

Why I Appreciate You

The Sunday we were away on vacation it was announced from the pulpit that October was "Pastor Appreciation" month. There was also a message to that effect on a white board on display in the Gathering Room. After we came home someone (I won't say who) wanted to pull my chain a little bit and asked me if I had put up that sign. And, just in case, anyone else is wondering about that; no, I did not put up that message. Nor did I assign anyone else to do it. After 27 years 5 months and 9 days, of being your Pastor, I know I am appreciated; I am appreciated far beyond what I deserve.

Nevertheless, thank you for your notes of encouragement, gifts, and even for the ribbing. Betty Jane and I appreciate your expressions of appreciation. Actually, Betty Jane is the one we really do need to appreciate. Without her I couldn't do what I do, and she is always coming up with new things to bless us and keep us on our toes. I think her latest endeavor in training a bell choir will be a blessing to us all. So if you really want to appreciate someone who deserves it, who is always going above and beyond the call of duty, appreciate her.

But what I really want to do today is express my appreciation for you. October was Pastor Appreciation month and today is my chance to get even and tell you what I think of you. I don't think you really know how exceptional and how very special you are as a congregation. I wouldn't trade you for anybody else. There is not another church in Altoona or in all our Conference that I would rather pastor than this one. As Tony the Tiger says, "You're Grrrrreat! What I want to do this morning is tell you why I can say that.

In I Thessalonians 1:2 & 3, the Apostle Paul writes to the church at Thessalonica: "We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."

Why do I appreciate you? I appreciate you for the work you do. I don't think anyone knows how much work it takes to keep our church alive, healthy, and moving forward, and if we had to pay for all the work that is done here we would need to be about 5 times as large as we are. When I think of the hours put in by

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Liza Scholl and Debbie Avent as Treasurer and Financial Secretary, respectively, and by all the people who help collect and count money, it's just amazing. We have taken in, counted, recorded, and spent over \$108,000.00 so far this year, and I appreciate the expertise and impeccable integrity of the people who serve us in caring for our finances. And, of course, I appreciate all of you who have given sacrificially to make our financial people necessary. In a year when gas prices reached \$4.00 a gallon and the stock market crumbled, we are on target to take in more contributions this year than any other year in our history as a church. I appreciate your faithfulness and your faith in me and your faith in what God plans to do among us in the future. This is work produced by faith.

I appreciate the work of Bill Bartley and Jeff Mathers in keeping our church clean. I appreciate Jeff and Janice for caring for the candles and the paraamonts on the altar. I appreciate Phyllis Heaton for caring for the flowers outside and for managing the church prayer chain. I Appreciate Eleanor Kiser and Cindy Rehm for taking care of ordering flowers and for decorating in the sanctuary. I appreciate the work of Cindy and Michelle in the church nursery, Kevin and Amber Shultz and Diana Bartley for what they do in Junior Church, and Diana and her mom Janet for the leadership they provide with organizing yard sales and other fundraisers. I appreciate Bud Mitchell and Wayne Blackie for building cabinets and Bud for making banners for advertising. I appreciate Ruth Mitchell, Louann Loechner, Paulette Thompson and anyone else who helps set up refreshments in the Gathering Room. I appreciate Bob Thompson for his excellent and thorough work as Council Secretary and Bob and Jeremy Snyder for all the work they do in running, upgrading, and keeping our audio-video system functioning. I appreciate Jennifer Snyder and Kim Thompson for handing out bulletins and greeting persons as they come to church on Sunday mornings. I appreciate Kevin Shultz for working on the church copier, especially when I'm the one who breaks it!

I appreciate Chuck and Peggy Gensamer who repaired and painted the Ladies' restroom earlier this year and Peggy for helping with signing for the deaf. I appreciate Joe Stotler for plowing snow and for the way he and Judy made and served hot dogs and sourkraut at our "Light the Night" outreach to the "trick-or-treaters." I appreciate the Yohn brothers and Bill Bartley for helping to tear out and haul the cast iron radiators and old

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furnaces in preparing for our new heating system. I appreciate Fayette Stitt for her music ministry and all who sing in the choir. I appreciate all who teach Sunday School or lead Bible Studies. I appreciate Leann Hornberger and her family for providing leadership at Vacation Bible School and for our outreach to Fairview Hills. I appreciate Matt Hornberger for his leadership as President of Church Council and for speaking for me when I have been on vacation. I appreciate his willingness to dress up in funny costumes and act in the dramas Leann dreams up for him. I appreciate their hospitality in inviting all of us to their home for picnics and to swim in their nice/ice swimming pool. I appreciate Todd Otto for painting the Church Nursery and for his willingness to dress up in funny costumes and act in the dramas Leann dreams up for him.

