

I'm here today, as I have been many times in past years, to give you an update on our financial position as we approach the end of the year, give you an update on the capital campaign, and to give some personal testimony about my life and Fanwood Presbyterian Church.

I'll start with the financial details. As of the end of October, we were about 32 thousand in the red. At first blush this compares poorly with the 16 thousand in the red last year at this time. But last year we delayed a lot of discretionary expenses to December, so we are actually in a very similar position to last year. And a sort-of silver lining is that last year's deficit was largely driven by a drop in giving, this year's is mainly driven by an increase in costs – most notably snow removal and heating.

Last year, unlike previous years, we didn't really close the gap much between October and the end of the year. When I looked into the reasons, I found the one issue I already mentioned, that quite a few expenses were delayed until December, offsetting an end-of-year surge in giving. In addition, we had a really weak November last year. I wondered why, and then I realized "Oh yeah – Superstorm Sandy".

I'd like to point out that we have maintained our giving despite the successful kickoff of our capital campaign. It is vital that the capital campaign not adversely impact our annual giving, so I thank you all for your continued generosity to our annual giving while also providing inspirational support to the capital campaign. We are called to tithe, and the capital campaign is a challenge and opportunity to move toward tithing, if you are not already there.

Our original estimates for the projects to be funded by the campaign was between 450 and 590 thousand dollars. We ended up with about 500 thousand in pledges. Things seem to always cost more than expected, and you find other things that need to be addressed as part of a project, so we really need about another 100 thousand dollars, taking us to the upper end of our range of estimates, to complete the planned projects. Although the campaign has been very successful so far, there are still a lot of people that we haven't heard from. To get the other 100 thousand dollars we would need 33 families to contribute 20 dollars a week for three years. If you haven't pledged to the campaign, I would ask you to consider doing so now.

As for projects, the campaign funded our new A/V system, the dining room improvements, and the renovations to Westminster Hall. Early next year we will be working on the chancel renovations, painting the sanctuary, replacing the carpet, and air conditioning.

Please pledge what you can to the annual budget. Just as is the case for all of you, our costs go up year after year and we need increased giving to meet our budget.

And as the last remark on finances, please give what you can between now and the end of the year, as we have always relied on end-of-year giving to make our giving goal for the year.

I'm not making any promises, but this is probably the last time that I'll be delivering one of these messages at FPC. As many of you know, I am moving soon; very soon actually; nine days from now to be exact. You may know that we bought a home in Cape Cod last year, so you might be surprised to learn that I'm moving to Monroe, New Jersey. I know that when we made the

decision to move to Monroe back in June, I don't think anyone could have been more surprised than I was. More on that later.

It is funny how things can happen that suddenly take your life in an unexpected direction. Sometimes you know right away that you've made a big decision, as was the case in deciding to move to Monroe. In other cases, there are a series of events that only much later do you realize had a big impact on your life.

When I moved to Scotch Plains in 1989, I continued to go to my old church in Morris Plains for quite some time, although less and less frequently as time passed. My son, Paul, was born in 1991 and when he was about a year or so old Mary and I tried attending the Presbyterian Church in New Providence. When we went to pick up Paul from the nursery after the service, he was crying terribly and had done so for most of the service. That put us off looking for churches for a while. When Paul was 4 or so, I started taking him back up to Morris Plains.

The drive became more of a burden, particularly when Paul reached an age where we wanted him to attend church school regularly. So Paul and I started attending FPC in 1997 and the rest, as they say, is history.

Mary is Catholic, and while she tried attending a few non-Catholic services with me, she never really felt comfortable. So that experience in New Providence was one of the only services we attempted attending as a family. Had I attended that service by myself, Paul would have stayed at home with Mary, and things might have turned out differently.

But they didn't.

I'm a strong believer that things work out a certain way as part of God's plan, so I think it was part of His plan that I end up at FPC.

It was certainly a great place to end up for Paul. Paul joyfully attended church school here, received his bible, enjoyed middlers, Summer Quest, senior highs, Montreat, spent many great years in Troop 33, became an Eagle Scout, and did his Eagle project to benefit the church. He also met Carol Thomson's daughter Karen here. They were friends for many years and they have now been dating for the past three years.

When I came here in 97, I attended regularly, and I gave regularly, and even helped out at a couple of Trustee work days, but I didn't become a member. I wasn't ready to get more involved at that point. So, knowing I have a hard time saying no to getting involved, I decided to wait a while to become a member.

In the fall of 2002 I joined FPC, and in the spring of 2003 I was asked to be on Session.

