

FIRST COVENANT LAMPLIGHTER

*First Covenant Church
Virginia, Minnesota
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NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS: THE TWO LISTS

I was fortunate to spend time with an enigmatic man named Robert during a very special period of my life. Robert taught me many things during our days together, and this time of year reminds me of one particular interaction we had.

"Now that you are becoming more aware," Robert said, "you need to begin to set goals for yourself so you don't lose the momentum you have built."

"Like New Year's resolutions?" I asked.

"That's an interesting idea," he smirked. "Let's do that."

By then I was used to his cryptic responses, so I knew something was up because of the way his eyes sparkled as he let out an impish laugh.

"Tonight's assignment is to make two lists," Robert continued. "The first is a list of all the New Year's resolutions you WANT to keep, and the second is a list of all the New Year's resolutions you WILL keep. Write the WANT List first, and when you have exhausted all of your ideas, then write the second list on another sheet of paper."

That night I went home and spent several hours working on the two lists. The WANT List felt overwhelming at first, but after a while I got into writing all the things I had always wanted to do if the burdens of life hadn't gotten in the way. After nearly an

hour, the list swelled to fill the entire page and contained nearly all of my ideas of an ideal life. The second list was much easier, and I was able to quickly commit ten practical resolutions that I felt would be both realistic and helpful.

The next day, I met Robert in front of the local food Co-op, where we seemed to have most of our enlightening conversations. "Tell me about your two lists," Robert said as the familiar smirk crept onto his face.

"The first list contains all the things I SHOULD do if I completely changed my life to be the person I always wanted to be. And the second list contains all the things I COULD do by accepting my current life, and taking realistic steps towards the life I want to lead."

"Let me see the second list," he said.

I handed him the second list, and without even looking at it, he ripped the paper into tiny pieces and threw it in the nearby garbage can. His disregard for the effort I had put into the list annoyed me at first, but after I calmed down I began to think about the first list in a different light. In my heart, I knew the second list was a cop out, and the first list was the only one that really mattered.

"And now, the first list." Robert bowed his head and held out both of his hands.

I purposefully handed him the first list and held his gaze for several seconds, waiting for him to begin reading the page. After an unusually long silence, he

began to crumple the paper into a ball and once again tossed it into the can without looking at it.

"What did you do that for?!" I couldn't hide my anger any longer.

Robert began to speak in a quiet and assured voice. "What you **SHOULD** or **COULD** do with your life no longer matters. The only thing that matters, from this day forward, is what you **MUST** do."

He then drew a folded piece of paper from his back pocket and handed it to me.

I opened it carefully, and found a single word floating in the middle of the white page:

"Love."

—Steve Blum

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." —Jesus

FIRST COVENANT CHURCH PURPOSE STATEMENT

**The mission of First Covenant Church is
to worship God,
equip people to live in faith,
share God's love,
and serve the community around us.**

SERVING CHRIST IN HIS CHURCH

Ushers:

Jan. 1—Linda Skogman
Jan. 8—Roger & Judy Linden
Jan. 15—Lloyd & Muriel Stanaway
Jan. 22—Mike & Kathy Hannay
Jan. 29—Brian & Julie Hill
Feb. 5—Ken & Linda Pogorelec

Sound Technicians:

Jan. 1—Roger Johnston
Jan. 8—Mike Hannay
Jan. 15—Roger Johnston
Jan. 22—Mike Hannay
Jan. 29—Roger Johnston
Feb. 5—Mike Hannay

MONTHLY FINANCIAL REPORT

11/1/16-11/30/16

Checking account balance as Nov. 1st: **\$4827.39**

General Fund income for current period: **\$4520.99**

Other income: **\$2588.42**

Rental income: **\$125.00**

Total expenses for current period: **\$6041.**

Checking account balance as of Nov. 30th: **\$5964.62**

PASTORAL SEARCH COMMITTEE UPDATE

The Pastoral Search Committee met with Jon Kramka, NWC Director of Congregational Vitality on December 14th. It was an informative meeting in that he gave us a thorough briefing on what our task will be throughout the entire process, culminating in the recommendation to extend a call to our next pastor.

