



Introduction

Invitation

Opening Prayer

Thanks for the ability to stay in touch and communicate with members of the congregation. Thanks for keeping us safe and well. Thanks for a new perspective and outlook on our lives and what we have to be thankful for. Thanks for the hope to once again meet as a congregation to worship you.

Reading the Word: Matthew 6:25-34

Message "Rich Church, Poor Church"
John VanReenen

Prayer

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen

Blessing

Matthew 6:25-34

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sew or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you - you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.



SERMON TRANSCRIPT GIVEN BY JOHN VANREENEN

Introduction

My message this morning is called Rich Church, Poor Church. This is a very dear to my heart and a message I've been trying to convey to the congregation for some time. I think you will find that the application of the ideas in this message to the work of the church, our church that you and I care so much about, has made and will continue to make significant improvements in the quality of our worship and our missions.

Back in the fall of 2017 the finance committee was looking for direction in a number of areas including how to proceed with our annual pledge campaign. We needed some new ideas and a new approach. We invited David Abbott (FUMC friend & Director of Stewardship for the United Methodist Foundation) to our October 2017 Finance/Stewardship Committee Meeting. As always, David was supportive, understanding, and most helpful. He had some great suggestions for a way forward for FUMC along with some great resources including an extended list of relevant books and additional Methodist Foundation resources. No one knew it at the time, but that one meeting was a game-changer for Finance and for FUMC Portsmouth, as we initiated at least two new practices that would change FUMC for the foreseeable future. They are:

- 1) Finance initiation of group book reviews to provide senior leadership with increased insight and direction for improvement and growth;
- 2) A new approach for our annual pledge drive in the Gratitude Campaigns and Gratitude Moments we still utilize today (this direction came from one of the books we studied entitled the Gratitude Path).

To date, five books have been read and reviewed while the sixth is currently in progress. Initially, we chose finance-related books, but have branched out to include those pertaining to spirituality and prayer. One of our favorite books was called Rich Church, Poor Church. Immediately in our first review, the Finance members were shocked at the similarities between FUMC and several Poor Church examples; I remember Sue Richards saying, 'that is us (rats)'. Although Finance was initially humbled by these findings and similarities we have since learned from our studies of the book and applied them for a marked improvement in several areas. The Finance Committee wanted to share this important stewardship information with the congregation, a review of the book by the Peace Circle and an open forum Sunday book review were suggested options. Since none of these options worked out, I felt compelled to share these teachings with you, the congregation.

The author of Rich Church, Poor Church is Clif Christopher. He was a pastor for 20 years. He is a successful church growth consultant; Horizons Stewardship Company. He has written 3 books on stewardship and church growth. The purpose of the book is to encourage church leaders to ask questions about their churches and their vitality; where changes need to be made. It also seeks to answer the question, "Why should I give to the church?"

The author poses several of the highest priorities for Rich Churches including:

- 1) Know the Church's Mission is the #1 reason for giving to the church. The Mission purpose - to keep church membership united, drive progress, measure accomplishments. A Rich Church focuses on Mission. A Poor Church focuses on survival. To that end, the Visioning Team has been working diligently the past several months in order to provide an updated Church Vision and Mission Statement with the rollout of our implementation shortly after we return to the sanctuary for worship.
- 2) The second reason people give to the church is due to their regard for church leadership - People give to People. A Rich Church understands why people give. A Poor Church must balance the budget. Clif Christopher says people relate to changed lives. Buildings and programs do not change lives. People do. A Rich Church focuses on changes lives; their very existence is to transform those lives. A Poor Church focuses on the need for more money. FUMC's continued focus on how the church has changed lives via Gratitude Moments; Church Use Groups (AA, NA, SPF, End 68 Hours of Hunger), Pumpkin Patch stories and experiences.

People don't want to hear ultimatums about giving and how dire the financial needs of the church are. Therefore, the financial giving and attendance tracking information were removed from the bulletin in an effort to remove negative messages.

