

The Lord said to Moses: Tell the Israelites to take for me an offering; from all whose hearts prompt them to give you shall receive the offering for me.

--Exodus 25:1

October 13, 2020

Dear Friends,

Under the right circumstances, even the simplest gesture can be quite profound.

Typically at this time of year, you might expect that your Stewardship Team would be unveiling a comprehensive plan for the cultivation of new pledges for 2021 ministry budget. It is that time again, but since it is 2020, we're going to stay true to form and do things a bit differently. My pastoral hunch is that most of us have already had our fill of campaign slogans for the moment. Therefore, our goal is to make this year's pledge process simple, adaptive, and direct.

In light of the incredible challenges of this fiscal year, I am deeply encouraged by the prevailing generosity of this congregation. The original 2020 budget represented a step of faith from previous years, but little could we have imagined the considerable *leap* that would be required of us on so many levels. I need not rehearse the extensive fears that have accompanied of collective dilemmas—at times it felt like an irrevocable membership to the “crisis of the month” club—but greater still is the inspiration I find in God's present goodness to us. Each trial has brought some manner of revelation, in which the assurance of *Here I AM* has been affirmed time and again. Sure enough, we are sustained by the steadfast love of the Lord!

For example, the finance report from last week's Board of Stewards meeting included phrases such as “lots of positives,” “surprisingly good,” “incredible testament,” and “tremendous support from the congregation.” I must say that such news does my heart good. Naturally, the leadership of the church has made adjustments in our spending and programming throughout the course of this year, taking repeated measures to ensure a just and equitable stewardship of the gifts received. Bills have been paid, the staff has been faithfully retained, and the maintenance of our current facilities has been conducted with due diligence and care. Most importantly, however, the mission of the church has been creatively expressed and extended in new ways this year with a fresh sense of urgency and conviction. In short, we have been able to do more than just *maintain*; we are now moving forward with purpose!

Dependent as we are on the Holy Spirit to hold us together, I also give thanks for the ways in which our growing use of technology may further assist us in the fulfillment of our shared covenant. Speaking practically, the consistency of automated giving has been a great benefit to the administrative functioning of the church. Under our current conditions, we also recognize that many may be reasonably prohibited from presenting a card in person, so we have once again transitioned our process to emphasize an online option at www.fairhopeumc.org/stewardship2021. In support of those who will be working to perfect the budget for 2021, your communication is most valuable and appreciated. Therefore, we ask you to submit your pledge either online or by mail by November 1.

~ over

Our Finance Team, with the input of our Trustees, Staff Parish Relations Committee, and the blessing of our Board of Stewards, has declared the church's intention to keep the 2021 budget largely the same as it was originally conceived for 2020, in as much as possible. There will be inevitable variables with insurance rates and such, but for the most part the plan is to keep it "as is," with no significant change in expenses pertaining to mission and ministry. With that understanding in mind, we invite you to consider your call for giving in 2021.

In 2018, Fairhope UMC received 291 pledges toward its operating budget. In 2019, 307 cards were received. Is it possible to keep this trend growing...even in 2020?

Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?

I thank you for your help and consideration.

Grace to You,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Darren", with a stylized, flowing script.

Darren

