

WHAT PARK AVENUE METHODIST CHURCH NEEDS MOST.

INTRODUCTION

- A. It was shortly after Christmas.....
- B. To begin with, it might very well appear to the casual observer who comes to worship with us on a.....
 - 1. It might appear to him.....people
 - 2. It might appear to him....money
 - 3. If he has an opportunity to look.....building.
 - 4. To the visitor.....larger staff.
 - 5. And the church certainly doesn't need...

DEVELOPMENT: What does the church need most?

- A. You ask then, what is it that this church needs most.
 - 1.. Committed members.
- B. Let me tell you what a committed member is....
 - 1. Baptized....
 - 2.. Furthermore.....confirmed...
 - 3. And finally....attends regularly.
 - 4. He contributes to its support...
- C. A committed member cares, comes, counts, and expects...

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT: Why do we need more committed members?

- A. Two reason:
 - 1. To take care of the ones we lose.
 - a. death
 - b. Some who are dissatisfied.
 - c. Move away...
 - 2. But there's another reason why we especially need more committed members.
 - a. Minister to many who will never belong...
 - 3. Some of the ways we minister....

AND SO YOU ASK * WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT THIS:

- A. Nothing if you're here for just today, or just this winter....
- B. If you're a committed member, ask yourself how committed am I....
- C. If you're settled in NYC, and expect to be here for some time....

I DO NOT KNOW HOW MANY HERE THIS MORNING MAY BE IN THAT SITUATION BUT THERE ARE THREE SUCH PEOPLE WHO MAY BE IN THE CONGREGATION TO WHOM I SHOULD LIKE TO SPEAK, VERY BRIEFLY, A WORD OR TWO....

- A. The first is the person who never wants to commit himself to anything. There's no real life without commitment.
- B. The second person to whom I'd like to speak is slightly suspicious of what I would call institutional red tape. His attitude -

- C. And finally the third person to whom I'd like to speak is the person who does care about the church, but who cannot accept all that the church teaches, and therefore feels...

CLOSING SECTION

- A. All of us, at different times and in different stages of life need to ask ourselves just where do we stand on the matters...
1. Do I stand over there with the materialists...
All there is....nothing more..
What's yours is mine if I can get it...
Do I stand with those who feel - expedience is
 2. Or do I stand with those who believe in a God who has revealed himself....
In the order and splendore of the world...
In science, in philosophy..
In history...in human personality.
Continues to reveal himself to us in what men call the Holy Spirit....that is, that divine presence of which we are aware in the high moments of life...
 3. Shortly after Christmas I had a letter....
 4. Well I wrote back to him. I don't know if he's still a good friend, but I told him that I thought that if he got rid of two or three of his cars he might have more Christians in his congregation....
I don't have a car. But personally I feel that we do have a good number of committed Christians in this church. And for this I'm thankful and very grateful for the way they're working in this church. But the fact remains that we still need more. The danger of a city church is this, that people will feel that they will never be missed. Do not...

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INTRODUCTION

It was shortly after Thanksgiving that I decided in my own mind that some time after the first of the year, I was going to preach a sermon on the subject, "What Park Avenue Methodist Church Needs Most". In view of the fact that our Annual Church Meeting is scheduled for tomorrow evening, I decided that today was the day for this sermon. I hesitate to some measure to preach a sermon that concerns primarily this parish for I recognize that there are usually some people here from other parts of the country, and occasionally from other parts of the world. But I do this on occasion, however, when I feel it is right and necessary always hoping that our visitors will translate what I say into terms of their own church loyalties.

To begin with, it might very well appear to the casual observer who comes to worship with us on a Sunday morning, that the church doesn't need anything; anything, that is, over and above the things that only God can give it. It might appear to him that this church doesn't need any more people for in recent months the congregation has been comfortably filling this area. It might appear to him that the church doesn't need any money for one seldom hears financial matters discussed in this pulpit. And if he comes at the right time of the year, he knows that somehow we manage to meet all of our obligations, somehow struggle to set up a budget for the following year. If the visitor has an opportunity to look around the church building, he would see that we do not need a new building, although he might feel that we need to redecorate the sanctuary, repair the roof, and perhaps have the pew cushions cleaned. It might appear to the visitor that we do not need a larger staff, but only we who work here know how much more could be done if we had a larger staff. And certainly the church doesn't need any more organizations, at least it doesn't, if you agree with me that one of the jobs of the church is to keep people home, and to have only those organizations that are necessary and essential to the welfare of the church and to the interior lives of its people.

