

Church of the Pilgrimage

November 5, 2017

Val Baumann - Guest Preacher and Chair of the Stewardship Committee

Ephesians 4:7, 11-16

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

**Draw The Circle Wide**

It's a pleasure to speak to you this morning on behalf of the Stewardship Committee. We have been working for months on our Fall campaign, Draw The Circle Wide. And it's exciting to have it going . I hope you have received your campaign letter by now and are thinking about your pledge for 2018.

I found myself in prayer a lot as I went about writing this sermon. I'll be honest with you... I felt very humbled by the task.

I thought a lot about those who have come before us.

About the incredible stewardship shown by our pilgrim ancestors who left their homes and traveled across the ocean to build a new church...our church...and to worship God as they felt called to do. How very faithful and brave they were!

And I thought too about our Church at the dawn of the 19th century. I drove here this week to look at the plaque in front of our building. It commemorates when our members, once again showing tremendous courage, decided that to be true Stewards of this church, they needed to separate from those members whose Faith had moved in another direction. I'm sure that was an agonizing time for us!

I also thought about the more recent past....and the things that many of you have shared with me; the tough financial times we faced some years ago. How difficult it must have been for you to be stewards of this great church then! Today, things are different. We are brimming with new members, new leadership and tremendous strengths. But, those times have left a scab that I know still smarts a little bit.

All of this ran through my mind and weighed heavily upon me. As I thought and prayed on all this, I realized that these events had something important in common. They all represented pivotal moments in the life of our Church. In each instance, our members were at important cross roads. They faced staggering decisions that required Great faith in God and Great trust in one another. Our forefathers and mothers came together, each doing their part, to fortify and grow our church....to write yet another chapter in the glorious story that is The Church of the Pilgrimage.

I think this is what Paul is talking about in our scripture reading this morning. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul tells us that God gives important gifts to the church. God gives the church members and clergy leaders who bring rich and diverse gifts of their own. Christ is the head but all of us are Stewards of the church. It is in working together, each sharing the best of his or her gifts, that the church matures and grows.

That's the spirit behind our stewardship journey this Fall. As we work together...joined together...each contributing God's gifts...the Church of the Pilgrimage grows, matures and thrives. Not just for itself, but indeed for the people of the world around us.

So what do WE need to do now to build our church up further in love as Paul tells us? What is required of us to draw our strong circles of faith, fellowship to one another and service to Community even wider?

Well, it will take a lot of thought as well as additional time, talent and treasure from all of us. Since we are deep within our Fall Stewardship Campaign, I want to focus today on one of these....treasure.

Let's talk for a few minutes this morning about money. I know this is a topic that we don't talk about very often. I've found that folks in New England are a bit shy about discussing finances. Perhaps it's a Puritan preference for privacy or maybe even a communal sense of propriety. Well, I'm not from New England...I'm from New Jersey. And, hey in Jersey, we talk about EVERYTHING!

Seriously, we shouldn't be so shy. Think about your family. Families need to discuss money matters...it's healthy! We are a church family and we need once in a while to get real about our finances too. It's one of those things that is required, as Paul tells the Ephesians, to grow the church up in maturity. So, here goes...

I expect most of you by now have seen the proposed budget for next year. Our church's operating expenses are projected to increase from about \$435 K to \$472 K. About \$37,000. This increase is due to a couple of things. First, is the usual cost of living increases for staff, increases in property costs like repairs, insurance, and church office supplies. We face these every year due to normal inflation. Also, next year, with Verna and Al Hoyt moving to Maine, the Trustees are reassessing our accounting needs and added a little extra to the budget for that. These are the nuts and bolts things that keep our church humming. And we need to fund them every year.

In addition to these, we have a new and exciting initiative too. We voted in September to bring a new staff member on board to assist Helen with visiting our members in need. The new position also provides direction to our lay visitation team. As our membership grows and ages, our need for Pastoral care has grown right along with it. It's now too much for Helen to do alone along with all her other vital responsibilities.

Our Congregation in September voted to fund this new role through the end of this year. We need additional funding though to keep this position for all of 2018. \$12,000. A small amount of money for the tremendous asset this is for us. Our own Rosemary MacKay is filling this position now. I understand the new arrangement is going very, very well. I'm not surprised, how fortunate are we that we have an extremely talented and dedicated chaplain like Rosemary in our midst. It is so crucial that we fund this position for all of 2018.

Our committees have expressed interest in doing new things too. I hope you have seen some of them included on our Draw The Circle Wide posters. They are displayed this morning in Allerton Hall so take a look later on.

Now to fund these initiatives, we must increase our pledges by about 15%. To be exact, our Trustees are looking for us to grow our pledges for 2018 from \$230 K to \$265 K. A tall order, for sure! But one that I know we can do.

It will require us to pledge more to the church this year. And that's a challenge. I need to tell you that while a few families have steadily increased their pledging, for the most part, pledging overall has been flat for the past few years. This is because a lot of us are pledging the same amount every year. Yet, our church's costs are rising. We need to do more for 2018.

