



Mission Moment: Minister Together
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Good morning!

The theme of this stewardship moment is taken from our mission statement, the part where we talk about “minister(ing) to others locally, nationally, and globally, with the same fervor as we minister to ourselves.” That word *minister* is key. If you look at the poster behind me, above the altar, you will see a bowl of food being given from one person to another person who is presumably hungry, in an act of love and fellowship.

The fact that the bowl of food was ready to be handed to the hungry person means that one group of people knew that other people would be in need of food, got together money to buy food, transported the food, found a place to cook the food, found cooks to prepare the food, found a place to serve the food, and found utensils to serve it in. They were ready to meet the needs of those particular hungry people. They were prepared. To me, this is the essence of ministering: We prepare ourselves to respond to needs.

Preparing ourselves to respond to needs is the reason we have a stewardship drive every year, asking people to support the finances needed by the church. Our church budget is our plan for ministering to needs. For example, a substantial part of our budget goes toward maintaining our aging building. Keeping the building in good shape means not only that we can use it ourselves, but we can also offer it to a

large number of community groups for their meetings. By funding that part of the budget, we are prepared to respond to a community need for a convenient, accessible meeting place. This is an example of ministering to a local need, and our budget is full of such examples.

Here's another local example: Have you heard of Our Whole Lives? This is a Sunday School curriculum that we implement every few years, and it deals with human sexuality in an ethical, comprehensive, age-appropriate way. The church budget provides for the teachers of this curriculum to attend training sessions in order to implement this curriculum. Is this how the church prepares itself to respond to a congregational need? Absolutely. Children growing up in our *#MetToo* culture desperately need this information.

What about ministering nationally? Through the budget line called Our Church's Wider Mission, First Congregational supports the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference, and the national United Church of Christ (the UCC), and they in turn minister to others on our behalf. For example, this weekend I was a delegate to the annual conference of the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference of the UCC. This conference provides opportunities to worship with the many diverse persons who are a part of the conference, to learn from others, and to bring that information back to our local church. I learned for example, that the UCC has a Disaster Relief Ministry—and that it maintains a network of state and national disaster preparedness teams.

As for ministering globally, well, that budget line for Our Church's Wider Mission also includes support for overseas ministries. Many years ago, David and I were missionary teachers at a residential school in Tarsus, Turkey, supported by

what was then called the United Church Board for World Ministries. We didn't realize it at the time, but First Congregational, here in Manhattan, was one of many churches whose budget had, and still has, a line item that includes support for world ministries. So David and I personally thank you for that support. It changed our lives.

I want to give you one final example of how our stewardship helps us to minister by responding to needs. Not too long ago, this church cosponsored a workshop on justice and reconciliation, with the goal of reducing the racial animosity that pervades American life. The K-O Conference made these materials and training available. Two weekends from now, on Nov. 4, First Congregational will sponsor an anti-racism retreat together with the Bethel AME church. Both of these training events were made possible because the members of this church committed funds to a ministry that has both local and national urgency—we prepared ourselves to meet this need.

In short, stewardship happens when each of us gives part of our resources and talents to the church, and we pool those resources and talents together. Then we allocate those resources to the many ways in which we prepare to respond to needs—"to minister to others, together."