



December 17, 2014

Dear Fellow Stewards,

Merry Christmas! In the midst of this most wonderful season, as we celebrate Christ's birth and all that it means to each of us, we can't help but remember with a smile of appreciation and satisfaction all that our church does to help our community during the holidays, as well as year-round. The ministries that we as a church perform are far-reaching, loving, and real.

It is with this very warm and positive feeling that we look towards our future. As we have been for the last few years, we are still very much in the midst of change, renewal, and growth. 2015, in its own unique ways, will therefore be another very important year in the life of First Congregational Church. In fact, it would not be overstating to say that we are at a critical moment in our church's life – a pivotal time which will determine our course of ministry for years to come.

We actually began our 2015 journey at last month's congregational meeting, where we voted to support the goals and aspirational budget that were discussed for the coming year. One of these goals is to hire a full time settled Associate Minister in the fall of 2015. In order to do that, we need to start the search in February. We're having our Stewardship Campaign early this year - in December and January - to be sure we have the financial support to proceed. The timing of the stewardship campaign is only different this year; in 2016, we'll be back to holding the campaign in the spring again.

This year's campaign is exciting because of the goals we've set and what success will mean for the mission and ministry of our church.

In monetary terms, what we are setting out to achieve is a \$50,000 increase in pledges. \$50,000 puts the church on a sound financial footing going forward to support the many ministries which are important to us: vital worship; children's, youth, and family ministries; church growth; pastoral care; adult education; and our music ministries. We also want to ensure our administrative staff has the support they need to strengthen our ministries. Specifically, the increase is needed to:

- Increase funding for our outreach ministry
- Complete our goal of bringing all of our employees up to minimum market wages and cost of living increases for those already at market wages
- Cover increases in administrative costs
- Provide more for building maintenance
- Reduce our annual draw on I&T funds to a more sustainable level of 4.5%
- And, last but not least, approximately \$10,000 of the \$50,000 increase is to cover the cost of bringing in a full-time settled associate minister by the fall of 2015

We hope to have our campaign completed by January 25th. Your new pledge amount will begin on May 1, 2015. Doing an early campaign also means we won't be having another campaign for about 15 months! ☺

To be a part of the Stewardship Campaign and help us reach our goal, we ask each of you to take the following actions:

- Attend the Community Collaborative on Tuesday, January 13<sup>th</sup>. This is a key date where Stewardship will field questions about our campaign and discuss our budget priorities. It will also be a time when the Associate Minister Search Committee will be soliciting input about what we as a congregation seek in a new associate minister.
- Watch for and read the letters we will be sending – this letter and one in very early January.
- Prayerfully consider an increase in your pledge for fiscal year 2015-2016 to support the aspirational budget for the mission and ministry of our church. Reaching our \$50,000 increase goal will require many pledge increases of between \$500 and \$2,000. We stress that, as always, all pledges of any size are gratefully received. The pledge increase numbers we suggest are intended to be a guide and to quantify the challenge before us in a concrete way, besides just stating the \$50,000 total.
- Please turn in your pledge card as soon as you can after you receive it in the mail – or you can also pledge online at any time ([www.firstchurchburlington.org/2015pledgeform](http://www.firstchurchburlington.org/2015pledgeform)).
- Attend the Congregational Meeting on Sunday, January 25<sup>th</sup>. At that meeting, we will discuss next year's plans and budget in light of the pledge support we have received by that time and will vote on whether to proceed with the search to call a full-time associate minister by the fall of 2015. Please remember, our ability as a congregation to vote affirmatively to proceed with the search is dependent on the support we receive.

As we decide whether we can support a full-time associate minister, part of our discernment will be determining whether our overall ministry can be financially sustained, and ensuring that one area is not neglected at the expense of another. It's very important to understand that our full-time associate minister is more likely to succeed and to focus on the areas of ministry important to us when all the parts of our church that together support our mission and ministry also remain financially strong, including staffing, programs, administration, and building maintenance.

As our President-Elect, Bob Wolf, is fond of saying, "we are at a pivotal moment in the history of First Congregational Church. What we do in this campaign will decide the path First Church takes over the next 10-15 years." Please think about how you can rise to the challenge of this moment and make a financial commitment to take us strongly and confidently into the future. Please share faithfully and generously in this "joy and cost of discipleship"!

Thank you for your prayerful consideration. If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to be in touch with one of us.

With great appreciation for each and every awesome one of our church family,

The Stewardship Team

Mike Knauer (Chair), Jennie Coleman, Peter Cook and Cyndy Hall