

When my sister-in-law lived in Gastonia, NC, she alerted me to a news item by Bob Williams in the Gaston Gazette in 2010. The story goes back to late June, 2008. Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Gastonia gathered in the fellowship hall to hear the results of a two-year capital campaign. The church was hoping to raise \$1.2 million to retire past debt and make new capital improvements. A sense of gloom settled over the gathering. Based on frequent pulpit announcements, people assumed that the goal was not nearly met. Contributing to the mood was the recent death of a dear couple in the congregation. Clyde died in May 2008 at age 92. His wife, Clara, died two weeks later, age 88. The couples' absence was palpable. Finally, the fund-raising chair announced how much had been pledged by the membership: \$400,000, a sizable amount but far short of goal. Then the pastor made a second announcement: That week, an anonymous donor had sent the church a check for \$800,000, to go toward capital improvements. Speechless for a moment, the congregation broke into applause. The pastor led a prayer of thanksgiving. No one but the pastor knew *then* what was only revealed two years later: the \$800,000 gift was from the estate of Clara and Clyde, who lived quietly and humbly in their tidy bungalow for 65 years of marriage. Childless, they kept a garden, wore ordinary clothes, and drove an older American-made car. Bob Williams wrote in the Gaston Gazette: "I had known the Motons for half-a-century. We sat on the same side of the aisle in church.

They had their imprints on the last bench. I thought I knew Clyde and Clara, but I didn't." Clyde was a retired salesman for A.B. Carter, a manufacturer of spinning and weaving machines. He was the laid-back one of the pair. Clyde grew up in Holy Trinity. Even in his nineties, he would usher when asked. Clara, the punctual and precise one, worked into her 70s for the local Metropolitan Life office. Back in 1991, they asked Mick McMahan, member of their church and a financial planner, to help them manage the assets which a different advisor, their lawyer, had placed in a revocable trust upon their retirement. They had made shrewd investments over the years in profitable companies, local and global. When asked to manage the funds in the trust, McMahan counted just over a million dollars. They were sweeping all dividends into CDs at several banks, \$100,000 per account. Over the next 17 years while McMahan advised them, their assets continued to grow. Out of their secure monthly income from the trust, the Motons tithed steadily to the church. When the church began its capital campaign in 2006, the Motons asked their attorney to put a charitable remainder clause in their will to benefit the campaign when both spouses died. And that gift, coming when it did, put the capital campaign over the top. McMahan, their financial advisor, who happened to be chair of the campaign, was as shocked as everyone else. Thus a modest couple lived on, even **More, Later**, in the memory and ministry of their beloved church. ■

Those of us who worshiped on Maundy Thursday a few weeks ago heard all of John, chapter 13. We recalled how Jesus washes the disciples' feet, and how Simon Peter protests, then relents. We gasped once again at the matter-of-fact way Jesus says to Judas, "Do what you've got to do." And we marveled as Jesus moves effortlessly from the topic of betrayal to the topic of love. Maundy Thursday is so named because of our passage today: "I give you a new commandment." In Latin the passage is called the Maundatum Novum, the same root as the English word "mandatory." Jesus knows he has little time before he goes where his followers cannot go. By nightfall next day, he will lie dead in a tomb. At table one last time with his disciples Jesus makes a request to the community that was to carry on after him. "Cherish one another," he mandates. "Just as I have cherished you, so you all should cherish one another." The word cherish is agapé, the kind of selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love that propels Jesus to the cross. Agapé often means doing hard things, such as forgiving, sacrificing, stooping to serve. Jesus embellishes the mandate: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you show your love for one another." In other words, the world is watching. Jesus' asks that his love be a will and testament to their love for one another and for the world. Agapé must be plain for all to see. Panicky at the thought of life without Jesus, Peter pleads, "Master, where are you going?" Anyone who has stood vigil beside a dying friend

knows the pathos behind that question. Knowing that his betrayer is even now carrying out the plot against him, Jesus repeats cryptically, "Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward." Jesus is saying, you will know **More, Later.** ■

At other times, Jesus has taught, "Love your neighbor," "love your enemy," "love the one who hates you." The Maundatum Novum challenge is even higher. Even harder than showing love to a neighbor or an enemy is to show agapé to a close friend, a family member, a brother or sister in the church fellowship. You know them too well. You have obligations toward them. There's a history of mutual expectations. Just think how hard it is to give the benefit of a doubt even to someone you love. (Especially to.) A story is often told in church-mission circles that while church volunteers are off in Appalachia, fixing up homes and drilling wells, the Appalachians themselves are off helping those even less fortunate than they. The reason this happens is a social paradox: In local communities, where everyone knows everyone's grandmother, people hesitate to help one another unless they are asked. But take them to foreign turf, they pitch right in. The same phenomenon propels individuals to give from their estates to those who wouldn't have accepted gifts during life, especially gifts of money. How much easier is it to give money anonymously – and posthumously, as did Clyde and Clara –

than to give money personally, during your life, to a relative or close friend?

