

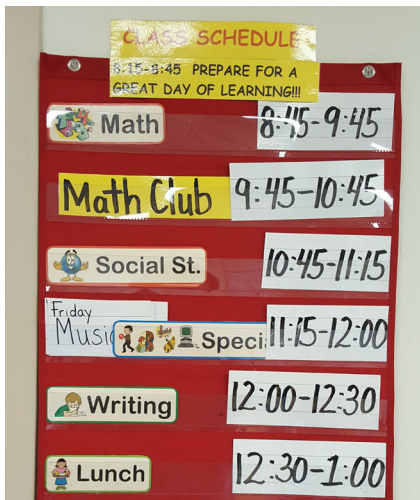
'Always enough to share'

By Catherine Bracey

Faith Story: Kevin Strawn and Mary Nell McPherson

Long-time Covenant members Kevin Strawn and Mary Nell McPherson both came from large families of faith. Growing up, they both went to church on Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings, Wednesday nights, and another night for choir. That consistent family time at the church was a formative foundation in their faith journey.

In their 36 years of marriage, their faith has evolved through experiences, reading, prayer, mission work and worship. When asked about their faith, Mary Nell referenced a Mary Oliver quote that exemplifies their shared faith foundation: "There is no way to be sufficiently grateful for the gifts we are given, no way to speak the Lord's name often enough, though we do try..."



For Mary Nell and Kevin, giving extends well beyond their financial contributions to the church. From his very first allowance, Kevin learned to tithe, a faith practice they instilled in their two daughters at an early age. There were times in their first years of marriage when they were tempted to find ways to spend their earnings, but the discipline of tithing became a faith practice that continues to give them great joy. Mary Nell says, "there has always been enough and always enough to share."

This understanding helped them to be intentional about their career choices as well. Mary Nell left her corporate position at Duke Energy, where they met and both worked for a number of years, and has since held positions at Habitat for Humanity, Crisis Assistance Ministry, and, most recently, as Executive Director of Freedom School Partners — all organizations that have allowed her to give her time and talents to important community endeavors.

Along the way, Kevin and Mary Nell crafted a five-year plan that would allow Kevin to also transition to a "career of the heart." They knew the shift would come with a reduction in salary and it needed to be planned. Two years into the plan, Kevin was dutifully attending a Presbytery meeting where Covenant minister Doug Oldenburg was speaking. As Moderator of the Presbyterian Church (USA), Doug's platform was focused on education. His words of "feed my lambs" resonated with Kevin as a calling. Kevin immediately explored teaching options.

Every other morning for the next five months, Kevin volunteered to observe and teach a first period pre-algebra class at West Charlotte High School before heading to the office. Ten months after hearing Oldenburg's words, Kevin was a full-time math teacher at East Mecklenburg High School, choosing a path for their family that meant lower income, but exponentially greater contributions to the community.

The Covenant capital campaign will positively and meaningfully impact the community for years to come in ways we can't yet fully appreciate. But, as we prayerfully consider our contributions, may Kevin and Mary Nell's conviction, faithful service and joyful giving serve as an inspiration.



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