

“No Giving, No Growth!

Know Giving, Know Growth!”

Brookline Boulevard’s Story by Pastor Marsha Sebastian

I usually scan any bulletin given to me from other churches for the sermon title. This title from Dr. G. Timothy Womack’s sermon of the First Presbyterian Church of Vero Beach immediately caught my attention, not only because it was so memorable, but because it is so true! It applies to the church as well as the individual. From Brookline’s perspective, we have done many things this past year to be faithful stewards of the ministry entrusted to us. That’s because stewardship and discipleship go hand in hand. Some of the decisions we made were painful, like eliminating the secretary’s position, reducing a staff member’s salary, and cutting back on mission giving. But under Session’s faithful leadership, we entered or continued exciting partnerships --- with True Vine Ministries, Head Start, Southminster Church, and the Presbytery’s Utilities Task Force. We eliminated flower arrangements unless designated; we’re using leftover bulletin covers; and we started a Capital Campaign including anniversary cookbooks and mugs. This has enabled us to focus on our community outreach to our neighborhood’s children and to call a Pastoral Assistant to help. Thanks to the generosity of an anonymous donor, we were able to give staff members a modest cost of living increase. At this point, our gains are fragile, yet they bear witness to the God who raised Christ in resurrected glory. It is all the Lord’s doing, and we are grateful to be a tiny part of it.

The PCUSA Office of Stewardship emphasizes that “not only does the ministry and mission of the church depend upon the faithful giving of God’s people to do the work of ministry, but our Reformed theology affirms a stewardship born of gratitude as the proper response to the grace of God.” That we, every one of us, are God’s mission on earth is pure grace and compels us to give. Our faith moves us to displace ourselves and our egotistic and materialistic preoccupations with Christ’s selfless love. We are daily susceptible to securing ourselves through our own futile means. We cannot save ourselves, no matter how hard we try. The biblical remedy to this spiritual dis-ease is tithing. Alden M. Hathaway suggests that we may often think of tithing as fund raising. But it is not; as he defines it, it is a matter of worship. “It is a matter of standing in the right relationship to God with regard to our material gain. This is the way he teaches us. By cultivating the habit of tithing (turning back the first part of what he has given) we are continually reminded of the giver of all good gifts—the material provision for physical maintenance, and the spiritual gift of eternal life. I have found this to be true in my own life, as I know many of you have too. If not, I urge you to try it. Perhaps you may prayerfully consider tithing during the Lenten period and see how you will be blessed by knowing spiritual growth!

Grace and Peace