

# “Spreading Our Wings: On Stewardship and Trust”

*by Pam El-Dinary*

*March 16, 2025*

“Spreading Our Wings” -- That’s the theme of our stewardship campaign. And our Soul Matters theme for the month of March is “Living Love through the Practice of Trust.” So, on this Stewardship Sunday, let’s explore the practices of trust that are involved in stewardship--and in spreading our wings as a congregation.

## **Butterflies and Birds**

“Spreading Our Wings” -- Oh, it sounds so poetic and fluid! Just stretch out those wings, and away we go!

Wait a minute! Not so fast!

Let’s take a look at the butterfly, going through its metamorphosis. As our Story for All Ages suggests, that kind of transformation can be disconcerting, mystifying, awkward and messy--a process that requires trust. I mean, think of the trust it took to leave that cozy chrysalis! And yet, imagine the delight of shaking off those wet wings and taking to the sky!

Given last year’s Stewardship theme of “Feathering Our Nest,” we look also to birds for inspiration. Baby birds learning to spread their wings may also find it awkward and scary. It seems like this would require trust in oneself, trust in those urging us on that we can do it, and trust in the laws of physics that these thin wings can hold this body aloft. And yet, imagine a baby bird finding itself in flight, chirping out, “Look, Mommy, I’m doing it!” Ah! and the

synergy of an entire flock of birds, working together as they soar on a great journey!

### **Trust as a Congregation**

So, here we are talking about the birds and the bees--I mean, the birds and the butterflies. How does this relate to us as a congregation? What kinds of trust are involved in spreading our wings? And what does all of this have to do with stewardship?

### **Trust and Stewardship**

I assert that the annual canvass is itself an act of trust:

- Trusting one another to pledge financial support
  - and to fulfill those pledges
- Trusting one another to volunteer for the work that makes church happen on Sunday and beyond
- Trusting ourselves to bring our own talents to serve our community
- Trusting our finance team to prudently manage the money we give
- Trusting our board leaders to wisely allocate that money for our mission & vision

### **Trust in Leadership**

Let's dive a bit deeper into the trust we place in our church leaders. In today's story, Homer the caterpillar trusts the guidance of his friend Alex who says, "Stay safe. Nourish yourself. Welcome change." Likewise, we trust our leaders to guide us in what it takes to spread our wings as a congregation.

## **Stewardship Committee**

Our Stewardship Committee is guiding us in this pledge campaign with the materials they've provided in the packet, the information they're giving us on Sunday mornings, and the focused conversations they're facilitating. The trust we place in our Stewardship Committee can be found in their official charge. We trust them to:

### [\[Charge -- Stewardship\]](#)

- Ensure that Channing Memorial Church is financially sound and capable of meeting its mission and goals.
- Educate Church Members and Friends in fiscal responsibility and the financial needs and goals of the Church.
- Along with the Treasurer, monitor church expenditures and report to the Board and Congregation as appropriate.

## **Board of Trustees**

Our board of trustees guides us through church life in many ways, including giving monthly board updates in the church newsletter and providing a model of church structure to clarify roles and responsibilities.

One iteration of the Board Covenant includes the words:

### [\[Covenant -- Board 10/16/2012 excerpts\]](#)

[We] covenant to ... carry out the trust placed in us as guardians of the Mission and Principles and as stewards of the resources of our church.

Turning to our board commissioning words from the beginning of the church year, our leaders said:

[ 🟡 2024-06-30 Commissioning of Board and LDNC\_slideshow for Zoom ]

We accept the honor of our election to the Board of Trustees at Channing Memorial Church and the trust that you have placed in us. We pledge to conduct our work in a manner that respects the mission, vision, and By-laws of this church as well as the free church tradition of faithful, open discourse and congregational participation. We take up this office in a spirit of trust and commitment to the best interests of this gathered community as we walk together in the Spirit of Mutual Love.

### **Congregation**

As a congregation, we told our leaders:

We trust that your work among us will be characterized by open reflection, transparent communication, and sound judgment, leading to decisions in the best interest of the whole of Channing Memorial Church.

We also made our own promises to our leaders:

In the tradition of a free church built on consent and persuasion, we commit to bringing our concerns and questions to you in the spirit of mutual love for free, fair, and faithful hearing.      **AND**

We commit to bringing our support and willingness to serve to the congregation, offering our time and talent to the extent we can commit.

