

# Greenwood Community Church, Presbyterian

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The Rev. Dr. Stephen L. Clark, Pastor

From 1 Chronicles 29: 14      Ascribed to Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

All things come of Thee, O Lord, and of Thine own have we giv - en Thee. A-MEN.

Dear Members and Friends,

November 13 is *STEWARDSHIP SUNDAY*, November 20 is *CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY*, November 24 is *THANKSGIVING DAY*, and November 27 is the *FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT*. As you may remember, on the liturgical calendar *CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY* is the final Sunday of the church year, and the *FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT* begins the *NEW YEAR*.

As I've written before, I see a common thread which wonderfully weaves these four November observances together: Our faithful *STEWARDSHIP* reflects our *THANKSGIVING* as well as our submission to *CHRIST THE KING*, and enables us to better plan for a *NEW YEAR* of ministry and mission. The name of the national holiday itself hints we best express our *THANKS* by *GIVING*; giving is THE Bible-honored and time-honored way of acknowledging our gratitude to God. In our giving we express not only our gratitude, but we also express our recognition of, and our submission to, *CHRIST THE KING* by acknowledging His primary ownership of all things. We return a portion of what is already His, as succinctly expressed in the above doxology still sung each Sunday at the Methodist church in which I was raised. "All things come of Thee, O Lord, and of Thine own have we given Thee." (from 1 Chronicles 29:14)

I have said or written the following in some way or another each of the twenty years I've been privileged to be your pastor, and I'll say it again: The overarching biblical context and motivation for giving is *spiritual*, not *institutional*; the people of God are to give primarily to God, not primarily to meet a budget. Yes, our church certainly has ongoing expenses, obligations and programs requiring an operating budget funded by our donations, and it is certainly true that the more we give, the more we will be enabled to do. As highlighted in the recent **Fishermen's News**, this is a **GOOD** time to foster and encourage the kind of faithful giving that'll help keep AND increase the ministry fire(s) burning so well here at Greenwood Community Church! And there is certainly always more we would all like to do ... to strengthen what is good and right about all our various ministry endeavors, to maintain and beautify and enhance this center of worship so it may serve well into the future, and to expand our horizons for outreach to our community and a world in need! However, let me again encourage each and every one of us to have the primary motivation of *GIVING TO GOD*. May we allow our giving to proportionally reflect our gratitude to the God Who has first given so much to us.

As each of us prayerfully considers how we will fill out the enclosed card, may we consider that Jesus freely and even joyfully sacrificed and gave Himself for us. How will we gratefully, freely and joyfully sacrifice and give for Him?

*Stephen L. Clark, Pastor*

**PLEASE BRING YOUR PLEDGE CARD NOVEMBER 13** for dedication during worship. If you can't be with us that morning, please deliver it to the church office OR bring it to worship the following week(s).  
**THANK YOU !**





## A BASIC PRIMER FOR THOSE WHO MAY BE NEW TO ALL THIS

### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "STEWARDSHIP?"

The English word "steward" comes from the Anglo-Saxon words "stig" or "stye", meaning an enclosure or a hall, and "wéord," which means keeper. A steward is, literally, a "stye-keeper;" the word now means a person in charge of the property or affairs of another.

A steward acts as a trusted supervisor and/or an administrator of finances and property on behalf of the owner of the property. The relationship between owner and steward is one of confidence; character traits of a good steward are integrity and trustworthiness. As Psalm 24 succinctly says, *"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it; the world, and all who live in it."* God is the Owner of all, and we are called to be His faithful stewards, using the time, talent and treasure He has given us to manage according to His intention and will.

### WHAT TO WE MEAN WHEN WE SAY "MAKE A PLEDGE?"

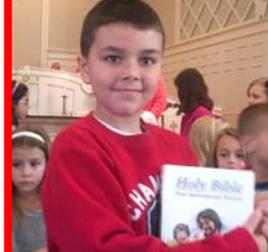
A pledge is a written declaration of intent to donate a specific amount of money over a certain length of time. In making a pledge to the church you are making a pledge for the next calendar year with the intention of paying in full by December 31. The pledge is not legally binding; we all understand life happens and circumstances can change; however, you are encouraged to make a pledge you may reasonably expect to uphold. We recognize that for various reasons some people may prefer to give without pledging; a pledge is certainly not required for church membership. However, (a) those who pledge find a pledge commitment can serve as a gentle yet persistent reminder that we have the ongoing privilege and responsibility to consistently and dependably support the work of the church's mission with our finances, and (b) pledging helps better enable our Session to responsibly and more accurately plan and budget for the future of our church.

