

DOING MORE TOGETHER

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, 'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷"In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young people shall see visions, and your old people shall dream dreams. ¹⁸Even upon my servants, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

37 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, 'Brothers, what should we do?' ³⁸Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.' ⁴⁰And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.' ⁴¹So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. ⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Acts 2:14-18, 37-47)

As many of you know, there's been a big change in my family in the last year. That change arrived at a little more than eight pounds and has since topped sixteen pounds. Since Julian's arrival, I have begun to see the world in a whole new way. People told me that having children was wonderful, and I always believed it to be true, but experiencing it is something else. Julian has helped me to understand love in a whole new way and view life differently. Suddenly, I became both excited and worried about the world my son is growing up in.

Of course, I already have dreams for Julian. While it would be nice if he became a pro athlete (and took care of his parents in their old age) or the president of the United States (and brought about world peace), my dreams for him have a lot less to do with what he will do, than what kind of person he will become and what kind of character he will

possess. I want him to be loving towards others and to know he is loved. I want him to know the power he has inside of him to make the world a better place. I want him to value people who are different than him and learn to find common ground with them. I want him to have an abiding sense that God is present in his life and available to him as he faces life's challenges.

I believe that outside of his own home, the place that will help Julian to become these things is the church.

In today's scripture passage which tells of the beginning of the very first church, Peter preaches the famous sermon at Pentecost, in which he quotes the prophet Joel. Peter declares that the events of Pentecost reveal that Joel's prophecy is being fulfilled. God's Spirit has been poured out on all people, daughters and sons, young and old, slave and free. The Spirit provides them with visions and dreams of God's wondrous works and new eyes to view themselves and the world.

Today, the Spirit offers us new eyes to view our world and ourselves. My hope is that God will give all of us dreams and visions of what we want our church to be—for our children and grandchildren and for us. What kind of exciting things does God have in store for us?

Getting back to those dreams for Julian—I look to the church as an important place for him to develop life-giving relationships with people of all ages. I want him to know that here is a place where he can find support when he faces life's challenges. With that in mind, in the coming weeks and months we will be looking at new ways to care for our oldest members, especially the growing number of church members who are homebound or in long-term rehabilitation. One of those efforts that will start soon is a support group for people who are caring for an aging parent or spouse. Jimmy and I have been approached by several of these families who are looking for additional support and care.

I also want Julian to learn that everyone can share the love of God with others—no matter how young or how old they are. The Board of Christian Education will continue its great work of offering a monthly Helping Hands Project, where our children make cards for our homebound members or send health care items to children in Iraq. Our youth also will continue their mission trips and other service projects. Yet, in keeping with our theme this year of "Doing More Together," we will also begin some new relationships with people and organizations. Thanks to the leadership of Regina Paul, our youth will begin next month going to Family Inn sponsored by Homes for the Homeless to work with homeless children. Also, as Jimmy will tell you in a moment, thanks to the leadership of David MacGown, we're developing a relationship with the Booker T. Washington Center in East Harlem. This should provide us with some great opportunities to minister to others and to be ministered to in return.

Finally, I want Julian to realize that he has a say in what goes on in his church. With that goal in mind for all of our children, we will be establishing a youth council made up of

youth and adults. This group will be responsible for organizing and planning youth events, so that our youth can have ownership over how they fit into our church.

I believe that in the coming days, God will provide many of us with dreams and visions for our church and the place of our children, grandchildren and ourselves in it. As we talk about stewardship, what we are talking about is making these dreams a reality. The church has a unique role to play in our world, and our particular church has a unique and exciting role to play in our community. Let us dream together and make the dreams that God has given us a reality.

Rev. Chase Peeples
The Congregational Church of Manhasset, New York (UCC)
October 19, 2003
Stewardship Sunday
Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

DOING MORE TOGETHER

This year's Stewardship Campaign is about more than raising money. We all know that money is necessary to support the mission and ministry of our church. We certainly wouldn't be here without it. From electric bills and repairs, to salaries and Sunday School materials, it costs a lot to run a church. Having said that, we need to remember that money-making is not our purpose. It is rather, the means to an end, or rather the means to our calling. The church's calling is not to make money, but to show love. And so as we think about stewardship, let's think about how we can support our church's mission to show that love. I believe that we're already on the right road. And I want to talk this morning about how we can expand our mission even further, by doing more together.

One of the ways Rev. Peeples and I would like our church to do more together is by reaching out. If you're like me, you want to get out there and help people, but you may not know where to start. And even though it's on your to do list, somehow, it just doesn't happen. You'd love to donate some time in a soup kitchen or tutor a child or repair an elderly person's home, but frankly, you need someone to make it easy for you. Someone to take care of the details, to tell you when to show up and what to do. There's nothing wrong with that. In fact, I think that our church should make it easy. That's why I'm working with our Board of Mission and Outreach to find one way each month that we can all become personally involved and do more, together. Some months we'll continue a successful project from the past—the blood drive and food drive in November, our Angel Tree in December. But we'll also be organizing new projects. We hope to encourage everyone to join our youth in their new efforts at the Family Inn sponsored by Homes for the Homeless. And we're working on other projects as well. This past Friday, our Mission and Outreach Chair, Dave MacGown, Rev. Peeples, and I visited the Booker T. Washington Center sponsored by the Church of the Resurrection in East Harlem to see if there were ways our members could volunteer there. We're also

working to set a date with Rebuilding Long Island Inc. to help repair the homes of low-income and elderly Long Islanders. We're contacting God's Love We Deliver in the city to set a date to prepare food for people with AIDS. We're in dialogue with the Interfaith Nutrition Network about setting up volunteer opportunities at food pantries and soup kitchens. And we'll be telling you how you can get more involved with our church's own ministry, Adventures in Learning.

