

November 20, 2023

I love our church.

Looking Back on 2023

The story has been one of a church growing in maturity, intimacy, service, and joy.

A few weeks ago, the Bishop told me he'd never seen a coffee hour quite like ours, and I think it's because you've invested so much time together helping one another with strollers and walkers, laughing, loving, praying, confessing, and pointing one another to Christ.

For me, I think I saw it most clearly at our services in the park, while our road was being repaired, again at the Fall Festival, in the reports of the Kairos prison ministry, and then most recently in the Adult Forum as we gave to the ministry in Tanzania; put succinctly we are a community church preaching the gospel.

Looking Ahead to 2024

As we think about how the budget relates to all of this, I'd like to thank you for the resources you gave to add a part-time post solely responsible for pastoral care to our oldest members. It has been a profound blessing to our church. In fact, I believe it's one of the best programmatic changes we've made in my time here.

There's a lot of hope for the future as well. In 2024, we'll graduate the largest group yet from Children's Ministry into our Youth Group. These children know far more about the Lord than I did at their age, and have more godly friends than I had. They will be the new leaders of the church and the world one day, so we need to invest in them as well.

We're taking several of our older youths through a new multi-year program of in-depth discipleship as we prepare them to thrive independently when they graduate high school. Last week Kat and I went to Youth Group along with the other parents and we got to see for ourselves just how excellent their teaching, fellowship, and vision for mission has become.

In the West, our elders are often neglected, and our youngsters are bombarded with inane jokes, hopelessness, and filth. As I reflect on 2023 and look ahead to 2024, I see that our church is uniquely placed in Fox Chapel to do something counter-cultural for our oldest and youngest members in the place that God has given us to steward.

With a bit more money, we could spend even more strategically, investing more in staff, resources for events, and program materials. And then we could look ahead to some bigger dreams like adding another home group, planning our first residential church retreat, or hiring a new curate to send out and run a church elsewhere.

The Theology of Giving

We do a lot of things well for quite a small church. But the main reason to give is not because this church is good, or because we could make it even better. The reason is because God calls us to give. He wants us to respond to the abundance of His giving by giving something symbolically abundant in return.

The verse for this year's campaign comes from 2 Corinthians 9:7-8:

Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

We want people to give cheerfully because we want to be a cheerful church. And we want people to give abundantly because we want to be an abundant church that has more than enough to do everything properly and then to give even more away.

What next?

For those wanting a guideline or place to start, the consistent call of scripture is for a tithe or 10% of income. For those who find this too legalistic, the ultimate call is for something more sacrificial beyond that.

For those who simply wish to update their giving to take account of inflation, the advertised national rate is 3.7%. We think the effect on our church locally is perhaps a little higher. So, if you want your giving power to remain the same, we'd be looking for an increase of 4%.

We know that not everyone can give as much as they would like because others have a say in how their family budgets work. But, within those constraints, when you've thought about the vision and prayed through the biblical call to give, *the single most helpful thing you can do for the vestry is to let them know what you intend to give in 2024.*

You can communicate via the website, app, e-mail link, or paper form, and the Vestry will do its best to spend every kingdom dollar faithfully as those who account to you and to Christ for their work.

Thank you for loving Jesus, each other, and our town, and for choosing to do so here.

Love in Christ,



Rev'd Alex
Rector