



The Link - April 2007

When "Giving Up" for Lent Becomes "Building Up"

Now that we are in the Lenten season, parishioners and others I meet publicly are confiding to me what they are "giving up" for Lent. Since the middle Ages, Christians have perceived Lent as a season focused on gloomy self-denial. Many people say they will give up favorite foods—chocolate is the usual choice—but I doubt that most persons seriously abstain throughout the entire forty days of Lent. I do remember one person who stuck to her decision to give up chocolate last year. I received several e-mails from her, all testimonials of discovery about how many of her favorite snacks contained chocolate and how difficult it was to give up habits of unnecessary self-indulgence that enslave us and make us less healthy over time.

Unfortunately, we often feel obligated to adhere to some draconian practice of self-denial during Lent. Most of us make individual decisions to give up something, and we quickly find that going it alone without support and companionship is frustrating and self-defeating. This practice is contrary to the benevolent, merciful God we worship, because it assumes a God who expects humankind to set itself up for punishment, failure, discouragement, and low self-esteem. We worship a God of building up, not of giving up that tears us down.

Recently, I heard someone say, "We don't have to give anything up for Lent, because Jesus already gave it all up for us." On the face of it, this is certainly a true statement. Our salvation is not tied to any "good works" of self-denial that we can do here on earth. Through Jesus' giving up of his life on the cross, he paid in full, once and for all time, for the possibility of our eternal redemption and reconciliation with God.

However, we as Christians are called to follow Jesus. Therefore, we need to look a little closer at all that Jesus gave up, not use at the Good Friday finale when he made the ultimate self-sacrifice. As a young person, Jesus gave up time from earthly occupations in order to learn in the synagogue. This prepared him for his future adult ministry, during which he consistently and constantly gave up his time and energy to pass on his wisdom and to heal. And, it's important to notice, that Jesus never did his teaching and healing in isolation. His entire ministry was done publicly in crowds, in synagogue gatherings, or in family homes.

Jesus "gave up" his time and energy for the sole purpose of "building up" the people of God. Because we are Jesus followers, we are to follow this example: to "give up" in ways that "build up," not in ways that raise feeling of smugness or repeated failure.

I invite you, during Lent 2007, to reinvent your understanding of the Lenten tradition of "giving up" something. Look for opportunities to "give up" something only for the purpose of "building up" some other part of our community. And, for Jesus' sake, don't make an individual decision and do it alone! Decide on a project or discipline with your family or with a Lenten buddy.

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CONFERENCE SPECIAL OFFERING PAYMENTS STATUS MARCH 2007

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST:

The Conference Special Offering is going very well thanks to all of you. As of this writing (March 18, 2007), we have collected \$ 1,070 in Conference Special Offering. That is fantastic. However, we have much more to do.

The Church's 2007 Assessment for areas such as World Service, General Conference and Ministerial Support is a total of \$ 7,860. Our Church's 2006 Ministerial Support (Leftover) is \$ 4,060. Our 2007 Pastor Pension Assessment is \$ 4,438. Added all together, our total conference assessment is \$ 16,358.

Currently, we have made payments to conference in all of these areas totaling \$ 3,240 (again as of March 18, 2007). This represents 17%.

Please continue to support this effort with the placement of donations in the specially marked envelopes. If you do not have access to a special offering envelope, please take a plain envelope and mark the outside with "Conference Special Offering".

Thank you.

Art Bastian
Treasurer

WANTED FINANCIAL SECURITY

The Church is in dire need of a Financial Secretary. This individual will lead a couple of church members in handling the income/revenue side of the weekly Sunday offering. Responsibility in this area includes coordinating or actually counting the Sunday offering....overseeing or actually seeing that the Sunday offering is deposited.....and reporting on the Sunday offering which includes inputting congregation donations into Quicken, running monthly, quarterly and yearly reports for Church treasurer and yearly donation reports for church members.

Our previous Financial Secretary was Mr. Tim Howe.

In addition to the Sunday offering responsibilities, you will coordinate fund raising activities for the general treasury and will lead the yearly Stewardship drive.

Anyone interested in this very important calling for the church should contact either Art Bastian (Church Treasurer – (w) 508 490 3448, (h) 508-481-4397, email address of arthur_f_bastian@raytheon.com) or Pastor Linda.

When “Giving Up” for Lent Becomes “Building Up” (Continued from Page 01)

Remember that we worship a God who constantly tries to gather us in community so that we do not have to live life alone, in a vacuum.

Here are some ideas to get you started in a positive Lenten discipline of “giving up” to “build up.” As you reinvent your attitude toward “giving up,” you will, most likely, be delighted to find that you are reinventing—and “building up”—yourself and your community, in the true Christian tradition.

