

Greenlights of Faith: A Stewardship Story from Jim Meulendyke

When I look back at my faith journey, I don't see a single "big bang" moment - I see a trail of greenlights. Quiet nudges from God that shaped my life, one decision and one blessing at a time. Many of those greenlights came through Immanuel - through its people, its pastors, and the sense of community that has surrounded my family for more than a decade. From being married here, to watching our daughters grow in faith at the school, to now serving on the *Called To Be* campaign leadership team, Immanuel has become the heartbeat of our family's faith story.

I experienced many of these "greenlights" early in my life. I grew up Catholic in Milwaukee, where faith meant routine - weekly Mass at school and the quiet expectation to do right and stand for what matters. My parents, who now often sit beside us at Immanuel's 8 a.m. service, taught our family the value of character and doing what is right. I attended Milwaukee Lutheran, where I learned more about Jesus and met many life-long friends, including my eventual wife, Amber. These experiences planted early seeds. But it wasn't until many years later, moving back to Brookfield and marrying Amber, that those seeds truly took root.

We began attending Immanuel as we looked for a church to join and get married at. We met Pastor Dan while preparing for marriage and quickly found that Immanuel wasn't just a church, it was a community. Pastor Dan and his wife Jerri welcomed us into their home for Bible studies, where we built the foundation of our marriage. His advice - to always keep our relationship strong because our family must be built on rock, not sand - became a cornerstone for us. Greenlight.

In 2017, another greenlight appeared when I was asked to join the Mission & Ministry Council. At first, I hesitated - I hadn't grown up Lutheran, and I wasn't sure I was "qualified." But with prayer (and a nudge from Amber), I said yes. That step led me into deeper service and connection, especially through the challenges of COVID, when our congregation showed remarkable resilience, leadership, community, and faith. Under the leadership of dedicated and with God's steady hand, Immanuel grew even stronger.

And when Pastor Steve arrived, we could feel God's timing. His leadership, energy, and general will to get things done added fuel to our mission. Greenlight. Alongside Pastor Colby, and supported by our incredible school leadership and staff, and with our childcare team, Immanuel continues to move forward with purpose. Watching that leadership blossom has strengthened not just my faith, but my conviction that Immanuel truly lives its mission.

Immanuel's influence on me has extended far beyond Sunday mornings. Even at work, where a casual conversation about faith during a business trip sparked a small group of Christian colleagues who began meeting to pray and encourage one another. What began as three believers has since grown into multiple small groups and a larger network. Greenlight.

Though I've mused that my faith journey was not built on a single moment - rather, many small ones compiled together - there was an experience in late 2023 made me rethink this concept. Pastor Steve reminds us often that we must be in the word daily and read the Bible cover-to-

cover each year, as that is how God speaks to us. Because of this encouragement, I was reading through the Bible, striving to listen more closely to God's voice. When I reached the book of James, each verse seemed to speak directly to me. Every. Single. One.

At the same time, Amber and I were expecting our son in just a couple of months, and could not agree on a name. I did not want a "junior" – there are so many other names out there! – and Amber had always loved the name James. Well, as I read these verses and chapters, I texted Amber how powerful the book felt and that I'd consider the name James. She replied almost immediately, "Jim, I prayed that you would received a sign to name our son James." In that moment I understood that God was speaking directly to me. It was a deeply personal "big bang" moment of faith, and one that never would have happened without Pastor Steve's reminder to be in God's word. Greenlight.

Through each of these moments - big and small - God has used Immanuel to shape my faith and my family's story. Our daughters, Leah and Ruth, are learning and growing in the same community that has loved and guided us, and our son James will join them at school in just a couple of years. We can't wait to see the impact Immanuel has on all 3 of them.

The beauty of stewardship isn't about having everything figured out. It's about being ready when God says "Go." For Immanuel, that time is now. As a church, a school, a childcare, and a community, we've been given another greenlight - to step forward boldly in faith through the *Called To Be* campaign, expanding our ministry and investing in the future God has prepared for us. My prayer is that we all recognize this moment for what it is: another greenlight, and the opportunity for us to say yes when He calls.

Jim Meulendyke serves as Vice President on Immanuel's Mission & Ministry Council and is part of the Called To Be campaign leadership team. He and his wife Amber were married at Immanuel and have been members for more than ten years. Their daughters Leah (2nd) and Ruth (Kindergarten) attend Immanuel school, and their 1yo son James makes plenty of noise in the back pew each Sunday.