We are currently working on a congregational survey to be completed by members and regular attenders.

The survey is specifically designed for each of you to indicate the type of pastor you would prefer with various categories to select from as well as essay questions that you can further elaborate on. It is vitally important that we receive everyone's (members and regular attenders alike) completed survey. Your input is necessary for the committee to develop a "profile" of the personality/ministry qualities we're looking for in our future pastor. When you get your survey in the mail, please return it within the next week using the stamped envelope provided.

We would also like to develop a "Volunteer Prayer Team" that would individually pray for the Pastoral Search Committee on a regular basis and specifically during the time we meet as posted in the bulletin. If you are interested, a sign-up sheet is available. Whether you decide to be on the prayer team or not, we want to encourage everyone to keep the committee in your prayers as we are confident that God will lead us through the prayers of many and eventually direct us toward the person He wants us to have as our next pastor.

– Roger Linden, Chair

CHURCH ANNUAL MEETING

Our Annual Meeting will be held at 11:00 a. m. on Sunday, January 29th. It is very important that all members and friends of the church be present as we review the work of the church over the past year and look forward to our ministry in the new year, including calling a permanent pastor. Organizational and financial reports should be turned in to the church office by Sunday, the 15th, to allow for preparation of the annual report booklet.

COVENANT PARK ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Meeting of Covenant Park Bible Camp will be held on Saturday, January 21st at Gethsemane Covenant Church in Duluth. Brunch will be served at 9:30 a.m., followed by the meeting. This is our camp, so it would be good if our church could be represented as the past summer is reviewed and plans for the coming year are discussed.

VITALITY IS VITAL

At Pastor Dick's suggestion, we are going to begin including a regular feature in the monthly newsletter to give members of our church family the opportunity to write about how they are growing in their spiritual lives or to share something they have been reading and how it has been impacting them. Sharing about growth in people is a good way to help others grow. Don't be bashful. If you have something you would like to share, simply give it to Editor Wayne Christiansen or e-mail it to him at wbchris@q.com. We are anxious to have you participate in this way.

NORTH ST. LOUIS COUNTY HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

Vision: A world where everyone has a decent place to live.

Mission: Seeking to put God's love into action, Habitat for Humanity brings people together to build homes, communities, and hope.

Habitat for Humanity at glance:

- In 2015, 92.4 cents of every dollar went into building homes.
- Partner families must qualify for an affordable 30-year mortgage and make a \$1000 downpayment.
- Each partner family invests over 300 hours of "sweat equity."
- The affordable mortgage payment for a Habitat home ranges between \$450 and \$700 per month, which includes taxes and insurance.
- Habitat homeowners' monthly mortgage payments are reinvested and build one home a year.
- Since 1995, a total of 78 families have been helped.
- Habitat is currently accepting applications for the 2017 building season.
- The Habitat model works because of faithful donors and volunteers.
- Volunteers contribute over 2500 hours per home to build hope in our partner families' lives.

OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD

Thanks to those who provided items to help fill the 14 shoeboxes we sent to Operation Christmas Child. While we do not know the exact countries which received our boxes, we do know that the boxes collected at our local distribution center went to Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania, and Ecuador.

UPDATE

FROM STEVE AND BARB SWANSON

We are enjoying a lovely 5 week break from travel, just speaking locally here in Minnesota. Check out our travel schedule in this update ~ it will get busy once again in mid January! Yet we are really excited to be out with ministry partners to share our thanks and updates about what God is doing in Europe and in our lives personally as He continues to call us to this work among refugees and immigrants.

~Dates have been scheduled in mid February and mid March for 4 Wednesday evenings to do a Sharing Lives course at Bloomington Covenant Church, Bloomington, MN. This is a great introduction course for anyone interested in knowing more about how to share their lives with Muslims. Pray for the time that we'll need to prepare for this course, in addition to the traveling that we'll be doing during those months.

~We turned in our visa applications to the Swedish Consulate in Chicago just before Thanksgiving. Pray that God would shine with favor on our application, and that we would receive the permission that we will need to live and work in Sweden. Providing our financial support has been raised and our resident visas approved, we hope to move to Sweden in late June 2017.

