

Stewarding Our Church

October 27, 2024

1 Peter 4:10

¹⁰ Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

Please pray with me:

God be in our heads and in our understanding. God be in our eyes and in our looking. God be in our mouths and in our speaking. God be in our hearts and in our thinking. Amen.

Stewarding our church. What the heck does that mean? What church are we talking about? We go to church. We do church. We are the church. We know people to ask, "Where is your church?" or "What time does church start?" We hear people say, "I've heard about your church." Our constitution ensures separation of church and state. So what church is that? And do you know the rule for when we capitalize the word "church?" What is church for you?

Have you ever considered all the ways we use the word church? It's the people. It's worship. It's the building. It's the institution. It's what happens when we gather. It's our ministry and witness in our community and in the world. It's the universal body of believers. It's all of those things.

The Greek word *ekklesia* that is translated as "church" means "called out" or "assembly." The earliest Christians met in homes. They ate and prayed. They worshipped and received instruction. In the book of Acts, the book of the Bible that tells the story of the birth of the church, the church is never a building...its always the gathering of believers. Acts 5:11 says, "Great fear seized the whole church." Buildings are not generally known for their emotions. Acts 15:3 says, "the church sent them on their way." Buildings don't do that either. But here we are, we have a building and a place we call church.

It's possible you grew up singing the song: I am the church – you are the church – we are the church together.... (all who follow Jesus, all around the earth, yes, we're the church together!) The first verse says:

The church is not a building;
the church is not a steeple;
the church is not a resting place;
the church is a people.

That's all well and good – but what if the church has a building, and a bell tower. What if the church is a resting place for all kinds of people?

If we were to start a church today, we would make different choices from our predecessors. We might question if we even need a building. If we did choose to build, we might imagine spaces that are more convertible and multi-use. They would be accessible and environmentally friendly. Our current FCCO campus was imagined in the late 50's and finished in 1961. It was a different time in the life of the church. Choices, made years ago continue to have implications for our ministry today – like the choir loft being up there, using jalousie windows, and the pews being bolted to the floor. A building and property can make amazing ministries possible, and at the same time they can drain resources, inhibit change, and burn people out.

We get to decide which it is – amazing ministries or a siphon of resources. This campus is **ours** to steward. It was **gifted** to us by a generation who had bold visions and big dreams for this congregation. And in the last 62 years, countless people have tended to this special place, making sometimes difficult decisions about how our campus and buildings will best serve the work and ministry we are called to do in this time and place.

And those difficult decisions will continue as the cost of maintaining property rises and our numbers don't.

There is no question that this is a season of change for everything we call church. Covid challenged us to imagine new ways of doing church and to revisit what it means to be church, while our building sat empty. Yet, what a joy it was when we could once again gather at this peaceful oasis when the world was and is still churning around us. We have yet to imagine how this campus will serve future ministries that promote life and love and compassion and service and community. It's time to start imagining that future. For now, what we have is a gift to be stewarded. It's time to open your basket.

First take a look at the little brochure to see how we currently use our campus. For those of you viewing online, I am going to go through it. On the back half of our campus the youngest students of TLC Public Charter School participate in an intentional and inclusive model of education. The school's mission and vision very much align with our values as a congregation as they welcome children of all abilities and circumstances to learn side by side in compassionate community. They also serve the needs of families and the larger community.

House of Mercy is the new name of the congregation that has been on this campus for more than thirty years. Under the leadership of the founding pastor's son, Rev. Edy

Donis, is casting a new vision for the church and evangelizing families and youth. Their new ministries utilize most of our shared space.

If you move to the next column, you'll see groups that utilize space for nominal rent. The longest running AA group in Orange County meets here on Tuesday nights. There's also a Wednesday night group, and a Big Book group on Saturday mornings. There are Barbershop singers and Square Dancers – all these groups meet weekly.

We have several groups that use our facilities once a month:

The Tortoise Club

Car Club

Girl Scout Troop

All three of these groups are connected to members of FCCO

The American Red Cross Blood (Approximately 5 Times a Year) uses our space for blood drives – and they are grateful.

There are occasional special events, services, concerts, weddings and memorials.

These buildings and this campus are buzzing with activity:

Every week, in Partnership with Mary's Kitchen Food Pantry, FCCO has a weekly food/clothing distribution event on Tuesdays at 2PM. This event provides approximately 55-60 families each week with produce, meat, and other food items. Volunteers from our church participate in the distribution.

Numerous small groups and ministries within FCCO use the facility:

- Disciples Women
- Choir/Bell Choir
- 5 Crowns
- Grief Group
- Small Groups
- Children and Youth
- Committee Meetings
- Yoga
- And worship on Sunday mornings.

This is what happens in this place, and in these buildings. How do you think we are doing at stewarding this gift we have been given? Do you see the ministry happening here?

Maybe you also see the brown lawn, the broken blinds, the frayed carpet, the dated kitchen, dust bunnies, the corroded plumbing, the cracked asphalt and path lights in various stages of repair. All these things are part of this gift we are challenged to steward.

This leads us to the other thing in your box. Your key to the church; a reminder that this is the place our church calls home, and it belongs to all of us, so that we can serve our community with compassion and love and be a community of compassion and love.

Your key unlocks opportunities to take ownership in what happens in this place. Your key is a symbol of our shared responsibility to steward this gift we have been given for ministry. There's a whole list there if you need some ideas on how you can help. Just an hour or two here and there, at a time of your choosing, can make a difference. Spending time in this place, contributing to its upkeep, can help to connect you to the previous generations who made it possible, and the ministries it sustains.

This leads us back to our brochure. If there is something going on with our property that concerns you, write it down on the little form provided, tear it off, put it in the offering tray. In the future, call the office, or send an email to the office. This will help us prioritize and communicate about projects. I also kindly ask that you do not complain to the individual you think is responsible, because that is how we burn people out. The reality is that we are all responsible. Next – tell us what you can do – how you can help, because, we need your help, and our community needs us.

What if we thought of this place as an oasis of peace and love in a turbulent world. Where else can you walk in and be reminded, "You are beloved. You belong?"

We know that the church is a people. But for some, the building, the grounds, and the bell tower are their only experience of what they know to be church. For some, it is a much-needed resting place. May it be a holy place and a beacon of light and love. May we steward it well.

