



*How Much Does It Cost?
II Corinthians 8:7-15*

July 1st, 2018 ~ 6th Sunday in Pentecost & 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time
First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois
The Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel, Jr.

“How much does it cost to join this church?” That question was posed to one of our Executive Board members not too long ago. He was unsure how to answer, so he asked me.

It is not an unreasonable question; after all, don't people say to us, “There is no free lunch”?

We pay to go to the movies, plays, join fraternal and social organizations, and country clubs.

So, how would YOU answer that question?

Some would say that the cost of membership is what is referred to as “the per capita”. The per capita is an apportionment that Presbyterians pay to the denomination each year. It is based on a congregation's active members. This year is about \$32 per member. We contribute a like amount to the United Church of Christ's Our Church's Wider Mission. I call this a “franchise fee”. It covers administrative support from all levels of the greater Church. This summer the Finance Committee had someone from the Presbyterian Foundation talk to the committee about the church's endowment policies. The consultation yielded good information and was free.

But, if every member paid only their per capita and nothing more, the church's operating budget would be \$20,000 per year. That is not sustainable. Earlier this year the Bethel Presbyterian Church on the southside of Peoria dissolved their congregation and their annual budget was larger than \$20,000 a year.

Maybe the cost of membership should be based on the cost of Sunday worship. Each week we invest approximately \$2,497.30 in our worship service, not including utilities, insurance and various miscellaneous items. Should a fee be charged at the door? Where's the grace in that!

Maybe membership costs should be figured on a carte blanche basis, that is, you pay for only for ministries that you like or use. But then, some less attractive things would go wanting, things like utilities, insurance, repairs and the like.

Maybe a church should be like a country club and have a year end assessment! But then, it wouldn't be a church, would it? It would be a country club open to only a select few.

There are all kinds of ways to answer the question, “How much does it cost to join the church?”

But maybe, just maybe, “How much does it cost to join the church?” is the wrong question. Have you ever considered that?

If you ask the wrong question you will not get the right answer.

Maybe the price of membership has already been paid! Maybe it was paid 2000 years ago on a hill far away, on a cross.

In his letter to the Corinthians the apostle Paul wrote:

For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. (II Corinthians 8: 9; my emphasis)

In a later letter the apostle wrote that “we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son. How much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through Him?” (Romans 5:10)

The baptismal font and the Lord’s Table are visible signs of an invisible truth--that the cost of membership into the Body of Christ, the Church has been paid in full.

If that’s the case, then a more appropriate question would be the one that the Old Testament prophet Micah asked nearly a century before Christ: With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? (6:6)

In other words, how do I respond to God’s grace in my life? “Praise God from Whom all blessings flow.” “Count your many blessings, one by one,” the old hymn says. How much are those blessings worth? What is your ROI--Return on Investment?

In his sermon on the Mount Jesus said “where your treasure is, there will be your heart also. (Matthew 5: 21). A corollary is that how we spend our money reveals what we treasure.

Today’s epistle lesson does not encourage poverty. It encourages generosity.

As the apostle Paul wrote,

I do not mean, it is a question of balance between your abundance and their need. (v. 13) ... Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough, you may share abundantly. (vss. 7,8)

So, “How much does it cost to join the church?”

That’s the wrong question. The right question is, “What shall I bring unto the Lord?”

To God be the glory. Amen.