

In baseball, it is said that you cannot really tell how a team might fare until Memorial Day. By then enough time has passed to separate the contenders from the pretenders. As United Methodists, we tend to use our Annual Conference gathering (which was held last week) to see how things are looking in the area of stewardship and finances. Enough time has now passed to see where we stand.

And, as we come to the middle of June this year, it is now obvious that our church finds itself facing a financial challenge. So far this year, our expenditures have outstripped our giving by something over \$20,000. We have reserves to cover the shortfall, but reserves do not last forever.

Now, in many ways our church continues to be faithful and generous; as a church we have responded magnificently to the mission challenges of the Haiti earthquake and to local missions (primarily to Pastor's Discretionary Fund), in amounts that in total actually surpass \$20,000. (Of course, of God's people, it is never a question of giving EITHER to missions OR to the church ministry budget. . . It is always a question of BOTH missions AND the church ministry budget...)

I am not one to panic over finances. God's people are generous people and the church usually finds its way forward in being able to provide vital mission and ministry in our community and world. However, it is also true that if a church falls too far behind on its finances, then the deficit, rather than ministry and mission, becomes the focus of what we are about. In other words, we start asking, "How are we going to pay the bills," instead of "What is God leading us to do?"

We have an excellent and dedicated Finance Committee and I know they will do their part in facing these challenges.

However, as the pastor, I must address this issue as well, and so I ask that as generous as we have been, that we outdo ourselves even in the generosity we have offered so far. I ask that we consider again the difference that our sacrificial gifts might make and respond accordingly. In other words, the church has a need, and I am asking for your help!

— Eric Lindblade