WHAT COULD THIS CHURCH POSSIBLY NEED.....

Perhaps you wonder then, what could this Park Avenue Methodist Church possibly need? I don't know what your experiences tell you, but mine tell me this, that at the present time our greatest need is for more committed members. Let me just briefly tell you what I mean by a committed member. To begin with, a committed member is a person who has been baptized in the Christian Church, not necessarily in the Methodist Church or even in the Protestant Church. He is a person who has been baptized in any branch of the Christian Church, anywhere on the face of the earth with water, and in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And furthermore, he has been confirmed, or call it if you will, admitted into membership of a particular branch of the Christian Church. At that time, and in that service, he assumed as an adult the responsibilities which other people assumed for him when he was baptized. In the Methodist Church, when a person joins, he accepts the responsibilities implied in the following declaration: "Will you be loyal to the Methodist Church, and uphold it by your prayers, your presence, your gifts, and your service?" And finally he attends the services of the church regularly, that is, as regularly as it is humanly possible for him to do so. He contributes to its support regularly and as generously as he can, and takes part in its activity and life. And so you see that by a committed member, I mean

a person who cares about the church, comes to the church, counts on the church, and expects the church to count on him!

**WHY DO WE NEED MORE
COMMITTED MEMBERS..**

Perhaps you wonder why I say that we need more committed members? In our particular case there are two very practical reasons involved as to why we need more committed members. In the first place, we need them to take care of the ones we lose. Each year, in the natural course of events, some die. Then there are some who are dissatisfied and move to another church which ministers to them in a way they prefer. The number of these, I'm glad to say, is relatively small. But the largest number we lose simply because they move away. This is the age of mobility and permanence of residence is becoming rare. Let me give you a few facts concerning this church just to think about. We worked hard this past year, and took in forty-eight new members. Certainly that's encouraging. But as you'll discover tomorrow night, in this same period of time, we shall be removing close to sixty persons from our membership roll, persons who we have lost contact with, and who have moved from the community. Added to this is the fact that our Sunday morning congregation is roughly 70 to 90 percent higher than it was last year at this time. Let those facts linger in your mind, and you'll understand the kind of struggle that a church in the city faces today.

But there's another reason why we especially need more committed members, a reason that I'm anxious for you to understand and appreciate. In this church, we minister to many people who will never belong to this church. This is one of the exciting things about this church, and one reason why a ministry in New York is so interesting. Certainly this is the way that it should be.

Your church staff is constantly reaching out to all sorts of people in every conceivable kind of trouble. Visitors come here from all parts of the country and we minister to them as well as we can. The members of the church staff are constantly visiting the sick, the lonely, the troubled, and many others, unconcerned as to whether a person is a member or not. Every Friday evening the church ministers to forty teen age boys and girls in the church basement. On Saturday mornings, our Lay Leader, ministers to the boys of this neighborhood through the Boy Scout Troop. Our Deaconess, in her work, ministers to many who do not belong to this church and who perhaps never will. Children come to our church school and we give them the best we can in the way of Christian education. Their parents are not asked to pay in order to enroll their children. Many come to the church to worship, to be inspired, to be comforted, and to be challenged. We hope they will find something here that will bring new meaning to their lives. This is the kind of ministry that we should perform, and it is the kind of ministry that I hope to increase as we go on together. But the thing that I want to underscore in your thinking is this, that such a ministry has to be supported by people who are committed members. We can minister to transients, but transients cannot maintain the ministry of the church. But rather it depends upon a corps of committed people, not only to supply the money, and in my mind that's not the real thing, but the life. It is the spirit in this body that ministers to strangers as they pass through. It is the spirit of the people who are here regularly that makes the person who comes here occasionally say, "This is a place where I can truly feel the presence of God"

This ministry can only be carried on by people who care deeply, who feel deeply the importance of this ministry, and who are willing to stand up and be counted.

WHAT CAN YOU DO
ABOUT ALL OF THIS

Now perhaps you're wondering what you can do about all of this. If you're here only temporarily then there isn't a great deal that you can do. For instance if you're here only for the winter, or perhaps only for today, then you can't do as much as you'd like to do. Come to the church. Join us in worship. Call on us if you need spiritual help or guidance. Use this church in any way you want, and never hesitate to ask us for anything.

