

Aldersgate United Methodist Church
Sunday, October 19, 2025
“Generous Hearts” (Laity Sunday)
Pastor Sue McNicol

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8:7-15

⁷ Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you ^(and your love for us)—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking. ^(gift of grace)

⁸ I do not say this as a command, but I am, by mentioning the eagerness of others, testing the genuineness of your love. ⁹ For you know the generous act ^(gift of grace) of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. ¹⁰ And in this matter, I am giving my opinion: it is beneficial for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something. ¹¹ Now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. ¹² For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have. ¹³ For I do not mean that there should be relief for others and hardship for you, but it is a question of equality between ¹⁴ your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may also supply your need, in order that there may be equality. ¹⁵ As it is written, “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.”

Have you noticed this past week how leaves are plummeting to the ground, snow is creeping in, and fog is hanging low in the valleys? It’s officially a new season in Montana and change is apparent. This past week I’ve started checking the road report and highway road cams before taking off on my commutes, and I completed that yearly task of swapping out one set of clothing for another. In the roles of church leadership, we’ve started planning for new seasons coming soon as well, Advent, then Christmas. But at the moment, we’re in the season I like to call “paperwork purgatory.” (you know – *purgatory* - a place of anguish or suffering – or perhaps we should say that place of purification before being received into heaven.) It’s the time of year when pastors and church lay leaders and committee leads come together to submit all types of

reports to our Church Conference about anything and everything we do, or touch, or dream about.

Our scripture reading this morning comes as we explore the topic of “stewardship” in our church year, and as we review the many ways we use our resources to continue our ministry. As a simple definition: stewardship entails the responsibility Christians have in maintaining and using wisely the gifts that God has bestowed. It’s when we, as collaborators with God, serve as stewards of gifts trusted to our care, to carry out God’s message through the works of our faith community. Our first instinct when we think of “stewardship” may be to think of money. How are the financial resources of our faith community invested and distributed and what keeps us going financially? Well, that’s certainly a part of our stewardship responsibility. But so to is our commitment to recognizing the many spiritual gifts and talents of our community and working together to carry out our mission as Aldersgate UMC. Our mission statement says: we are a community growing in Christ, led by the Holy Spirit, **Welcoming** to all, **Gathering** in relationship to inspire and nurture a spirit of compassion, and **Serving** each other, the community and the world, wherever there is need.

One of the many reports we must submit to the Church Conference is called the “Pastor’s Report.” Our UMC Book of Discipline advises the report to contain the following:

The Pastor shall give a **written report** on the state of the church and an account of pastoral ministry as it relates to (§ 340): providing support, guidance, and training to the lay membership in the church; ministering within the congregation and to the world; and administering the temporal affairs of the congregation. (§ 349).

I think a sermon on “Generous Hearts” is the perfect place to highlight what *we* as a faith community, (mainly you, and a little of me) have been up to this past year and we will have completed my Pastor’s Report and discussed how we’re doing (stewardship-wise) and where we might go from here. How’s that for multi-tasking some paperwork, discussing our church stewardship and giving thanks for everything you do (on this Laity Sunday) all as part of my sermon AND our shared time together this morning?

Aldersgate UMC is first and foremost a place of welcome, gathering and service as our mission statement says. As a **welcoming** church we have provided opportunities for worship, education, shared space (use of our facility by others in the community), a place for children and youth to

receive education, nurture and support, and an environment of openness and warmth. Our ***gathering*** certainly happens in our church building, but we also gather in our community with other faith communities (i.e. our ecumenical Service in the Park), and with groups outside our traditional worship schedule (Walk to Emmaus 4th Day Groups, visits with the homebound or those in care facilities). We open our doors to community groups such as Red Cross, the Girl Scouts, Butte Miners Baseball, SPARCS, concerts and community performances.

Exploring our mission of ***serving*** would take much longer than I have here today. In short, we serve others through projects and ministries with the Butte Rescue Mission, UMCOR, our neighborhood schools, the community rummage sale, Harvest Dinner/Sandwich Ministry, BUMP Shoeboxes, clothing drives and, well...this is where we just add, “fill in the blank.” Our ***serving*** has no finish line. Within our own faith community, we strengthen our relationship with God and one another through adult education classes, bible studies, special celebrations honoring graduates, our many beloved “saints”, long-term members and those we’ve baptized, joined in marriage and celebrated at their passing.

So often we lose sight of the servants who are continually supporting our mission behind the scenes. Those in our midst who make it all happen – the glue! Committee and team members, lay leaders, worship preparers and participants, church employees and supportive community neighbors and friends. The ministry that takes place in our midst comes from (and through) all of you.

Today’s scripture reading represents the heart of Paul’s appeal to the Corinthian Christians to fulfill their pledge to the collection for “the poor among the saints of Jerusalem.” Verse 7 says, ⁷Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you ^(and your love for us)—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking. ^(gift of grace.) Paul assures them that his council is not a command but an appeal to show “that your love is also genuine.” The reading goes on to explain the implications of this theological economy – what we might refer to as stewardship. Our church economy excels as a generous undertaking (gift of grace) thanks to God and all of you. We sustain, grow, improve, and share year-by-year because of your gifts. The gifts of your financial support, your labor and your love. It’s through these gifts we have been fortunate enough to continue our normal church upkeep and ministry operations. We have made improvements to our facility, highlighted this year with the

completion of our kitchen remodel, and we've strengthened our connection to our congregation by transitioning to Ministry Brands (our new church management software). We are also preparing to convert to solar energy in the spring with the implementation of our Solar Project.

As the Body of Christ, we continue to care for one another and for our community by sharing what we have. Your generous giving has remained consistent and allows us to stay faithful through financial challenges, as well as plan for future ministries. We continue to make positive differences in our members' lives and the lives of the greater global community. Paul doesn't command the Corinthians to give under pressure. He invites them to grow spiritually through generosity.

Generosity is not an obligation—it's an invitation to share in what God is already doing.

In the United Methodist tradition, we talk about the means of grace—those practices that open us to God's presence and transformation. Generosity is one of those practices. It opens our hearts. It loosens our grip. It teaches us trust. Our founder, John Wesley, said it this way:

“Gain all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can.”

Wesley didn't promote giving just to fix church budgets. He saw it as a spiritual discipline—a way to live in freedom and obedience to God.

Giving takes many forms – stewardship, service and prayer. I invite you to be open to all the ways you may be called to give, and all the ways we too can give back to you – physically, emotionally and spiritually.

How about we wrap up this Pastor's Report/Sermon with a resounding AMEN. (And I'll add a very heartfelt “Thank You.”!)

Today, let's ask God to help us excel in the grace of giving—out of love for Christ, and in love for our neighbor. And let's continually give thanks for all the ways we can and will serve as the hands and feet of Christ.

Let us be a people marked by grace, generosity, and joy—so that in all things, God may be glorified. Amen.