

### **Meditation: “The Fund-amentals”**

I remember, as a kid, taking a family trip to Mexico, for three weeks. We started off with a week in Acapulco. The first hotel was a dive, but, as advertised, it was right on the beach....after you crossed a six lane thoroughfare. The second day we moved to a hotel that was actually on the beach....the Mara Lisa. After a week there, we left Acapulco in a rented car, but after one day spent on a toll highway that ended abruptly in the middle of nowhere, about a kilometer past the last toll booth, and having to backtrack, dad hired a guide in Taxco. Now dad had taken a wad of cash to pay for all of our expenses while we were there, but by the time we travelled from Taxco to San Jose de Purua, Guanajuato, San Miguel de Allende, Janitzio and other places in central Mexico, by the time we arrived in Mexico City he was tapped out. He had to go to a bank and arrange a wire transfer of funds from Canada to pay our expenses for our final week in Mexico City. These were the days before he got his very first Chargex card.

My how the times have changed. Now, when Barbara and I go on vacation we take some cash, but mostly we put all of our expenses on the credit card, or we use debit. How do you fund your travels?

All of this came to mind when I was reading the scripture lesson for today. Here are Paul and Silas in Philippi, far from Jerusalem and the land of Israel. Paul made extensive journeys around Asia Minor and into Europe, and I wondered, without a Chargex card, how did he fund his travels? Any ideas?

And it's not just Paul and Silas who travelled around. Jesus and the disciples travelled and did not appear to work for income. They travelled far and wide through cities and villages proclaiming and bringing the good news of the Kingdom of God. And, you guessed it, Jesus didn't have a Chargex card either. So how did they do it? Well, it wasn't just Jesus and the twelve that travelled together. There were women, wealthy women, like Susanna, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward, Chuza, and many others. And, according to Luke's gospel, these women provided for them out of their resources. (Luke 8:3)

How many of you have figured out by now that this is a sermon about a topic that most ministers avoid like the plague: money? You know that I have taken a couple of weeks of continuing education leave in the past month. What you may not know is what I did during that time. Amongst other things, I read this book by the Rev. Dr. Brian Arthur Brown, *Keys to the Kingdom: Money and Property for Congregational Mission in the United Church of Canada*.

The book starts with the story of Bob Keys, who, during his travels around Europe during the second world war, wondered how it was that little churches in small, backwater villages had survived for a thousand years or more. The offering that is now taken up weekly had at one time been an annual offering and neither, while good and necessary in their own right, are enough to keep and maintain a building and support a local ministry. Bob wondered about this and started asking questions. How did so many local churches maintain themselves through the vicissitudes of changing demographics, fluctuating societal trends, and ever-changing economics? The answer, he discovered, was that at some point in time when those villages had been prosperous a family of faith had bestowed an endowment for the church. The offering paid for local outreach initiatives, but the maintenance of the building and ministry was paid for from this endowment. Before he died, Bob endowed his local United Church in the Niagara region with \$10M. A start on their goal of a \$100M endowment fund.

The endowment fund was called EMBRACE for Eternal – the congregation was expected to expend up to 90% of the investment income. The other 10% was to be re-invested. 5% for exceptional circumstance, and 5% as a hedge against inflation.

Eternal, Memorial – the annual interest payment was to be taken in December to pre-finance the budget for the following year. This allows budgeting for growth and outreach without worrying about possible decline in revenue or fears of diminishing returns on investments.

Eternal, Memorial, Building – one third of the endowment was to maintain, enhance, and extend the physical facilities of the church for the purpose of worship, education, and service.

Eternal, Memorial, Building, Religion – one third of the endowment was to support the educational and worship aspects of the church's religious programs.

Eternal, Memorial, Building, Religion, Charitable – and the final third of the embrace endowment was to fund outreach to those in physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual need.

The Eternal, Memorial, Building, Religion, and Charitable Endowment.

I know, I hear you. None of you have a spare \$10M to donate. The final chapter of the book talks about the United Church of Canada Foundation, which is an arm's length body within the denomination that is expert in the management of the trusts and endowments that can support the work of the denomination. Many congregations have invested their funds with the foundation and the local trustees still control things....the money doesn't go to the national office. In this final chapter, Rev. Brown proposes five ways to build an endowment fund.

First is by a special offering taken up on anniversary Sunday. That could be the service closest to June 10, or the Sunday you celebrate the anniversary of this congregation, or both.

The second idea is to ask people to make a once-in-a-lifetime gift to the church. This is something that one of the very first bishops in the church, Polycarp did with the people in his church in Smyrna.

Third is by tithing in our wills. Ask yourself, would it significantly change the life of your heirs if they inherited only 90% of your estate, instead of 100% of your estate? Then ask if it would significantly affect the church if it received 10% of your estate instead of nothing?

The fourth idea is memorial donations. Many people ask for donations to a specific charity, like the Cancer Society, in their obituaries. How many would make a gift to the church if they knew it was going to an endowment fund to ensure the church is still around in another 100 years?

The final idea is to build an endowment through annuities. Members can make a donation that will go to the church's endowment fund on their death, but until that time, they receive a monthly cheque. Just so you know, since its inception in 2002, the United Church of Canada Foundation has not dipped below a 9% per annum return.

Local churches cannot survive over the long run on just what comes in on the offering plate. Jesus certainly never passed the plate at any of his gigs, yet he was able to feed the poor, cure the sick, and spread the good news – the gospel – of the Kingdom of God because he had another source of income – the wealthy women who travelled with him. In fact, it might surprise you to know that Jesus talked about money, or wealth (gold, silver, coins, purses, etc.) more than any other topic....a total of 119 times. He only mentions love 51 times. Paul financed his trips through his work as a tentmaker in Corinth and Ephesus.

By the way, there are other ideas in this book, like working with UPRC to redevelop the property to provide not only worship and ministry space, but affordable housing and a second stream of income to support the congregation over the long haul.

Jesus ensured that his mission and ministry was provided for. Paul did what was necessary to ensure that his mission and ministry was provided for. It is incumbent upon us to ensure that God's mission and ministry in this place is provided for, now and into the future. May it be so.