Now if you're already a member, and perhaps consider yourself a committed member, then stop to ask yourself how committed am I? Perhaps you've belonged to this church a long time. It's your church. You need it every once in a while. Not all the time, but there are times when you desperately need it. And you stop to remember that perhaps your church is needing you more than you think.

If you're settled in New York City and expect to be here for some time, and you come to this church, and think of it as your church, and count on it as your church, then you ought to seriously consider the possibility of becoming a committed member of it. There are always exceptions of course, but by and large, this I think is the thing to do. I do not know for sure how many people there are here this morning who may be in this situation, but there are three such people who may be in the congregation to whom I should like to speak, very briefly, just a word or two.

THREE PERSONS IN THIS
SITUATION.....

The first is the person who never wants to commit himself to anything. He's the person that's always suspicious of anything that might involve responsibility.

He's always on the edge of life, looking at it wistfully, longing for its fuller life, but never willing to make the plunge. He stands on the brink of the church, partaking of its life when he needs it but never becoming a part of its life. To such a person, and I'm not sure whether there is such a person here today, let me just say this. There's no real life without commitment. There's no real love in the world without commitment to some one person and the responsibility which that relationship involves. There's no real beauty ever anywhere in the world with commitment to the discipline of art. And there's no real religious experience without commitment to the obligations of some religious institution. A foreigner from any country on the face of the earth can live in the US for years and enjoy its benefits and take part in all of its activities, but he never knows what it really means to enjoy life in the USA until he swears allegiance to the constitution and becomes a citizen. It's something to think about.

The second person to whom I'd like to speak is slightly suspicious of what you might call institutional red tape. His attitude perhaps is something like this. Why do I have to go through all of this to be a Christian. Why is it necessary to be a member of a church in order to be a Christian. What has church-going got to do with my living a Christian life. Frankly I'm very sympathetic with such a person because deep down, I'm not very institutionally minded myself. But here are some things to think about. Where would Christianity be now, and all that we value in Christianity, if there had not been some institution

to preserve it and pass it on. Where would love be without marriage and the family? Where would education be without schools and colleges. Where would music be without the orchestra and music hall. Where would justice be without the courts of law.

And finally there is the person who cares about the church, but cannot accept all that the church teaches, and therefore feels that he would not be honest or sincere to join a church and subscribe to its creeds. I think I can appreciate this situation too, because, I seem to have been given a skeptical mind by nature. My advice to such a person would be this. Of course, it depends on what it is that he cannot accept. If he can't accept belief in God, then perhaps he had not better contemplate becoming a member of a church. But if it's a particular interpretation of an article in a creed, such as the virgin birth, or the second coming of Jesus, then perhaps he had better investigate the various interpretations, and if necessary ride easily for the time being on that particular article of belief. If he says he can accept the total outlook of the church, and if he is ready to look at life from that point of view, and make his judgments within that frame of reference, and if in general the church represents the kind of life he would like to live, then I think he can honestly say, "This is where I belong. This is my spiritual home."

IN CLOSING. In closing just let me say this, that at different times and at different stages of life, we need to ask ourselves, just where do I stand on some of these matters. Do I stand over there with the materialists who think that this is all there is, and that there isn't any more. Do I stand with those who say what's yours is mine if I can get it, and keep it? Do I stand with those who feel that expedience is the way, the truth and the life? That life has no meaning, and in the end comes to nothing.

Or do I stand with those who believe in a God that has revealed himself to us in the order and splendor of the universe, in history, in science, in philosophy. Do I believe in a God that has revealed himself to us in human personality in Jesus of Nazareth. Do I believe in a God that continues to reveal himself to us in what we call the Holy Spirit...that is, that divine presence of which we are aware in the high moments of life, that comforts and strengthens us in moments of prayer. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ Do you believe in the life of the world to come. If you want to stand on that side, then the normal thing and natural thing is to become a committed member of some church.

