Good News / Bad News

I have been thinking quite a bit about the biggest challenge we face as a community - our financial situation. We began this fiscal year with a $21,000 deficit budget. Because of your generosity with pledges, the end-of-year holiday Gratitude House, the Sunday plate, other gifts, and our various fundraisers, after 9 months, it looks possible that we will end this fiscal year in the black or close to it. (Good News!) However, we cannot go along as we have year after year and remain financially sound. What we bring in simply does not cover our expenses despite us all giving to the best of our abilities. (Bad News!) We have been spared facing this reality by luck and good fortune over the past few years.

This is the time in the year when the Finance Committee develops a proposed budget for the next fiscal year. Once again, the proposed budget for fiscal year 2024-2025 projects that our operational expenses will be significantly higher than the projected income, resulting in a deficit of around $30,000. (Bad News!) This is a significant deficit.

There are several factors that result in this deficit. Aline Couture and Barbara Nowicki reviewed the budget in the congregational meeting last Sunday. The summary of those points is linked in the newsletter.

In planning this budget, it is important to note that we gave all employees a 3% salary increase; we added a third Nursery Attendant for Religious Education, and our new Financial Administrator, Karen St Peter, works 10 hours instead of 5. (Good News!) The budget was built knowing that pledges are strong, our Sunday plate collections are generous, and we have an engaged and invested congregation. (Good News!) Further, if absolutely needed, we have savings that would allow us to close any financial gap if that was needed. (Good News!)

Still, we must figure out how to raise additional income for next year (and beyond). To do so, we will need ideas, and we will need volunteers to get involved. This budget does not include potential additional fundraisers, beyond the Holiday Fair and Dining 4 Dollars+ auction. How about an art and quilt auction? How about a chili cook-off? How about a concert, cabaret, or variety show? How about a 5K Family Run/Walk for Peace? How might we use our biggest asset – the building – to raise income? There are so many possibilities! (Good News!) And all these ideas involve reaching out to the wider community. (Good News!) I have already formed a Fundraising Committee. (MORE Good News!)

Another consideration: our aging building requires significant financial outlay to sustain it for the future. (Bad News!) In this year's budget the Facilities Committee recommends that the first major project, significant roof and chimney repair, be completed this year – likely a significant capital expense (estimate not yet known). The Committee recommends that this project be followed by tuck pointing and sealing the bricks on the back wall to stop the moisture penetration which is beginning to deteriorate the structure. (Bad News!) However, already we have found a grant specifically for Churches housed in buildings with historic significance that need exterior maintenance (like roof repair and moisture remediation!) (Good News!) While a long shot, with 20 years of grant-writing experience, I will write this

grant and see what happens. If we do not receive grant funding, sustaining our building will require another capital campaign.

I support this budget, deficit notwithstanding. The Board has also approved it. We do so with optimism, because we know that we have amazing resources – our people – who will come together as a community to use our collective creativity, innovative thinking, and energy to raise additional income. (Good News!) We must face this challenge head on, together. We can do this! (VERY Good News!)