How can we do this?

Well, I'll speak for me. I'll be honest, I'm one of the people who pledged the same amount this year as I did for 2016. Here's why. When it came to our Capital Campaign gift, Paula and I gave a pretty substantial gift. We knew that the church really needed the money for significant repairs...and gee, I sat in so many of your living rooms and asked YOU for a significant contribution. I knew I needed to step up.

And then there's that whole "God will provide" thing. So, I thought I'd take God up on that and take a leap of faith. It's been hard but we are getting there. If you happen to be in Town Square on June 30th at 3:45pm, you will likely see me running up The Hill with a check in my hand to get it to Shellie before the deadline!

How about you? Did it feel like it was hard to Pledge more last year as you were paying your Capital Campaign amount? The good news is that most of us are finished with the campaign. Can you believe these couple years have already passed? How about we take some of the money we were paying for our Capital Campaign gift and add it to our pledge amount for 2018. We are used to paying this amount to the church anyway. Let's increase our pledge this way.

I am also taking a second look at all the donations I make each year. I give money to the American Heart Association and the American Cancer Society. I lost my grandmother to heart disease and my mom to cancer, many years ago. As it happened, I lost the two most important women in my life before I was even 30 years old. And so I give to these large organizations in the hope of helping others. I give to my college too. These associations are very worthwhile of course. Yet, I wonder if my donations would make a bigger impact if I took some of these funds and instead increased my pledge to our church to benefit our members and our local community.

I hope, like me, you are enjoying hearing folks share their stories of gratitude for our church in the Moment of Gratitude parts of our Sunday Services and in the Herald articles. We all know personally how much our church means to us; how great it is to hear from others too. Dawn Durmis and Diana Budge shared how the church has been there for them in tough times. Meg and Amy wrote about the many ways our church nourishes them. The Selvaggis last week spoke of this too. We heard from Nancy Morse about the good works our gifts to Habitat for Humanity are yielding. And how about Michael Cappola, who shared how important our church has been to him and his family. We have watched Michael grow up into the outstanding young man that he is. These are the very tangible and visible things we are funding with our pledge dollars.

So, I'm going to take some of the money, a portion, that I give to these big national organizations and give it instead to our church. I want to feel I'm really making a difference. I want to see my gifts going to help people right here in our church and in our community.

How about you? Do you feel this way too? Are you troubled sometimes by the big administrative costs some of these large colleges and charities have? Would you consider shifting some of your donations instead to our church where you can really see how well your money is being spent?

If you are pledging \$1000 a year now...can you increase it by 15% to \$1150...or \$3 a week more? Or maybe increase it by \$300 which is \$6 a week more. Can you find some room in your budget?

Now I know that not everyone can do these things.

This is to be expected; we are a family and in any one year, some of us are having a harder time and others are doing a bit better. What we are asking is that everyone make a Pledge...first and foremost...and then pledge an amount that is the best that you can. Let's continue to pray on this and consider all of our blessings. It's so important that we get the funds we need to pay for all the things we need to do...to follow where God is calling us.

I want to remind you too that our Missions Committee is funded by our pledged dollars; 11% of our pledges go to Missions to fund the important work that they do. The 11% is actually pledges made AND collected which is another reason to be sure to pay your pledge in full each year. And, by the way, the amounts that go to our Missions Committee have nothing to do with the dues we pay to the United Church of Christ. That is funded elsewhere in our budget.

Our campaign ends two weeks from today— November 19th —when we will place our completed pledge card in the chest of Joash during the Service. If you need another pledge card, you can find them in the back of the Sanctuary. We will have envelopes here that day for your use if you choose.

If you know you can't be here that Sunday, please send your completed pledge card to the church office before November 19th. I understand that every year, the Stewardship chair has to call out to some folks to get them to send their pledge card in. I'm hoping I won't have to do that (and you don't want that either!) so please make sure your card is in on or before the 19th. Thanks for that. The Trustees will then take a look at the total amount pledge and finalize the 2018 budget which we will vote on in January.

So this is where we are...this is what we need. Is this as dramatic a moment as when our members decided to leave on the Mayflower and come to America....or when almost 200 years later, our members had to provide for the church after the split?

Well, no...and I am glad about that. But it is an important moment for us nonetheless. We have some decisions to make about what we do now with all the assets we have.

We all will be completing an important church survey later this month which will ask us to think about what is important now and where God may be calling us to go next as our Pilgrimage continues.

That will come but the first step towards embracing our future is funding the things we need now. Paul's words to the Ephesians are the same to us today as they were to our members in 1620 or in 1801 or 10 years ago.

We must endeavor to come together, each doing our part, to Draw our Circles of Faith, Fellowship and Community Service Wide....and then Wider still! For as we do that, we meet Christ's call to grow and build our Church up in love. We have been doing this for almost 400 years. We will do so now and in the future, with God's blessings and ever present aid. May it be ever so! Amen.