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Foolishly bold or boldly foolish?

Holdeman Mennonite takes on sacrificial giving experiment

by Noël King

Foolishly bold or boldly foolish—
take your pick!

The title of this sermon, which congregants at **Holdeman Mennonite** in Wakarusa, Ind., heard two weeks before trying something far outside their comfort zone, aptly reminded them that whatever they were about to do, it wouldn't be boring.

And it wasn't.

"It" was the idea that Associate Pastor Bj Leichty and Lead Pastor Danny Jones brought to the church elders after reading an article in the March/April 2008 IN-MI Conference *Gospel Evangel* about a sister congregation who dared call for a congregational offering wildly above and beyond what the group typically gives. (During one extraordinary "Super Sacrificial Sunday" each September, Community Christian Fellowship Ministries in Detroit encourages participants to give a week's salary over and

above their regular offering, and many do.)

"I remember reading the article and just being really excited about how it worked for their church and about some of the unexpected things that came from it, such as people's marriages being changed," said Bj. "I found it very, very inspiring and thought, 'Wow, I would like to be part of a congregation that would do something like that.'"

The idea became reality. Having received the blessing of the church's elders, Pastor Danny presented the idea of a "Bold Giving Sunday" to the congregation one Sunday last June at the conclusion of a month-long sermon series on stewardship.

"God pulled a fast one on us—the economic climate in October was drastically different than it had been in June when we presented the challenge."

Holdeman Mennonite: Steve Ramer, church member, and Bj Leichty, associate pastor. (Photo by Charlotte Long)



Welcome ...

... to this inaugural edition of the Missional Seeds Giving Club quarterly newsletter! We are pleased that you have chosen this way to support the missional transformation of IN-MI Conference.

Our featured story demonstrates how a conference resource that you support—**Gospel Evangel**—can be a channel for one congregation's story to call another congregation to more profound reflection and action. Our community of congregations is a web of relationships that encourages us on toward love and service. (Dan Miller's message continued on reverse)

"We brought it to them as a challenge," Bj said. "We were only asking those who wanted to do it to participate. If you could give a week's paycheck, okay. If not, just give whatever would be sacrificial."

"We tried to make sure not to present this as an equation for spirituality, that if you give you are spiritual and if you don't give you are not spiritual. We tried to present it as an opportunity as well as a challenge."

As it turned out, the challenge proved even more significant than they had imagined.

Just six weeks before Bold Giving Sunday was scheduled to take place, nearby Monaco Coach Corporation closed its Wakarusa production plant, laying off nearly 1,000 workers. Although not many of the laid-off workers were attendees at Holdeman, the closing created a ripple effect on the local economy that resulted in many congregants seeing a reduction in their own work hours.

"God pulled a fast one on us," Bj mused. "The economic climate in October was drastically different than it had been in June when we presented the challenge." (cont'd.)

The congregation proceeded to move ahead regardless. In preparation, Bj laid out four characteristics of what a Bold Giving Sunday was *not* in her “Foolishly bold or boldly foolish” sermon two weeks before the scheduled special offering.

It was not about judgment, she said: “No one except you and God are going to know how you have met this challenge.” It was not about the amount individuals could give but about the sacrifice they made. It was not about giving out of guilt but about “deciding—with God—what he wants you to do and how much you can cheerfully and willingly give,” and, finally, it was not to replace weekly giving to the general fund.

If Bold Giving Sunday was not about all of those things, then what was it to be about? “It was an opportunity to increase our faith,” Bj explained, “an opportunity to do something foolish, something bold, something risky, because we take God at his word.”

How did congregational members react to the idea? Church member Steve Ramer said that the challenge made him and his wife Luanne sit down and “really evaluate our commitment to the church and what we were willing to sacrifice.”

Apparently many others did the same, because what happened on that last Sunday in October 2008 at Holdeman Mennonite, amid one of the worst economic climates in decades, was this: **a congregation of approximately 150 people gave \$25,468.41 in one offering.**

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The total was announced the following Sunday during a “Celebration Sunday” service to the happy surprise of the congregation. The feeling was of, “Wow, we did this!” said Bj.

“The results were much more positive than most of us anticipated,” agreed Steve, adding, “I think that the process of determining how to spend the money has been a bigger challenge than the actual giving was.”

That was something they didn’t expect, Bj and Steve said. Holdeman’s sacrificial offering—unlike that of Community Christian Fellowship Ministries—was not initially targeted for a specific fund or project, and since that Bold Giving Sunday last fall, the congregation has spent a significant amount of time and effort discerning how to spend the \$25,000.

As part of that discernment process, the congregation took a series of steps that included a Sunday School discussion, a roundtable discussion, and a special congregational meeting six weeks later. Members were

encouraged to regularly fast and pray throughout the process.

After the December meeting, \$15,000 of the total was still undecided. Three months later, the congregation met yet again to come to a consensus about how to spend the remaining

portion of the money.

During two meetings filled with prayer, silence and listening, the group reached consensus on giving to four



areas: a mix of local ministries, global ministries, church operational needs and seed money for future projects.

The Holdeman pastoral team, Bj said, hopes that the Bold Giving experience not only encourages members to learn to give boldly but that it also inspires them to live boldly, to take steps of faith that lead them to increase their trust in a God who provides. To that end, the team led the church through a Bold Living series three months after Bold Giving Sunday.

What other lesson have Holdeman’s participants taken from this bold-giving and bold-living experience?

Expect the unexpected when dealing with God, or, as Steve said he learned, “Don’t be afraid of change or challenges.”

—Noël King is a freelance writer from Scottsville, Va.



(continued from front)

None of us is created to follow Jesus alone. We are created for relationships of mutual encouragement and challenge.

We anticipate this newsletter will be a way to thicken the web of relationships as it tells stories of congregations engaged in missional imagination. Perhaps this first issue will challenge you—as Community Christian Fellowship’s story challenged Holdeman Mennonite—to be foolishly bold or boldly foolish in following Jesus.



Dan Miller
Dan Miller,
lead conference minister

why we give

“ We have always considered the conference to be an important link between congregations, and between congregations and the denomination. By supporting the conference with our financial gifts, we help keep those links in place.

Giving through a program like Missional Seeds keeps us disciplined; the quarterly mailings remind us to write that next check. We also like to think it is helpful for the conference to know they can count on these regular gifts.”

—Don and Elizabeth Stauffer, Union, Mich., members of Bonneyville Mennonite, Bristol, Ind.

