

FOREVER AND EVER

Peter Bennett

These familiar words are sprinkled throughout scripture, and they conclude what is arguably the most famous prayer in the world. In a world consumed by the 'here and now', 'forever and ever' seems faintly anachronistic. In an era where convention is being challenged and institutions are sometimes toppled, is anything '...Forever and ever'?

Anyone studying the life and times of the Church of the Redeemer would look at our building and the congregation that has worshipped here for over 130 years and find an answer - an answer shaped by the past and firmly embracing the unfolding mystery of God's future purpose for us here at Bloor Street and Avenue Road.

Generations of believers have passed through our doors or been touched by our ministry. Each has given generously of their time, talent, and treasure in good times and bad to ensure a continuing presence. As stewards of this heritage of believers, we inherit these gifts, and build future generations, equipped to proclaim, to open doors, and to make room for another.

It is in this context that the Stewardship Committee has prepared a planned giving brochure entitled, (you guessed it) *Forever and Ever* for your consideration. It will be distributed throughout the last quarter of 2008, and is available on the web site. We invite your participation and your comments.

In its simplest terms, planned giving is the irrevocable gift of financial capital during your lifetime or at death. Annual or pledge giving normally is a gift of a portion of your income, and is done during your lifetime. The brochure gives some examples of how you can give, when to give, who can give, etc., but this article attempts to put planned giving into the context of its relationship to our everyday stewardship and its impact on the parish.

During its last building campaign, the parish made the very courageous decision to spend much of its capital, including the proceeds of two significant bequests and the capital received as a share of the sale of our air rights. Previously, the income from this capital supported our operating budget to the tune of almost 50 percent. When the capital was spent, the income dropped. The Stewardship Committee has spent the last six years supporting the parish as it moves towards self sufficiency in its operating budget. This remains our priority. Research shows that one of the signs of a healthy parish is the ability of the membership to support its operating budget. The corollary is that there needs to be reserves accumulated to restore and expand property, deal with emergencies, and to seed new ministry when we are called to new purpose by God. We are currently at that stage in our life as a community.

The last decade has seen a tremendous growth in philanthropy, fueled by changes in taxation, generational transfers of wealth, and largely buoyant investment and real estate markets. While religion remains the number one recipient of annual charitable support, it has lagged behind in the receipt of planned gifts. In my next article, I am going to try and address some of these reasons. However, the number one reason why people do not make a planned gift is, ‘No one asked!’ *Forever and Ever* is our way of asking you to consider Paul’s transformative words to Timothy.

‘They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life’

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