### WHAT IS THE LITURGICAL CALENDAR?

The Liturgical Calendar orders the annual life of the church according to the life of Christ and events of salvation history. The Common Lectionary recommends a set of Scripture readings organized around the Christian year and attentive to the broad themes of the biblical story. In the Old Testament, seasons of fasting and feasting were observed as occasions for festival worship; for the New Testament church, Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and promised return give meaning to the seasons, help order the annual cycle worship and guide the selection of Scriptures read and proclaimed in worship. Over the years a cycle of festivals and seasons has emerged and is now generally observed throughout the ecumenical church, including these days and seasons:

- Advent, the season to recollect the hope of the coming of Christ, and to look forward to the Lord's coming again,
- Christmas, the celebration of the birth of Christ,
- Epiphany, a day for commemorating God's self-manifestation to all people,
- Lent, a season of spiritual discipline and preparation, beginning with Ash Wednesday, anticipating the celebration of the death and resurrection of Christ,
- Holy Week, a time of remembrance and proclamation of the atoning suffering and death of Jesus Christ,
- Easter, the day of the Lord's resurrection and the season of rejoicing which commemorates his ministry until his Ascension, and continues through
- The Day of Pentecost, the celebration of the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church.

*The church also observes other days such as Baptism of the Lord, Transfiguration of the Lord, Trinity Sunday, All Saints Day and Christ the King.*





FOR THOSE WHO MAY BE NEW (and/or for those who might like a review), the following was adapted from a 2002 sermon series & from our stewardship appeals of 2006 and 2007: *"As you prayerfully consider how you will fill out the enclosed pledge card, let me encourage you to take to heart Paul's advice to the Christians in Corinth. He writes much about giving in chapters 8-9 of his second epistle to this church. One reason is that he's raising funds for impoverished congregations in Judea, made up of Jewish Christians, many of whom have been cut off from the Jewish community (and, for many, from their sources of livelihood) due to their conversion to Christianity. A famine in the area has exacerbated their difficulties. In order to help these needy congregations, Paul is asking all the newer churches in Asia and Greece to share their financial resources with them."*

(adapted from 2007 letter) **SIX THINGS PAUL DID DO IN HIS APPEAL TO THE CORINTHIANS:**

1. **Paul based his appeal on their desire to give.** *"I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, and you've stirred them to action. (9:2)"* And as your pastor, I know your eagerness to help, and this year as always I want to appeal to your desire. Every time there's an appeal, be it for a special mission, a building project, disaster relief, a new organ, One Great Hour of Sharing, the Holiday Food Drive, the 29Eleven Mission trip, you respond. Many of you have displayed giving as a vital part of your Christian walk; you want to share through your giving as well as through the generous, selfless contributing of your time and talent.
2. **Paul told them what others were doing:** *(8:1-2) "We want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity."* Paul told them about the generosity of the financially-strapped Macedonians, not to shame or coerce the Corinthians, but to encourage them. In a similar vein, my late wife used to love to tell a story that made quite an impression on her as a neophyte church-goer. Ann was not raised in the church; she came to faith and became involved at National Presbyterian Church in D.C. as a young adult in her mid-20s. While sitting with a colleague in worship, she noticed this young woman writing the numbers "5-0-0" on a check for the offering. Ann half-expected her to put a decimal point after the five; after all, she'd never seen anyone put more than \$5 in the plate! No, to Ann's surprise her colleague was giving \$500.00 (*this was 1983 ... according to inflation calculators, that is the equivalent of \$1,212 in 2016*). At the time, Ann honestly didn't know normal working people put such amounts in a church plate. She later learned this was the usual bi-weekly pledge of this colleague, a single young professional who delighted in giving a tithe of her income to God through the church. It impressed Ann, and helped inspire her to a lifetime of similarly faithful and generous giving.
3. **Paul called for proportional giving.** In 8:11-12, Paul says give responsibly, *"... according to your means."* In other words, don't be irresponsible and impulsively give or pledge beyond your means ... but don't give or pledge *below* your means, either! Plan your giving accordingly; pledge and/or plan what you can reasonably expect to fulfill.
4. **Paul assured they would have ample capacity for giving.** It's been said God wants us to be *distribution centers* of His blessings, not *warehouses*. If we prove ourselves faithful and generous and wise in distributing what we are given, the distribution center Supplier might just increase our ability to be *more* generous by entrusting us with more. But if we shut the doors of distribution and hoard the blessings, we become warehouses. We then limit what God wants to do through us, and God may just choose not to bless any further. Paul writes, *"Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously, will also reap generously. He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God (9:6; 10-11)."*
5. **Paul arranged for strict monetary controls.** He writes, *"We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer these gifts. For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men. (8:20-21)"* Be assured Greenwood Community Church, Presbyterian does likewise. Every cent given to God through this church is carefully and continually accounted for: we have three separate counters each week, tallies are then recorded by our financial secretary, who is overseen by a treasurer, who is overseen by a Stewardship committee, who reports to the Session, who oversees, reviews and approves all expenditures via the budgeting process through its various committees. *Privacy is at all times scrupulously respected.* At the end of every year an internal audit is carried out by two trustworthy auditors elected by the congregation, whose reports are approved at the annual meeting of the congregation. Like Paul, we intend to do what is right, not only in the Lord's sight, but in yours.
6. **Finally, and most importantly, Paul underscores our prime motivation for giving:** *"You know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. (8:9)"* *"Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (9:7)"* Instead of appealing primarily on the basis of need ... and the need was great! ... Paul appealed on the basis of what God has done. When all is said and done, giving is not primarily a compulsory duty laid on us by the church to support the institution's budget. Giving is **first and foremost** our personal, individual, heart-felt, free response to the gracious, generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ Who freely loved us and willingly gave Himself up for us.