All of these new initiatives are being undertaken with the knowledge that most of us are overbooked and under-rested. Nevertheless, the truth is, once we get over the initial inertia, taking the time to help other people can actually reenergize us, bringing joy and fulfillment to our lives. Another benefit of "doing more together" is the "together" part. Working to improve the community around us helps build community within our own family of faith. We have a lot of new members in our church family, and when we paint a room together in a homeless shelter or make sandwiches side by side in a soup kitchen, we have the opportunity to get to know each other on a whole new level. When Traci Quackenbush first began tutoring kids at Adventures in Learning, she also began a friendship with Maggie Grundman that has only deepened through the years. Let's deepen our relationships as we love our neighbors. Let's do more together by reaching out.

Another way we'll do more together is by staying after, after church that is. The fact of the matter is we grow in our relationships with one another by spending time together. I want us to spend some time together in small groups, learning about our faith, hearing from one another, growing spiritually. We're all at different levels in our journey. Some of us have read all the great theologians and some of us feel like we need to attend Sunday School again. Some of us are on a spiritual high, and some of us are still searching. That's ok. You can come as you are. Our main target time will be right after church on Sundays, when you're already here. That's when we're starting our book club that will meet every other month. All of the books will have themes dealing with faith or another religious theme, and our first book will be *The Da Vinci Code*. I know a number of you have already read it. I started it two nights ago, and stayed up way too late reading it. I can't wait to hear your take on it. Chase will lead our discussion following worship on November 16th. And yes, there will be childcare. What a great way to talk about our lives and our faith, and to get to know each other a little better.

In addition to our book club, we'll have after church events to discuss topics relevant to our everyday lives. In December we'll talk about ways to make sure that the true meaning of Christmas doesn't get lost in the busy holiday shuffle. This will be especially aimed at parents and grandparents of school age children. Other after-church events may focus on children and spirituality, nurturing our marriages and other significant relationships, or other practical topics that can help us find more meaning in life. All of our conversations will be aimed at helping us deepen our spirituality in very practical ways. When we stay after church for a book club or conversation, we're giving ourselves time to grow spiritually and time to grow our relationships with one another. Let's do more together by staying after.

With all of these new initiatives, we will continue to improve already existing ministries and programs that make such a difference in people's lives. Our children's ministry will continue offering weekly Sunday School to teach our children about the Bible and God. And they'll learn to follow the loving ways of Jesus as they do their monthly helping hands projects. Our youth will grow in their faith through retreats, youth Sunday School, Confirmation, and special P.F. events. They will learn the value and the joy of hands on ministry through ongoing service projects. And their annual Mission Trip—a week spent away from here, dedicated to helping others—will continue to promise lots of hard work, great fun, and concentrated time to think about how they can use their lives for God. Our music ministry will continue lifting our hearts and enriching our lives week after week with anthems and solos, concerts and hand bells. They will inspire our spirits and stir our souls with the beauty of the human voice set to music. And our church will continue to host groups for every age group throughout the week from children seeking fun in Scouts to adults seeking help in AA, from nursery school children learning their ABC's to people starting over in our New Horizon's Group, from the Women's Club who sponsors our amazing Antiques Fair to our Men's Club who sponsors an amazing array of speakers. Our church will continue to be a center for our community, a place where Long Islanders can come for help, inspiration, counseling, and spiritual nourishment, a place where people can grow closer to God and one another.

Just like the ancient church in Jerusalem we heard about in today's scripture lesson, our church stands at the beginning of an exciting new chapter in our history. Like those disciples who were inspired by God's dreams and visions, we too are only just beginning to perceive all that God has in store for our church. Sure we have some ideas about ways that God wants us to do more together, but I'm sure there is always more. Today in the brunch there will be note cards on the tables so that you can offer us ideas of how we can do more together. My hope and my intention is that this year's stewardship campaign will be the beginning of a long conversation, a congregation-wide conversation about big dreams and big plans for our church's continued ministry. There is something that God wants each of us to do through the ministry of this church. Everyone has something to contribute. My hope and prayer in the coming weeks and months is that we will share our ideas and dreams. May the Spirit continue to open our minds that we might find God's purpose for our congregation, open our hearts that we might fulfill God's vision of love in the world, and open our hands that we might continue to bring healing and hope throughout our community, our nation, and our world. AMEN.

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PASTORAL PRAYER

Eternal God, we thank you for all of life's blessings, friends and family and a place to worship. You have given us so much and we ask your help in learning how to give back. The needs of the world are great, but our resources are great too. Challenge to use all that we have and all that we are to make a lasting difference in the world. Give our church wisdom as we seek to dream big dreams and see new visions for our mission in this community and throughout the world. Open our minds, our hearts, and our hands that we might do more and do it to your glory. Through Jesus Christ we pray. AMEN.