

From Pastor Jerry's Desk

My Project and My Church

I've read a couple of articles this year on the financial habits of Millennials - you know, the generation comprised of today's young adults. One article called them the "Recession Generation," because their formative years took place during the Great Recession, and pointed out that they are much more careful with money than their Baby Boomer parents have ever been. Millennials do not assume that there will always be money, or that things are just going to always get better. Millennials save more, and they invest carefully. Another article talked less about Millennials' saving habits than their giving habits. Today's young adults are also remarkably generous. They give more than their Boomer parents did at the same age, too. Does this come as a surprise? It might, at least to church finance committees, because very little of that generosity makes its way to the Church. No, Millennials trust religious institutions about as much as they trust the economy, which is to say, not much. Where do they give? To specific projects that can demonstrate tangible, measurable results.

I can sympathize. Giving money to support an infrastructure – which, as likely as not, gets tied up in bureaucratic inefficiencies much of the time – can feel like throwing money into a pit. We feel more confident when we give for something we can actually see, whether that is a building improvement, a specific ministry like the Personal Needs Closet, or a well in South Sudan. For this reason, during pledge season, we occasionally offer some special projects that people may want to make special gifts to.

But this year we are not. In the next week or so, you will receive your annual pledge card with an invitation to step up in your giving in one of several different ways. But we are not suggesting any special projects this year. The truth is, if we don't support the institution as a whole, all our church's special projects are doomed.

Such as the Personal Needs Closet – through which we've helped over 1100 people so far this year. Such as the Community Meals – by which we've fed over 400. Such as the Project Connect breakfast for the homeless, which we've held twice this year, in partnership with the United Way. Such as the Memory Café, which has brought love and acceptance to dozens of guests with memory problems (and their heavy-laden care partners). Such as the New Life United Methodist Church – the new congregation that began in September and that is already reaching out to the Wausau Hmong community from their base in our building.

All of these are exciting ministry projects and might, perhaps, be more fulfilling to give money to than just boring old giving-to-the-church-on-Sunday. But these projects only exist because they stand on a foundation established by the generosity of earlier generations: the church itself. No, I can't promise we'll never get tied up in bureaucratic knots (Give me a break! We're Methodists!). But this I promise: we will never forget that we exist for the sake of others and that your gifts are a sacred trust for ministry. And for all your gifts, thank you.