

The First Community Church of Southborough
137 Southville Road
Southborough, Massachusetts 01772-1937
November 20, 2024

Dear Member or Friend of our Church Family,

Approximately thirty years ago, I met with a committee from a church to explore the possibility of my serving as their interim minister. After our first meeting, I asked them for copies of their last four annual reports so I could get a feeling for their finances and the range of church activities.

I found the financial reports interesting. Three years prior, there was a dramatic spike in the pledging; it went up approximately 25%. However, the following year, pledging dropped to a level lower than it had been before the spike.

When I asked the committee if they could explain the spike and drop, they told me that three years ago the church contracted the services of a professional stewardship consultant. The consultant organized and trained stewardship teams of church members that visited every person/family on the church mailing list. In these visits, the team talked about the importance of stewardship, outlined the church's needs, prayed with the person about his/her pledge, and then asked the person to fill out the pledge card in the presence of the team. What a surprise--pledging increased dramatically! Everybody was thrilled, especially the consultant who, I believe, received a percentage of the increase.

However, not everyone had good feelings about what had happened. Some parishioners felt they had been pressured into giving a pledge that was beyond what they could afford. The following year, pledging not only fell back to where it was before the spike; some people/families reduced their pledge even further. I'm sure it was not a pleasant experience to feel spiritually manipulated! I told the search committee that if I were called to be their interim minister, I would not be comfortable conducting that kind of stewardship drive. They agreed.

When I came to this church twenty-seven years ago, I told the members of the Church Council and the Stewardship & Growth Committee what had happened. They totally agreed with me. So, for the past twenty-seven years, our "stewardship drive" has consisted of the following:

- I preach a couple of excellent sermons about the theology and spirituality of stewardship.
- I and/or the Stewardship and Growth Committee write you a letter informing you of our needs in the coming year.
- You fill out your pledge card. Then you bring or mail it to us.

You are correct; this is not a very sophisticated pledge drive! First, we tell you what we need:

- Our annual budget (operating expenses) for 2024 is \$77,564.

- Last year, members and friends pledged \$31,280 to the General Fund.
- The average pledge was \$35.38 a week (\$1,840/year), which is really high!
- Because we have so few pledging units, our pledges cover only 40% of our operating expenses
- The remainder (\$38,400) has to be drawn from our endowments.

We ask you, as a member or friend of our church, to pledge an amount that not only reflects your commitment to the life of this church; we ask you to pledge an amount you can give sensibly and with joy. No manipulation! We simply trust that if our members and friends give what they can, we will do fine!

Our unsophisticated, non-coercive approach apparently works! This church has been in existence for over 159 years. We have survived because of the support that members and friends like you have given to this church through the years, and you have given a lot more than money! It is because of your gifts of time and talent as well as treasure that we have become the special church we are.

I have no idea who pledges or how much anyone pledges, nor am I the least interested in knowing this. Only the collector and the treasurer know. I do know from our annual reports that Friends of the Church give us gifts of several thousand dollars each year. Believe me, I am well aware that inflation has taken a bite out of your disposable income. You know your circumstances better than we. I just trust that if you do the very best that you can, if we all do the very best that we can, together we will build something special, something unique, something that we, our community, our nation, and the world desperately needs!

Faithfully yours,
 Reverend Paul D. Sanderson

p.s. If you would like us to send you a pledge card, weekly General Fund and Mission envelopes, or if you would like to make a weekly pledge or a gift to our church, please contact our Church Collector, Jim Holmes. If you prefer, you may fill out the following and snail-mail it to the church, email it to Jim Holmes, or place it in the offering plate any Sunday.

In gratitude for all I have received from First Community Church, and in support of our church's ministries, I make the following pledge of financial support.

I pledge to support our church by making a weekly pledge of \$ _____ to First Community Church.
 I would like to receive pledge envelopes: Yes ____ No ____
 I would like to give weekly ____ monthly ____ quarterly ____ annually ____

I would like to make a gift of \$ _____ to First Community Church.

I would like to make a gift of stock to First Community Church: Yes ___ No ___

I would like information about how I might include First Community Church as a beneficiary in my will. Yes ___ No ___

Signed:

(Printed)

Address: Street: _____

City/Town: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____