



October 5, 2014

Thought For The Week

My Personal Stewardship

For many years, I have taken, very seriously, my own responsibility of being a faithful steward of God's gifts in my role as an Elder and Pastor of a congregation. For most of my life as a minister (55 years), each year I re-examine and update my own Stewardship Commitment of Time, Talent and Treasure.

I could perhaps say, "Well, as a minister, I've given my life to God in the service of his people, what more can I do?" But it's not quite that simple. "Commitment of Time," especially as it requires time management, especially the time I dedicate to prayer, does not come easily to me any more than it does to you.

There are always a million things pressing on me, each of which has its own claim to "urgency," and each of which tries to claim time I have dedicated to God in prayer. I cannot take this for granted. Even at age 70, commitment to prayer time takes daily renewal, or it falls by the wayside. Sound familiar?

My "Commitment of Talent" is not something that, even as a Pastor, automatically "comes with the job." Deciding how to best utilize my own talents and abilities (God's gifts) to best serve you, God's people, often takes the form of encouraging, teaching and empowering you to develop your talents to serve one another, even in ministries that, in the past, were expected of the priesthood. When I was ordained, this congregation as well as the old Redford Congregation had 10-12 priesthood serving in each congregation, a pastor, bishop's agent, Elders, Priests and Deacons. Back then, it was pretty simple to delegate responsibilities to other priesthood members. There are fewer of us now.

Not being able to fulfill the expectations of the past requires me to continually discern how today I can best focus my talents in the ministry that is mine through the God-given sacrament of Ordination as an Elder and the Church-given assignment as your pastor.

How about my "Commitment of Treasure" (money)? Our church ministers do not belong to a religious order that requires us to take a vow of poverty. A vow of poverty means that, in adhering to a religious order you voluntarily give up all personal ownership and control of anything that might count as a "possession," whether property or income. I haven't done that. As a minister of the Community of Christ Michigan Mission Center, I do not receive a salary. However, in my earlier years when I was also a "working stiff", I earned enough money to save up for retirement and I also received a pension from the Bell System where I worked for 36 years, mostly in the field of Architecture & Real Estate. So, like all of you, I pay taxes, and am part of the Social Security system.

I think I, along with most other ministers in our church, am living a relatively simple, middle-class lifestyle, and for Stewardship purposes, I fall within the median household income in Michigan and use a somewhat fixed amount as the basis for determining my commitment.

My wife Anita and I have come to believe that it is important to be intentional about the amount of our giving back to the Church, and we believe that is what is expected of us.

Whether you can or should consider a tithe of 10% of your income or increase (what's left after your just needs are realized) is a matter for your own prayerful discernment in accord with your own needs and responsibilities.

Whatever the amount or percentage, giving back to the Lord should always be intentional, planned and proportional. As a pastor, I also have a responsibility to be a faithful steward of the resources of the congregation, which we generously support. I have always taken the expenditure of church funds very seriously. After all, we are the Community of Christ.

At this time, I invite you to join me in seriously considering what we can return to the Lord from what the Lord has lovingly and generously given us.

May God bless you always. I love you and am grateful to be your pastor.

Prayer For The Week

O God of peace, come into the brokenness of our lives and our lands with your healing love. Help us be willing to bow before you in true repentance, and to bow to one another in real forgiveness.

By the fire of the Holy Spirit melt our hard hearts, and consume the pride and prejudice, which separate us. Fill us, O Lord, with your perfect love, which casts out fear, and binds us together in unity with you.

We pray for all attempts to bring together people of different traditions and customs. Help us to see the good in all people especially as we remember the people of Portugal, and pray your blessing on them.

We thank you and praise you for love that sustains us, for wisdom that directs us, and for desire that beckons us toward peace in this world. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

Stewardship Thought For The Week

In a culture that encourages us to live as far above our means as possible, personal stewardship can often be a source of worry, guilt, or confusion.

God's desire for us is simple, and yet more stretching and fulfilling than we can imagine.

He wants us to be wise managers of all He has entrusted to us, and generous givers who give in response to His great love.