

November 17, 2019

"Stewardship 2019-2020"

It was one year and a week ago that I last shared with you about the Church of the Covenant's financial situation, our assets and liabilities, our income and expenses for the previous year, and our budget for the 2018-2019 church year. Today our assets remain the same: 5 acres of land and buildings at 4405 Boonsboro Road (Pantops) and 4415 Boonsboro Road (the Church House and the Lodge of the Fishermen). However, July 1st the City of Lynchburg increased its assessment of the Church House and Lodge \$10,800 and now the total for the two properties is \$530,100. Last year I reported to you that we were in the process of filing an application to the United Church of Christ (UCC) for a refinance of our existing mortgage on 4405 Boonsboro Road (our parsonage, known as "Pantops"). The refinance would have extended the loan out to 20 years, but would have significantly reduced our monthly payment amount.

However, I also reported that three days earlier our bookkeeper, Susan Allen, texted me with a photo of a check payable to the church in the amount of \$100,000 from the Cosby Charitable Trust. I was stunned, and I invited everyone to pray for God's guidance as we contemplated the use of this incredible new gift. Personally, I remembered how a number of years ago our members had met one evening in the Lodge and gave away \$55,000, proceeds from the sale of a house on Spottswood Place which had been gifted to the church by a generous deceased member of our church family. I remembered that the Israelites, wandering in the wilderness, could only gather enough manna for one day at a time, otherwise it would go bad and smell. And I remembered that sometimes, to use a familiar 12-step fellowship saying, "if you want to 'keep it' you have to 'give it away'".

After prayerful discussion about many possible uses of this unexpected gift, our members wisely decided to use it, plus other funds we had on hand, to pay off our mortgage and line of credit indebtedness of \$109,000. We also abandoned our application to the UCC for a mortgage refinance. I think we all felt a real sense of relief that we no longer had those monthly payments to be concerned about.

Last year I reported to you that we were still in the process of developing our 2018-2019 Budget. Once we decided to pay off our indebtedness, we significantly revised our budget draft. We approved a balanced budget of just under \$84,000. Grouping Expenses into 3 general categories, we projected expenditures of: (1) \$29,600: "Facilities" (M&R, Utilities, & Property & Liability Insurance), (2) \$45,100: "Staff Payroll & Expenses" (Minister & Bookkeeper); and (3) \$9,300: "Other" (Office Related Expenses, Outward Ministry giving & Worship Supplies).

I also identified 4 main Categories of Income which we would receive this past year. They were: (1) "Gifts and Offerings" which has 4 sub-categories: "Regular Offerings" (includes those gifts from donors who are identifiable and give weekly, monthly or annually on a regular basis), "Loose Offerings" (currency and coin gifts received weekly in the offering plate), "Non-Regular Offerings" (gifts received from donors who give occasionally but not on a regular basis), and "In Honor, In Memory and Designated Gifts" (designated gifts are given for a specific purpose and must be spent for that purpose); (2) "Use of Facilities" - donations for use of the Lodge of the Fishermen or other church property; (3) "Common Grounds Cafe" - \$130 monthly rent payment to the Church; and (4) "Other" (sales of books & CDs, interest income & other miscellaneous items).

Total Income for the 4 Categories last year, not counting the \$100,000 gift, was \$67,500, and \$59,000 of that was from "Gifts and Offerings". We ended up \$16,500 short of our budgeted income amount of \$84,000. Half of that is attributable to Regular Offerings and the response to our Appeal letter totaling \$8,300 less than the previous year. A large part of the shortfall in Regular Offerings is due to the number of regular donors in previous years who are no longer part of our community.

For our 2019-2020 church year we have approved a budget of \$80,700, slightly less than last year's amount. Because we know our current expenses, for the most part projecting realistic amounts for our budgeted expense categories is easier than projecting our income category amounts. In calculating the income amounts for the budget we try to estimate the level of giving of our regular donors (weekly, monthly or annually), and the amounts received in Loose Offerings. At this time, based on current giving levels, it appears our Regular Offerings total for this coming year will be about \$49,500, the same level as this past year but more than \$12,000 less than our budgeted amount of \$61,656.

Now that you have digested all the budget numbers, I would like to talk a little bit about "giving". One of our Covenant Member Commitments reads as follows: "As a Covenant Member of the Church of the Covenant Community, I make a commitment to: Support the life and ministries of this community of faith through the giving of at least a tithe of the income which is entrusted to my stewardship. Personally, at this point in my life I am blessed when it comes to "money". I receive monthly payments from Social Security and two pension funds, and I have an IRA and other investments which provide a more than adequate income. When my children were growing up that was not the case. Today the Inward Journey commitments are the ones I struggle with.

As many of you know, my Mission Group is The Haven Mission Group, and we use the Recovery Devotional Bible (NIV). In closing I am going to add a little bit about the two scriptures in the bulletin today. They both appear in the Bible's Subject Index under "Giving". In his second letter to the church at Corinth, the Apostle Paul writes about "encouraging generosity" and "sowing generously". The Recovery Devotional Bible contains this "Life Connection", a brief commentary about "sowing generously". {READ} The passage from Luke 21 "The Widows Offering" is accompanied by a Meditation entitled "Giving from the heart" {READ}

In closing, I believe the good news this morning is that we have a \$50,000 line of credit which we can tap if and when we need to. Even better news than that, we are celebrating our 65th anniversary. That means God has been with us for 65 years, through times of plenty and times of scarcity. I also believe that God will be with us in the year ahead. But we have to do our part.

If you're a regular donor (cash or check) and are not already using our numbered envelopes, please take a box and sign the sheet. That will be a great help to us. Also, we have added a "DONATE" option on the first page of our church website. Please know that any and all information about your donations to the church is kept confidential.

Thank you for listening. I will have copies of our 2019-2020 Budget after worship in the Lodge, and I welcome any questions you may have.