



An Open and Affirming Congregation
of the United Church of Christ

October 12, 2015

Dear Friends,

Since I sat to write last year's stewardship letter so many things have happened. I am filled with gratitude for Circular and its mission and vision as I remember:

The coming of marriage equality, the rainbow banner on the wrought iron fence, and the many tearful and ecstatic weddings held in our sanctuary.

A movie theater filled to overflowing with members of Circular and Charity Missionary Baptist churches viewing "Selma" and staying for a time of dialogue.

The guest teachings of both Rev. Darby and Rev. Rivers at Circular, including the choir from Charity and Marjory Wentworth standing to read in a column of sunlight.

The surprise of being voted best church once again by readers of the *City Paper*.

The poignance of standing with Rev. Rivers, Rev. Pinckney and others as we held a vigil for Walter Scott in the field where he died.

The crowds at Easter and children hunting for eggs among the headstones.

The sanctuary of Mount Moriah Baptist Church filled to capacity for our Charleston Area Justice Ministry's Nehemiah Action, and our public officials agreeing to fund a wage theft recovery program.

The long line of us joining "Hands Across the Sand" at Folly Beach in order to warn against offshore drilling and preserve our land and sea for future generations.

The bus tour taken with Charity Missionary Baptist Church and the sights and sounds of Selma, Memphis, and Montgomery.

The prayers offered in arenas and on street corners for our sisters and brothers at Mother Emanuel AME Church and the outpouring of love and grief; neighbors hugging, crying, and singing in the streets.

The courage, resilience, strength, and humor of our many Circular members and their families fighting cancer.

The days representing Circular and the Southeast Conference at the national gathering of the United Church of Christ, asking an audience of thousands to honor Charleston by working against white privilege and the ideology of white supremacy in their own context.

The building and grounds overrun with children during Vacation Bible School.

The van and cars full of Circular members unloading in Columbia to bear witness against the Confederate flag and insist that it be taken down.

The welcoming of new staff members Stephen Cofer-Shabica as Sexton and Kyndra Luce as Director of Youth Ministries.

The filming of the PBS special “America After Charleston” in Circular’s historic sanctuary.

The beginning of a second year of Thomas Groups with many new members and friends signing up to deepen their spirituality and connections with each other.

The conversations with public theologian Diana Butler Bass and black liberation theologian James Cone, both of whom knew of Circular’s work and were excited to join us for teaching, preaching, and dialogue in the fall.

The flooding rains that came and the kindness that followed as members called each other, checked in, and volunteered at church pumping out water, cleaning the basement, and caring for our sacred space and grounds.

I could go on, but I’m not sure where to stop. What I’ve listed are particular memories, which is to say nothing of the usual good things that happen in Conversations in Faith, Dining for Women, the Environmental Mission Group, Jazz Vespers, youth gatherings, or regular Sunday worship. There are so many good things happening that it is not difficult to write and ask that we each pledge our financial support to Circular. But there is another reason that I ask.

It has become clear to me that Circular has very important roles to play in both the new Civil Rights Movement and the flourishing of progressive Christianity. We are uniquely positioned to build bridges, to work for justice, and to articulate a truly liberal faith that welcomes and celebrates everyone. I am receiving more and more calls – people would like to visit, authors and theologians would like to speak, community leaders would like to collaborate, young ministers would like to observe and intern, media would like a quote – and I am amazed to be a part of such a vibrant community of faith. Yet in order to plan and exercise our full creativity, we really must know what resources we have on hand.

In the Sunday sermon I asked everyone to pledge for this reason: we are limited in our mission and vision when we do not know how much money we have to support them. Submitting a pledge is a statement of intention not a binding contract. And only the Finance Manager sees the pledge; I do not see it nor does anyone else on the staff or in church leadership. What we do see when people pledge is the total amount, the building blocks we have for the coming year.

As we near the end of 2015, the possibilities for Circular seem limitless. I ask you to join me and my family in making a generous financial pledge to our church for the coming year. Friends call me from around the country to say that they have read or heard about Circular and to ask what exactly is going on, what is so special about the place. I just smile and shake my head.

In gratitude,


Jeremy