LOOKING AT STEWARDSHIP

Dear Salem friends and family …

Traditionally, November is our annual Stewardship month. In the past, we've sent out letters and forms asking for each family to plan and make a commitment to Salem for the upcoming year. Last year we did not send out pledge cards, and this year will be no different.

Why? Well, quite simply because the returns we received were never sufficient to use as a base for developing a budget. So as we begin to plan for 2021 we will do as we have been doing, building our budget based on our needs. This is both a blessing and a challenge, because we tend to budget for operational costs and our standard benevolences, but don't really budget for what we are called to do as Christians and good stewards. This doesn't mean that we haven't worked to demonstrate good stewardship.

We are grateful for the tremendous generosity that has been shared over this most unusual year. When in-person services were ended due to COVID-19 many people stepped up with special gifts and additional giving to help ensure that our operational expenses were covered. In addition, we were able to receive a PPP loan that helped ensure that we were able to make it through the summer months.

We've had staff members and volunteers step-up and initiate new ministries like streaming Facebook services on Sunday mornings, ongoing music ministries, and workshops like "Faith in an Anxious World," a grocery ministry, virtual Sunday school and confirmation, Kindle worship distributions for those who are not virtually connected, and more. We have focused on ways that we can stay connected as a congregation and a family of faith. If you haven't stayed connected using any of these opportunities, I pray that you work to engage and maintain your connections at Salem.

We have also engaged in special activities like the Drive-in Brat Fry that has allowed us to demonstrate Christian stewardship by helping out our brothers and sisters in Christ in Liberia, our endowment team has again been able to provide support to the mission and ministry of former Lakeland students in Malawi, and our UCC partners at Back Bay Mission.

And, I am also thankful to report that we've been able to bring new life into the family of faith through four baptisms in October.

Even in a time of social distancing—maybe "especially" in a time of social distancing and restrictions due to a pandemic—we are called upon as Christians to be good stewards of the blessings we've been given.

On October 25, Rev. James Hoppert's message focused on Matthew 22:34-46, where Jesus distills all the many, many laws that the faithful at the time felt obliged to follow into the greatest commandment:

> *Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' [38] This is the first and greatest commandment. [39] And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"*

Love is also the theme for the United Church of Christ's Mission and Stewardship program. Love of Children, Love of Nature and Love of Creation, as well as the guide for the Governance Team and the work that we're beginning to move forward on, always asking ourselves, "What should we do, for the love of God?"

As we move toward the close of this most unusual, inconvenient, and challenging year, please do not lose sight of the fact that God is calling us, above all else, to Love.

Please consider ways that you can help demonstrate your love of God, children, nature, and creation—and your love for Salem and our ministries maintaining your financial and participatory support, renewing your commitment to financial support for the coming year, and engaging with Salem's staff and ministry teams with any ideas on how we might be able to improve and grow in the year ahead.

We are hoping that giving will improve as we head into November and December, to help us finish our year out strong, and meet our budget for 2020, and thank you in advance for whatever you are able to do to help.

May you and your families be blessed, safe, and healthy as we move into the holiday season. May you find the will and commitment to stay engaged with the household of faith, and may we all find a way to unite in love.

Thank you on behalf of Salem's Generosity Team.

Mary Mullen