The author asks: Who is Leading (the Church)? People are part of the church because they want to be part of God's work and God's plan. A Rich Church creates compelling communications to donors. A Poor Church bombards the congregation with facts. A Rich Church is looking for commitments. A Poor Church settles for contributions. A Rich Church believes that God is calling us to a purpose. A Poor Church says we have a problem and need to find a solution. I remember myself standing up in front of the congregation in years past talking about the church's financial condition and making pleas for increased giving. Now, we rely on the Gratitude Campaign and our Gratitude Moments to make the case for us. How lives have been changed through the work of the church, our church. The author talks about Principal, not payments. Poor decisions about the minister or the ministry can be resolved; however, excessive debt can be unforgiving and last forever. A Rich Church manages debt principal. A Poor Church only looks at debt payments. A rule of thumb, never get into debt without a plan to be out of debt within 7 years, have no more than two back to back capital campaigns. A Rich Church enters into debt with a safety net in place. A Poor Church is vulnerable to economic changes (ie, Covid 19 Pandemic).

Build it and they will come can be found on many church tombstones. Paying for debt through new/expected memberships is not a viable approach. A Rich Church - We (those who implement) will resolve debt + shows maximum commitment. A Poor Church - They (those expected to join later) will resolve debt and shows minimal commitment.

The only viable reason for debt is to enable the ministry. When debt becomes the church's focus, the church has lost its way. A Rich Church afford ministry (Mission Shares). A Poor Church prohibits ministry. FUMC has met our Mission Share commitments for 5 years in a row and will again in 2020. Our last Capital Campaign was in 2016. From the information provided by the author, FUMC meets all of the financial requirements of a Rich Church.

The author talks about being Thankful. In a Rich Church personal thank you notes are sent for gifts. In a Poor Church no thank you notes are sent. Question - Have you ever resented being thanked?

FUMC continues concerted efforts to thank the congregation in writing for pledges, financial contributions, and special project/fundraising efforts.

Finally, what the author says about Transformation...In a Rich Church, transformation is found in changing lives. In a Poor Church, Transformation is limited to paying the bills. In a Rich Church, the Church website/facebook, Beacon, and Bulletin share stories and examples of transformation. In a Poor Church, the website/newsletter focus on the church organization.

Here are my thoughts and observations about OUR church.

1). FUMC on Dedication and Honesty. In my experience, the Finance Trustees & Visioning Committees are some of the hardest working and most dedicated committee members ever. The Finance Trustees have a consistent track record of doing things right, honest, above-board, and in the way that God would approve. Example, I think back about a recent special meeting intended to make funds available for payment of bills during COVID-19 pandemic to insure continued church operations, payment of obligations, and success.

2.) FUMC on Generosity:

When we needed a TV screen - You were there; When we needed a hand-held mic - You were there.

When we needed an office laptop - You were there; When we needed a new sound system - You were there.

When we needed boiler repairs - You were there; When we needed donations for The Giving Tree - You were there.

When we needed support for Kids First - You were there; You give generously, especially to specific causes.

3.). Finally, and most importantly, FUMC has and continues to change lives, as follows:

Remember: the author reminds us this is the most critical and beneficial characteristic for a Rich Church to have.

Art Munson Gratitude Moment - Art talked about a low point in his life when he reached out to this church for comfort and support. You did not disappoint. Art was able to make changes for improvement in his life; this church was here when he needed you and he is most excited to talk about it.

Pumpkin Patch - 16 years of great stories and moving experiences too numerous to mention. Sue Richards has literally hundreds of accounts where the Patch has changed lives; and that includes many of OUR own lives.

Sunday School - We have 10-15 of OUR kids that are enriched through the learning and activities by our Sunday school. From my own experiences with our grandkids, we hear the songs they sing and the stories they recount at home and can't wait to get back to class with their friends the following week.

End 68 Hours of Hunger - Jen Berry and many others have related how this program has given children a new reason for hope; just ask the 100 plus students from 7 Portsmouth schools how their lives have been touched through this program.

Seacoast Family Promise - Many have shared their experiences of how this program has improved their lives & provided housing and security opportunities they otherwise would not be enjoying now; just ask the 253 families; 804 individuals and 476 children who have been through this program during the last 15 years.

Glenn Cier's Gratitude Moment for AA - Glenn said that members of AA cannot survive without the meetings at our church; their existence may very well be a matter of life or death; even during the pandemic, the church was there to allow meetings as the group has requested.

COVID - 19 Pandemic - FUMC continues to be there with Facebook updates; daily devotions; weekly sermons, daily prayers, special music, Mother's Day flowers, Father's Day flags, and countless acts of kindness and caring.

For these reasons, I can say with the utmost confidence and conviction that you have changed lives, you will continue to change lives and you, FUMC, are a Rich Church.....Amen.