

# *First Congregational Church of Western Springs*

## *Stewardship 2019: Fruits of the Spirit*

"The fruit of the Spirit," Paul writes, "is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." When we witness or embody these virtues, we know that the Spirit of the living Christ is in our midst.

There are many metaphors for church. There is church as the Body of Christ, church as the boat in which we journey through the travails of life, church as a glimpse of the Kingdom of God.

Consider a new metaphor, albeit one rooted in the truths of scripture: *church as fruit bowl*.

Those of us who know and love First Congregational Church of Western Springs have encountered an abundance of spiritual fruit in this place. We experience love for the people in the pews around us; joy as we laugh alongside fellow Rummage volunteers; peace as we breathe together in Tai Chi or Faith & Flow yoga; patience as we wait for the tenors to learn their part; kindness as we welcome new members into our family of faith; generosity as we return a portion our time, talents, and treasures to God; faithfulness as we lift up joys and concerns in prayer; gentleness as we sing the children forth to Sunday School; self-control as we honor the covenants that give meaning and structure to our lives.

There is a whole lot of fruit in this bowl.

The bounty of blessings we share seems limitless, and in some ways it is just that. The love and joy we know here has an eternal quality to it; it is a foretaste of the love and joy we shall know in the fullness of time. But we also know that growing fruit takes work. The poet Wendell Berry writes, "The hand must ache, the face must sweat./ And yet no leaf or grain is filled/ By work of ours; the field is tilled/ And left to grace."

There is a whole lot of grace in this place.

As a congregation, we want to keep bearing fruit. We want to keep making a difference in people's lives. We want to keep living into our ambitious mission statement, knowing that it is only possible to do so if we entrust ourselves to the grace of God.

We have tangible goals that serve as small signs of fidelity to our shared vision. We want to increase our Mission and Outreach support to \$180,000, offer a 3.1% cost of living increase to our remarkable staff, and fund the newly full-time building manager position to care for our building and grounds. After last year's Goodall Requiem we're all yearning for another extraordinary encounter with exquisite music in worship. We also know it's time to relaunch our website with help from a professional web designer and information architect.

*Wendell Berry, Sabbath Poems*

*Whatever is foreseen in joy  
Must be lived out from day to day.  
Vision held open in the dark  
By our ten thousand days of work.*

*Harvest will fill the barn; for that  
The hand must ache, the face must sweat.  
And yet no leaf or grain is filled  
By work of ours; the field is tilled*

*And left to grace. That we may reap,  
Great work is done while we're asleep.  
When we work well, a Sabbath mood  
Rests on our day, and finds it good.*

To live into our aspirational ministry vision we need to average a 7% increase in stewardship giving. We are therefore encouraging one another to prayerfully consider increasing our pledges accordingly - or give even more generously, knowing that some households will not be in a position to do so.

This year we have the opportunity to make two parallel promises to our church - a financial pledge, and a survey indicating the time and talents we are ready to share. Both of these can be completed using the paper forms or online via Realm Giving and the survey posted on our church website.

**We have been blessed with such abundance. Let us give thanks, and give back.**

<b>Pledge Range</b>	<b>Number of 2018 Pledges</b>	<b>Percent of 2018 Pledges</b>	<b>Total Amount Pledged</b>
\$10,000 & above	12	3%	\$187,400
\$5,000-\$9,999	38	9%	\$244,633
\$3,000-\$4,999	51	12%	\$187,633
\$2,000-\$2,999	71	16%	\$167,033
\$1,000-\$1,999	146	33%	\$193,666
\$500-\$999	72	16%	\$46,874
\$0-\$499	46	11%	\$11,580

*(Metaphors and poetry are lovely - but some of us are left-brained and appreciate the data.)*