



St. Paul's United Methodist Church

The Ministry of Stewardship and Finance

December 2011

Message From the Finance Committee

December, 2011 – Extravagant Christmas

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. John 1:14

Friends in Christ,

The birth of Jesus Christ is represented in three of the four Gospels. Matthew and Luke tell of his birth as a narrative connecting the actions of God to be with us. John tells of Jesus' birth in a cosmic sense, poetically, drawing us into the mystery of God made flesh among us. In all three ways the wonder of God's self-giving is told with human words, a story of God's extravagant generosity.

Recently Tim Tebow, a quarterback for the National Football League's Denver Broncos, has made an impression on sports fans because he has led his team to last minute, even seconds, victory in the last 7 of 8 games. This would be noteworthy on a sports level alone, but what makes it more so is that he is a professed Christian who is known for sharing his story of faith with others in many different ways. ESPN football commentators, including Tom Jackson a former Broncos player, have joined in the speculation as to what it is about Tim Tebow's Christian faith that may explain why he is having so much success on the field of play. Tom Jackson mused that Tim Tebow's faith is what centers him, allowing him to be in the moment without distractions in the crucial moments of the game. There may be something to what Tom Jackson has to say, but with a caveat.

When a person is centered upon their purpose in life, their "calling" rather than a career or a transitory goal, much of the rest of life that can cause us distractions from success can fall away. Tim Tebow has shown repeatedly that his faith is more than the football field and success on it. Yes, he played on teams that have won considerably more than they have lost. Winners tend to be viewed by the public as having more to say about success than losers. Yet, when Tim Tebow has played in games in which his team lost, he did not make excuses for himself, but took the responsibility to play to the best of his ability the next time. In that sense, his Christian faith has shown itself as being something that does not create "success" in worldly matters, but in matters of loving God and loving neighbor.

Here's the caveat. If I try to create a worldly success on the playing field, at work or in a career, or in relationships by trying to be a Christian, then I have the potential to be very disappointed. It has been my experience and reading of Christian history that many people who have genuinely professed Jesus Christ as their savior and have lived in the fullness of the grace of God of which John's Gospel tells, have lost games, failed in business, shuffled through careers, and have had broken relationships. The disciples of Jesus are good examples of this. To put this into play with professional sports, the number of professing Christians who played on losing football and other teams would, in my estimation, be even greater than the number that have played on winning teams, considering that only one team is named the champion at the end of the season.

However, if I attend to the profession of Jesus Christ, humbly, seeking to grow in knowing and following Christ day by day through prayers, presence in worship with others, through generously offering my gifts, service, and witness to Jesus, then as a person of faith and as a pastor I have the potential to grow in **faith, loving God and neighbor. This may, or may not, translate into “success” as the world measures success.** But I pray in my life, that as I live worldly success means less and less to me, and faith in Jesus Christ and his work in the world means more and more.

This is the reason that, when it comes to encouraging St. Paul’s to grow in financial giving and supporting the work of Jesus here and around the world, I believe my role as pastor is not to be a “fund raiser” but a promoter of spiritual growth. Some years we may “succeed” in balancing a budget – which is a good business plan. But some years we may not “succeed” in the business sense because I believe that what we need is a sound spiritual growth plan. I ask myself these questions: Have we extended ourselves in the name of Jesus Christ for his mission in the world? Are we encouraging one another in **being mission minded and with mission action? Have we relied upon God’s grace rather than our own limited estimation of what God can do in our lives and the lives of others?**

As you might imagine, the answers to these questions are difficult to put into quantitative numbers and are subject to speculation. I believe that we are being the church in many profound and meaningful ways, even when we may struggle in some ways. But this is always open to prayer and speculation **about the mystery of God’s flesh living among us. Which is where I started this article with a football player who has faith.**

I continue to pray with you and for you. Merry Christmas and a happy new year together.

Grace & Peace,

Pastor Harlan Gillespie



Thank you very much to all who have given so much of their time and talents to create cubbies for the Early Childhood/Sunday School Classrooms. The ministry of these gifts of time and talent is greatly appreciated.

Our Gifts: Recent Special Mission Offerings:

Linn Comm. Food Bank: \$255 plus 148 pounds of food helping feed local hungry families.

Emergency Assistance Fund \$1,333 ...a ministry of hope and encouragement to those who find themselves in need of short-term emergency assistance.

UM Student Day \$138 ...A special offering for scholarships and loan funds for United Methodist students attending United Methodist colleges.

