

Confessions of a Non-Pledger

from: Diane Smith

It is true! I haven't pledged anything to the church since I officially joined in February. I rarely remember to write a check to the church. Couldn't they find someone better than me to write the message on giving? Possibly. Most of my life I have pledged at least a small amount to the church and even managed to tithe for a few years. I learned important lessons during those years. It is time to review those lessons.

The first lesson is that pledging and fulfilling that pledge is a powerful spiritual exercise. Consider I Corinthians 13:11: "When I was a child, I talked like a child. I thought like a child. I reasoned like a child. When I became a woman, I put childish ways behind me." When I was a child, my parents gave me many things. They were wise enough to know that I could only accept so much before I became cranky, judgmental, and ungrateful. Isn't this the story of the Old Testament? God gave and gave and gave. The Hebrews were "a stiff necked people" who frequently blamed God and rarely were truly grateful. So God sent Jesus to teach me a new way - the way of giving. If I only receive God's blessing, I have a limited view of God's greatness and a limited ability to accept. If I become a channel of blessing through which all good things flow, I open my eyes to God and to the "abundant life" he has promised me.

The second lesson is that "giving as the Spirit moves me" simply doesn't work for me. In my case the Spirit had better bring a forklift, a lightning bolt, or (in one real incident) a car accident. I am just not that easy to move. I always have several excellent reasons. It is disruptive to fumble for my checkbook and pen during a church service. After church I need to talk to a few people before I write a check. On and on it goes. I need the spiritual discipline of pledging and writing a check monthly. If a child told me that he didn't need to go to school regularly, that he could learn to read or add "as the spirit moved him", I would laugh and tell him to get to school. Why should learning to give require any less practice and regularity? The Holy Spirit is capable of instantly transforming me. Do I really have the time or patience to be struck blind on the road to the grocery store?

The third lesson is that I shouldn't limit my giving to a few good causes where my help is "really needed". The church budget has a bunch of boring stuff like utilities, insurance, and pension payments. That doesn't seem to be at all spiritual. The truth is that spiritual homes often have physical roofs. My pledge to First Methodist will buy spiritual education for 500 children, a place for 500 senior citizens, a haven for 1000 other adults who need spiritual renewal. If I remember to wear my name-tag for a few days, the church is the place "where everyone knows my name and they are always glad I came". This spiritual home will have a roof and lights and heat and a caring staff. What could my money buy that is better than that?

So I am going to work on being a Methodist - on being methodical about giving, praying, meditating, and volunteering. I am teaching myself to have ears to hear and to have eyes to see the Lord's greatness. I invite you to join me.

Do You Hear FUMC's Song?

By: Fran Williams

“We will listen.” This is one of the operating principles of the new Administrative Council in our Church. I’m sure it comes as no big surprise to many of our members that I am a visual, hands-on person. I see God and feel His presence in the faces and actions of those around me. Maybe it is because my hearing is not what it once was I am straining to listen. What is the church in the 21st century calling us to be? I also strain to tithe...

I brought my little garden statuary indoors where I can see it. I’m looking at it as I write. It is St. Francis of Assisi with a bird perched on his hand. So let me make “birds” the theme of my stewardship letter. For sentimental reasons, I find the sound of crows flying overhead on my walks (kaw, kaw, kaw) very comforting. We chose Transforming Tomorrow and Elevate Our People to identify our building campaign. I wanted our church community to climb a ladder, as able, and put our pledges in a nest; and use the theme “On Eagles’ Wings”.

Yes, I’m hands-on and visual...

- A favorite cartoon sketch of life today shows a frazzled “mama” bird flying back to a nest of little opens beaks...a McDonalds bag in HER beak!
- Another cartoon shows a bird perched on a branch with a wind chime. Caption reads, “If you listen with your heart, you will hear one another’s song”.
- But this phrase (no artwork) I framed years ago. I hung it in the media center for a while; now it hangs on a living room wall. “GOD GIVES EVERY BIRD ITS FOOD BUT HE DOES NOT THROW IT INTO THE NEST.”

The church cannot exist on GOD’s nourishment alone! Let’s work together as we fast approach another year...combine our efforts, listen, support one another, to undergird and strengthen the work of the church. It will enrich your life, as it has mine, in ways unimaginable.

Oh, another bird favorite... “All GOD’s creatures got a place in the choir; some sing low and some sing higher”.