(... and adapted from the 2006 Stewardship letter!)

... AND SIX THINGS PAUL DID NOT DO IN HIS APPEAL TO THE CORINTHIANS:

- 1. Paul did not lay a guilt trip on the Corinthians.** Nowhere did Paul write, *"Now, you who have so much ought to help those who have so little."* Paul never says "ought" in this appeal. "Ought" is the language of coercion. "Ought" is the rhetoric of drudgery and duty. "Ought" lays on people a millstone of guilt. Paul DOES write, *"Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."* The Greek word translated "cheerful" is the word "hilaron," from which we derive the word "hilarious." True giving from the heart is something that puts a smile on your face, not a grimace! It uplifts your spirit and invigorates your soul. What we really should expect when the offering plate is passed is cheers, hilarious laughter, roars of appreciation, a real whooping it up! It'll never happen; we're too Presbyterian. But Paul isn't saying, *"So you ought to be cheerful when you give. If you aren't cheerful, well, then you're ... you're ... you're a bad dog!"* The word "ought" never appears in these two chapters of II Corinthians, and the word "ought" will not appear again in this addendum. In short, Paul says give because you *want* to and/or because you *get* to, not because you *have* to!

Giving by its very nature is voluntary. Involuntary giving is not giving; that's taxation or even extortion (or both). God does not compel or coerce His people to give, He *allows* us to give ... freely, voluntarily, from the heart. One Sunday in November 2005, a member asked to meet me after worship in private. He explained he had an unexpected windfall profit from a long-ago business investment, and he and his wife wanted to express gratitude for God's blessings in their lives. He then gave me an envelope; a \$16,000 check to Greenwood Church was enclosed. They gave *(anonymously)* because *"We just want to see others get as excited about Jesus as we have, and this church is helping people do that!"* They gave this tithe not because they *had* to, but because they *delighted* to.

On a related note, over the years we have also enjoyed unexpected blessings in gifts generously and gladly *(and anonymously)* given over and above the regular giving of the donors, from hundreds of dollars donated in Stop and Shop cards, to anonymous gifts ranging from \$50 to \$1000 to support our youth fellowship's mission endeavors, to **\$25,000** anonymously given by one donor to kick off our Organ Fund drive *(and almost countless generous donations received thereafter which exceeded the fund's goal!)*, to unexpected bequests from the estates of dearly departed friends who gladly and gratefully remembered the church in their wills because of the church's ministry in their lives.
- 2. Paul did not appeal to their pity.** Paul didn't display pictures of emaciated children from the struggling churches in Judea, or tell heart-rending stories of starvation, privation and/or job loss to tug at the Corinthian's heartstrings. Pity and emotional appeals may have a place, but they were not Paul's primary way of motivating God's people to give.
- 3. Paul did not paint pictures of doom:** NOWHERE does Paul write anything like, *"Unless you give, the church in Judea will just go down the tubes!"* Paul does not use scare tactics to promote and/or encourage giving, and neither will I.
- 4. Paul did not offer "premiums."** Note that Paul doesn't offer free books containing his latest sermons if they gave a certain amount, nor does he offer Bibles covered with olive wood from the Holy Land, nor CDs filled with their favorite gospel songs, nor prayer shawls he has blessed, nor anything else of the sort. Years ago I actually received an ad from a company offering to make plates for top contributors emblazoned with a picture of the pastor! *(I can see the pledge campaign now: "Pledge \$1000 or more, and you won't have to get one of these plates!")* To give out premiums or preferred status or privileges or any other incentives for giving suggests that God should somehow *pay* us for giving. No, God has already paid, dearly, on the cross, and that payment forever precludes premiums.
- 5. Paul did not promise big financial returns for their giving.** There *are* promised rewards of giving, but they are not necessarily financial, as if we could donate to some sort of spiritual mutual fund with a guaranteed financial return. Yes, there is a sense that God will bless in proportion to how generously and freely we give, but again, the promised rewards are not always financial. Paul writes: *"Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously, will reap generously. He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness."*
- 6. Paul did not call for a tithe.** That's a bit surprising, because a tithe (ten percent) of income was considered the minimum standard for giving in the Jewish community of that day. Paul himself certainly tithed. The practice of giving God a tithe preceded even Moses by centuries; it has long been a means for the faithful to demonstrate their gratitude *for*, and commitment *to*, living under God. Now, tithing was important to my late wife and has been and continues to be an important commitment, even a privilege, to me. A minimum of ten percent of my income and then some is given back to God through the church and other ministry causes; I am told others in this congregation tithe as well. However, while I do recommend the practice of tithing for the joy and blessing it brings, I will not lay it on you as your duty.