

## The Right Decision . . .

### The Right Reasons . . .

#### The Right Time!

Pastor Jim Stender

St. Andrew's, Vancouver, WA

(The following is excerpted from an article by Pastor Jim Stender to members of St. Andrew's.)

"To those, whom God loves,

"Our church's finances, especially our cash flow, will be a challenge in 2003. A year ago we entered 2002 with \$34,000 in the checking account. This balance helped us through the cycles of giving during the course of the year. Because our overall offerings were less than expected, the balance in our checking account at the end of 2002 was only \$11,000. Because January and February were low months in our cycle of giving, our checking account balance has now dropped to zero. The only reason we stayed in the black is because we did not pay out our 10% of gifts and offerings to benevolence.

"Given our current financial status, the council made the right decision. Your elected leaders decided that our 10% benevolence is not optional nor something we would withhold to the end of the year. Instead, it would be the first check we write every month.

"It was not just the right decision; it was for the right reasons. God asks us to give our best, our first fruits to the Lord. We at St. Andrew have asked our people to give their best, their first fruits to God, through the mission of St. Andrew. We as a congregation live a lie unless we act consistently with what we preach. Secondly, it is too

tempting to place any shortfall we may experience on the people we cannot see. It is not fair for our foreign missionaries, mission congregations locally and bishop offices to only bear the burden. If there is going to be a shortfall the leadership team decided it will be in our place not a foreign place.

"It was not just the right decision for the right reasons; it was at the right time. To have delayed this decision another month or more could have made this decision much more difficult. Making up \$4,000 is different from digging out of a \$32,000 hole. It is a decision at the right time for another

## CONNECTING WITH YOUR STORIES

Rev. Philip Reitz  
Stewardship Specialist

"Making Christ Known" acknowledges through stories and pictures your generosity through your regular and designated giving to the ministries of the ELCA. These stories are available on the web at [http://elca.org/dcm/stewardship/resources/making\\_christknown.html](http://elca.org/dcm/stewardship/resources/making_christknown.html) as are related pictures. The following is part of a story that I am sharing with you because I re-sided part of my home this summer and can relate to hammers, saws, two-by-fours and sweat. . . .



### BUILDING HOUSES, BUILDING CHARACTER

Illinois, USA

*"I enjoy knowing that I am helping make a difference in the lives of the Habitat families that receive our houses and cabinets. Upon my release to the community I plan on applying for a job as a carpenter or carpenter apprentice so I can utilize the skills I have learned here."*

"As an ELCA Lutheran, you can be proud of the many ministries that make a real difference in peoples' lives. One such ministry brings together people who need houses with folks who have time to build them.

"Eleven years ago, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois, one of 280 social ministry organizations nationwide, hatched an idea that linked prisoners in Illinois with Habitat for Humanity, a Christian housing movement. For the first time in 1992, a group of minimum-security prisoners built an entire house on site. This effort was so successful that by 1995 the program was expanded to include prisoners who were not allowed to leave their facilities. So they began framing interior and exterior walls, building trusses and cabinets and other building components, which were then shipped to the housing site.

The Right Decision cont.

reason. The holy season of Lent begins with smudging our faces with ash to remind us that we are not the center of the universe. The season of Lent telescopes our vision on the love of God seen in the passion and death of Jesus only to give way to the new life we all celebrate in the resurrection!

This was a decision focused on God's love and power. . . . the new life the resurrection of our Lord and Savior brings into each of our lives personally."

At a leadership gathering including council leaders, team chairs and other congregational leaders this group decided to take the first step themselves and make a written commitment to 'becoming current with our benevolence' which was two months behind. When the tally of pledges was collected the leadership team had pledged \$6,000 toward that effort which meant they were able not only to become current for their January and February mission support but to make a forward investment in their benevolence for March.

This is a 'different way of operating.' It is 'a different attitude'. The 'jury is still out' on where this will take us for the rest of the year. But we have taken the first, courageous steps. "I believe it is by this same resurrection power that folks will give their best and first fruits to God for us as a congregation to meet and exceed our budget."

*"The right decision for the right reasons at the right time* is a reflection of the new life that is ours from the gift of Jesus' own death and resurrection."



**"Building Character"** continued . . .

"This project brought a double blessing: benefits to the prisoners and benefits to the Habitat families."

You can find the rest of this story and others at the web site noted above or in "Making Christ Known". For a copy ask your pastor, synod office or call Janet at 800.755.5831 ext.103.

Working together as the whole Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, we are making Christ known in ways that no individual or congregation could do alone. You are making a difference in your community and around the world. You can feel good about your partnership in Christ's mission. Thank you!

We must  
try to  
become  
mature  
and start  
thinking  
about  
more  
than just  
the basic  
things we  
were  
taught  
about  
Christ.

Hebrews 6:1 (CEV)