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## Homesteader - November 18, 2014

### TO BE, OR NOT TO BE...

Whenever a congregation goes looking for a new pastor, the first question on their minds when the committee interviews a new candidate is: Will this pastor grow our church?

I'm going to go ahead and answer that question right now: No, he/she will not. No amount of pastoral eloquence, organization, insightfulness, amicability, or charisma will take your congregation back to its glory days.

What then can your pastor do? She can make your board meetings longer with prayer and Bible study. He can mess with your sense of familiarity by changing the order of worship and the arrangement of the sanctuary. She can play those strange new songs and forget about your favorite old hymns. He can keep on playing those crusty old hymns instead of that hot new contemporary praise music. She can bug you incessantly about more frequent celebration of Communion. He can ignore your phone call because he's too busy praying. She can ruin your perfectly balanced budget with appeals for more funds to be allocated toward mission and outreach. He can take up your precious evenings with kooky new book studies and meditation groups. She can take up your precious weekends with exhausting volunteer projects. He can open your church building to the ugliest and meanest freaks in town, who show up at odd hours, beg for handouts, track muddy snow into the building, leave their cigarette butts in the parking lot, and spill their coffee on the carpet during their Junkies Anonymous meetings. She can come off

Those who stay won't fit in with the old guard. They won't know about how you've always done it. They'll want to make changes of their own. Their new ideas will make you uncomfortable. Your church won't look or feel like it used to. You'll feel like your losing control of this place that you've worked so hard to preserve. It will feel like your church is dying.

And that's just the thing. A growing church is a dying church. It has to be. It cannot be otherwise. The way to Easter Sunday goes through Good Friday. The way to the empty tomb goes through Golgotha. The way to the resurrection goes through crucifixion. When Jesus told you to take up your cross and follow, did you expect it to lead anywhere else?

What Jesus told us about himself is also true of churches: Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it bears no fruit.

But what if it doesn't work? What if you let your pastor do all that crazy stuff and nobody new shows up? What if the church still goes under? What if all that time you spend studying the Bible, expanding your horizons, deepening your spiritual life, and serving your community turns out to be time wasted? What if it does?

Tell you what: if that's what happens, if you commit yourself to all this and still feel like it was a waste of time in the end, then maybe your church really needed to die.

Written by: Rev. J. Barrett Lee

Taken from "The Lighthouse" A publication of First Presbyterian Church, Schuyler, NE

## #GIVING TUESDAY

sounding like a Jesus freak evangelical, gushing on and on about the Bible and your personal relationship with God. He can come off sounding like a smells n' bells catholic, pontificating on and on about tradition and sacraments. She can come off sounding like a bleeding-heart liberal, prattling on and on about social justice and the need to constantly question old interpretations.

What can he do to grow your church? Nothing. There's nothing your pastor can do to make your church grow. She can't save your church. Your church already has a Saviour and it's not her. He can push you. She can open doors. He can present you with opportunities. It's up to you to take advantage of them. She can plant seeds and water them. It's up to God to make them grow.

And what if that happens? What will growth look like? Will all those old, inactive members suddenly return? Will the pews be packed again? Will you need to start a second service and buy the lot next door in order to expand the parking lot? No. you might see a few new faces in the crowd. There won't be many of them. Some might stick around but most won't.

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## Keep Thinking...

It's always a good time to change your mind when to do so will widen your heart.  
-Wm Sloane Coffin

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