

# The Pastor's Report

BRRR, Brrrothers and Sisterrrrs, It certainly was a cold January! I trust you are all warm and well, and that the teeth chattering has subsided.

Winter is the time for story telling, so this month I thought I'd tell you a story of your own. As the case with all the stories I tell, it is true (enough) though identities obfuscated.

A couple of weeks ago, during that brutally frigid cold snap, a message was left on the church answering machine from a person who had run out of kerosene with which to heat their mobile home; apparently due to a paperwork snafu with HEAP. By the time I got the message at 1:30 p.m., they had been about 18 hours without a main heat source, with the temperature poised to drop to -20 again that evening.

It is not at all unusual for the church to receive such calls, though usually they are owed to a lack of payment (which was not the case in this particular instance). What was unusual, is that I've known this person my entire time in Canton; an older, single woman who is a good and gentle soul. She tries very hard with what is, frankly, a very full plate (she is raising her grandchild as the parents are uninvolved or unable). A difficult situation to be sure.

After being unable to reach her on the phone, I drove over to the house. Turns out the tank had been mistakenly allowed to run dry. Not only was fuel required but, in all probability, the supply lines would need to be bled (at the least) if not the nozzle in the heater replaced having been gunked up due to tank sediment. So, two problems to solve and, apparently, the church was the only one to solve them.

She told me she had contacted the fuel supply company, and that they'd be unable to provide a fill that day due to overwhelming demand (as you might imagine at such temperatures). Instead, she was merely looking for a few gallons to get her through. I knew, though, 5 or 10 gallons wasn't going to go very far so I called the fuel company and played the "minister card." To their credit, they said they'd be there that night. However, I'd have to pay for a minimum fill of 100 gallons which totaled a little less than \$500. Which is a lot, and certainly more than we like to provide to any one person at any one time. Really, though, what choice was there? Widows and orphans in distress, and all that. So I drove to the fuel company and gave them my credit card to charge. Thankfully, I knew several families in our church had donated their stimulus check to the Pastor's Discretionary Fund, so the money was there. Problem #1 solved.

Which left problem #2, bleeding the lines. 100 gallons of kerosene in the tank wouldn't be of much use if it didn't get to the furnace and/or the furnace would not fire. So, I borrowed a kerosene can from the guys at the Village Barn, filled it, poured the 5 gallons in her tank and asked her to fire up the furnace: no go. In a bit of desperation, I went to Grant's Heating and Plumbing; with whom I've had no dealings, but they were near to the house. By now it was 4 p.m., and I was fearing the worse. However, the folks at Grants were nothing but gracious (small town at its best) sent someone right over, bled the lines, replaced the nozzle and got the furnace working! Problem #2 solved. Having received the good news from the woman I immediately went over to pay the bill, which was just shy of \$100 for the service call (not at all atypical). *(Continued on Pg. 6)*

"And if one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?" - James 2:16

Later that night, I got a call from the woman who told me the fuel had been delivered, that they were warm and toasty and profusely thanked the church for their graciousness. Though I lamented the total cost of almost \$600, it was absolutely the right decision to make and I would do it again without hesitation. It made me realize that for many in the community a church is often the last resort; and for this community, our church in particular. Though it certainly came with a higher than desired price tag, I was proud of our congregation's generosity in providing the resources to afford such assistance, and a spirit of grace and compassion that would not only welcome such need, but strive to address it.

That would be the end of the story, except that the following day I did my due diligence in calling the HEAP Office at the county to see if we could recoup any of the money (no way Jose) but also to make sure the paperwork snafu was straightened out so as to solve problem for the long-term. This prompted me to touch base again with the woman who told me that she just got off the phone with the fuel supply company. She told me about 30 minutes after I had paid for the minimum fill, her HEAP benefits came through and HEAP had actually paid for the fill and that the charge on my card had been cancelled. Which, of course, I immediately confirmed with the fuel folks. A bit of a miracle by my reckoning, however large or small (and to this woman, I can assure you, it was a very LARGE miracle, indeed).

I tell you this story because things like this happen all the time at our church. Owing to confidentiality, though, I am rarely able to relate them to the congregation. Sometimes our understanding of the church is limited to our own experience of

it. While this is ample and sufficient in many regards, we should also remember the power we wield as ambassadors of Christ in our community. I'm not sure what seeds get planted through such merciful and generous acts, but I know they are planted deeply and bear great fruit in God's own time and plan for this world.

May you be warmed this month in knowing the difference we are making as such a humble but spirited group of Christ's disciples. - Rev. Mike