In early 2006, Paul Rack was our interim pastor and a PNC was being formed to find a new pastor. I was asked if I would be willing to serve on the PNC if needed. I'm not sure of the details, either someone wasn't sure if they could serve on the PNC, or perhaps someone changed their mind about being on the PNC. Whatever the case I wasn't sure whether I was on the slate

to be voted on until the day of the congregational meeting. As it happens, I was on the slate and became part of the PNC. Being part of the PNC began the chain of events for just about everything else I've done at FPC over the last nearly 8 years.

And we had the **best** PNC! We started with the strong foundation laid by the mission study group to try to find Christ's way, not our way. The nominating committee that selected the PNC wisely brought together people on all of the sides of the disputes that led to the departure of our former pastor. But there were no sides on the PNC. We didn't always agree, but we always got along, and really enjoyed each other's company through meetings every Monday night for a year. I think of the PNC whenever I see Graham Daniskas. Krista was on the PNC and Graham was born just as we were getting started. I recall phone interviews with candidates where Graham could be heard making little noises in the background. The PNC will always stand out as one of the highlights of my time at FPC.

And as the PNC was getting close to selecting a candidate, Liz Henderson spoke with me after a Sunday service and suggested, as only Liz can, that it would be unfortunate if our new pastor came in without a permanent clerk of session, and that she thought I would be a good person to fill the job. So, I took the one job that I particularly never wanted to have, and that led to a chain of events including the personnel committee, the second service committee, the search committee that brought Caroline here, and the capital campaign committee, and many other things.

Who knows how things might have been different if someone else had said yes to that PNC position. But they didn't. And who knows how things might have been different if Liz hadn't foreseen a problem and taken action. But she did.

Now let's get back to our sudden plans to move to Monroe. Mary and I have some very good friends named Bill and Bonnie. Bill and I have been close friends since high school. Bill and Bonnie have a daughter that is six days younger than Paul. Paul and Stephanie have been like brother and sister over the years. We've been on close to a dozen cruises with them. As fellow empty-nesters, Bill and Bonnie had been looking at places to move to, some as far away as North Carolina and Florida.

One day in late May, Bonnie asked Mary if she'd like to come with her to visit a 55 and over community in Monroe. So they went down there, and both loved the place. So both families made the decision to move there. There was a lot of pressure for a quick decision on our part, because while there were many units of the kind Bill and Bonnie were looking for, there was only one that met our needs, and it was already fully built and the builder was trying to move it.

So on Memorial Day we had no plans to move out of Scotch Plains, but two weeks later we had signed the papers. If Bonnie hadn't called Mary that morning, none of this might have happened. But it did.

I want to express my appreciation to all of you at FPC for the opportunities to serve that have been afforded me, and the trust and confidence that has been placed in me. I also want to thank

you for the opportunities to address you, as I am today. It is a humbling responsibility to make the best use of your time and attention in worship, and I pray that my words serve His purpose.

At its heart, my stewardship message has been pretty simple and consistent over the years:

- That we are charged to make the best use of the resources given to us by the Lord.
- That giving money is important, but giving of ourselves and our time is equally important.
- That it is through service to the church and to others that we grow in our relationship with the Lord.

I have talked about that last one quite a bit in the past, and would like to spend some more time on it today.

We often talk about being “called” to a particular kind of service. There have been a number of times that I have felt called to fill certain rolls in the life of the church. Sometimes the call is clear and direct feeling you have. Sometimes the call comes in the form of a messenger like Liz Henderson. Sometimes the call is a soft voice inside you that you’re not sure is really there, and that you might try to ignore for a while, but it persists. We all need to listen carefully for such calls, and to follow Liz’s example of being a messenger for the Holy Spirit when needed.

I have for some time felt the need to dial back the number of things I’m involved with at FPC, and the decision to move to Monroe has accelerated that need. A big part of the original need was based on my plans to take over operation of the company that I have been with for the past 21 years. That transition took place on July 1st of this year.

In addition to my departure, the coming year includes the planned or potential departure of the Chapmans, the Seavys, and the Cavicchias. I’m not sure I deserve to be included in the same category with those people who have been incredible church leaders at FPC for so long, but lets just say collectively these changes will leave many shoes to be filled.

This church has gone through a lot of transitions in the past several years. Our entire staff has turned over at least once in that period. And each of those departures was a difficult blow, particularly the passing of Barbara Knapp. But the Lord has blessed us with David, Tom, Judith, and Christie. I like to think that we are seeing God’s plan for FPC in action.

And in the same way that someone first had to say no for me to have a spot on the PNC, and in the same way that the clerk of session position had to be open for me to fill it, some of our current church leaders sometimes need to move on to create opportunities for others to fill.

As I have described in detail before, all churches these days are facing serious challenges. Church attendance is declining and it will be the churches that best navigate these difficult waters that will survive and prosper.

It is for this reason that we have embarked upon things like the second service and the capital campaign. But it is also for this reason that we have expanded our outreach in areas such as the meal ministries.

