

September 2019

Dear Fellow Bethlehem Members,

Our fall stewardship programs have historically focused primarily on the overall theology of why supporting Bethlehem and the many ministries of this congregation is important to our own faith lives. The theological focus has emphasized the giving of our first fruits and giving with gratitude in response to the blessings God has laid in our lives. And who can forget Dick Dubois' description of our various ministries – Third Avenue Charity Organization (TACO), Es Por Los Ninos, Scraps and Prayers, and many others – that this church supports. The list of ministries we provide to our neighbors continues to grow.

But we learned something this past year about how many in our congregation view financial stewardship. This past spring when we had an urgent need to replace our failed air conditioning unit and you responded to that need in a huge way – thank you! Because your response exceeded our goal, we asked for help in stretching those dollars to also cover a new roof and a few other capital needs. And this congregation responded generously yet again – thank you AGAIN!

That experience got us thinking – when members understand the concrete need, our hearts are more open to stewardship theology and our ministries. In light of that, this year, our focus will also include more specific information about the needs for the regular weekly/monthly giving and what that means for each family. So this year, you will hear temple talks about what it takes to fund our congregation and three specific budget *needs* we have for 2020:

- **Landscaping** – we eliminated a substantial portion of our landscaping budget for 2019 as one of our “belt tightening” efforts. We *need* to restore much of this in 2020 to maintain the integrity of our campus.
- **Library** - for several years, the community library that we've operated in our multi-purpose building has been underwritten by directed member funding. That funding has come to an end so we *need* the operating budget to cover the costs going forward.
- **Livelihood** – our congregation is blessed with incredible pastoral talents – in preaching, counseling, and overall leadership. Unfortunately, we've historically compensated them at the very low end of the scale (easy to do in our high-cost area) and it is time that we rectify this. We *need* to fairly compensate our pastors for the loving, wonderful work they do.

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These are the most pressing, extraordinary *needs* that are beyond the day-to-day increases that we typically expect. In total, and after consideration of cost controls and income opportunities, our 2020 budget increase may range from \$45,000 to \$55,000, or 8% to 10%. As you listen the next few Sundays to our stewardship appeal, please prayerfully consider your response to these needs. We trust that your response will mirror your continued generosity.

In Christ,

Bethlehem Lutheran Church Council