

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

30th January 2022

Ephesians 2:11-22

The Rev. Dr. Brian C. Wyatt

Annual Meeting

Years ago in a class on counseling in seminary, I remember learning that the top three topics most long-term couples reported fighting about were: (1) money; (2) chores or household responsibilities; and, (3) communication. I'm not sure that such learned insight requires extensive research to determine so much as it does simply living with another human being for a while. What a surprise that when you bring people together within a household, there will occasionally be some conflict and disagreement as people learn how to live and

work together.

We get all kinds of metaphors for the church in the Bible—Paul describes it as a body with each part serving a different function, as a temple enabling the world to experience God, and, as in our reading this morning, as a household.

That's the image I want to invite us to consider this morning – thinking about our church as a household. We bring different people together to share a space, to sometimes share a meal together, to make decisions together about the wellbeing and the future of the household.

So I had this vision for today of trying to kind of build a sermon around the idea of how we function as a household while at the same time taking care of some household business. And the way I envisioned approaching that was for us to have some conversation about those three areas that seem to create friction for many households—money, chores, and communication.

Money

So, let's start with the money. Money is something like the energy that we have for ministry here. We can go as much and as far as the money we have allows us to. You all should hopefully have access to a copy of the 2021 Annual Report of our congregation. I invite you to turn or to scroll to page 8 of that report and let's look at our financial situation.

You can see that in 2021, it took about \$210,000 to

run the church. Where does that money come from?

Well, about 85% of it comes from all of you, all of us, when we make our pledges and give our contributions to FPCe.

We also get a small amount of income each year from something called the Dixon Fund. Back in the late 1980's, a man named Tom Dixon left a trust to the church that generates some money. You may have noticed that the room downstairs adjacent to the kitchen is named the Tom Dixon room after him. How much that generates for us each year depends on the interest rate, so some years it generates more than the difference and other years, not. In 2021 it did better than we expected, but interest rates are pretty low right now, so we're holding onto some of that extra in case it turns up short this year.

That's the income side of things. On the expense side of things, one of the pages in your Annual Report you'll find a narrative budget. I put that together starting a couple years ago as a way to try and help communicate the story of where our money goes, hopefully in a way that may be more engaging than a sheet full of numbers. So you can see that 30% of our money goes to worship. That includes everything from paying our music team to part of my salary to tuning the piano to buying communion supplies to 40 other things I'm forgetting.

For anyone who prefers to see the numbers, you can find a breakdown of those on page 10, or login to our online portal, Realm, and download the full line-by-line budget from the link in the announcement section.

So, I'll pause for a moment here and see if anyone

has any questions...

Household Chores

Okay. Next we get to household chores. Household chores are the stuff that has to get done, but isn't always stuff that everyone loves doing. Mowing the lawn, paying the bills, washing the dishes, folding the laundry, and so on. Keeping the church going is full of those kinds of tasks. Changing out the paraments, preparing and cleaning up from communion, putting up and taking down Christmas decorations, setting up for fellowship meals and washing dishes afterwards, you get the idea.

Taking care of these things is kind of like the morale of our church. Keeping things in good order helps us all feel good about our church home here, and that, I think, gives us all energy and enthusiasm for participating and pitching in.

A lot of these tasks are taken on by the different teams or committees in our church. You can see a list of those teams on page 20, and individual reports from each committee in the preceding pages.

Maybe some of these things are not typically at the top of any of our lists of fun things to do. I've been a part of organizations where I'd rather poke myself in the eye with a sharp stick than sit through another meeting. I hope most church meetings aren't like that. But, like housework, if we do not take care of this stuff, the church becomes less healthy and a more difficult place to be.

Much like the chores at home, church work means pitching in. I actually think this church is already pretty awesome at this. I'm aware, though, that this pandemic has made church partici-

pation into something that can happen pretty easily and passively; just flip on a computer and sign into YouTube and watch. On the one hand, that's good – we can connect even when we're housebound, or away on vacation. On the other hand, it can build a bit of inertia.

Here's my hope. My hope is that sometime this year, maybe even this spring or this summer, we're going to get a chance to come back together more fully. When we do, I invite you to find a way to be a part of it. It doesn't have to be a committee, though that is a great way to be involved. But I encourage every single one of us to find some way that you can be a part of the mission of this church, some way that makes your spirit sing a bit, some way that enables you to be part of the team. Go ahead and be creative! And if you just can't

find a way in, call me. Maybe we can find something together.

So again, I'll pause here for a moment and see if anyone has any questions about our committee work, or if any of our committee folks want to add anything...

Communication

Finally, we get to the communication piece. Communication is the heart of an organization—it's what keeps us all connected and united in purpose even as we're all focusing on different tasks and pursuing different passions.

One of the things I did with some of my continuing education time last year (and some more this coming year) is to work toward a certificate in Nonprofit Fundraising Leadership from the Lilly Institute of Philanthropy. It's not so much exclusively a church thing as focused on general financial health for

nonprofits. Of course, the church is also a nonprofit entity, so those lessons apply to what we do here, too.

One of the lessons emphasized in those classes has been communication and transparency. That's one of the reasons I wanted to take time and make this a part of our worship today rather than just handing out the report. I hope this is helpful in communicating clearly with everyone here more about what our church is doing, how we are using the money we contribute, and how you can be involved in the work we're all doing.

Communication is difficult in any relationship, and that includes within a church family. Maybe even more so here, and especially more so during a pandemic. Think about how we often share information in a household...we talk about our day around the dinner

table. We remind one another about appointments on our way out the door.

Here, one of the primary ways of sharing information was when we saw each other on Sunday mornings. But we went for 15 months not seeing each other at all. Then another 5 months just gathering once a week. Even now, more than half of our church family is worshiping with us on YouTube on any given Sunday.

And we are a diverse family—including in age and in comfort with technology. Some of us check email for information. Others never look at email and prefer texting. Or Discord. Or What's App. Some of us look to Facebook for information. Or Twitter. Or Instagram. Others abhor social media and avoid it altogether. Some of us are comfortable gathering on a Zoom, but not everyone. So how do we

share information?

First, we thank Amber for all she does to help facilitate that – managing our Facebook page, our eNews, our social media, and our website. Those are all places you can find up to date information about what's going on.

But communication in any relationship takes effort from all parties. Healthy communication in a church is more than just one or two people sending out information. It involves all of us... all of us not only sharing information with each other, but all of us really communicating with each other, having conversations, even difficult ones, in healthy ways...that's probably a sermon, or a year's worth of sermons, in itself. Since we're getting closer to lunchtime, I'll save that sermon for another day.

But I do think Paul, or whomever wrote Ephe-

sians, was onto something in describing the church as a household. Because ultimately, a healthy household is a partnership among all the members of the home. I think we are pretty good at this, too, and seeing ourselves as partners in this family. I hope so! And I hope as we move through this year, that we can continue to build on healthy habits, that we can bring our own uniqueness to this family in different ways, and find our strength together as a place where God's spirit is alive in us. May it be so. Blessed be.

