

“Our Story”
Rev. Joyce Kirk-Moore

Mark 10:35-45
San Dimas Community United Church

October 18, 2009

My focus for today’s sermon is two-fold. First, this is the Sunday when churches throughout America celebrate “Children’s Sabbath.” It’s a Sunday to lift up the church’s care and commitment to children. And second, it’s a day to tell the story of our church, perhaps in a little different way. I recall the church council saying after previous stewardship drives, how we should probably take some time to inform the congregation more about our budget.

I imagine some of you have never seen the budget or have only looked at it at Annual Meeting time. And that’s OK. And yet, it doesn’t seem quite fair to you not to explain the church budget as an important document, indeed, a theological reflection of who we are as a church. I’ve learned over my years of ministry, that one can tell a lot about a church by “following the money.” Money talks, and it speaks to priorities, and perhaps from time to time we ought to think about what is most important to our ministry here. I have some trepidation preaching on giving because for so many years, I had very little money to give, and stewardship sermons made me feel guilty and inadequate. That’s exactly what I *don’t* want to have happen this morning.

So much of our story as church has nothing to do with gifts of money, but rather gifts like these: teaching our children, mentoring our youth, working the food bank, leading Bible studies, volunteering to repair and upgrade our building, printing the bulletin, keeping Church records, picking up our members who no longer drive, calling the sick and shut-ins, preparing the church building for services, and the list goes on and on. Our budget is only one part of our story; all these other gifts (that have nothing to do with money) are “priceless” and no amount of money can take their place. One part of our story here is that so many people are involved. Sometimes in really large churches, it seems about 10% of the people do 90% of the work. But here almost all are involved in the unique and special work that each one is able to do. All the ways that your particular piece makes the church puzzle whole, is absolutely priceless. If we spend just a little time looking at our church budget some more of our story as church is revealed. So let’s listen to our church’s story as told through our budget.

A metaphor to do this that’s been used before is to talk about the 3 M’s: Mission, Ministry, and Mortar as seen in budget dollars. It’s a little challenging because our accounting system doesn’t have these as line items. But I’ve done my best to sift through the lines and give an estimate that represents these three M’s. Keep in mind that my categories, out of necessity, pull together items to present the big picture of “our story.”

First, let’s consider Mission. Our total designated budget is \$134,000, but over the past 12 months we’ve given approximately \$13,000 above this to mission. This means that most of our mission work is paid for by special offerings, and events organized by our Mission Ministry and youth. In addition, this does not include food donations or the space of our kitchen offered to Hope Partners which they value to be a gift of about \$5000. Though about 10% of our churches total giving is mission oriented, I know that many of our folks give to the worthy causes, the missions to the world, for which we get via snail mail at our homes most every day. For our family this meant several thousand dollars last year and I imagine many of you give likewise. So our story says that we are a church that cares deeply and one that reaches outward beyond itself in mission both near at hand, and mission far away. By joining our individual efforts, our caring, we can meet more needs. As we move from our story of Mission to Ministry and Mortar, I’d like to add to our budget the additional mission dollars given in our church, so we get a little clearer overall; so for big picture purposes that total is \$147,000.

The second “M” word is Ministry. Much of our ministry is your presence in the world (that *priceless* piece I spoke of earlier). Since today is Children’s Sabbath Sunday, I want to separate out our story of ministry to children. When we include all items designated for our youth and add to this camperships and support of other youth events, we support our children and youth with approximately \$21,000. This is very important to me because I wouldn’t want to serve a church that did not place

children's ministry as a high priority. If a church spends more money on fancy furnishings than on their children and youth, it tells me they care more about how things look than the very hard work of loving and guiding children with results that often show up years later and may never be known to us at all. Children and youth ministries means being willing to take risk by casting God's love toward them, not knowing how God will work in their lives in the future. When I look at church budgets, I always look at how much money is spent on the children. Our story is that we are solidly devoted to children and youth, and we are so very blessed to have such an outstanding director of education as we have in Christina Held.

The remainder of our "ministry" includes salaries for our music director, office administrator and your pastor as well as employee benefits, FICA taxes and workers comp. In round numbers, that total is \$80,000. So again in round numbers, our "M" for Ministry including our children and youth is \$101,000. It's amazing to get 4 salaries and youth support for \$101,000.

That leaves us about \$46,000 for "Mortar." Mortar includes all that goes into our physical plant and the operations of church life such as custodial, landscape, office equipment and supplies, utilities, some building maintenance, property insurance, postage, and much more. A separate "mortar" category (outside our regular budget) is "This Old Church," started in 2005 as a 3-year drive for long deferred and necessary maintenance. After the 3-year commitment was completed, some of us have chosen to continue to give to the "This Old Church" fund in order to continue with major church repairs. This year, \$6800 in pledges for "This Old Church" are included in this separate budget. Moreover, many of you give generously when you see a need to be met, and others provide the expertise of their labor so that costs are kept to a minimum. And there's also our "fountain of blessings" where we can give additional amounts in honor of someone who has done something for us or to celebrate a special occasion.

As one who has seen quite a few church budgets, this is the story I see. We are a faithful mission church. We are faithful to our covenant with the United Church of Christ and to needs both local and global. We are blessed with missionaries who help us connect with a world that God cares deeply about. And our major source of direct mission action is through the maintaining of our food bank. We always want to do more mission while keeping in mind that *we do do more* through outside charities to which we as caring people contribute. We are a church committed to children and youth. One seventh of our budget goes to support our commitment to children and youth. We feel this to be a strong calling for us in our time and in this place. We are faithful in our ministry. You are faithful to your staff, and I am grateful to be called by you to this work. We are a church whose story includes a beautiful old church that has stood the test of time and continues to do a lot with what we have to be a place of hope and service.

I may have told you the story of a church consultant called to evaluate an old city church in the midwest whose membership had dwindled to practically nothing and they could barely afford to keep the lights on. The consultant walked the streets around the church and came upon an old lady with some bags, and he stopped and asked her if the church had done anything for her. The lady replied: "yep, that church has done a lot for me." The consultant wondered and asked "what has that church done for you." The lady said: "that church gives me hope."

As long as San Dimas Community United Church of Christ is here and as long as we continue to try our best to be faithful in mission, ministry, and mortar, we will be a place of hope for our community and the world. May God grant us the courage, the wisdom, and the generosity to be a church that gives hope. AMEN