

STEWARDSHIP IN TIMES OF CRISIS

*“Give thanks with a grateful heart
Give thanks to the Holy One
Give thanks because He's given Jesus Christ, His Son.”*

While the doors to many of our churches may be closed, or slightly opened for small worship gatherings, the virtual doors to our church, and our faith, are open. Our churches have stepped up to the challenge and have become places to gather via social media, to reach out to others in need and become closer to God while keeping our social distances.

Many of our congregants are streaming worship services, Bible Study, book study, Sunday School, Youth Groups meeting on Facebook Live Zoom, Goggle Duo, YouTube, or on the church's website. We have been engaged in praying for the needs of each other and our community through prayer email chains. We're honored to have Senior Dining in our church that sponsor's Meal on Wheels, delivering meals to those who can't get out. We have a robust group that calls or writes to church family and friends to check on them and offer friendly "human contact" during these times of social distancing.

What is a constant through these challenging times is the common denominator of our faith. We are called to reach out to those in need, and while we can't physically be present, we certainly do our part virtually. I'm continually impressed by the resourcefulness 5th Avenue United Methodist Church has displayed, the talents and skills of so many that have allowed us to have amazingly praiseful in-person and virtual worship services, our incredible staff and volunteers, the unwavering faith of so many dedicated souls and the generosity of the faithful to support those in need.

Our pledge and unpledged giving through these past 6-months has netted the church on 37% of our annual budget. We do understand that many have been impacted severely with the loss of jobs, cutting of hours, and increase cost with staying-at-home. Faithful stewards, your offering becomes the symbol of surrender into God's hands, a symbol of gratitude and your faithful stewardship is gratefully appreciated.

As many are being led to be cheerful givers, we humbly ask those who are able to prayerfully increase your giving to allow your church to survive and thrive during this crisis. Our ministries, India School, Full Shelf Pantry, Pastoral Care (through your generosity, the Pastor's Fund has paid rent, purchased food, fixed tires, paid utilities, taxi passes), Angel Tree, Charter Boys and Girls Scout Troops.

Monetary support has been given to our Technology Team who have working diligently to improve our technology capabilities - upgrades of our Digital Soundboard Console, Live Streaming and Recording System, Audion System for the Fireside and Fellowship Hall (if our social distancing continues but we're allowed more persons for in-person worship, we will be able to utilize the Fireside Room and Fellowship Hall for adequate distancing), and a new electronic marquee - these critical upgrades are only possible through your continued faithful generous giving - thank you all.

As more of our finances go increasingly paperless, Electronic giving can save you time, is convenient, and provides a steadier stream of giving. and ensure your monetary giving is

submitted directly to the church. This is a free service! Please contact the church office - 262.334.2059 - and we can explain this effortless but reliable the process.

Despite the unknowns - how long will this last, when will we be able to return to work, or attend church again - I am reminded of how blessed I am. Recognizing our respective gifts and talents during a crisis, when we are only thinking about how our lives have been changed, helps focus our attention on others and helps direct us in ways that have positive impacts.

Stewardship, as defined by Merriam-Webster, is the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care. The idea of stewardship during times of crisis is a difficult one to comprehend. Our daily lives have been upended. Many of us are working from home, and while the idea may have been exciting at first, it has proven to be more of a challenge each day. What were easy tasks in the office have turned into more difficult and time-consuming exercises.

I believe that God is asking each of us during this time to examine our own gifts and talents to see where we can help. For some, it may be volunteering to assist neighbors, friends or other parishioners. For others, it may be lending our expertise of technology and helping our church reach those who are craving the spiritual content which we so sorely need. Just as we have been given different gifts, our individual responses will be different but, collectively, we will get through this.

I humbly ask you to continue to pray for our 5th Avenue United Methodist Church, our Bishop and the Wisconsin Annual Conference. It is my prayer that when we are able to gather again, our churches will be full with grateful hearts, fully aware that we have been good stewards of the gifts we have received.

We will indeed hear God's voice telling us: *"Well done, good and faithful servant."*
(Matthew 25:21.)

*"Give thanks with a grateful heart
Give thanks to the Holy One
Give thanks because He's given Jesus Christ, His Son.*

*And now let the weak say, "I am strong"
Let the poor say, "I am rich
Because of what the Lord has done for us."*

Stewardship Prayer: Dear Father, I pray with a grateful heart. You have blessed me in so many ways. Thank you for the time I have right now to pray to you. Thank you for the gift of time that I can spend with family and friends, neighbor and stranger. Thank you for the gift to be alive in this world and for the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ. Help me, Father, to use wisely the time, talents and treasure you have given me. Grant me a generous heart when I pray and ask for your will to be done in my life. Allow me to surrender to you as Jesus did. Grant me the courage to use the gifts and talents you have given me for the building up of the kingdom on earth. Help me to forget myself and serve you with generosity. May I not seek recognition or status in my community, but only to serve you well. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Your humble Pastor-Servant-Leader,

Pastor Clarissa Martinelli