Shortly after Christmas I received a letter from a very close seminary friend who is now minister of a church in Los Angeles. In his letter he described his church to me. "I'm in my third year here... I have a \$23,000 budget, a paid benevolence apportionment, 350 members, and one or two Christians. It's a good church, and I'm having a great time. I now own five cars, including a Rolls Royce and a Model T." I'm not sure whether he's still a good friend for I wrote back and told him that if he gave up two or three of his cars, he might have a few more committed Christians. I don't have a car. And I wouldn't want to trade any of the committed Christians I have for a car. Personally I feel we have a good number of committed Christians in this church. But we need more. The danger I suppose of a city church is this, that people will feel that they will never be missed. Do not ever think that if you belong to this church. The church depends on its people, and the light of it will shine as far and as brightly as the commitment of its individual members will allow it. No farther and no brighter. When then does this church need most? It needs YOU.

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To begin with, it might very well appear to the casual observer who comes to worship with us on a Sunday morning that this Park Avenue Methodist Church really doesn't need anything; anything, that is over and above those things that only God can give it. It might appear to such a person that our church does not need any more people for in recent months we've had some good congregations. It might appear to him that we do not need any money for one seldom hears financial matters discussed in this pulpit. If the visitor has an opportunity to look around the church building, he'll see that we certainly do not need a new building although he might feel that we need to redecorate the sanctuary, repair the roof, and perhaps even have the pew cushions cleaned. It might appear to the visitor that we do not need a larger staff, but only we who work here day in and day out really know what could be done if we did have a larger staff. And certainly we do not need any more organizations, at least we don't if you agree with me that one of the jobs of the church is to keep people home, and to have only those organizations that are essential to the welfare of the church and necessary for the interior lives of the people.

**WHAT COULD THIS CHURCH
THEN POSSIBLY NEED....**

Perhaps you wonder then, what could this Park Avenue Methodist Church possibly need? I don't know what your experiences tell you, but mine tell me this that if this church,

at the present time, hopes to continue to grow, then it simply needs more committed members. Let me just tell you what I mean by a committed member. To begin with, a committed member is a person who has been baptized in some branch of the Christian Church, not necessarily in the Methodist Church, or even in the Protestant church. He is a person who has been baptized in some branch of the Christian church, anywhere on the face of the earth, with water and in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And furthermore, he is a person who has been admitted into membership of some particular branch of the church, if you will, he has been confirmed, and at which time and in that service, he assumed as an adult, the responsibilities which others assumed for him at the time of his baptism. In the Methodist Church, when a person joins he accepts the responsibilities involved in the following declaration, "Will you be loyal to the Methodist Church, and uphold it by your prayers, your presence, your gifts, and your service?" And finally, he attends the services of the church regularly, that is, as regularly as it is humanly possible for him to do so. He contributes regularly and generously to the support of the church, and participates in the life and activity of the church. And so you begin to see that by a committed member, I mean a person who cares about the church, comes to church, counts on the church, and expects the church to count on him;

WHY DO WE NEED MORE
COMMITTED MEMBERS..

Now, I know that some of you have very logical minds, and perhaps the question you're asking right now is this, why does this Park Avenue Methodist Church need more committed members?

I'll tell you why. There are two reasons, both of them very practical reasons. In the first place, we need more committed members to take the place of the ones that we lose each year. In the natural course of events each year, some die. Some are dissatisfied and move away to another church where they are ministered to in a way that they prefer. The number of these, I'm happy to say, is relatively few. But the greatest number we lose simply because they move away. This is the age of mobility, and permanence of residence is very rare. Let me just give you a few facts concerning this church. We worked hard this past year and we took in forty eight new members. Certainly this is encouraging when one stops to consider that the preceding year we took in only twelve. But tomorrow night, at the church meeting, we'll be removing close to sixty names from our membership list, people that we have lost contact with, and who have moved away from this vicinity. Added to this is the fact that our congregation this year is running 75% to 100% higher than it was this time a year ago. When you stop to think about these things and to add up these factors, you begin to realize something of the problems that a city church is facing.

I said there were two reasons why we need more committed members. First - to take the place of the ones we lose. The second is one that I'm anxious for you to understand and appreciate. In this church we minister to many people who are not members of this church, and who will probably never become members. This is the way it should be. And this is one of the exciting things about a ministry in New York. It makes it very interesting.

