

CHURCH APPEAL, JANUARY 31, 2010

“A church in the heart of our community with the community in its heart.”

This mission statement was chosen by the members of our church in the late 1990's, when the decision to remain on this site and truly become a downtown church was made. Not long after this pledge was made by the congregation, our church began expansion in both programs and facilities. Over this past decade, “Bloomington First” has sustained and indeed increased our worship opportunities; we have sustained and in many instances, expanded the teaching and support ministries for our members; we have demonstrated our support of civic, non profit and other organizations by making our facilities available to groups with the welfare of the citizenry and the city in their hearts.

A building addition was added in 1999-2000 to support and accommodate the expanded ministries and programs of our church. Then, in the midst of the building expansion, our congregation had the opportunity to purchase the city block across the street, where the US Post Office presently sits – a rare opportunity that we could not pass on, since land is critical for our future as a downtown church.

In 2004, we launched an alternative worship service at the Buskirk-Chumley Theatre, thanks in part to a \$100,000 seed grant from our denomination. This new service, which is aimed at a different demographic than our present congregation, has been an important and successful part of a church with a downtown identity and mission. The Parent's Day Out program has served the community since the early 1970's, and it remains a vital program of our church. The Wednesday Food Pantry is, similarly, a part of our face to the community. We lend support to the Shalom Center by providing spaces for their operation, and we provide kitchen spaces to Middle Way House as they offer employment opportunities and resourcing for victims of domestic abuse.

To remain a church in the heart of the city is not easy. As a result of our building expansion and property acquisition, we incurred a debt that was impossible to sustain. Over the past several years we have carefully watched our spending, while concurrently increasing our programming; a delicate balance. I can happily report to you that we balanced our annual budget each year since 2003 until 2009, when we had a nominal deficit due to building maintenance and equipment replacement matters that were out of the ordinary. These balanced budgets have included substantial principal payments against our debt and complete payment of our yearly apportionments to the United Methodist Church.

Everyone has been affected by the downturn in the US economy that began in the fall of 2008 and continues to this day. Since churches depend on the generosity of their members to sustain their programs and fund their budgets, it is not surprising that churches face the same financial stress that other organizations do in these times.

We now know that our annual campaign results fall short of our being able to fully fund staffing and programming at their current levels without additional income. The anticipated shortfall is significant, in the neighborhood of \$180,000.

The proposed budget currently before the finance committee holds all ministerial and staff salaries at 2009 levels. All program budgets are also flat lined at their 2009 levels. Some items – such as utilities, property & casualty insurance, medical insurance, and interest payments, to name a few – are not totally within our control, but these are being monitored very carefully.

We cannot make the cuts that seem indicated by our anticipated income without reducing both program and staff, which in turn will impact what we can do and our identity as a vital downtown church whose presence enhances the quality of life in our city.

We come this morning asking you to consider increasing the pledge you made to support the 2010 budget. And if you have not yet submitted a pledge, we ask you to make this commitment. It is a risk worth taking we believe.

We can remain a real leader in the heart of our community with the community in its heart if we will step forward in these uncertain times to make a statement of faith. You will find estimate of giving (what some call pledge cards) in the pew racks.

Thank you for your time and attention.