

Forging Our Future

Reading: 'Choose to Bless the World' by Rebecca Parker

"None of us alone can save the world.
Together—that is another possibility, waiting."

We know this. We have heard Diane, Neena, Diane, and Don state this so beautifully this morning. This is why we gather together Sunday after Sunday. We know the power of joining together. We join our voices together in song. We join together to educate our children—teaching them our values and encouraging them to seek truth for themselves. We join together to support one another in hard times, giving voice and hands and feet to the love that surrounds us, the web that connects us to all that exists. People's people choose to bless the world in so many ways.

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Those of you familiar with how we do things around here know that this is the stewardship kick-off Sunday. This is the service where you are asked to be generous, to begin considering your financial pledges to the church. This service begins six Sundays where we'll be talking more about money than we do in the rest of the church year combined. If this is your first Sunday with us, please know that we do a lot more here than talk about money. We also talk about religion, death, sex, and all the other challenging, vitally important topics. We explore together what it means to live with integrity – and financial generosity is a piece of that.

What we do here matters. You know that. That's why you're here right now when you could be anywhere else. That's why you come Sunday after Sunday. That's why you're here on Tuesday mornings for the building and grounds work group or every first and third Tuesday night for the young adult group. That's why you sign up to do things and join committees. That's why you'll be helping to set out the tables for our lunch today and a few especially important people will stay late to wash the dishes. People's people choose to bless the world in so many ways.

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Today, I invite you to reflect on giving generously to support People's Church. Our stewardship campaign this year includes three pieces – our annual operating budget, our capital campaign, and legacy giving.

First, our annual operating budget. If you hear only one thing today, here this: give generously to our operating budget. The operating budget is the core of who we are – the operating budget is how you all pay my salary and the salaries of our wonderful staff. It is how we keep the lights on and the snow plowed. It pays for all of the supplies and curricula used in religious education classes. If we aren't funding our annual operating budget, the rest doesn't matter.

As many of you know, our ambition has been outstripping our resources in recent years. We've been using reserves to balance the books. We've been cutting committee budgets and freezing staff salaries. I came

to you last October to ask for a special supplementary gift to get us through the current fiscal year – and you gave more than what was asked for. Please continue that generosity. Please be generous during this stewardship season.

Especially if you're new here, and new to church in general, it might be hard to know what a generous gift is. We know that everyone's financial circumstances are different. One way to approach giving is to consider a proportional gift, to give a percentage of your income to the church. I will be giving 3% of my income to our operating budget for the upcoming fiscal year. For me, that's a stretch. My family is balancing student loans and childcare costs and living expenses – and we support two churches: People's Church and Saint Luke's, where my husband attends. For us, 3% is generous. I will feel proud of that gift and will feel it's impact in my budget, but I will not resent it. I will feel good as I write those checks, knowing that that money is doing good an important work in the world.

I invite you, in the coming weeks, to reflect on what amount will feel generous and attainable for you. Perhaps you'll realize that 3% of your income is the right number for you too. Perhaps you can give more than that or a smaller percentage is what makes sense for you. You know what pledge amount is right for you. With our generosity combined, we will sustain the important programs and ministries of this community for another year.

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The second part of our stewardship campaign is paying off our capital debt. Several years ago, you all expanded this building. It was an ambitious project. Everything beyond the double doors in the foyer is new – the offices, the classrooms, the elevator, the entryway. It increased our capacity for meetings and religious education and made our facility more accessible and welcoming. Our summer worship services now happen in air conditioned spaces.

This ambitious project, cost about 1.5 million dollars – and we have about a third of that left to pay off. Church leaders debated about having a third three-year capital campaign to retire this debt once and for all. We explored options and ultimately your board decided this was the best path forward, pay it off and be done. I hope you join me in giving generously to this capital campaign, making a commitment to give over the next three years. Some of you were here when the decision to expand was made. Others, like me, came later. We enjoy the expansion without giving it much thought and can't quite imagine how everyone fit before. It's up to all of us, newcomers and those who've been here for a while, to step into the tradition of generosity well established here at People's and pay off this debt. Being debt-free will give us the financial flexibility to live our mission and vision in new and exciting ways. Please join me in helping to make this a reality.

The final piece of our stewardship campaign is legacy giving – that is including the church in your estate plans. End of life gifts make a tremendous difference for our church. For example, the resurfacing and expanding of our parking lot last summer was paid for with a legacy gift. It was a significant necessary expense and a person who loved this church very much allowed us to go ahead with it without any special fundraisers or adding to our existing debt. It was a beautiful gift to our church that will make a difference for at least a generation.

I encourage you all to consider including the church – and other causes that you care about – in your estate planning, in how your assets are distributed after you die. I hope you join me in this as well. I have

included People's Church as a beneficiary in my retirement account. If there is money in that account when I die, People's Church will get 10% of it. I hope People's Church doesn't get that check for a very very long time, but it does give me comfort knowing that my resources will support this institution that will speak out for my liberal religious values after I am no longer able to give voice to them myself.

I just covered a lot of content here. It's a lot to absorb in one sitting – and I don't expect you to remember it all right now. Over the next few weeks, about 100 of you will be visited by stewardship ambassadors. They will get to know you a little, speak with you in more detail about all of this, and answer any questions you might have. Everyone will be receiving mailings with pledge packets in a few weeks which will go into all of this in more detail. In the meantime, I invite you to reflect on what this church means to you and how you can generously support it with your money. We're going to have a celebratory end to this campaign on April 16, with people turning in their pledges as part of an intergenerational service that day.

So may you take time in the coming weeks to reflect on the important work of our church.

May you be moved generously support the work of our church.

And may we all remember:

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May it be so. May we make it so. Amen.