

Pastor's Ponderings May 2022

I have now been pastor here at Faith Church for three years. Exactly three years as of May 5. There have been births and deaths, weddings and baptisms, funerals, confirmations, celebrations of new members, lamentable losses of other members. Ups and downs. Celebration and lament. Through it all I have felt the comforting reality of God's Spirit in my life and in this church. But also, though almost all of it, for the past 2 ½ years there has been the surprisingly relentless disruptions and devastations of the pandemic. It has taken a toll. Yet, despite the losses and our weariness, our faith remains. We are still in the Easter resurrection season, and we are resurrection people. We know that new life, renewed life, the life that God intends triumphs eternally. We *are* coming through this. But it's not easy. The crisis lingers.

A crisis does not mean all is lost. A crisis is not even necessarily a bad thing. "Crisis" literally means a decision point, a crossroads at which one direction or another *must* be taken. The English word crisis comes from a Greek word meaning decisions, and it first entered the English language as a 17th century medical term meaning a turning point in the development of a disease. A disease is a problem in the body, which, if it persists long enough inevitably reaches a turning point, a crisis point when the body either recovers decisively toward restored health or declines precipitously toward death.

Over the past two years our church has experienced a dramatic decline in attendance and financial contributions. We are not dying or even in danger of dying. But we are facing a kind of crisis, a turning point, a decision point at which we *must* change direction.

As is displayed on a chart elsewhere in this newsletter, we are at a \$14,000 deficit over the first four months of 2022. Compared to this time a year ago, we are down about \$10,000 in revenue on the year. At the same time costs for insurance has gone up over 40%, utilities costs have also risen markedly and the price of everything else has gone up as well (as we all are experiencing). At this rate of deficit spending, the current account will be overdrawn by July of this year.

The board has taken steps already over the past 2 years to reduce spending, and at the end of last year cashed a bond to provide cash in the event of a budget deficit. More recently, we have taken steps toward moving funds from other accounts to make them available for current expenses, and at its last meeting the board moved to cut copier costs in half by purchasing and self-maintaining a smaller copy machine rather than continuing with our current copier lease and service contract.

The larger problem, however, is that church attendance is down, and congregational giving is down. Two years ago, we were forced to the level of zero attendance due to the pandemic shutdown. Two years later, there are still some who legitimately do not attend out of health concerns. There are others who do not attend due to the health precautions we implemented last fall. Others may have simply fallen out of the habit of attending. A few have moved away or are no longer able to attend. And some have died. These have been difficult times.

It is now time to pull out the stops, muster all our energy, and make a dedicated decision to turn in the direction of renewed life and health. We need to strengthen our church attendance and strengthen our financial contributions. If you are able to attend worship, we need you in worship. We need the moral support of your fellowship, we need your companionship in the pews and in the life of this congregation. If you know people who might benefit from attending our church, we need you to invite them and encourage them to attend, perhaps bring them with you. Also, if there are ways you might reach out to offer support and help to others around you, to your friends, neighbors and community, please do that. Strengthening our community with our good will, good deeds, and moral energy will also strengthen our church.

If you are able to increase your financial contributions, we need you to do so. We need you to contribute as generously as you can, whether or not you attend worship. We need you to ask yourself at this time how much you can really contribute. If the future of the church depended on you, and it does, how much could you contribute to that cause? As I shared in a previous newsletter, Leslie and I contribute \$250/month to Faith Church. Our contribution is based on the biblical concept of a 10% tithe of income. That is just our habit and the way we have chosen to live.

I ask you to prayerfully consider increasing your contributions in order to strengthen our church. Together we can and we will take a decisive turn toward regaining financial health. Those who established and built this church gave a great deal of their time, energy, and resources to make it happen. They did so believing in the ultimate value of having this community of faith as a part of their lives in this community. And they did so believing in God's blessings, and with faith in God's presence in and through this church. We are all benefactors of their dedication and commitment. Let us now rededicate ourselves to maintaining the strength and health of this church into the future.

May God bless you, your family, and our church.

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