

A Word from our General Presbyter

By Ed Thompson

With Valentine's Day approaching, love is in the air. Love can certainly mean different things. Some people love their husband or their wife. Others love their children or grandchildren. We don't limit love to people, though. Some people love chocolate, for example. Some people love their dogs. Others love cats. Some love cheesecake or cheese steak. Others love apple pie or, perhaps, ice cream. I have even heard people say, "I love my church."

I'm not always quite sure what they meant by that. I guess I've been too shy or, perhaps, too afraid to ask any follow-up questions. What exactly do they love? Do they love the building? Do they love the people? Do they love the worship services or the sense of fellowship? Or do they love the sense of awe, the feeling of being in the presence of God?

How would you love a building, anyway? I suppose you could keep it in good repair, with grass mowed, bushes trimmed and no signs of peeling paint or water stains. You could keep the bulletin boards up to date, remove old bulletins from the sanctuary and get rid of any hymnbooks that have the bindings falling off.

Those would be good things to do, although unfortunately you don't always see that. Maybe people get used to these unsightly blemishes or maybe they don't have the money to do the painting, buy new carpet or make the necessary repairs.

As the Avery and Marsh hymn reminds us, though, "The church is not a building...the church is the people." You do see people love and care for one another within the church. People will step up to make sure their fellow church members can get to the doctor or to their chemo or radiation treatments and to physical therapy appointments. At its best, the church is love in action.

I sometimes wonder, though, when it comes to the church, if people love the past more than they love the future? When they talk about love, it seems they mean they love the way things used to be. They love the memories of full sanctuaries, large youth groups, overflowing Sunday Schools. They love the honor and the prestige the church used to have.

But maybe we need to love the future of the church. Maybe we need to think about and love the possibilities and the potential the church holds. Maybe we can love the way the church could host various non-profit ministries and groups that are touching people's lives and making a difference in the community. Maybe we could love the way the church didn't worship its building and was willing to sell the space that was too big for its members and too expensive to maintain. Maybe we could love the way the church was willing to invest in ministry and outreach by getting rid of its building, so it didn't have to invest in roofs and furnaces.

Maybe we could love the way the church was open to new people and new ideas. Because I think if we love the church, we will recognize it's not about us. It's not about what we like. It's not about what we want. It's not about our preferences for worship times, music style or type of programming. If we love the church, we will be willing to sacrifice all that (you think love might have anything to do with a willingness to sacrifice?) so we can reach people and connect with people — people who are searching, people who are open to learn more about God, people who are attracted to Jesus but just can't seem to make Sunday mornings work for themselves or their families. It seems to me if we love the church, we will be willing to make those sacrifices. If we love the church, we will think more about its future, what it can be and what it needs to be, rather than its past or even its present.

What do you love about the church? What could your church become? What are you willing to sacrifice to make that happen?