

My name is Chris Kortlandt.

Last week Rev. Meredith kicked off the annual giving campaign with his sermon topic, and over the next few weeks you will hear from Eileen Macholl, Kathleen Kiernan, and Steve Bear about what CUUC means, why CUUC is important, and how we can support CUUC's mission in life. Today you will hear from me.

My wife Catherine and I started coming to CUUC over 25 years ago when our kids were young and we were looking for a religious home with the right values. We immediately got involved in CUUC life, with my wife teaching in one of the RE classes, and me helping her occasionally. When she got busy at work and had to work pretty much 24/7 over the span of a few months, I covered for her in RE, resulting in my getting on the RE Council within a year or two, and from there I got involved in other volunteer opportunities and committees.

After starting in the RE wing, I quickly got involved in other aspects of congregational life including the Finance Committee with Robert Sherwood and Charles Selinske, longtime members who have since passed away. Later on, I got involved in the annual Auction, and participated in many other activities, including journey groups.

So why is CUUC important to me?

Well, I like the values and what CUUC stands for. CUUC members are honest and forthright and I have made some very good friends here, all of whom are either still here or we are still in contact with. In today's uncertain world, crazy world, CUUC gives me a place where I feel safe and secure, where can I express myself, and help wherever help is needed. CUUC is to me a mini-democracy in a larger world where unfortunately democratic values are being torn down left and right. This place makes me feel at home.

The nice thing about CUUC is that you can find plenty of volunteer opportunities that cater to each and everyone's interest and passion.

So, the theme for this year's Annual Giving Campaign is "**Forging Ahead with Excitement and Commitment.**"

Forging Ahead, not so much because we are trying to leave Covid behind, but because there is plenty to do at CUUC. Rev. Meredith will soon enjoy his well-deserved retirement, and we are actively looking for a quality replacement. Many people are involved in this process and they are volunteering their time to make sure we find the best possible candidate available for CUUC.

Excitement, because people are excited. This place is buzzing with activities and you won't even see half of them as a lot of work is done behind the scenes. By the way a big thank you for all of you who do this important work.

Commitment, because we need people's commitment, each one of you, to make this a better place both here at CUUC and in the larger world.

So where does that leave us today?

As with any organization, it costs money to keep things running. We have salaries and daily expenses that need to be paid. We are very fortunate to have rental income, but the largest source of income is contributions from congregants like you and me. Your pledge or annual giving amount is crucial to making and keeping CUUC as vibrant as it is today. And in order to attract a new quality minister we will need to continue to pay staff fairly across the board.

With inflation at 6-7% over the last few years, everything has become more expensive. We are proud that over the last 5 years (and before),

we have always paid our staff fairly, and we plan to increase the staff's salary by at least the rate of inflation. If we do not, we are effectively reducing their salaries, which is not a good thing. So if you can, I hope you find it in your heart to increase your pledge, especially if you have not increased your pledge over the last few years.

Most importantly, I would like you to have an honest conversation with yourself and ask why CUUC is important, what it means for you, and then think what you can do for CUUC, both financially and non-financially. Remember, what you give to CUUC you will get back many times over with all the programming, journey groups, and other activities at CUUC.

April is canvass month. Whatever number we raise will go to fund all our dreams, activities, and outreach. The more we raise, the more we can do. Please open your heart and let CUUC fill a bigger place in your heart.

Thank You