

# I GIVE THANKS TO MY GOD ALWAYS FOR YOU...

## A Stewardship Message for December

These past nine months have felt a bit like Groundhog Day. One day blurs into the other. Every day is Blursday.

In the liturgical calendar there are clearly defined beginnings and endings. Nevertheless, I've been feeling a bit of Blursday in our transition from one season to the next. And it's not all bad. With Thanksgiving Day and the First Sunday of Advent falling on the very same weekend, one season morphs into another. Thankfulness and hopefulness happily blur together.

With the first of our four Advent candles recently lit—the Candle of Hope—I've been thinking about this relationship between thankfulness and hopefulness. The Stewardship Committee has been living between these two poles ever since the beginning of Lent when the Coronavirus upset our doing business-as-usual. And it's all been good. Rather than experiencing scarcity, as one might expect under the circumstances, we have been overwhelmed with abundance. Rather than feeling gloom-and-doom, we are filled with excitement about what the future holds for our work together as Christ's people in this corner of the world.

Some signs of abundance in our Pacific Northwest Conference that I am thankful for:

- **CHANGING LIVES/CHANGING TIMES**—Faced with the grim prospect of virtually no income stream required to sustain our camping programs, 360 donors gave \$224,000 in response to this special appeal. Imagine the audacity of running a campaign in a time of such great uncertainty!
- **OUR CHURCH'S WIDER MISSION**—At last report, churches were actually ahead of schedule in paying their 2020 OCWM pledges—101% of what would have been hoped for through October. Of the \$333,000 pledged for the first ten months, \$335,000 has already been received.
- **SOLIDARITY FUND**—Anticipating that some of our churches could face life-threatening financial shortages from loss of rental and other income during this lockdown, one church donated \$300,000 for the Conference to distribute life-support as needed. We are all bound together in covenant and are there for one another, perhaps like never before.
- **DORIS WAGGONER GIFT**—One year ago when a friend of the Conference died, we received an initial bequest of \$120,000. Last month we received an additional \$188,000—totaling \$308,000. A bequest literally means “to say,” and Doris made a powerful statement in saying “thank you” in this way.
- **ONE MORE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING:** At the very moment when we normally receive this offering in support of emergency relief throughout the world—the middle of March—the pandemic causing greater need than ever prevented churches from promoting OGHS. So nine months later in our Conference we're asking churches to extend this invitation to give one more time. Gifts are still arriving.

- **GIVING TUESDAY/FRIENDS OF THE CONFERENCE**—We set a goal of \$40,000 for this year’s December campaign for Friends of the Conference. Even before the big day on December 1<sup>st</sup>, we had already received \$20,000 in sponsorships from individuals and churches. If you want to participate but didn’t get around to it on Giving Tuesday, you can still do so. Simply go the PNC/UCC website, click on “donate,” and then make your contribution on the “Giving Tuesday” line.

These are only some of the signs of abundance and sharing that I am thankful for. But what I am most thankful for is the profound commitment of members of the Stewardship Committee to engage in the work we are doing in support of the Conference. There is 100% attendance at most every meeting. Everyone actively participates. Tasks are readily undertaken.

No one would have wished for this terrible plague to be inflicted upon us. But there are good things coming out of it. I am thankful for the strong connections being made among leaders and churches. For deepening relationships even when faced with the challenge of being physically-distanced. For renewed vitality and excitement about what the future holds for us on the other side of this pandemic.

One of the scripture readings for the First Sunday of Advent speaks to this blurring, or blending, of thankfulness and hopefulness. The Apostle Paul is writing to an early Christian community in Corinth. **“I give thanks to my God always for you ... as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** [I Corinthians 1:3-9] To believe in God is to live in hope, trusting that the future is open. Thank God for the gift of tomorrow!

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