



**South Mecklenburg
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
2018 Operating Fund Campaign**

The Gifts of God for the People of God

Dear SMPC Family,

I guess you could say my faith journey began when a Nazareth Church bus would ride through my St. Louis neighborhood like the Pied Piper calling children to church. I was in it for the big free stick of bubble gum they would hand out after the ride home. Life was good.

In truth, it began on a day in the summer of my 20th year on the floor of a psychiatric ward with a slippery peach and a prayer. Unbeknownst to me, I had been in the ward for two months overcoming the effects of a family legacy now known as bipolar disorder. I later learned a grandfather I did not know died in an institution of ilk when I was three. Nobody talked about it.

Do not feel sad for me. It is a gift from God.

That summer day, I was at a stage in my treatment that I began to return to real consciousness. I was newly aware that I had received daily family and friend visits, a doctor that cared, and shock treatments. My case of mania was severe. I was scared of all this newfound awareness.

Back to the peach. It was lunchtime. Not thinking, I tried to stab that slippery peach on the tray when it leaped to the floor. Without thinking, I dropped down to grab it. The consciousness of my condition overwhelmed me. I quietly cried out, "God help me." And with that, came a spirit that held me. I felt overwhelmingly calm.

Fast forward through 20 years – no second episode, off meds, three college degrees, a career, a husband, and two kids. One day my world got dark. Quick and easy, I felt despair and doubt. Meds, my boss, my husband, and the faces of my children helped me recover. Yet doubts about God's presence lingered. Then along came a new preacher to SMPC. On the way in to church his first Sunday, thinking it could not possibly be true, I said, "Lord if this southerner has any relationship to Missouri there must still be a God." It was Matt. Everything about him reeks of Missouri. Why Missouri? I knew. I was aware. I was being called home again to an overwhelming calm. Tears of joy.

I share my story with you not for your sympathy but for your awareness that God and church matter. It is where we all return to experience love, to learn, to give, and to share of ourselves no matter your ilk. It is why we must all give, in even the smallest of ways – our time, our talents, and our treasure.

This year's 2018 Operating Fund Campaign is *The Gifts of God for the People of God*. In immeasurable ways, we receive God's gifts – in hospital wards, the community, and in church. I encourage you to give back or pay it forward. Let's pay the bills, maintain the brick and mortar, fund a 365, 7 days a week staff, reach out to the community, and feed ourselves and our souls. Give. I promise you will receive more in return than a big stick of bubble gum.

Gena DeChant