

Hello to all the church family of Lake Ann UMC;

I am writing this letter to you today as both the pastor and a member of the finance committee in regards to the direct relation between your giving and the ability of the church to do the ministry that God has called us to. In the Book of Esther there was a time of great suffering for the people of God and Esther's family member Mordecai sent a message to ask Esther who due to being the Queen has found herself in a position to potentially help. She is hesitant though as there is a law that might cost her dearly if she goes against it so she is afraid. She initially sends a message back to Mordecai that she can't do what he is asking due to the potential cost, Esther is scared and would rather sit back and ride things out as best she can. In Esther 4:12 – 14 this is Mordecai's response;

"When they told Mordecai Esther's words,¹³ he had them respond to Esther: "Don't think for one minute that, unlike all the other Jews, you'll come out of this alive simply because you are in the palace.¹⁴ In fact, if you don't speak up at this very important time, relief and rescue will appear for the Jews from another place, but you and your family will die. But who knows? Maybe it was for a moment like this that you came to be part of the royal family." CEB

What Mordecai reminds her of is two things; the first is that the plan of God won't be derailed, if Esther doesn't act against her fear and reservation to do all that she can for the people she will not be spared the suffering and also she will be cut out of what God is doing. The work of God will be done, just not with her included. The second thing is that ending line, that maybe she has been placed in the position she has to be able to help, to be able to do the work that God intends. Mordecai asks her to contemplate the idea that perhaps it was God that put her in this place at this time to do good work that will benefit the people.

You might be asking yourself why this little lesson, what does this have to do with finance; it's because the lesson for us is that God has put us as the church of Lake Ann in this time and this place to help the people who are in need. We are in this place and time to meet physical needs, spiritual needs, emotional needs, whatever is coming down the pike God has placed this group of people, this body here to do the work that needs to be done to address it. One of the prime things that enables us to do this is your offering. I know that people get uncomfortable when the topic of money and giving are brought up, but there are times that we need to talk about it and be aware of what's going on.

Let me not mince words, the church is in need of your financial offerings to be able to carry forward and do the work that God is calling us to do. One of the trends that has been a real thing in every church I have ever served in is that if Sunday service is cancelled giving goes way down or becomes non-existent. Earlier this year we missed a Sunday due to weather and as of right now our finances are pretty much taking a hit to the tune of one regular Sunday offering. Also realize during this time that between the regular flu, snowbirds being gone, vacations, and the issues in the UMC as a whole giving is way down. Now this week we have the directive of the Bishop to not have face to face in person meetings for the next three weeks which will most assuredly negatively impact giving unless you as the church do something about it. You might be asking yourself right now if the church is closed why do I need to give since things aren't happening anyway, well let me address that with two things you should know;

1. Just because in person face to face things aren't happening that does not mean that ministry and service from the church to the people will stop. Our staff will not be getting a three week vacation. The staff will still be working during this time to find new and creative ways to help people engage in worship on Sundays. They will be looking for ways to make sure that Bible

study and discipleship is still available and happening. Our staff will be seeking people and groups out to see how we can provide help and assistance for them. Many of you should have already seen from our Children's Director Julie an email outlining how she will be sending materials such as activities and songs to families so they can still have Sunday School and learn together. She has also made herself available as a resource(she is a homeschool mom) to those with children who will be at home now for the next 3 weeks to help come up with ideas for families to do things together. The worship email you got this morning was put together by Leah who went and selected songs, wrote the prayers made the announcements, and put my sermon letter in. During this time she will also be recording and editing sermon videos for youtube on Sunday morning while also putting these Sunday morning worship emails together. She will also be handling our social media accounts and getting information out there about upcoming opportunities. Kathy will still be in the office connecting people to resources that they need and making sure that everyone is getting all the information and help they need during these next three weeks. If anything we are going to be asking more of our staff during this time because we are going to ask them to still minister to people in way that they are loved and cared for without being able actually be with them. They are going to have to think outside of the box, they are going to have to spend extra time making these ways of loving God's people possible. They were put into the places they are in for such a time such as this.

2. During times of crisis and chaos people look to the church for hope and direction. Right now people are scared, they are unsure, they are anxious about what is happening and how things will shape up. The church should be stepping up into the lead during these times to help bring rest and peace to those who are suffering and hurting. During this time there will be extra needs that will surface that are beyond the scope of what the church might normally see and our response should be how can we help. Our response should not to be to turn anyone away, but if our giving suffers during these next three weeks that is what will happen. If our giving suffers we will struggle to meet just the regular needs of people, we will not be able to do more and thus our ability to be the light in the darkness in the world that can use a lot more of that will be curtailed. Lake Ann UMC has been put here for a such a time as this.

So what am I as the pastor and we as the finance committee asking you to do about this? The first is to make sure your regular tithe and offering gets into the church every week. Due to the current health crisis and the churches desire to be an example for others we are asking that you don't come to the church to drop off your tithes, please mail them to us at:

Lake Ann UMC 6583 1st Street Lake Ann Michigan 49650

We are also pursuing setting up a way to give online right now as well, if we get it set up we will email you all to let you know how to do that as well. Let me reiterate in case you have missed it in this letter, we cannot be who God is calling us to be and cannot do what God is calling us to do if you don't give during these next three weeks.

The second thing we are asking of you is to pray and contemplate giving more than you normally give. This pandemic is unprecedented during my life time. There are some that may have lived through similar things but for a lot of people this level of struggle and chaos is something that will be new to us. People are going to not only be suffering during these next three weeks which could end

up being longer honestly, we just don't know; there will also be massive fallout in the lives of families for weeks to come after this has passed that the church should be stepping up to help out with. The more you give, the more we are going to be able to do during the actual crisis at hand and the more we can do to help address the fallout afterwards.

Let me leave you with this thought based on the story of Esther. God inspired people to put this story in the Bible, it is not just historical, or entertaining; we are to learn something from it, we are to apply its truth to our lives. That truth is this; that if the church does not rise up and do all that we can to meet the needs of those that God loves while they are suffering make no mistake God will still take care of them. But if that happens we as the hands and feet of God that He has put in this time and place will suffer for not doing all that we could. We cut ourselves out of what God is doing. I know that sounds harsh but that is the message that Mordecai gives to Esther when she is unwilling to put herself out there, and that is the message to us if we do the same.

I apologize if the frankness of this letter offends anyone, that is not my intent. However I don't apologize for being frank, you need to know exactly where we stand, exactly what we could be doing, and that it hinges on what you, the congregation, the family of Lake Ann UMC decide to do about it. We made a commitment to God when we became a part of His family and to each other when we came together as a family here at Lake Ann UMC, we are asking you all to hold to that commitment so we can be who God has called us to be and do the work he has set before us to do.

We were put here for such a time as this.

In your service and His,

Joshua Manning and the Finance Committee of Lake Ann UMC