

# “Joyful Giving Makes a Holy Difference”

1 Peter 4:8-11, 1 Timothy 6:17-19 & James 1:17

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The meaning of life is to find your gift, the work of life is to develop your gift and the purpose of life is to give your gift away. God wants us to enjoy our lives. Jesus came to give us abundant life and to fill our life with joy. The Apostle Paul discovered that one enjoys abundant life when they share. Paul wrote, **1 Timothy 6:17-19 NRSV “As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.”** The church needs your support, your financial donations, yet even more you and I by giving will enjoy abundant life.

Pastor Shannon from the fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago told a true account from a pastor friend. “A particular member had a sizeable amount of resources but for whatever reason, his pledge did not reflect his capacity to give. But this man was a regular worshiper, and he had heard my pastor friend preach time and time again about the joy of giving and how giving made a holy difference in one’s life. The member became sick of hearing this spiel and decided to challenge my friend’s assertion. “Pastor,” the man began, “you are constantly talking about the joy that comes from giving away your money. Well, I don’t feel joyful. My giving has not made a bit of difference in my life. Rather, it feels like drudgery and expectation to me. One more bill, this one due to the church rather than the athletic club.” My friend replied, “Well, Joe [not his real name], I think that means you are not giving enough.” Joe was taken aback, a little offended, but also challenged by his pastor’s response. And so, he decided to test my friend’s theory. He greatly increased his pledge that year. In addition to writing checks, he also got involved in the work of the church. He started teaching Sunday school and volunteering at their food bank. In other words, his larger investment of his monetary resources led to a much larger investment of his time and energy, his heart, into the work of the church, the building up of the kingdom, the reign, of God. And even though he did not initially realize it, his generous giving started to make a holy difference in him. A year or so later, he came back to my friend. “You were right about the joy,” he said. “I am having so much fun giving away my money and giving my heart and my time.” And then Joe said, “I think I feel more joy because it is impossible to be grouchy and generous at the same time. When I was feeling grouchy about my giving, I realized it was because I was not feeling very generous about it. Now that I am acting with generosity, joy surrounds me.” True story.

Why make an offering of money? Giving is an act of worship and thanksgiving for who God is, as well as an act to help us remember that all of it belongs to God in the first place. Generosity, born of gratitude makes a holy difference in the life of the one on the receiving end of that generosity, and it also makes a difference in the life, the expansiveness of the spirit, of the one who is being generous, as well. Loving, giving, sharing fills us with joy and makes life abundant. As you prayerfully consider your pledge imagine what kind of holy difference your giving will make on yourself. How will it expand your spirit?

The history of the early church is recorded in Acts. It tells of a family of faith that was so thankful for being a church that they spent as much time together as possible praying, studying scripture, sharing meals, enjoying each other’s company. They were filled with awe by God’s grace, luminous with resurrection, certain that love is stronger than death. They were so overwhelmed by God’s generosity that they put whatever they had into the offering plate grinning as they gave, then they looked at others joyfully giving, so celebration erupted. In some traditions the offering is a festivity, with dancing, clapping, hugging and laughing.

The offering is a time for each of us to remember God’s faithfulness in the past, to celebrate the gifts, the money, the love our ancestors shared, to connect anew to God’s continuing faithfulness in our present lives. Our offering makes a holy difference expanding our trust in God’s promise of faithfulness for our future, and all the generations that follow us. As we recall God’s generosity, one realizes we are not giving something we possess rather returning to God a portion of the blessings God showered on us. Sharing sparks joy and sets gratitude aflame. Giving opens our hands and opens our hearts, so we can receive peace, hope and grace. Our

offering can become the highlight of our week. Yes, our giving matters to the church, and even more our giving matters to ourselves, a tangible expression of our love for God, each other and the world.

So this week, as you continue to prayerfully consider what you will pledge, give, to this church for God's work in this world, for the building up of God's kingdom, God's reign, God's community of love, or as you reconsider what you have already pledged, take into account what kind of a holy difference your gift will or will not make in your life. Maybe one shortcut could be to ask if you feel grouchy when you do it, or if you feel joyful. As Henri Nouwen put it, "Even a seemingly small act of generosity can grow into something far beyond what we could ever ask or imagine—the creation of a community of love in this world." Your giving makes a holy difference in the life of this place, in the life of our city and world. And it will make a holy difference in your own life, as well.

Researchers have discovered that stewardship language and explaining the holy difference an offering makes only motivates some. Others want to be directly asked. Please give your money to support the ministry of North Presbyterian Church. Others want to know numbers and the state of the church.

