



Newsletter for December 2023

Greetings.

This month is Advent. As we quiet our hearts to welcome the Christ child let us put down our weapons. Our weapons of mass destruction: unkind words, rushed responses, a cowardly retreat, lack of RESPECT. Let us bring healing to our world.

I watched the documentary “American Symphony” about Jon Batiste and his wife Suleika Jaouad on Netflix last night. It was a deeply Christian portrayal of art, love and the creative process. It spoke to me about facing health fears alone yet with each other, with a symphony of people and the community of saints. A good friend, Karen Kim who was 52 years old, died in October. I grieve her passing. My regrets will be channeled into making time for people and metaphysical touching as the Spirit prompts. May your Advent season be peppered with abundant joy and deep blessings.

Budgets are passed and we look forward to the new year. In faith we passed a budget that is backed by historical giving and a planned draw from our investment assets. Without an infusion into our investments, our future operating budgets will not keep up with inflation or will deplete a sustainable corpus. That means less staff and less help for our struggling churches. When we keep the holy currencies flowing, we are rich beyond all measure. It is my hope and intention that we circulate and grow ALL our currencies so the future Presbyterian part of the kingdom of God will impact the Bay Area.

Are you flush and looking forward to giving generously for the holidays? Are you short and worried about how you will pay off the credit cards? Somewhere in between? Financial Independence was my goal after business school, and we achieved it at age 59. Please talk to me if you like thinking and talking about these things. Often within our churches these discussions bring discomfort or dis-ease. Will your church meet all its obligations and be able to expand its ministries? Is your church able to reach out to sister churches to build the connectional body together? Good property and financial management and generosity must be practiced at all levels. Cindy Cake and I learned at the Presbyterian Finance Conference that

Americans give 2% to charity. Mainline church members may give 4%. This giving is to non-profit charities not necessarily to support their church. The lower 60% of Americans are getting poorer and the top 1% is getting much richer. Given that a diverse church will have economic and racial diversity the racial ethnic churches in poor neighborhoods may be economically affected more so. Since the aging church is made up of seniors on fixed incomes with basics costing more, all churches will be affected. On that note the Partnership Working Group will be reconstituted in the New Year. The FPOC will distribute endowment grants. We have a Presbytery Deacon's Fund. I am very pleased that the FPOC will be full with 15 members. It is my hope that many of these members will be available to assist any churches that need help with mission, financial and property issues.

For my last note of the year, I want to introduce Rev Mark Elsdon. He is director of Pres House at the University of Madison Wisconsin where he hosts 240 residents and oversaw a \$17 million dollar development project. Their property is worth \$30 million but more importantly serves 1000 student residents a year. He went to Cal Berkeley so we lamented together the loss of Westminster House. I spoke with him today about his non-profit [Rooted Good](#) which make resources available to assist churches and denominational entities with envisioning the use of their properties. The [Good Futures Accelerator](#) looks like a good toolbox for churches ready to embark on a journey. Rooted Good is working with PMA to make these resources available Presbytery wide at a discount.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Marda Quon Stothers
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