

## STEWARDSHIP REFLECTION: CHRIS MORAVEK

November 29, 2020

Good morning! My name is Chris Moravek. Some of you may have seen my face or my ubiquitous blue jacket, but you may not know much about me because I'm fairly new here. At this time two years ago, I was worshipping at the church in New Jersey where I'd grown up, leading the same youth program that had once helped to form my faith. One of my favorite youth group catchphrases was, "We're an open and accepting group." Apparently, I said it so often that it became a bit of a punchline among the youth, but...I didn't mind. As long as they were saying it, even jokingly, it reminded them that they were welcomed and that they were loved.

Then my company moved its office to Bethlehem, and suddenly it was time to find a new church home. After so many years of seeking to welcome others, now I was the one in need of being welcomed, and honestly I was nervous about it. I wondered how long it would take me to find a church as "open and accepting" as my old church had been.

Well, it took me one Sunday. That Sunday was the day of the church picnic last September. (You know, back when we could actually have church picnics.) Within the first few minutes of the worship service that morning, I could already tell how much this church cared about being welcoming, because the first thing we did was to share the peace of Christ. Then after the service, it was time to share food, fellowship, and fun together, and somehow I already felt like part of the family.

Within a few weeks, I'd joined the handbell choir. Then last October - during stewardship season, in fact - Blaine Sheppard shared an amazing message that mentioned how open and accepting the Chancel Choir was, and it sounded like something I wanted to be a part of. By the end of the year, I had walked with the First Pres contingent on the CROP Walk, participated in multiple education series, and joined a wonderful koinonia group. Now, as I joined all of these groups, I might've expected to meet some folks who were...a little prickly, a little less than welcoming. But I didn't. Not one. Every single person I've met here has welcomed me with open arms.



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But these groups have gone beyond just welcoming me. A lot of churches like to write fancy statements about their mission and their values, but very few churches live out their mission and their values as fully and as passionately as this church does. I've had the chance to learn from some amazing teachers. I've had the chance to grow in my faith by wrestling with some challenging questions. And I've had the chance to heed Christ's call and take action in the world during these difficult times.

First Pres is an incredible congregation, and I'm deeply grateful for the opportunities I've had here. Out of that gratitude, I'm excited to have the chance to invest in First Pres during this stewardship season. Because for all of the incredible work this church has already done, there's so much more work left to do. There are more people to welcome and more lessons to learn. There's a youth program to build, the kind of "open and accepting group" where our youth will always know that they're welcomed and loved. And there's a hurting world out there, a world that desperately needs to see and hear and feel Christ's love through us.

So I hope you'll join me in investing in all of the exciting work that's happening here at First Pres. I think it's work that's well worth the investment. Thank you.