

## Stewardship Corner

Written by a long-time church member of a small UCC church in Massachusetts, Lawrence poses a good question to us all.

### What is your Legacy?

People often think of a legacy rather narrowly in terms of a gift or bequest of property passed on in someone's will. A more encompassing definition of legacy, however, would have it be the passing on of anything good from one generation to future generations. For most of us our legacies will be built up slowly over time and will consist not of significant property transfers but of the transfer of values, ideals, knowledge and our own novel ways of viewing God's creation to the next generation, and through them, to the generations to come. If we believe, as Paul taught, that we are all members of one single body, the body of Jesus Christ, our legacy should, at the very least, be to keep that body of Christ in good health for the benefit of future generations. This legacy should be given *freely to all* people in the next generation, not just those in our own, immediate family living unit. It is never too early to consider how you will go about building your own part of this legacy.

Most of us are not gifted speakers, writers, thinkers, artists, musicians, scientists, etc. and will not by ourselves pass on much of an individual legacy to the generations to come as have, for example, Mozart, Galileo and El Greco. Our legacies are just as important, however. We are beneficiaries of a legacy that has been carefully nurtured and passed from one generation to the next for almost 2000 years. This legacy is a cooperative legacy, a gift made great by the many small, individual actions of members of a group working in concert. In our case, the most precious gift we can offer the generations to come is to maintain this legacy given us: to pass on a strong church that upholds the ideals of strong spiritual and ethical ties between all people. There is no other institution in society that does this. Without the church, our society becomes valueless. If we do not continue the legacy of our forefathers, no one will. The world will be plunged back into the barbarism of the past. Is this what we want for our children, for their children, and for those of our neighbors?

How, exactly, can we pass on this legacy? One way, of course is by our example: by our active participation in church and community activities that benefit all; by our upholding high ethical and moral standards in our own living. Upholding these standards requires continual awareness, thought, and, yes, even prayer. In living an ethical life, we must address even such mundane things as the kinds of cars we drive, the kinds of houses in which we live, the ways we choose to spend our income, and the ways we treat other people, even those we are not inclined to like. It is a constant process of observation, listening, prayer and reanalysis.

Unfortunately, our good examples and our cheerful participation are not sufficient. We must also *support financially* the institution that is our only hope of providing a legacy for the future (you all knew this was coming, right?). Without the institution of the church, the only institution that turns our small, insignificant contributions in to one great contribution, all our good examples and all good works wither and die. Only by ensuring that the church itself endures can we ensure that we are maintaining a legacy for future generations.

We are grateful to all members of the congregation who have expressed their confidence in our future by pledging and who have demonstrated their determination to ensure that the legacy of *abundant life for all*, begun by Jesus Christ and nurtured by countless church members through the ensuing generations, will continue into the future.

Lawrence G. Piper - 15 June 2004