

Celebrating Change

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Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in God

Luke 8:4-15 The parable of the sower

Today we are recognizing and celebrating the efforts of the members of the Stewardship Committee for their work to re-establish our stewardship program in Camrose United Church. For many years this important program was untended, like a field left fallow too long or a pasture that is root bound. Both need to be worked to sustain them and help to produce a healthy crop. And like those fields, it has been proven, time and time again, that an effective stewardship program is vital for the sustainability of the church and congregations. But it takes time for a program to work to its full potential, especially after long period of inactivity. We will have to have faith, be patient and trust God and each other that it will work.

Last year's stewardship initiative was more than just a drive to raise funds. Although it was an important component, it also looked at what concerns you had, your talents and what interests you the congregation have. Again many of you responded and bless you for doing so.

Some of you may still be asking yourselves: What was the point? In my work world it is called an environmental scan. It provides an insight about what is going on around us, what potential resources are available and in a congregation of this size and diversity that is pretty important. It serves as the basis for engaging in a S.W.O.T. analysis, short for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

We are definitely doing better this year than we were last year. Our committees are slowly populating, folks are coming forward and there is excitement building!

As I said we are doing better, but despite continued responsible spending by our Committees and the dedicated efforts of Tom, Dan, Jim and all the other volunteers, we still have a cash flow problem and a ways to go.

There are several ways to view this and it will depend on your own perspective and personal experiences how you yourself perceive the problem. The cash flow problem did not occur overnight, it is the symptom of several factors and several years without a sustainable stewardship program, which is now evolving and in the process of implementation.

As a reminder to all of us and to celebrate to our successes as a Congregation here is a short list of how we spend our operating budget and the program initiatives that were undertaken by this congregation in the last four or five years:

We as a Congregation have voted on several occasions over the last five or so, years to increase our staff because we recognized we were growing and our needs were changing.

We added Helen Reed as the Youth Minister to our staff, because we all thought this was a good idea and the needs of our young people had to be addressed. I would judge this to be a success.

We continue to need two full-time Ministers due to the size of our congregation, all their committee work and the pastoral workload is too much for one. We are certainly blessed by the leadership and service to our Congregation of Mary Ann and Jim!

We have an excellent music program under the direction and leadership of Darryl Dewalt, our Minister of Music, because you said as a Congregation this is important to you.

This Congregation said the organ was important and you provided direction to the old Board that it was to be fixed and maintained. And thanks to the numerous volunteers notably Bob Walline, Dave Steblyk, Darryl Dewalt, it is happening, too!

Our many Committees are doing great work! They develop operating budgets for their areas of responsibility and we have voted to approve the combined CUC budget, each and every time. What that meant to me was the Congregation supported all these programs and the Congregation would provide the necessary resources, which includes the funding and people for those programs.

Bonnie Smith our office manager provides ongoing support to our Ministers and the needs of the Congregation.

Supporting and leading the maintenance of our church building and grounds with our Property Committee, is our great caretaker, Jack Kamphorst.

All of these come with a price and we all know too well, costs are going upwards. Fuel and heating costs, building materials and service provider costs, because they themselves are experiencing increased costs, these are passed on to the customer!

I want you to know that we have not reached the point right now, and we may never have to go through the stress and anguish of reducing staff or downsizing Church programs, because we have not exhausted all our options yet. We will be more creative, one way would be establishing a credit line to offset cash flow shortages, another is spreading our debt out over a longer period of time rather than trying to eliminate it in one year, because that debt sure didn't happen in just one year.

The good news is that because of measures implemented by your leadership team and your generosity, our accumulated debt is not as high as it was eight months ago. It was a combination of many factors coming together all at once that caused the accumulated debt. I can say with impunity that it was not from irresponsible spending on anyone's part that we arrived at that state.

Bottom line, I am speaking mainly to the converted, you have stepped up to the plate and those of you who did! Be proud of yourselves and be proud of your efforts for this Congregation! That is stewardship! So you also need to celebrate yourselves.

The Stewardship Committee said to Council earlier this year that they had reached the point of diminishing returns on individual visits. They just couldn't contact everyone personally because of their few numbers even with additional volunteers. How can you help? Begin by completing your stewardship sheet and returning it would be a great start,

volunteer to work on a project or a committee. If you would like them to visit with you or you want to volunteer to help with the stewardship program, please contact Dan Pudlowski or Tom Dobbie, I know they would like to hear from you.

Their work is not just about finance and cash flow. A sustainable stewardship initiative is about the survival of our congregation and the church. It is about you and discovering your needs spiritually, your interests and talents that you could explore or use to contribute to the overall well being of our church community. I have frequently heard the words in this congregation and I do include myself, "I have done my time or I don't have time"! I wonder where we would be if God had said the same thing!

The Christ observed that some of the seed fell on good soil. This good soil represents the heart that listens and responds. It is the sincere heart! It is a prayerful heart! It bears the fruit of the Spirit! There is some of each soil in us, at different times and under different circumstances. Our hearts are responsive, however, when we are moved from active listening to God, to action!

Do you like to read, art, drama, play games or photography? What about sharing that love with the Sunday School classes, these are all part of the WoRM [Workshop Rotation Model] style we use in leading Sunday School. Would you like to feel more energized, try volunteering for the youth conference in November. If you don't have lots of time, bake an extra pie for the UCW fall supper, volunteer to deliver the newsletter, try a short-term project, be a scripture reader, usher or a Sunday greeter. What might you be holding on to that is no longer true, or no longer serves you? You can be involved, you just need to decide how you can contribute in a meaningful way and do it!

Your talent is your gift from God. How you use it, is your gift to God!

I would like to close by reading from Jeremiah 6:16:

*Stand at the crossroads and look;
ask for the ancient paths,
ask where the good way is,
and walk in it,
and you will find the rest for your souls.*