

 **Issue 3 *News and Notes* Spring 2020**

**Foundation Board Meeting**

At its meeting on March 12, The Foundation Board of Directors

discussed the opportunity to provide grant money to GLC congregations and agencies in response to the coronavirus outbreak; received a “clean” audit from Ridge and Company; adjusted the timeline so that Preliminary Grant Applications will be due on the last Monday of January; gave preliminary review to 13 Formal Grant Applications; and approved a recommendation for Executive Board to amend the Code of Regulations to hold the Sole Member meeting in the first or second calendar quarter.

In addition, the Board heard a challenging report from its fund manager. The Foundation divides is assets between equities and fixed assets which has cushioned the worst of the downturn. The Foundation invests for the long term anticipating that over time patience will be rewarded. Distribution consists of a maximum of 4% of the average of the three previous years of unrestricted net assets available for benefits.

**Grants for the Greater Good**

The coronavirus pandemic has created both the necessity and opportunity for the Church to serve our communities. Much of this opportunity will be fueled by neighbor-love: reaching out by phone, card or email to those most vulnerable; visiting outside a resident’s window at the nursing home while conversing with the resident on the cell phone; offering to pick up groceries or medications for a neighbor and leave them on the front porch;  offering childcare, homeschooling or tutoring for a neighbor who is juggling children and work.

But some of those opportunities may come with a price tag: providing meals for area children or families whose employment has been disrupted, creating the means to broadcast worship services, purchasing food, household supplies or medications for those in need, etc.

The Foundation would like to make modest grants available for short-term ministry. A one-page application for Conference congregations and agencies to apply for a relief grant, not to exceed $5,000, is available by emailing the Foundation. The application is meant to be simple and straightforward; however, it will require official action by your governing board or leadership team. Action may be taken by email, telephone or a face to face meeting, and is meant to reflect the support of the Body. In that same spirit, The Foundation hopes to stimulate congregational involvement, both financially and with the personal involvement of “sweat equity.” The Foundation wants to stimulate ministry by coming alongside and encouraging those who are serving as the hands and feet of Jesus in this challenge.

The Board will consider each grant and is prepared to approve grants quickly by electronic means. They may ask for more information, so please be as thorough as possible in your application.

**Planned Giving Ideas**

When an appreciated asset other than primary personal residence is sold, the gain (difference between the sale price and the purchase price) is subjected to a capital gain tax. If, however, that asset is transferred to a charitable organization the donor is given credit for the entire gift and pays no tax on the capital gain.

The recent downturn in the stock market has, at least for the moment, erased a significant amount of equity appreciation. However, individuals may own other appreciated property of which a charitable contribution may offset the tax liability on the capital gain.

Recently The Foundation was beneficiary of a gift of appreciated real estate that had been sold inside a charitable trust. The transfer shielded the donor from any capital gain tax liability and maximized the donation to The Foundation and several other charitable organizations.

If you have interest in exploring the sale of appreciated property, please consult your tax advisor or financial planner. For more information, do not hesitate to contact The Foundation by phone (419 425 9602) or email (FoundationDirector@cggc.org).

**Stewardship Moment**

Twenty-five years ago, Rodney Stark published his insightful and influential *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries.* He suggests that in its first three- and one-half centuries the Christian movement grew at a decadal rate of 40% to 30 million people, roughly half the population of the Greco-Roman world (Stark 6f). This rapid growth can be explained first by the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, a supernatural phenomenon. The Spirit worked through people and the way they responded to each other. Stark is a sociologist by trade and offers sociological explanations to this profound growth along the lines of the early Christian welcome of women and children, the nature of the city, and the choice among Christians of personal sacrifice and/or martyrdom.

In his chapter on epidemics Stark describes the Christian response during several of the plagues. In AD 165 – 180 and again beginning in AD 251, for example, two catastrophic epidemics (perhaps of smallpox, then measles) claimed the lives of between a quarter and a third of the population (Stark, 73). But despite death and despair, the Christian faith flourished. How could that happen? Among other reasons, Stark attributes this to the Christian world view (providing hope in a good, redemptive, healing God, personal meaning despite the uncontrollable ravage of disease, and consolation of eternal life) not found among the pagans, and a sacrificial attitude of Christians—even to the point of their own dying—willing to enter into the lives of and care for the sick and dying.

Dionysius of Alexandria, in his Easter letter of 260, writes of this incredible willingness to serve: *Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many, in nursing and caring for others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead…. The best of our brothers lost their lives in this manner, a number of presbyters, deacons, and laymen winning high commendation so that death in this form, the result of great piety and strong faith, seems in every way the equal of martyrdom* (Stark, 82).

*The heathen behaved in the very opposite way. At the first onset of the disease, they pushed the sufferers away and fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead and treated unburied corpses as dirt, hoping thereby to aver the spread and contagion of the fatal disease; but do what they might, they found it difficult to escape* (Stark, 83).

Stark ably makes the point that believers who lived out their love of Jesus in tangible ways made such a profound impact on the community that others would freely join them. They wanted the faith and assurance of believers, and willingly joined the growing movement of Christ followers. In that way “the marginal Jesus movement became the dominant religious force in the western world.”

This current pandemic is not the plague. Neither are non-Christians abandoning their care of others. But there is something to be said for believers, who, in the name of Jesus, step into their communities and their neighbor’s lives to offer support and care and neighbor-love. During this social isolation we may have to be creative, but generosity and care will bless others.

This is the stewardship of service: looking out for the well-being of family, neighbors, friends and those who may not know the Lord with a phone call or text, (soon) a visit over the back fence, a word of encouragement.

Pastor Bill