

On Stewardship

My first memory of church stewardship was in the early 1970s. My father was the minister at the United Methodist Church in Mechanicsville, Iowa, population 1,004. I was six or seven years old. Every year the church hosted a fundraising event it called, "The Lord's Portion."

Parishioners would donate items to be sold or auctioned. I don't recalled many details of that event. Just a few: Dad buying a big leaf sweeper that I would push around our yard until we gave it away a year or so later when we moved. One of my mother's blueberry pies sold for \$15. And of course, the name. The Lord's Portion. So small-town, yet so very appropriate.

Over the years, in many churches since, stewardship to me has taken on many forms. There was Cecil Bolsinger, the usher who greeted us our first Sunday at Grace United Methodist Church in Des Moines in 1973, and who was always there as an usher over the years when I returned for a visit, eventually with my wife, Julie, and our son, Andrew. Cecil continued to usher at Grace until he died last year at 102. There was Lisle Shires, an audio technician at a Des Moines television station, giving up an entire Saturday to install and tweak a new sound system in the church. And there were the well-organized stewardship drives that involved dozens of church members gathering on a Saturday and making home visits to long-lost members, in a last-ditch and usually fruitless attempt to remind them of the importance of the church in their lives and therefore the importance of their stewardship to the church.

I came to understand many years later that those home visits were not so fruitless. It was those visits that drove home to me the importance of stewardship, that a church cannot function without the time, talents and gifts of its parishioners. And that being the member of a church carries with it the responsibility of offering these gifts, the Lord's portion.

When my family decided two years ago that it was time to find a church that better fit our needs, our first stop was Baker Memorial United Methodist Church. By reputation, we figured it would be a good fit – strong music ministry, a commitment to local and global service and traditional worship. So we trekked the 5½ miles from Batavia and were immediately impressed – no, *MOVED* – by what we experienced. You all were far more friendly and welcoming that we could have expected, the Chancel Choir was even better than we'd been led to believe – and we had high expectations – and, of course, this marvelous building.

Needless to stay, it didn't take long for us to decide that we wanted our spiritual growth to continue at Baker Memorial United Methodist Church. We never visited another church, and we joined within a few months, not long after our daughter, Charlotte, was born.

And as we began to participate in church activities, we realized several things:

First and foremost, that Baker Church lives up to its reputation. For several recent years, when I worked as the city editor at a Kane County newspaper, I frequently encountered the names of many Tri-Cities residents who are greatly respected for their community involvement. Names like John Wredling, Rob Murphy, Jeff Hunt and Phil Zavitz, to name just a few. Imagine how pleased I was to learn not only that they are members of this church, but they are active here, too, also remembering the Lord's portion.

We discovered that Baker's standing in the community is so great that its members are not just from St. Charles. The choir alone has members who come from Bartlett, Elgin, Geneva, Batavia, North Aurora, Sugar Grove and even Huntley.

And we were pleased to learn that Baker has many opportunities to volunteer and actively serve God. And we also are pleased that Baker cares for our children, 7-year-old Andrew, who is in the second grade and this year sings in the boys' choir, and 21-month-old Charlotte, the one with the curly hair.

Ronnie asked my wife, Julie, and I to address you today. Julie isn't here because she's doing the work of the Jesuits, appropriately. That's her job. It pleases Julie that the same commitment to service that defines the Jesuits also is a crucial function of the United Methodist Church, and in particular, this church.

When I told my father, a United Methodist minister for more than 40 years before he recently retired, that we planned to join this church and also planned to join the Chancel Choir, dad, typically had to one-up me. He told me that he'd already sung in this church, as a member of the Albion College choir, not long after Baker was built. So, apparently, the mission of this church began in my family even before I was born, long before we were members. That is something we must take seriously. So many have given so much to bring this church to where it is today. Our generation now is called to make certain that this church's mission will be handed on to our children.

Because we believe that we are called to live that mission, Julie and I have chosen to increase our pledge to the ministries at Baker Memorial United Methodist Church by 50 percent for 2010. We encourage you all to search your hearts for what you can pledge. We believe that what you receive from God in return is worth the investment. It is, after all, the Lord's portion.