Our church's vision is "Growing in God's Love, Serving all God's People through Rejoicing, Renewing and Reaching Out". The more effectively we fulfill that vision, the more successful we will be as a church.

The size of Session has been reduced recently from 18 to 15 and now to 12 members. This was motivated by the smaller size of our congregation compared to decades ago, and the resulting difficulty in finding people to serve across all of the boards (Session, Trustees, Deacons, and Foundation Trustees). I believe the smaller size of Session will require a change in focus. That the Session needs to spend more time on the larger issue of how well we are fulfilling our vision.

Effectively fulfilling that vision is going to require bold leadership from the pastor and staff, but also from the lay leadership of the congregation.

So, what makes a good lay leader? You can decide how much weight to put on what I'm about to say depending on whether or not you think I'm a good lay leader.

First, don't be afraid to speak up. If you've ever been in a meeting with me, you know I don't have a problem expressing my opinion. I read that in experiments, people don't like to be the first to speak. So much so that people were much more likely to speak after someone else has already spoken, even if the first person said something stupid or not even related to the current topic. I use this research as an excuse for many of the remarks I've made in Session meetings.

I think the number of different things that I've had my hand in at FPC is an inspiration to some people and a cautionary tale to others. So this is either how to emulate this, or how not to, depending on your point of view. The short answer to how to get your hand in lot of things, is to say yes when people ask. Now for the long answer.

My mother was a nurse, still has boundless energy, and is incredibly generous with her time in service of others. I'm a slacker by any comparison with my mother. My father was a former ships captain who embodied the spirit "often wrong, but never in doubt". He never shied away from trying new things, and usually succeeded. I'd like to think I possess some of the better traits of both my mother and father.

My father fairly often asked me to do things that I only later learned were unusual things to ask of a child my age. When I was six my father got a new camera and gave me his old one. It had a separate light meter and required manually setting the aperture, shutter speed and focus. But I learned a lot and had a great time with that camera.

From those experiences I drew a conclusion that would prove invaluable during my career, namely that no one would ever ask me to do something unless they knew I could do it. That conclusion was completely wrong of course, a lot of people will ask you to do anything they

think you'll say yes to. But it has served me well because it has allowed me to take on responsibilities without fear of failure.

There is a quote a found years ago; I don't remember where. It addresses the fear that people have answering God's call to leadership: Secular leadership is something people can aspire to. Spiritual leadership, on the other hand, is not a role for which one applies. Rather, it is assigned by God. Historically, God has chosen ordinary people, most of who were not looking for a divine assignment. We will never be educated enough, or skilled enough, or confident enough, but we must be willing enough to obey His call.

So, you must trust that if you are called to take on a job, God will make sure you have what you need to succeed.

The last piece it to take responsibility. You might ask "For what?" For everything. If a door is locked that should be open, unlock it or find someone who can. If the parking lot is slippery and someone could get hurt, do something about it. As the anti-terror slogan goes "If you see something, say something". You'll sometimes see a news story where a person falls from a subway platform onto the tracks and someone jumps down to help them. Be the figurative person who jumps down onto the tracks at FPC. You want to act like FPC is a company and your life savings is invested in its stock. Don't assume someone else will act, so you don't need to.

And when all is said and done, never forget that we are all part of Jesus' church. A church whose central tenets are forgiveness and redemption. I have had a lot of different jobs in this church and I've done them well at some times and not very well at others.

My successes have always been met with appreciation and gratitude. My shortcomings have always been accepted with forgiveness and forbearance.

Your best will always be enough; for your bothers and sisters in Christ and for the Lord above.

So to summarize:

- Don't be afraid to speak up
- Don't be afraid to take on jobs – the Lord will provide
- Take responsibility and take action when action is needed
- Don't be afraid if things go wrong – that is what Jesus is here for

When I say "don't be afraid", what I really mean is that it is okay to be afraid, but don't let it stop you from acting.

There is not much that I'm afraid of in my church service, but there is one thing, and it is what I'm doing right now. I don't mind speaking in front of people. My fear is about what I say. That I won't say the right things; that I won't say something worthy of all your time; that I won't say the what is needed for where FPC is today. Even though I've done this many times, I feel the same way every time.

Getting back to my moving plans, I hope you won't be disappointed, but even though I'm moving very soon, you won't be completely rid of me for a while. I'm hoping to see the chancel renovations through to completion and will be working to find people to head up the other capital campaign projects. And Advent is a time I would like to be with my church family here at FPC, as much as possible.

In conclusion, thank you for being brothers and sisters in Christ for these past 16 years or so. Thank you for the opportunities you've given me. Thank you for the trust you've placed in me. Thank you for your prayers when I have needed them. And thank you for your generosity in spirit that has made worship and service here so meaningful.

The Lord bless you and keep you.