**Restricted and Designated Funds: Responding in the Midst of COVID-19**

In Genesis 41, Joseph interpreted the Pharoh’s dream that the seven good cows and the seven lean cows were a window into the future. God was providing a vision for how Egypt could manage the coming years of famine. And Joseph stated that it wouldn’t make sense for there to be a time of abundance without some thought for the time where there was also scarcity and need.

We are in unusual and unprecedented times as we live in this time of COVID-19. It is not unusual to experience anxiety and fear in a time like this. Leaders in congregations are wondering how a congregation can make it through in a time when weekly offering is not being collected. Leaders are wondering how to make decisions in a time such as this. There are numerous congregations who are surviving with a thin margin to make it from month to month to pay the bills. At the same time, some of these congregations have money in savings, in restricted accounts or in endowments.

We have been asked for guidance for how to think about this time and the challenges facing congregations. If you have restricted accounts (memorials or other specific savings) what should you be thinking about to dip into those accounts at a time like this? (Endowment funds are in a different legal category than savings accounts; it is necessary that you check documents if you can legally access the principle in those funds.)

If we ponder the grace of abundance and the challenges of lean times, then may we also see how some abundance allows for some freedom in decisions in the midst of lean times?

Here are some thoughts and suggestions as a congregation considers using restricted funds to meet the needs of the general fund in a congregation:

 Are there written stipulations about how the funds can be used? Where are those records? Are there records of who gave and under what circumstances funds were given to a specific fund? The paper trail of that information varies from congregation to congregation. It might be important for there to be a conversation with family members regarding a gift that was made if that is known. If, over the course of years people gave to a specific fund, the need to trace the intention of gifts by individuals is lessened. (ie: building fund)

 Is there any guidance in the constitution, the by-laws or in the guidelines of funds about use of the monies? Every effort should be made to clarify that information.

 If there seems to be some openness about the use of the funds, with a church council decision, the monies could be transferred to the general fund to meet budgeted expenses in a time such as this.

 The decision to use designated funds for normal operating expenses should be communicated to the congregation. The decision could be made that the monies would be considered a “loan” to the congregation during this period to be repaid during a more prosperous period.

 Although the decision to remove money from a designated fund to cover costs of normal operations is not easy to make, to view the decision as a blessing of abundance from a different time than the present, to allow ministry of a congregation to continue, shifts the focus from scarcity to abundance.

 Even though worship may not be held inside the building, has the congregation been asked to give? Leaders in the congregation can model generosity by giving as they are able in this time. Although there may be many members who are facing economic challenges at this time, it is not likely that all are affected in the same way.

 Please contact Bishop Laurie Jungling or Pastor Peggy Paugh Leuzinger, Director for Evangelical Mission with questions.