

## Testimonial for Religious Education Sunday

Sonia Tonelli – Senior Youth Group leaders

When I first came to Allen Avenue, my hair was long and auburn in color.

When I first came to Allen Avenue, my two sons Andrew and Bret, who are now in their early-to mid-thirties, were very young.

When I first came to Allen Avenue, Pat McLaughlin was the preschool teacher all year long. That was her passion and her gift to us. Tirrell Kimball had already been the DRE for years and years. Ralph Smith was the Sexton, and he and Mary and their team made dozens and dozens of needhams for the Holiday Fair.

When I first came to Allen Avenue, I volunteered in the religious education program. Then I served on the RE Committee. For a long time, the Membership Committee was my berth. The Holiday Fair, Personnel Committee, search committees. And so on. And on. (When one is around for a long time, there are ample opportunities to explore.)

In my own search here for “spiritual growth” and “community,” my spirit is nurtured directly in the Sunday services and just as surely in interactions with committee members, in discussions of church business or religion or at Ferry Beach or at our community potlucks or in the foyer at coffee hour.

For the last four years, I have engaged with three other adults and an average of ten A2U2 youth in Senior Youth Group. The energy, the enthusiasm - or the sleepiness and lethargy - on any given Sunday give me the gift of time travel back to Me at that age. Our times together give me hope, make me laugh, cause worry, test my wisdom, feed my curiosity. There are silly games, art projects, discussions of sports, remarks on particularly difficult or demanding teachers, peer help with a problem at school - or an entertaining and enlightening critique of the OWL program, or an analysis of our Seven Principles, and - above all - a safe space where we explore questions of human spirituality and morality. This intergenerational experience in human connection is unlike that which occurs in any other sphere of our lives, I am certain.

In all the work and play in this community, NOTHING speaks more to my searching than my association with high school youth in our Senior Youth Group. Committees and meetings are certainly necessary in a healthy church community. But SYG is a lot more fun!