Listen to the words we use: Covenant. Commit. Pledge. Trust, trust, trust.

It's helpful here to look at trust as a verb. Trust isn't just something we have. It's something we do. On an ongoing basis. And during this Stewardship month, we celebrate one act of that trust -- making our individual financial pledges to this congregation.

As those individual pledges combine, we accumulate the wherewithal to do something greater. Working as a flock, we have the wherewithal to spread our wings and sustain our flight.

**Spreading Our Wings -- How?**

Spreading Our Wings -- How? In what brave ways are we, as Channing Memorial Church, spreading our wings?

Our president's letter in the Stewardship packet lists several ways.

Here are some of the ways I have noticed us spreading our wings lately.

- The re-emergence of the choir, under Gabbi's direction
- Social justice through work with UU Legislative Ministry of Maryland
- Social responsibility through monthly special collections
- A wide range of spiritual growth activities such as Lectio Divinia, Wisdom Tales, book club, Covenant Circle. Men's Group, Xennialz, and the current series exploring a variety of spiritual practices
- RE Nights--offering a new way to provide Religious Education and to support families with young children
- Investment in technology for videography--helping us improve our online worship experience
- Outreach and growth efforts such as
  - representing at the Howard County Pride Festival
  - and "boosting our social media engagement" -- including a viral TikTok video
- We are also spreading our wings organizationally: trying out a new structure for how our church functions to optimize putting our energy toward our mission. Specifically, twelve major areas of church life are organized into four major quadrants. By having a Point Person for each of the twelve major areas, as well as a Coordinator for each Quadrant, there is now greater clarity about who to contact with questions--and brilliant ideas--about various activities. Check out the Stewardship Packet for details.

- This time of sabbatical itself is a time of spreading our wings, and one that is full of trust, as we:
  - trust that we will be okay in Rev. Jane's absence
  - trust our sabbatical coordinator to guide us through the process
  - trust our worship team to continue providing enriching services
  - trust that Rev. Jane will use the time for her personal and professional growth
  - trust that we, too, will grow as we hear a variety of voices in the pulpit
  - trust that Rev. Jane will come back
    - and that she will come back renewed, refreshed, re-energized, and full of new ideas
- Looking ahead to the future,
  - Perhaps with your participation, we can grow our choir in numbers as we continue our commitment to use the power and variety of music to enrich the experience of all who attend our services.
  - We can discern a flight path for Religious Education so that we are well prepared to welcome young visitors into spiritual community.
  - We can see to fruition the ADA accessible bathroom remodeling project, in keeping with our commitment to safe, accessible, nurturing physical space.
  - We can give flight to our commitment to promoting justice, equity, and compassion for all races, and ethnicities, gender

identities, and abilities -- through the new Justice in Action Circle

As Rev. Cameron Trimble suggests, our transformation as a congregation happens step by step. It doesn't wait for perfect conditions but begins in the messiness of the present moment. "It begins with people like us," Trimble says, "—worried, inspired and sometimes unsure—but willing to take one step forward."

### **Discerning Your Pledge of Stewardship**

What about you? What one step forward are you willing to take? How can you, personally, spread your wings this church year?

What can you give of your money? Are you able to increase your pledge in this annual canvass? Times may be uncertain with your personal finances as we face an uncertain economy. Yet, each of us has the capacity to give back, commensurate with our resources and with our commitment to Channing.

Check out the Stewardship Packet. It will give you guidance in discerning the amount that's right for you. There's information about the wide range of financial gifts that your fellow members and friends are giving. There's information about what your money will be supporting. And there's a handy guide for calculating the pledge that's right for you.

Some people say, "Give until it hurts." But here at Channing, one of our founders is fond of quoting, "Give until it feels good."

And remember that Stewardship is not just about the money.

When it comes to your time and talent, how can you give until it feels good? Is there something you love to do that you could be doing for the church you love? Or are you looking to challenge yourself by trying something new, cultivating new skills? Maybe you're feeling ready to not be afraid of the branch breaking--ready to place your trust not in the branch but in your own wings. And if that sounds scary, I'll encourage you by sharing that in my experience, Channing is a safe supportive space to spread your wings.

### **Conclusion -- Let's Spread Our Wings**

So, as we reflect this month on what we have to offer, let's each spread our wings in our stewardship so that we can all spread our wings as a church that is living love through the practice of trust.

May it be so. And Amen.