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*“Community is the fruit of our capacity to make the interests of others more important than our own.” Henri Nouwen*

A lot of my colleagues are very uncomfortable with the idea of fundraising. Money is considered a private affair that isn't anyone else's business. There's also the fact that there are pastors and churches that are more about greed than gospel. None of us want to come across as either greedy or nosy. That said, *there is* a connection between spiritual health and how we spend our money. That means talking about money is an important part of a pastor's job.

Biblically speaking, the Law of God, stipulated that Jews give 10% to the temple for the maintenance of the building and the provision of the priests. The Christian church continued the tradition by pressuring people to give as much as possible in an effort to earn salvation (see Martin Luther's 95 theses). As good Lutherans we know that we could never possibly do enough or spend enough to earn our salvation. We have the promise of eternal life with God anyway due to the work of Jesus Christ. Which is definitely good news for the modern church goer, who is very unlikely to give even 10% of their income to the church.

Anyway, giving money to the church in order to get something out of it, completely misses the point as to why God commanded it in the first place. Giving to God is a deeply spiritual act and it involves much more than money. All baptized believers are meant to give of *ourselves* to the ministry of the church. Giving of time and money is only useful if it deepens the relationships in the community. God wants us to use our resources to grow closer to God and neighbor (literally the essence of the commandments).

Much of what fills our lives is stressful: school and work; caring for elderly family members; even fun things, like sports, are competitive, which can add to our overall stress load. Many people try to relieve the stress by vacationing or buying expensive toys to play as hard as they work. All of these things are great, but only provide a short-term stress relief. Investing in healthy spirituality: prayer and conversation with other faithful people; volunteering to care for our neighbors; worshiping and receiving communion. These things lead to an overall more peaceful life. They give you something to lean on when life becomes overwhelming.

God created us to be in community and community *requires* the engagement of everyone in it. Beyond that, it requires investment. Please start with prayer. Pray for our community and pray for God's direction in how you can best be a part of it. Then consider raising the amount you give over the course of 2024. If you are nowhere near 10%, consider upping your offerings by just one additional percentage point. If you plan that now, you can work on budgeting in a way to make it work for yourself and your family. (Word of caution: God does not want you to suffer need in order to give to the church. Prioritize eating and safe housing, etc, before giving anything away.)

In addition to the financial investment in the ministry of the church, find ways to be directly involved with the ministry. This can be as simple as committing to yourself attending worship more frequently. Again, it can be helpful to set yourself a goal for attendance. If you are already attending regularly, then look for an additional ministry or two to check out during the year. The following pages are full of suggestions.

Not everyone is in a position to give more time or money. If that is the case, then know that God is well aware of your circumstances. God sees you and cares about all life's struggles. If you know of ways that the church could do a better job of supporting you, please reach out to me – anytime. God has equipped St. Timothy to do really good work in Wayne, NJ. We do have enough people and money to make a significant impact. Each one of you is an important part of that.