- If you are going to give up food, select a type of food to give up—such as deserts—and then donate the money you would have spent on that food to our church mission fund. Give up unnecessary car trips and donate the saved gas money to funds that pay for winter fuel for the elderly.
- Decide on a project that you can carry out through all the weeks of Lent. For example, most of us have clothing, toys, furniture, books, school supplies, household goods and other things around the house that we don’t use. Clean or fix up these items, package them attractively, and donate them to someone who needs them. Quit procrastinating and get on with it! Lent is a season not only for cleaning out your spiritual clutter but also for cleaning out the material clutter in life.
- Go shopping for a hungry family and/or prepare a meal for a shelter. It’s not enough to donate money for the food. Jesus calls us to roll up our shirt sleeves and actually DO the mission work—not grudgingly, but joyfully grateful that we have all we need and more to give.
- Don’t forget to PRAY your way through your project. Pray for the well-being and future of those who will receive what you offer. “Giving up” is about more than mechanically cleaning closets. It’s about being consciously grateful through prayer and thanksgiving. “Building up” is about more than mechanically cleaning closets. It’s about using your hands and feet and energy to become visible signs of future hope for others.
- Use your imagination to start a new project that honors God’s creation. For example, volunteer at an animal shelter and gather items needed for care of the animals. Or, launch a campaign you have never tried before to preserve a small part of the environment.

“Lent” is derived from a word that means “long.” So, all the better if you begin a Lenten discipline that continues “long” after the forty days end. After all, we call the forty days a “season of preparation,” which implies preparing to do ministry that reaches far beyond Easter Sunday. As “Lent” denotes “long,” we Christians must reconcile ourselves, as Christ did, for being in ministry for the “long haul.” We live in a world in which selfish, evil and natural forces are tearing down humanity and the environment, all that God called “good” in Genesis, at unprecedented rates.

John Wesley preached “give all you can” and “do all you can.” Thus, Methodists have long been leaders in an effective method of “giving up” for the purpose of “building up.” We are bound, through Christ and the Wesleyan legacy, not to be smugly self-satisfied, robotically repeating Lenten disciplines that we felt were adequate in 2006. Lent 2007 calls us individually and collectively to be accountable to God for new and more significant ways of “giving up” to “build up.”

Who Really Uses the Food Pantry?

--Thoughts from Pastor Linda

Recently, I heard some grumbling about our ministry to the Marlborough Food Pantry. The criticism was that maybe we are sending too much food and too many gifts to clients who don't appreciate help, don't belong in our town in the first place (i.e., immigrants), or are too lazy to help themselves. I certainly believe that, from time to time, we should review our mission efforts and either continue them or discontinue them. However, we should be making informed decisions based on fact rather than assumptions.

The Marlborough Interfaith Clergy Association has become quite interested in the Food Pantry over the past six months. We have visited the facility as a group and have gathered factual information about who is using the Pantry and what our community's real needs are. Here are some facts we discovered for the year 2006:

Food Orders Filled by Ethnic Background:

White	4162
Latinos	2421
Portuguese	562
African-American	341
Asian	23

(Note: The number of orders filled for White residents exceeds the total of all other ethnicities.)

Gender:

Female	4088
Male	3559

Age:

Adults	4233
Children	3081
White	1472
Latino	1241
African-American	173
Portuguese	160
Asian	10
Seniors	263

Most of the adults who use the Food Pantry are working poor whose one or two jobs do not afford enough income to pay increasingly high rents in Marlborough. If you have been listening to the news lately, you will know that Massachusetts is experiencing a very high default and foreclosure rate on mortgages. The cost of homes has outstripped the ability of many families to pay. Many families, including, I suspect, many families in our church family, do not have sufficient savings to weather a major problem that leaves a breadwinner unemployed or sick with medical bills. Many Massachusetts families rely on credit cards to get them through monthly expenses. Over time, this is a losing battle.

The Marlboro Interfaith Association is concerned about the economic situation in our community: large affluent companies continue to do well while a fragile middle class continues to fade and disappear. In both of my congregations, I have conversed with seniors who are wisely fearful that their life savings will not cover the cost of skyrocketing home care and assisted living expenses. Their children, who often are financing education for their own children, are increasingly hard pressed to subsidize retirement incomes for aging parents.

It is clear that, in the foreseeable future, the Food Pantry in Marlborough will experience increasing need. We as a church family need to be in prayer for those families who struggle to make ends meet, for seniors who should not have to live in fear during their last years, and for the fragility of our own family and church financial situations. As Christ taught us in the Parable of the Talents, we will be tempted to look out for ourselves and bury our talent. Instead, we should be sharing and investing our talents (presence, time, money, and influence) for the good of everyone. Christ's message was one of unity: as in all things, we will stand and flourish if we are united for the common good of all. Or, we will disintegrate from our self-serving divisions and neglect God's plan for a kingdom of plenty and joy for everyone.