At the end of August, as a church we have spent \$19,000 more than we have received. This deficit is because our giving is less than what we expected. I can't give you the numbers through September, because we are trying to get by with old computers. The financial computer malfunctioned and is being replaced with a refurbished computer. It is not unusual for us to have a deficit after summer when giving is the lowest, while our expenses continue. However, this year's deficit is higher than normal. In 2018 at the end of August, we had a \$12,000 deficit and ended the year with a \$4,000 deficit. This year, especially, every penny matters.

Looking ahead to 2020, we need to replace the rent that was paid by Treasured Tykes Daycare who have rented from us for 18 years. They paid us \$11,340 per year. Treasured Tykes closed their infant and toddler daycare this past Friday. If you know of a tenant interested in renting from us, please let Kevin Carlson or me know.

Session has been making deep cuts to our budget in recent years. The last time there was a staff raise was 2017, a 2% increase. Our deficit does not come from Reimagined Sundays or the Praise Service. Lonnie does an exceptional ministry of finding equipment at a great value all of which was paid for by earnings from our endowment. All the simulcast equipment was paid for by endowment earnings. None of it was funded by the operating budget. It costs twice as much to have Traditional Worship as Praise Worship. We need you to increase your giving, so session will not need to make more cuts.

We need Sunday School teachers. We have children. We have Renee, Director of Christian Ministries, who provides the curriculum, supplies and will model and teach how to teach. We want to have Sunday School during worship every week, but we do not have teachers. Could you volunteer one Sunday a month? Would you be willing to be a teacher's aide?

Roughly, every 500 years there is a colossal change in society. We are currently at the epicenter of change. Ministries that transformed lives and flourished in the past are no longer nourishing. New and unexpected ministries are emerging, some will be inspiring in the future. Love for God, worship, is a constant although it is evolving in form. Love for others, mission, is a constant, also evolving in form. In this season of change it is a challenge to discern God's will for the church. God is always loving to transform all. How will we partner with God? Is there a church revival on the horizon?

The session of North Presbyterian Church is bold to ask tough questions, wrestle with answers and try new ministries without fear of failure all while listening for God's guidance. Growing churches have vibrant worship in various forms, Hands-On Mission and safe places for sharing of faith stories. Other churches consider us to be creative and innovative looking to us for leadership. The Presbyterian churches around us are in similar situations. Presbytery is interested in our simulcast. Might this be a way for a larger church like us to provide a sermon to a smaller church? Might the Presbytery then be able to provide us some additional money in return? Please pray for our session and Presbytery.

We have many challenges. We need you to increase your giving. Yet, we are a church of abundance. The average Presbyterian Church has 175 members. We have 274. The average protestant church has an average worship attendance of 75. We have 125. We are younger than average. We have children and youth fellowship which many churches have discontinued.

We have several different endowments. We never touch the principle. The earnings are used to buy music, curriculum, send youth to camp, fund special projects and cover unexpected expenses. We have

\$104,000 from the Arlington Hills Presbyterian church closing. We borrowed from this account to pay for the entry way until the capital pledges fund it in full. We still owe ourselves \$55,000 on the entry way which has been pledged and is coming in. We have \$92,000 that we have set aside for Hands-On Mission. Soon we will need to replace the Sanctuary roof, cost expected to be around \$100,000. Should we use some or all our reserve money to fund the roof? El Shadai pays us \$23,000 per year. Can we utilize other sources of income? Every penny you give matters. Session is a prayerful, careful steward of every penny received.

Some of our hopes for Reimagined Sunday have not come to fruition. Adult education attendance has been low. Remember this is a pilot ministry. Session is discerning our future together. We are aware that the Praise worshipers have sacrificed the most, giving up their worship time and the message being delivered in that worship space in person. Should we return to two services at different times? Should we add a different style of worship on an evening? Please share your insights with session and me.

Although the uncertainty of what we should be doing is challenging to me I am excited for our future together. It is an honor to serve with you. God will always transform us with grace. We are abundantly blessed as a congregation.

Martin Luther once said, "Humans need to experience three conversions in order to fully live our faith: a conversion of our heart; a conversion of our mind; and a conversion of our purse. The act of giving our money is as much a spiritual discipline as the act of bowing in prayer.

James said, **James 1:17a NRSV "Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights."** Peter said, **1 Peter 4:8-11 NLT "Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay. God has given each of you a gift from God's great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to God forever and ever! Amen."**