



Pastor's Corner, August 2016

This pastoral letter is longer than normal. I hope that you will take the time to read it all because it is alarming and encouraging at the same time.

We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; ²for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, 2 Corinthians 8:1-3a

As you read this passage from 2 Corinthians, you will have noticed that St. Paul begins with “We”. He informs the readers of his letter that there are many people working to do the will of the Lord as they lead God’s church. How many times have you heard me say, “The church today struggles with the same issues of the early church?” Paul’s encouragement is one that invites all people to embrace joyful giving to the church, no matter their income. It’s non-threatening, inviting, and matter-of-fact appreciation for the gifts given.

In the study book, “The Seven Habits of Jesus,” the author speaks of the Ten Principles of giving. Our weekly offering is about returning back to God a portion of what he has first given us. The author’s 1st Principle is “Give with the generosity of God” — in other words, like the people of Macedonia, we give to the Lord according to our means. I don’t think I need to spell it out for the people of God today. But, I will ask “Do you give with the generosity of God or are you like the person in Luke 12:13-21?”

God’s church here at St. Paul has many members from various places, with various gifts and talents. But as I’ve said many times in sermons, “We are all one in the Body of Christ”. Together we need to look at the church debt because it is the debt payment that continues to pull this Body of Christ down. It’s not my debt and for many of you, it is not your debt. I wasn’t here when it was taken out. But unfortunately, many of the people who were here, are not here now. But there are those who stayed the course over the years and have carried this unbearable debt, and if not for them, the church would not be here today. I want to thank the members of St. Paul who had the courage and strength to see the church through to this point. Without your financial support, St. Paul would not be here today. Many of the new members will remember me saying, “Someday there will be a debt reduction program and when that time comes don’t feel as if you have to participate”. I truly believe that no person received into the church should ever feel like a number or a wallet. But on the other hand, if you’ve invested your spirit and strength into the Body of Christ alongside of others, you will want to help as your means allow.

The Congregation Council of St. Paul has called a meeting for us to vote to reduce the debt and refinance this unbearable mortgage. This mortgage is stealing away our ministry opportunities. It is stealing away our unity as a people. It is stealing away our mission to serve the community. Because the payment is so high, all we can do is get by. Our General Fund has suffered this year based on giving and drop in attendance. The decline in attendance is probably from fear and financial worry. For those who are not attending for reasons unknown, your absence or departure from the Body of Christ is felt spiritually, physically, and financially.



Your church council members want you to know that we are not sinking, folding, or giving up. We are committed to God by staying strong and passionate to the mission of his church. We need your help in completing this commitment. We know that in the past, we've relied on monies that were left to the church, but that is no longer the life we choose as a people of God. We must, for the sake of Christ's mission in our community, stand with each other, relying on each other, and supporting each other, so that we don't abandon the ministry or mission of St. Paul Lutheran Church.

How?

With the help of Thrivent Financial, our Finance Committee, and the Church Council, we have developed a plan to decrease the mortgage and stabilize the General Fund of St. Paul. Again, like the church in Macedonia, we must all help from within the means and gifts that God has already given to us. That means to return to God a portion of what he has given to you based on your means. This plan will allow everyone to help, and it is not set up so that only some can help God's church. With the help of Thrivent, on August 14th, we will vote to refinance the mortgage to a lower interest rate, which will decrease the payment by as much as \$1,500.00 per month. In order for the mortgage to go through, we must also approve a debt reduction plan titled "Blueprint for the Future." We believe (faithfully) that maintaining the General Fund and doing a Debt Reduction Program can change our lives and future together. The complete plan and opportunity for questions will be presented at the meeting on August 14th after worship. Please plan to attend the meeting, and learn what we're doing together.

Each person can make a difference in the life of God's church. The call for a larger vehicle to collect goods for Waterfront Mission is a recent example of how one person can make a difference. We went from a small passenger van to a large 48' moving van. One person made the difference. Will you go theologically deeper with me for a moment? One person made a difference in the life of the faithful. One person bore the shame of a brutal public beating. One person bore the shame of nakedness and crucifixion. One person took the sin of all humanity. One person accepted God's will be done, even to giving his life. Are you willing to give with the generosity of God to the church? Because if you are, the Body of Christ will become strong, passionate, and fruitful in the mission to serve Pensacola.

Martin Luther wrote this about Faith and Grace: "The world lets itself be deceived that wealth is an unfailing indication of God's favor. We think it natural that if we have good fortune, wealth, and health that we have been blessed by God. This sort of deduction is utter nonsense. God does not bestow riches on us so we may draw conclusions about his graciousness. God has given us a greater blessing from which we may draw a more proper conclusion — he gives us faith as a free gift of his grace. Faith is the best indicator that we have been blessed by God!"

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

Have Faith!
Pastor Frank

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast." (Eph. 2:8-9)