I appreciate Bob Thompson, Gary Irvin, and Debbie Avent for helping with the bulletin-mailing ministry. I appreciate Louann Loechner for helping to lead worship and to provide a special message for the children each Sunday. I appreciate her work with organizing the Samaritan's Purse Christmas Shoebox ministry, and for working with the Church Library. I appreciate her work as chairman of Worship and Outreach. I appreciate John Vance for his work as chairman of the Property Committee and Nora Seville as chairman of Christian Education. I appreciate Butch and Nora Seville and all who help with the pre-worship praise service each Sunday. I appreciate the members of the Cloverleaf Class for your example, for all you have done, that lays a solid foundation for the younger ones to build on. I appreciate all of you who are here week after week. I appreciate the congregation at Fourth Street for your willingness to work for the sake of the Kingdom. I appreciate you for your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and for your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. I appreciate you for the work you do.

A second thing I appreciate you for is your love for one another. Paul says in II Thessalonians 1:3, "We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love everyone of you has for each other is increasing. There is a sweetness of spirit and patience among you that one doesn't find in that many other churches. You enjoy each other's company and look forward to the fellowship each Sunday and Wednesdays in between. I like the words in the song, "The Family of God:" "You will notice we say "brother" and "sister" 'round here--It's because we're a family

and these folks are so near; When one has a heartache we all share the tears, and rejoice in each victory In this family so dear." I've never been in a church where there was so little pickyness, jealousy, or family-feuding. Even the gossip, the little that there is here, tends to be kind-hearted and playful as opposed to mean and hateful. As another song in our hymnal puts it, "There's a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place, and I know that it's the Spirit of the Lord." I appreciate you so much for your love for one another and for your love for me and for Betty Jane. It makes ministry among you such a joy and outreach to others so much easier. The spirit of love you have for one another backs up the claims of Christ and gives witness to everyone that you are His disciples.

Whenever they ask and I tell people outside our church how long I've been here, they marvel, and then I always compliment you; I say, "they are a very patient people." I think the persons I'm talking with on these occasions generally believe I'm just being modest when I say that, but I'm serious: Your patience, motivated by love, allows me to do what I do here and takes away any temptation to want to go anywhere else.

This leads me to the third major reason I appreciate you and that is I appreciate you because you are consistently open to and ready to show hospitality to the visitors and seekers who show up among us on a rather regular basis. Paul says in I Thessalonians 1:4-10, "For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia--your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead--Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath."

Now the phrase I want to key in on in these verses is found in verse 9 where Paul says, "for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us." I'm guessing a little bit here because

I've never kept a log on this, but I would say that at least 98% of the people who visit us here at Fourth Street for the first time tell me, when I talk with them about it later, that they found the people of this church to be very friendly and welcoming. In fact they are somewhat amazed by the warmness of their reception. When I asked our last group of new members why they wanted to join our church almost all of them mentioned this above all. My good looks and great preaching were a lot further down on their lists! Don't figure!

I hope you know that I'm not saying any of this just because our Congregational Meeting is coming up and you get to vote on my next year's salary package. I do know respect the hand that feeds me, but this isn't politics. I think you know what I've told you is absolutely true. There are a lot of people here who work hard out of a sincere faith and love for God. There is a sweet spirit in this place. You do make a great impression on most visitors and seekers, and I want you to know that I notice and that I appreciate all you do and all you are in our Lord.

I also want to encourage you to keep striving for these goals. We were talking about this in our Sunday School Class last Sunday. The writer of Hebrews talks about our spiritual journey in discipleship as a race and by race he doesn't mean sprint; he means marathon; it's not a 50 yard dash, it's a marathon. Or as Eugene Peterson refers to this theme in one of his book titles, it's a "Long Obedience in the Same Direction."

I appreciate you for who you are and for what you are doing right now, but whatever happens and whatever you do in the future don't quit. Finish the race. Continue to put your faith in the Lord and love the Lord and continue to show your faith and love for Him by working hard and by enduring hardship for the sake of building up His church. Continue to love one another and figure out ways to show that love more and more. Paul notes II Thessalonians 1:3 that the love that the believers have for each other there is increasing. Make sure that your acts of love toward one another are increasing. And finally, continue to give a warm reception to strangers, to the visitors and seekers whom God sends among us from time to time. Look for opportunities to bless others at church and wherever you are. Honor the name of Jesus by your attitudes and actions toward everybody. Let's not quit until no one can come into our presence without running into Jesus.

The Fourth Street Church of God

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Sermon for November 9, 2008

Why I Appreciate You I Thessalonians 1:1-10; II Thessalonians 1:1-5

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