

Loving the
Fellowship

CREATIVELY

Dear Ones,

We are closing our stewardship season with unpleasant news. We need a second ask. This is my last pledge campaign, so I wanted to be the one to announce this last Sunday during the service. You can watch this segment by clicking on the video above. The first reason I asked to share this news is that it gives me a last official chance to say thank you to all of you who give. I am in awe of the generosity I experience here.

The second reason is that I want to make three observations about Fellowship finances:

1. The small handful of top givers can't just keep giving more. It gives too few too much power. We need people at the comfortable bottom or middle of their capacity to move up. If you give a hundred bucks every year and can afford the coffee shop every few weeks, I ask you to prioritize giving \$200 annually. If you pledge \$600, and can take a vacation most years that costs a thousand, could you double your pledge? If you give \$3000 and winter in warmer climates, own a cabin, or travel internationally, consider pledging \$5000. My examples and amounts might be wrong for you but there is deep untapped giving capacity in this congregation. How can you help transform that culture?

2. It's tempting to imagine we can get by with less money if we get more volunteers. The reality is this is a congregation that already pitches in impressively. Volunteerism actually keeps pace with professional staffing levels. Staff and volunteers are parts of the same; the more we resource one, the more the other increases. Don't believe that? Lay off staff and atch.

3. I want you to know my giving story, which is that since my early 20s I've given away about 10% of my income, with the exception that in graduate school I tithed on money I earned but not student loans. Some years it's been a little less, like when extended family had a particular need. Some years it's been a little more, like when I paid off my used car and joined the Fellowship's Acorn Society with a one-time \$500 gift to the Endowment.

For the upcoming year, my partner Amy and I pledge \$2100, at the same time we're decreasing our income to move somewhere way more expensive. Homeownership is likely out of reach. I'm scared. It makes me feel stingy. But it will be the last year I get the honor of being a Fellowship supporter and I take seriously that obligation. After November I will resign as member and minister. I won't pledge again.

My ask, my hope, is that quite a few of you who pledge less than my \$2100 will take over my financial commitment. Could you add some zeros to your current or first pledge? If so, I suspect you would find it meaningful.

I promise to end on a cheerful note, but first let me complain:

Right now, we are 30.8% short of our goal budget of \$836,049. We just got word that our insurance premiums will increase much more than we budgeted. Below my note you will find more detailed financial information. I hope it inspires you to act.

The most demoralizing, frustrating thing about this ministry is that every year we exhaust ourselves to barely make a barebones budget. I am tired of having to celebrate that I still don't have dental, we still can't afford a bookkeeper, there's no way to launch exciting new programs, but hooray because my salary wasn't slashed. The cynical part of me says that the Fellowship doesn't actually want a mission of welcoming, growing, and leading, so let's shrink it to something tiny that costs less and demands nothing.

But! I have been serving a bright, warm, caring, brave congregation for almost a decade so I cannot give in to cynicism. You make it impossible. I know that we—that you—can realize a creative, life-changing, world-transforming mission and vision. We already see so much evidence, so many glimmers of this.

But we can't do it at this budget. The choice is yours.

With gratitude,

Leah

Rev. Leah Ongiri