~We started our first baby steps towards learning the Swedish language here in Minneapolis at a local community college. Not the immersion experience that we need to really learn a new language, but it got our feet wet and our hearts are full with desire to take on this new challenge. Basically, we walked

away with loads of new vocabulary, some grammar rules (ever so important), and we figure we'll work on the pronunciation differences when we actually get to Sweden next year. Pray that God will give us the gift of language learning in the coming years!

-January 9, 2017. It's an important date, as we pray alongside our partner church in Sweden for a three week long outreach event that will take place in Malmö beginning October 9, 2017. This start date in January is the launch of a nine month commitment to pray, and we're excited to join in even as we anticipate our participation in this important outreach event when we arrive in Sweden. Be looking for more prayer updates in the coming months! For now, pray for the team that will be organizing the weeks of outreach activities, that they will work well together as a team. Pray for the Holy Spirit to be present in all planning and conversations that will be necessary. Pray already now for the lives that will be impacted with the life changing truth of Jesus in October.

COVENANT TRUST COMPANY

Charitable giving is on the hearts and minds of many as we make decisions about how to give faithfully in the new year. But charitable giving is not only an important expression of our faith; it is also a significant part of our finances. And as with any other part of our finances, creating a strategy can make for a more effective and efficient use of our resources.

So how can we decide who we will give to, how we will give, and how much we will give? In 2 Corinthians 9:7, the Apostle Paul writes, "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." Deciding who to give to and how much can be difficult if you are passionate about many different causes. However, it's important to realize that you can't afford to donate to everyone and everything. So take your time when deciding who to give to and how much

to give. Pray. Discuss your options with your family. Give cheerfully.

How will you donate to your chosen charities? Perhaps the most common way is to write checks or give cash. But did you know Covenant ministries like First Covenant Church and many other charities can accept investments and other assets as donations? You can give stocks, leave assets through a will or Revocable Living Trust, open a Charitable Gift Annuity, and even give through your IRA with the IRA Qualified Charitable Distribution. Gifts like these can increase the impact of your donation while providing you with unique tax savings.

As Paul said, decide in your heart first, then give during this new year. Give it adequate thought and discernment; prayer, and time. And if you would like Covenant Trust Company to help you discern and plan your charitable giving, contact:

Steve Allison

218-297-7701

srallison@covenanttrust.com

Remember that no matter who you give to and how much you give, God can use and multiply your gift. So regardless of what decision you make with your charitable gifts, trust that God will use it to bless others.

THANK YOU NOTE

Thank you so much for your ongoing support of the ministry of Adventurous Christians, which helps provide a wonderful setting for people of all ages to experience God's love through wilderness and community and to grow in their relationship to Jesus Christ.

Our retreat staff, Michael and Alyssa Chmielewski, have been a wonderful addition to our transi-

tion. We have been working hard preparing for the winter retreats, chopping wood, deep cleaning, baking, site prep, and more. We have been painting the new Retreat Building and will host guests here beginning in January. In the spring we will be putting in the flooring and trim work.

Again, thank you for your faithful support. Blessings from the woods!

Brooke Shannon

Director of Guest Services

JANUARY BIRTHDAY

Gail Johnston 6th

AMONG US

Congratulations to **Mike Hannay** on his retirement from St. Louis County Social Services.

Carolyn Erickson is at Cornerstone Villa, 1000 Forest Street, Buhl, for therapy.

Shirley Koski and her family spent Christmas together in Mazatlán, Mexico.

BULLETIN, CALENDAR, AND NEWSLETTER DEADLINES

Items for the February calendar need to be e-mailed or in the church office by Sunday, January 15th. Weekly bulletin items should be e-mailed or brought to the church office by 9:00 a.m. Wednesday. E-mailed items need to have either "calendar" or "bulletin" in the subject line.

Items for the February issue of the **Lamplighter** should be turned in by Sunday, January 22nd. Items may be submitted by e-mail to **wbchris@q.com**. Remember that we are always looking for news of interest for the "Among Us" column.