It has always been the Methodist way to, Wesley's words, give all we can and help all we can, whenever and wherever we can. This is our mandate for Mission, and it is the most powerful expression of Christ's commandment to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

Acts 20:34-36, the words of the Apostle Paul:

“Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

WORSHIP COMMITTEE:

Would you like to help in a large way? Does anything special interest you in the church?? Help is needed to Greet, Usher, & read the Liturgy on Sunday A.M. Sign up sheets are available at church or you may call the church office, or Pastor Linda for any of the above & you will be directed to the right person in order to help out. Once a month, or any time you feel the spirit, as it would be a wonderful service for the church and you.

We are grateful to Ann Bastian for the beautiful Paraments she sewed for Rose Sun., representing the middle of Lent. We thank God for Ann & the contribution of her talent.

Acolyte Training will be held in the future for any of the young people who are interested in serving as an Acolyte. Ages 9 yrs. and up are eligible. If you are interested please talk with Ann Edelman.

The next Worship Committee will be held on April 29th following the church service.

Memorial Gift Opportunity

We know there's a lot going on in the church right now, financially as well as spiritually: Lent, fundraisers for the lift, as well as other community giving...but isn't it WONDERFUL??

We don't want you to miss out on this exciting opportunity to enhance and support our worship for years to come!

The Worship Committee and Trustees are pleased to announce the purchase and consecration of the United Methodist authorized hymnal, ***The Faith We Sing***. If you would like to dedicate hymnals in honor or memory of loved ones or to the glory of God, fill out this form, attach payment, and put it in the offering plate or mail it to the church office at 52 Church Street, Marlborough, MA 01752. Half of your donation covers the cost of the hymnal; the other half is a donation toward the debt of our new lift. A customized book plate will be put in each dedicated hymnal. Each donor's name will be recognized at the consecration of our lift. Donations are tax-deductible. **The donation for each dedicated hymnal is \$20; however, you may choose to dedicate 3 for \$50.**

Name of Donor: _____
Address _____

I wish to dedicate:

____ One Hymnal @\$20 in honor/memory of/to the glory of God

____ Second Hymnal @\$20 in honor/memory of/to the glory of God

____ Three Hymnals @ \$50 in honor/memory of/glory of God

____ Six Hymnals @ \$100 in honor/memory of/glory of God

Church Calendar for April 2007

HOLY WEEK SERVICES:

1	Sun	10:30 AM 11:00 AM	Fellowship Hour Palm Sunday Processional and Worship Reception of New Members
5	Thurs.	7:00 PM	Maundy Thursday Service with Holy Communion with Residents of New Horizons, 400 Hemenway, in the Assembly Hall
6	Fri	5:45 PM	Service of Tenebrae, Education Room
7	Sat	7:00 PM	Easter Vigil, begins with lighting Easter Candle in parking lot and processing into sanctuary for worship
8	Sun	10:30 AM 11:00 AM	Fellowship and Coffee Hour Traditional Sunday Easter Service, Sanctuary

OTHER REGULAR MONTHLY CHURCH ACTIVITIES:

2	Mon	7:00 PM	Organizational Administrative Board Meeting, all committees must be represented, Education Room
3	Tues	7:15 PM	Choir Rehearsal, Sanctuary
4	Wed	7:00PM	Trustees Meeting, Education Room
5	Thu	7:00 PM	Worship at New Horizons Assisted Living
10	Tue	7:15 PM	Choir Rehearsal, Sanctuary
12	Thu	7:00 PM	Worship at New Horizons Assisted Living
15	Sun	10:00 AM 10:30 AM 11:00 AM Noon	Sunday school Coffee Hour Fellowship, Vestry Morning Worship Youth Group Meets
16	Mon	10:00 AM	Adult Bible Study Resumes, home of Bess Cowan
17	Tue	7:15 PM	Choir Rehearsal, Sanctuary
18	Wed	7:15 PM	W.H.O. (Women Helping Others) meets, Education Room
19	Thu	7:00 PM	Worship at New Horizons Assisted Living
22	Sun	10:00 AM 10:30 AM 11:00 AM	Sunday school Coffee Hour Fellowship, Vestry Morning Worship
23	Mon	10:00 AM	Adult Bible Study, Home of Bess Cowan
24	Tue	7:15 PM	Choir Rehearsal, Sanctuary
26	Thu	7:00 PM	Worship at New Horizons Assisted Living
28	Sat	9.00-3.00	Youth Group Spring Yard Sale
30	Mon	10:00 AM	Adult Bible Study Resumes, home of Bess Cowan

NOTE: There will be no Sunday school on Easter Sunday, April 8th.



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Address Correction Requested

Pastor Linda Stetter

