

God of grace and abundance, fill our hearts with your love, our ears with your words and our thoughts with your wisdom, as we lean into your stories of faith. Amen

"...it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something--now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means."

Once again, I stand in awe of how the Spirit moves in our midst. I did not specifically choose this text for today. At least, I didn't dig through the bible looking for something that would speak to us, as we let go of being members of St. Paul's; as we embrace the possibilities that will come when our resources are pooled together with the congregations of Rutland and First. Rather, this story of Paul encouraging the sharing of our abundance, is, in fact, one of the prescribed texts for this 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost.

It's been a year and half since we sat in the hall in the Seventh-Day Adventist building and you told me, loud and clear, that you thought it was time to have a conversation with the other United Churches in the area. You wanted to explore ways in which we can better serve God in this community and the world.

That directive led us to a Saturday conversation in February 2020, where I was really hoping we would have 30 people and instead, 100 interested, passionate folk showed up! The conversations were deep and rich. We shared ideas, hopes and dreams.

The leadership went away from that day with a clear directive. "The worst thing we could do is nothing" and that we needed to move forward in a timely manner with the intention of the day in our hearts.

Just two weeks later the pandemic forced us to close our buildings and discontinue in-person gatherings, but that did not dissuade the leaders of these congregations from being about the work they had been tasked with.

Over the next year, an Exploration Team, followed by the Amalgamation Steering Committee worked on your behalf, to determine how we can best work together, living out the gospel and expanding the work of the United Churches in the area.

Then, on March 14<sup>th</sup> of this year, at our Annual Congregational meeting, we voted almost unanimously to amalgamate. The people at Rutland and First United followed suit.

Without really knowing it, and yet knowing it completely in our hearts, we have responded to Paul's calling to share our abundance so that we can better live the gospel.

And now we stand on the precipice of this new thing, this new way of being. Some will take the next step with excitement, some with hesitation, and some with just a little bit of fear in their hearts.

What will happen next? How will we be together? What will I miss about this community? What new things will be possible? What will be birthed in and through our new relationships? Will my voice be heard? Are we bringing enough to the table of this new relationship?

These are always the type of questions that arise during an amalgamation process.

What Paul reminds us in today's reading is that we each have an abundance that we are bringing into this new community. If we think about it for a minute we will realize that some are bringing property, some are bringing financial security, some are bringing congregational numbers, some are bringing long-term ministry staff, and we all are bringing an abundant desire to serve God through our words and actions.

As one theologian states: "How believers use their resources — time, money, talents, and attention — is a reflection of what they believe about God and God's actions in the world. Furthermore, how those resources are used, preaches a message to others.

[This is precisely the message of today's text.] Paul wants the Corinthians' actions [and ours] to be a reflection of the gospel in which they [and we] believe."<sup>i</sup>

As the community of St. Paul's United we have listened to the Spirit, we have dared to trust in this process and the people that are leading us. We have even agreed to live in the midst of the confusion and uncertainty that comes with bringing together three congregations.

Why? Because, we have an understanding of what Paul speaks. To let go of that which we hold dearly, so that we can share our abundance with others even while they share their abundance with us, is indeed an act of grace. But it is more than that, it is also an act of service, of fellowship, and of blessing. It is "a tangible gesture of gospel solidarity and love."<sup>ii</sup>

I am so, incredibly proud of all of you! Your desire, your drive, your passion for the gospel radiates through and beyond this church family ... through and beyond the church family we are about to create. It is and will be a beacon of hope for this whole community and for the United Church of Canada.

We are not amalgamating out of desperation or a lack of resources, but rather, we are amalgamating in order to better resource the ministry of the church through the abundance we and each of the congregations bring to the table.

It is, as Paul states "a question of a fair balance between our present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for our need".

Of course, Paul wasn't talking about congregations amalgamating, but he was talking about how we support and live out the gospel, caring for the poor and those in need. Which is, in fact, what this amalgamation allows us to do more effectively.

The hopes and dreams for these coming years overflow with possibility! The excitement and passion that I hear in the leadership is palpable. We see, in this new congregation we are about to form, how much more is possible when we work together for the glory of God, because "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."

As we release what was and walk together into this new future, may we continue to seek to live in the ways of Jesus, offering one another the grace and hope, that he first offers to us!

Because "...it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something--now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means."

And in the ways of abundance, may our growth in numbers be nothing more than a reflection of our growth in faith. May our combined gifts, skills and passions enliven us to provide more fully for others; and may everything that we bring with us – our attitudes, our love for one another, our care for one another, our laughter, our music and song, our hospitality, our resilience, and our joy enhance our ministry in the months, years and decades to come as each of us and all of us together let our lights shine!

Thanks be to God for you! Thanks be to God for all that was!  
Thanks be to God for all that is to come! Amen

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<sup>i</sup> Works, Carla.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-13-2/commentary-on-2-corinthians-87-15>

<sup>ii</sup> Green, Garrett. Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol. 3