Special Mission Offerings in the near future:

December 24 & 25 Christmas Missions Offering: 1st Mile Missions through Apportionments

January 1 Linn Community Food Bank: Bring boxed/canned goods or make a financial contribution for the Food Bank.

January 7 & 8 Interfaith Religious Council: Support the faith community of the Cedar Rapids area.

January 14 & 15 Human Relations Day: This Sunday before the observation of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday supports Community Developers, United Methodist Voluntary Service and Youth Offender Rehabilitation programs. A community developer who directs a program funded by the offering said, "the primary focus is to help kids see Jesus and to help them grow developmentally and spiritually."

January 21 & 22 Emergency Assistance Fund: ...an ongoing St. Paul's UMC ministry of hope and encouragement to those who find themselves in need of short-term emergency assistance.

January 28 & 29 Pastor's Youth Lunches: On Tuesdays and Thursdays a free lunch is provided for students of Kennedy and Washington High Schools. The lunch begins with prayer and provides an opportunity to meet with a pastor during the meal. This is a significant ministry in building relationships with Christian peers outside the church building.

An Exciting Announcement - 2012 Increase Match!

Once again St. Paul's UMC is blessed with the faithfulness and *extravagant generosity* of the anonymous donor who has already given much to our church. Last week we received notice from the donor via correspondence from their attorney, stating "*the donors will for one more year match dollar for dollar on the basis of increased pledges for 2012 over what was pledged and paid in 2011*". Thanks be to God!

We studied together this last month the text "Practicing Extravagant Generosity." It has in part been in preparation for consecration weekend when we placed our estimate of giving cards for 2012 on the Lord's Table. It is for the ministry within our church, in our neighborhood, and around the world as we help all to know and follow Christ.

As you know, if we fall short of fully funding our financial plan, it is often our apportionment giving that has not been completed. The letter states clearly the donor's desire we fulfill this obligation by saying, "***the match is made in hopes of encouraging the congregation to pay the first obligation of a connectional church. The purposes of the apportionment are important to the day-to-day ministries of St. Paul's and its missions. The donors recognize and appreciate the congregation's directions towards making St. Paul's mission relevant to the future. They wish the congregation well in challenging themselves to step up to increases of 2 or 3 fold so that the vision for St. Paul's future will not be hampered by finances.***"

Let's take up this challenge, to each give according to our means – generously – all to the glory of God!

You can be a part of God's extravagant generosity. If you have not yet returned your estimate of giving for 2012, please do so as soon as possible by mail to the church (1340 – 3rd Av SE, Cedar Rapids, IA 52403) or during worship. Join with others in expressing the image of God that God generously impresses upon your heart so that the ministry of Jesus Christ can transform the world around us for the goodness of all!

Lorna Barnes, Council Chair; Ron Bunch, Council Vice-Chair

Dannie Keck, Finance Chair; Dave Mather, Finance Vice-Chair

November Income	Year to Date Income all sources	Five Year Average Income	November Expenses	Year to Date Expenses	Five Year Average Expenses
\$89,891	\$1,019,319	\$1,016,593	\$86,238	\$1,188,098	\$1,106,531

Our Gifts: The General Ministry Budget

The above chart is a review of monthly and annual income year to date as compared with the five averages for income and expense. The income year to date is 0.3% above the average. Expenses are 7.4% above the five year average. The revenue indicates a deficit of \$168,779 of meeting expenses.

Our total Apportionments commitment through November is \$211,162. The total amount paid through November is \$59,950. With a slightly improved cash flow, an apportionment payment of \$8,856 will be made this month. The Christmas special offering this year is for first mile giving. We are prayerful that we will make a significant apportionment payment by the end of the year.

Offering envelopes for 2012 will be available in the parlor on Saturday, December 17th. Please stop by and pick them up as we will not be mailing them.

If you have not made your 2012 estimate of giving, please contact the finance office. We rely on your financial support to continue in mission.

Finally, a reminder regarding year end contributions...The Internal Revenue Service dictates the guidelines for timing of charitable giving. All contributions must be received or postmarked no later than December 31, 2011, to qualify as a 2011 charitable deduction. Checks received in 2012, even if predated to 2011 will be recorded as a donation for 2012, unless delivered by mail bearing a 2011 postmark.

My Christmas wish for all of you is that you will find peace this holiday season and rejoice with the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ!

Blessings,

Kate Ulmer, Treasurer

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