**Legacy**
*A sermon preached by Barbara England, February 11, 2024*

When I was asked to speak today about stewardship I initially thought, no I have a lot going on that month. But in bed, later that night, I gave it more thought. I love this place. I love what we do and why we do it: our theology and our ministries. And I love the people who are part of this faith community, many of whom are not here on Sunday mornings. It was clear to me that I wanted to speak. So here I am.

And as I thought about what to say, the word *legacy* kept coming back to me. Thinking of those who went before us and had the vision and gave the funds to create these buildings and spaces and programs. The legacy that we of the present will leave for the ones in the future, who will go on to create their own. For over 110 years this has been a welcoming place of faith to students at the university and the larger community. For those of you listening who are relatively new to our congregation here is some of our history and for those of us who’ve been around a longer time, we can nod in remembrance and look hopefully to the future.

Of course, the most obvious examples of giving are the buildings:

* The synod purchased property at 5th and John Streets in Champaign to be used as a site for a church building to serve students. In 1911 the cornerstone was laid honoring Senator McKinley’s generosity and named to honor his father, a Presbyterian minister.
* Several years later McKinley donated $200.000 as the seed money to be matched by members’ gifts, for a foundation building again to minister to students at the university.
* The breezeway that keeps us dry walking between the two and where we have our annual ice cream social is the, the Fraser Memorial Cloister.
* On the adjoining patio are spaces dedicated to the generosity of the Zwoyer family and a bench honoring the work by Dick Ziegler with the Urbana Lierman neighborhood in cooperation with the Garden Hills Food Pantry.
* The purchase of a fraternity house next to the church established the Livia Ball Memorial Presbyterian House (Presby House), named in recognition of Ms. Ball’s generosity and created so there was a safe place for women at the university to live when there was none officially provided. The house is gone now, replaced with Presby Hall, this church and foundation’s vision to provide inclusive housing with social justice ministries for students.
* If you’ve sat on the red benches on the corner you enjoyed the gift of Charlie Wert who gave them in honor of his wife, Lucy. Every year, about this time, Charlie would stand up in church and proclaim that the seed catalogues had arrived and it was time to start planning your garden. (At his death he established a scholarship for a student studying the ministry).
* Further down 5th is the labyrinth given by the Bechtel family and where we had our first Easter sunrise service last year. We lost Dave Bechtel to COVID and how I wished I could have sat with them as I wrote for today because he was the one who kept the history and archives of this place.
* Around the corner I think of students passing by the lush giving garden, or volunteering in it on a Monday evening or passing out some of the fruits of their labor at the Garden Hills Food Pantry. Each of these places speak of vision, generosity and care for this holy place.

In the book of Matthew we read *For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?  When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’*

St. Francis of Assisi wrote in his [Rule of 1221](http://www.apostle1.com/oofm-rule-of-life.htm), Chapter XII on how the Franciscans should practice their preaching:

No brother should preach contrary to the form and regulations of the holy Church… All the Friars … should preach by their deeds. Or as we remember that quote, “Preach the gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.”

Because mission work has always been a hallmark of our church. We don’t always do it right, but we try to live the teachings of Jesus. This building has been literally, a sanctuary: During protests against the Viet Nam war students came here for first aid and a safe place. The basement below us was not always clean, bright and modern. But even its dark, leaky and very unattractive state it was a place of light and inclusion for the homeless men who were given hot soup and a safe place to sleep in the Men’s Winter Shelter, continuing for ten years until the needs outgrew the space. During the height of the violence in central America and as part of the sanctuary movement, that space was a place of refuge for people escaping those brutal regimes. In the basement of the foundation building was Scot Free. There, surrounded by racks and stacks of donated clothing, Marlyn Rinehart and other volunteers would help anyone who came in select and take whatever articles of clothing they needed, free of charge.

In 1977 The Metropolitan Community Church, composed of gay and lesbian people who were not comfortable or welcome in other local Christian churches, was provided with both worship and office space. In 1980 McKinley becomes a “More Light Church,” joining with a handful of other Presbyterian churches nationwide to advocate for the full inclusion of all LGBT people into the life of the local and larger church. And in 1994 Session established the blessing of same-sex unions. These were radical actions at the time, and they were not met with favor by many in our community and denomination.

There is much more that I could talk about: Intercambio mission trips to Mexico supporting the needs of the beautiful Mayan people; a Laotian family welcomed here and sponsored for a new life in the United States; three small homes purchased and rented to families in order to desegregate the neighborhoods and give housing help to families of limited means; Share the Care; summer mission trips by our youth; monthly service projects done by our children in Sunday School. Some of you will have others in mind that I have not mentioned.

We are grateful to the cloud of witnesses who came before us, giving of what God had given/has given to build for the future. They did so during some pretty dark times:

* many wars, depressions and recessions,
* When the Foundation Building was completed, the country was in the midst of the Great Depression and there was no money to buy furniture for the space. So for every event they would carry the furniture needed between the church and foundation building.
* differences of political opinion, Presidential assassination, widespread civil unrest and protest.

Not easy times to find the silver linings in those clouds.

Our stewardship committee considered this idea of light coming through dark times and they chose the theme Let the Light Shine as the slogan for this year’s financial ask. It’s based on Matthew 5:14-16:

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

I know not all of you like our singing of This Little Light of Mine following communion. It seems silly to sing the children’s song and make those motions. But monthly it reminds us to shine in doing God’s work. Small children, standing in that circle learn from their elders that we stand tall and bright as we do what we think the gospel is teaching us. We sit surrounded by stained glass windows many honoring the saints gone before us. Some of them — Rosa Parks, Madame Curie, Louis Pasteur, Bishop Romero— were famous. Others dedicated to and given by people who worshipped here and left us beautiful ways to honor God. Now, by our actions, generosity, stewardship and with the help of God we are determining what we will leave for the future. and we trust the future McKinley families will do the same. And so I ask you to do as our Stewardship committee asks: volunteer in the work of this congregation. Reflect and engage in the decision-making processes that rely on your ideas, needs, and help. Pledge financially for the monetary needs of your church. Spread the light of Christ loving God and your neighbor. With thanks I say Amen.