So, it is no small thing Jesus demands of us, to love one another during our lives.

Here's how the world will know we're truly Christian.

- When we willingly and sincerely apologize to one another when we're mistaken or have failed to be helpful.
- When we approach conflict with mutually forgiving hearts, ready to make peace, and eager to restore faith.
- When we pray seriously for unity of purpose, even when we believe the other side is wrong.

Jesus is demanding intentional one-ness throughout the global Christian community.

We live that command far from perfectly.

Don't you suppose, in 65 years of membership, that Clara or Clyde

had their differences with the church?

Don't you imagine that from time to time they questioned the wisdom of the church budget?

Can't you believe that, ever so quietly, they wished that others would be as generous as they were?

Of course they did.

But they remained cheerful givers – sacrificial, humble givers – who stayed connected, even in death, to the community that gave them life abundant.

Their anonymous bequest, secret even to their money manager, says volumes about their discipleship. Their fiscal health, though excellent, was less their concern than their spiritual health. They lived in a mutually loving relationship with each other and with their family of faith, always giving, never expecting anything in return.

Their membership was an expression of themselves, just as their marriage all those years.

If we give extravagantly to our spouse, we do not feel it a sacrifice, but a joy.

If we sacrifice career advancement for a child, we do not count it a cost, but a privilege.

If we commit time and money to our alma maters we do so out of gratitude, not obligation.

If the church for you is in the same league as your spouse, your child, or your alma mater, it's because church is an extension of your *self*.

In the same way, the church is an extension of our Lord, Jesus Christ, who loved sacrificially.

Christians worship and adore the incarnate God, who took on human flesh, hungered, wept, suffered, died, and returned resurrected.

In his name, Christians feed the under-nourished, clothe the under-dressed, conserve the planet, preach redemption, and practice forgiveness.

It's not to sustain our names

but to sustain Christ's name that we leave legacies to churches and other ministries:

so that God's work continues, even **More, Later**.

One worship service every spring is designated by the General Assembly as "Wills Emphasis" Sunday.

Most Americans have no will at all when they die. Probate settles their assets according to state law, which gives no recognition to charitable causes.

So the first step

is to prepare a will with an attorney.

If you have a will, make sure it is up to date.

Bequests in the will,

such as charitable remainder trusts, can be written so as to be contingent

on satisfying your needs during life

as well as the expectations of other beneficiaries.

Leaving the church a bequest in your will –

**More, Later** – is attractive in ways that life-time giving is not:

- The gift can be confidential until you're gone, and maybe well beyond.
- The gift can be for long-term support of ministries that have meant something in your life – camping, music, education, pastoral care.
- The gift costs you nothing now. It may be structured to *maximize* your income while you're living, with the remainder to the church upon your death.

Appreciated assets that end up not being spent during your lifetime are a liability to your estate unless bequeathed, because of capital gains tax.

It may be advantageous to donate appreciated assets to charity during your lifetime, which may also result in a current tax deduction.

A charitable trust lets you provide a payout to a charitable cause during your lifetime (or a term of years) and preserve assets for other beneficiaries, such as grandchildren.

Such beneficiaries may actually net a greater inheritance as a result.

Some of your most sizeable assets at death – balances in retirement accounts, cash-value life insurance, survivor pension benefits – can be directed to charity without a will, simply by contacting the firm administering them.

To paraphrase our Lord,

Where we are going, our assets cannot follow.

## CONCLUSION

A gift to the church

of some portion of our accumulated assets ensures a faith-legacy that lives on in the ministries and missions we hold dear.

The building in which we worship – and the land on which it sits – are here because our forebears had the vision and the confidence that there will be **More, Later**.

By their witness,

our community knows Christians live here.

Leave a legacy.

The Lord mandates it.

Amen.