

Together we will...

One of the most common laments today is about the division in American society – between generations, parties, classes, and neighbors. Here at First Church, we have members from both sides of the political aisle. We have kids in their first few months of life, almost 40 active children, and members who have been here 8 decades. We have folks who own multiple homes, and those who are homeless. And while we might not agree on everything, we *do* agree on one thing: the importance of being *together*.

It is, in fact, a sacred responsibility. In the Hebrew Bible, we are charged to set aside the sabbath as a day of “sacred assembly.” Even in the first century, when gathering wasn’t safe, Paul wrote that we were not to “neglect gathering,” but rather to “encourage one another, and continually consider how to spur one another to love and good deeds.”

Gathering is the way we express, practice, and grow our faith. And gather we have. In 2023, we have averaged almost 100 for worship in the building, and over 125 (!) online. We have gathered for benefit dinners, breakfasts, cooking competitions, and simple meals. We have gathered for concerts, art receptions, dragon-boating, discernment and retreat. We have gathered for worship in just about every room in the church, as well as by the lake, on the lawn, downtown in service, and with College Street down the road.

I firmly believe this is why First Church is thriving. In a time of mainline decline, we are in a time of renewal – a truth that will only be enhanced by the implementation of our visioning goals. I run quite a risk saying this, as are two possible reactions to hearing that things are going well: giving will drop, or giving will increase. I am banking on (excuse the pun) an increase, and I feel confident in doing so, *not* because it is clear that First Church is a “wise investment” (though it is). Rather, I feel confident in your response to this letter because it is clear to me that what you are all “invested” in is not yourselves, or your portfolios, but the love of God we know when we gather in this place.

Without a doubt, the single greatest spiritual challenge we all face is money– how to get it, what to do with it once we get it, and how much of our self-worth we link to these two processes. Jesus talked about money more than any other subject. Whether we like it or not, money is the medium through which we communicate what we value –not just to the world, but to *ourselves*. We pledge our money so that we might pledge our hearts. How much is enough? That is not for me –or anyone– to say; it is a decision that can only be made in prayer. What I *can* say is this: pledging at First Church ranges from \$5 a year to the traditional 10% of salary, and each pledge is valued, appreciated, and put to good use. Our goal this year is to emphasize doing this *together* – to get as close to 100% pledging as we can – whether you pledge \$1 or \$10,000.

If you are in a position to support our growing vitality and vision, and to help us spread the good news, I hope you will consider doing so. If you are not, then I hope you know that the rest of us are here to support you. Because that is, after all, what Stewardship, the Kingdom, Christianity and First Church are all about – we’re in this together.

Thanks be to God.



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