee, finding a theme is a big conversation. And at some point in the meeting, the drag queen says, "Well, this is what I think the theme should be." And I can't repeat all of the words that she says, so I'm going to bleep out the profanity. She says: "This **bleep** ain't free, so you better tithe **bleep bleep**." You put in whatever words you think are appropriate in the bleeps.

What I love about this story, and what I love about this suggested theme, which they did not ultimately go with it, is the way that it just cuts through so much of the talk and the sanctimoniousness and the big feelings around stewardship. It gets right to the heart of the matter.

This ain't free. This building isn't free. The heat that we need to meet in this building is not free. I'm not free. Tom is not free. The organ is not free. The blue room is not free. Cutting the grass outside is not free. And in our tradition, we are financially responsible for doing what we need to do so that we can meet together, that we can worship together, that we can have a church home together.

The drag queen's proposed stewardship message says a lot about the how and the where and the who. And I love it. But I don't think it says enough about the why. If stewardship is just about how we've got a building and we've got to heat it and we've got grass and it needs to be cut, I don't think that's enough reason for any of you, for me, to contribute to our stewardship pledge drive this year. I think we have to answer the question of why. Why would we actually want to keep this building? Why would we actually want to heat this building? Why would we actually want the grass cut?

I'll tell you one story that I think of. When I try to answer this question of why for myself. We were in an Adult Enrichment meeting, and a longtime member of the church shared with us her sense of faith, and she said at the end of it: "I've never said that to anyone out loud before." That's an answer to "why" we would want to keep this community going - so that people don't have to walk the journey of faith alone, that there are people around us that we can open our hearts and our souls to to tell the truth of that piece of our life, which is so real and so important and so meaningful.

That's my story. That's how I answer this question "Why?". One of many ways I answer this question. But this moment, as we enter Stewardship Season, is a moment for you all to ask yourselves "Why?". What does this place mean to you? Why is this place important to you? How does this place make you laugh and your heart smile? How does it maybe sometimes make you cry? And if you can answer those questions, then the how and the how much and the when will all answer themselves.

So, just because I love it so much, I'm going to say the proposed stewardship theme of that drag queen one more time. "This **bleep** ain't free, so you better tithe **bleep bleep**." And I will just add to that theme an invitation for all of us to first ask ourselves "Why?"

Amen.