

Planning to be Generous

It's budget time, in the life of the congregation and in our family life at home. In our personal life, Matt and I are taking stock of where we are, looking at our goals for the year to see where we have fallen short and where we are meeting them, and making decisions about next year. How much will we set aside for health care and daycare FSAs? How much will we try to save? What big purchases will we need to make in 2021?

Our staff and ministry teams at FLC are doing much of the same work. 2020 was a strange year, in every way imaginable, and our balance sheets reflect that. Much of the money budgeted for program ministries in 2020 went unspent or was reallocated for other needs that have arisen. Our giving has remained strong, which I think reflects the faith we have as a congregation that God is working through this community of believers to share Christ's love. Subsequently, our benevolence to the larger church and to local organizations has also remained strong.

In so many ways, we know that it is hard to predict what a new year may bring. That truth is evident to us now more than ever. Even so, we make a plan, so that we can be good stewards of the gifts we receive from God. And then when something unexpected happens, we adjust our plan.

As your family does the work of assessing your financial situation, looking ahead to a new year, and making a plan for the future, how do you decide how much to give to the church? Do you practice first-fruits giving, where you decide to take a certain amount each month to give as an offering? Do you look at what you have given in the past and try to find a way to increase in generosity in the coming year? Do you consider some of the special funds of the congregation, like the Building Fund or the Mission Endowment Fund, as places where additional gifts might be needed? Do you contribute to ministries partnered with First Lutheran, like World Hunger, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois, or ELCA Disaster

Response? Is benevolence to various Geneseo and Henry County charitable organizations part of your budget each year?

Matt and I have chosen to practice percentage giving, where a percent of our income becomes our offering to the congregation. Our goal is to increase the percentage each year, usually an increase of 0.5%. It seems like a small increase, but it reminds us to continually be growing in generosity.

We invite you to join us in growing in generosity this year. You could choose to grow by a specific percentage or a specific dollar amount. You could choose to grow by making a special gift during two months of the year (*maybe choose the birth months of two people who have guided you in your faith*). You could choose to make a gift to some of our partner organizations or to a special fund at FLC. You could choose to enroll in recurring automatic giving, so that your offering is received consistently, even when unexpected things happen in your life. You could choose to include First Lutheran Church in your estate plans, so that your generosity will continue to impact this community into the future. However you choose, you will be blessed in your generosity and you will bless others with your gift.

We will receive commitment cards on the weekend of November 14 & 15. We invite you bring your card to worship, mail it to the church, or e-mail the information to our financial secretary, Deb Spence, at financials@firstgeneso.org. Our goal this year is to receive commitments for 2021 from 130 individuals and families, which would be about a 10% increase from this year.

We know that where our treasure is, there our hearts will be also (*Luke 12:34*). As we give generously to the church, our hearts will encounter God's heart.

—Pastor Laura