



LESSONS for LIFE

JANUARY 13, 2008 11:00 a.m.

RSVP MONTH SERIES

'S' STEWARDSHIP

Rev. Jo Bell

Last week Brent spoke about the 'R' in RSVP: Recognizing our Past and Our Potential and tonight we move to the 'S' : Stewardship.

How many of you have sat through a sermon – or a hundred – on stewardship? (a number of congregants raised their hands). Hopefully tonight will wrap something different into this word, this concept, this spiritual discipline for us.

It's January, RSVP month. During January we try to "set the path" for the year, and in 2008, our 35th year as a congregation, we've set the stage with "Celebrating our Past – Securing our Future." In January we're also engaging the Spiritual Practice of Generosity, so tonight is quite a wonderful mix.

Last week Brent mentioned four initiatives that the Board of Directors are including in our budget this year, all of which have the power to transform who we are as a church:

- 1) \$10,000. to be set aside for advertising. Other than Christmas Eve and 'Pride' we don't spend one penny promoting this church and reaching out to people beyond this church in an attempt to let them know we exist.
- 2) Additionally, the Board has agreed to set aside 2% of our offerings to support MCC churches in Canada either to strengthen existing churches or to establish new ones. So two cents of every dollar will go to that.
- 3) An additional 2% of our offerings to establish an MCC church in Poland We were asked by our denomination to respond to the interest in Poland and establish a church there, so 2% of every dollar will go to that.
- 4) Hiring an Executive Director in order to run the day-to-day operations of our church. This is in addition to our current staff who are already stretched.

These initiatives alone define 2008 as a 'stretch' year for us financially, and this stretch feels to me like a serious and exciting Step of Faith. When I first heard of these four initiatives, each of which increases our budget, I thought – these are not "for us", - they are each, especially the first three – examples of extreme generosity. They are "for someone else":

Advertising – to our city and its people to let them know we're here and they're welcome!

To our country;



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To the world!

And the hiring of an Executive Director – so that we can actually accomplish the first three – and so much more.

These initiatives will require more financial support from YOU. Yet, we're not keeping the "extra"... the "additional" it will take to accomplish them. We're just "paying it forward."

I was jazzed about them, because to me we're now beginning our year in a truly GENEROUS way of being!

And, these initiatives join other powerful ways in which we already are a conduit – giving to others:

Community Outreach Grants;

2005 offerings to the Canadian Red Cross to Tsunami victims and those Impacted in New Orleans; and

We already give 10% of the offerings we gather to our denomination.

Now this morning I heard Brent say that we had some systemic challenges to reaching these new financial goals. Brent shared with us that he was raised in a "guilt-based giving" tradition: Tithing – ten percent of one's income is given off the top to the church. Many people perceive that we talk about money too often. However, many of our congregants do not have "other adult church experience" and simply aren't aware how much it takes to run a church. I'm the same way as far as tithing goes: \$20. – cold turkey – really a spiritual discipline. Today, MCCT don't buy the legalistic message of having to tithe – give 10% to your church. We'd actually be ecstatic if each person gave 5% of their earnings to this church and 5% to other charitable organizations. An easy way to calculate what that means is to say that 5% is one dollar per Sunday for every thousand dollars of your annual income. So, if you make \$25,000.00 a year, that would be \$25.00 per week – to equal 5%.

Now, you all know that I love language – right? And Scripture – right? There's a scripture that has been misused by the church in their annual stewardship sermons for centuries. It says that "God loves a joyful giver." We mean GIVE your 10% and you'd better darn well ENJOY giving it – or – you're not a good Christian."

I just love how Lori Boyce interpreted that scripture when she was giving the offering call at Roy Thomson Hall this past Christmas Eve. She quoted the scripture and said, "Or, give until it FEELS good."

That's my simple stewardship message tonight. It feels good. It feels GREAT to be a generous person. And what do we each have with which we can be generous?

Precious gifts of SELF; of our skills and gifts and talents; and of our generous financial support.

In your order of service you'll find two forms: one is a volunteer form on which you can indicate your intentions or desire to help as a volunteer in a variety of categories; and the second is the financial contribution form which you can look at and decide whether you want to increase your financial giving this year because of these new initiatives or, if you've never before made a pledge to become a sustainer, then those opportunities are on



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these forms and I encourage you to complete them either today or in the next couple of weeks as we continue this RSVP month.

Those forms come back to us. However, I'm gonna have some folks hand out ANOTHER slip of paper which is for each of you. I highly suggest that – after you fill it out – you find a loving home for it – on the door of your refrigerator, or on your washroom mirror. I want you to try on being a generous person – commit to yourself to be a more generous person this year than you were last year.

Commit to giving someone the gift of your Presence: BEING not DOING.

Give someone or some organization the gift of your skills and talents.

Give someone or some organization the gift of your financial support.

Give until you FEEL GOOD. I guarantee it won't take long.

WE DO IT at MCCT.

Amen.