

Congregational Letter
February 2009

Hi everyone,

I'm writing today with two main purposes in mind. First, I want to keep you updated as a church family on how we are doing with church finances in these difficult times and encourage you continued support. I also want to make you aware of an upcoming body life opportunity.

1) Church Finances. As we prepared our 2009 financial budget, we anticipated a drop in revenue. Instead of assuming an increase of 5% (which has been typical), we projected a 5% drop in revenue. Our hope was that this combined anticipated drop of 10% would be reasonably close to reality. Obviously cutting 10% from our budget when needs would likely continue to rise (especially in compassion related ministries) was not easy, but we have been able to do so.

Our 2009 budget is based on a giving rate of \$4500 per week (\$234,000 per year). Our income level in January was only \$3650 per week, a drop of over 18% below our already reduced projections. This was on the heels of an 8 % drop in anticipated revenue in December. Seeking to be good stewards, we are scaling back, eliminating or simply holding off on non-essential spending. We are prepared to make further budget cuts if necessary.

God has consistently impressed upon us as leaders in the Vineyard the call to simplicity. Even the building we worship in reflects this. God is using the humble place he has provided for us. We are committed to using the building creatively, with multiple services and ministry approaches. Our goal is simply to keep money available for direct people-ministry. We have worked diligently not to waste what God has provided.

I want to thank those of you who have so faithfully and consistently supported the work of this local church. Please know that your faithful giving is deeply appreciated. I also want to make everyone aware of the needs we face. This is not a panicked plea. I continue to be confident that God will bless his people and his people will bless the work of his church. Yet I am not ashamed to make our needs known and challenge God's people to give to his work.

If the call to discipleship is new for you, financial giving may be one of the toughest obstacles. Frankly, for most of us it is far easier to believe the promise of Jesus recorded in Luke 6:38 when things are going well than it is when things are tight. Jesus simply gives us a principle of Christian life. He tells us, *"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."*

I simply want to challenge you to invite God to have influence over your giving. I clearly understand that we are in tough financial times. But I remind you that faith does not call us to give out of our excess, but from our first fruits. C. S. Lewis writes, "The only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. Our charities should pinch and hamper us. If we live at the same level of affluence as other people who have our level of income, we are probably giving away too little."

2) The Underground Café. I also wanted to take this opportunity to share with you an upcoming event that I am truly excited about. On Friday, February 27th from 6:30pm to 9:00pm we are planning the first of what we are calling "The Underground Café."

The Underground Café is designed to be a place to invite friends or family for an informal gathering to simply hang out, relax, have a sandwich or pizza, listen to music and build relationships. The primary

focus would be on building biblical relationships with other believers and with unsaved friends and family. People would be free to drop in for a few minutes or for the whole evening.

I see the most important function of this effort to be evangelistic in nature. To me the name implies a safe place, below the radar screen, for those who are living their lives in slavery to sin and need help to find freedom. It would be a place that doesn't feel "churchy" but feels more like a relaxing coffee shop where you can invite friends in a non-threatening, yet intentional environment. The sharing of faith then becomes more integral to simply sharing life, as opposed to some formal up-front presentation from the leader. My hope would be that some who might not come to our Sunday services would come to see Christians as regular, caring people.

Some of the details are still being worked out, but the basics include:

- Will meet downstairs, utilizing the big area and the smaller rooms as well to foster a relaxed atmosphere and conversation
- The idea will be tested for three times on:
 - Friday, February 27, 6:30-9:00pm
 - Friday, March 20, 6:30-9:00pm
 - Friday, April 24, 6:30-9:00pm
- Those who have participated in the TLC venues (as well as others) will be invited to participate and scheduled to provide music, dance, poetry, readings, etc.
 - They will need to understand their role is to help provide a warm and welcoming environment that can allow relationships to develop in a relaxed atmosphere.
 - Presentations could include Christian music or secular music with positive and appropriate messages
 - CD's could be used between sets, etc to facilitate a casual change of musicians
- The Brazil mission trip team will be providing food as a fundraiser. It could include things like Sloppy Joes, shredded chicken sandwiches, and pizza by the slice (from next door), chips and pop, etc. The food will be set up and distributed from the break room.
- Families will be responsible for their own children, and will be expected to maintain appropriate oversight and supervision just like they would in any public café setting.
- We are recruiting team members willing to serve to make the evening a success. Please contact the church office for more details.

Today more than ever I am convinced that the local church is the last hope of a broken world. I was moved in a church conference well over a year ago now to hear men from the secular world of business say that only the church of Jesus Christ could provide genuine answers for the needs of mankind. I know that God has and will continue to use his church for the salvation of this world.

I consider it a privilege to serve with you in the work of the kingdom. May God continue to bless and guide us as his church as we continue in this journey together.

Warmly,
Steve