Your church staff is constantly reaching out to all sorts of people in every conceivable kind of trouble. Visitors come here from all parts of the country, and we minister to them as well as we can. The members of the church staff are constantly visiting the sick, the lonely, and the troubled, and many others, unconcerned as to whether a person is a card carrying member of this fellowship or not. On Friday evenings, we minister to forty teen age boys and girls, only two or three of which belong to this church. Saturday mornings, our Lay Leader, Mr. Black, ministers through the Scout Troop to many of the younger boys of this vicinity. Miss Hedman, in her work as the Deaconess, ministers to many who are not members, and who will never be members. Children come to our church and we enroll them in our church school program attempting to give them the best we can in the way of a Sunday School education. We do not ask their parents to pay in order to enroll their children. Many people come to the church on a Sunday morning to worship, to be inspired, to be comforted, to be challenged, and we sincerely hope that they find something here that will help them. This is the kind of ministry that we are attempting to carry on, the kind we should carry on, and the kind I hope to increase as we go on together. But this is the thing that I want to pin down in your thinking. This kind of ministry has to be supported by committed members. We can minister to transients, but the transients cannot maintain the ministry of this church. But rather it depends on the committed corps to supply not only the money, and this in my thinking is not important, but the life. It is the spirit of those who come here Sunday after Sunday, year in and year out, that makes a person who comes here occasionally say, "It's a friendly church. It's a place where I can feel the spirit of God moving, and enjoy Christian fellowship". You see, this ministry can only be carried on

by those who care deeply, and feel deeply the importance of this ministry and are willing to stand up and be counted!

WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT THIS.....

This is why we need more committed members. Perhaps you're wondering then what you can do about this. Well, if you're here only temporarily, then there isn't a great deal that you can do. For instance, if you're here only for today, or only for this winter, you can't do as much as you'd like to do. But let me add this - come to the church, join us in worship, call us if you need any kind of spiritual help. Use the church, and don't hesitate to call on us for anything.

Now if you're a member, and perhaps consider yourself a committed member, then ask yourself how committed am I? You may have belonged to this church for a long time. You love this church. It's your church. There have been times when you have desperately needed the church; not often; but there have been times. Perhaps you need to ask yourself, is my church needing me?

But on the other hand, if you're settled in New York and expect to be here for some time, and come to this church, and count on this church and consider this your church, then perhaps you ought to seriously consider becoming a member of the church. I know there are exceptions, but by and large, this, I think, is the thing to do. I really don't know if there are any people in this situation in the congregation this morning, but if there are I hope you'll think about it, and take it in good faith, because we do really need more committed members. There may be three people here this morning who are involved to some extent in this kind of situation, and I'd just like to say a few words to these three persons.

THREE PERSON INVOLVED IN THIS SITUATION....

The first person to whom I would like to speak is the person who perhaps is afraid to commit himself to anything. He's the person who is suspicious of anything that might involve responsibility. He's always on the edge of life, looking at it wistfully, longing to be a greater part of it, but never willing to make the plunge. He stands on the edge of the church partaking of its life, but never becoming a member of it. I'm not sure whether this person is here today, but if he is just let me say this that there is no life without commitment. It's true in so many areas of life. There's no love without commitment to someone and the responsibilities that that relationship involves. There's no beauty ever anywhere in the world without commitment to the discipline of art. And there's no real religious experience without commitment to the obligations of some religious institution. There is no life without commitment! A foreigner from any country on the face of the earth can live here in the US and share in its life, and partake of all of its benefits, but that person never really knows what life in the USA is until he commits himself so to speak and gives his allegiance to the constitution as a citizen. It's something to think about.

The second person to whom I'd like to speak is the person who is suspicious of institutional red tape. His attitude is something like this: Is it necessary to be baptized and confirmed in order to be a Christian. Why is it necessary for me to go to church. Can't I be just as good a Christian outside the church? Now I'm very sympathetic with such a person, because deep down in my heart I'm just as suspicious of institutional red tape as the next person. But here are some things to think about: where would Christianity be today, and all that we

value in it, if there had not been some institution to preserve it and pass it on. Where would education be without schools and colleges. Where would justice be without courts of law. Where would love be without marriage and the family.

And finally the third person to whom I'd like to speak is the person who cares about the church, but who cannot accept all that the church teaches, and who therefore feels he would be insincere and dishonest to join a church and subscribe to its creeds. Once again I can sympathize with such a person because the better I get to know myself, the more I realize that I have a skeptical mind about many things in orthodox Christianity. My advice to such a person would be this. If you can't accept a particular interpretation of an article in a creed, such as the Virgin Birth, or the Second Coming, or the physical resurrection of a body, then ride easily on those beliefs, and investigate some of the various interpretations. But if you can accept the total outlook of the church, and look at life from that point of view, and make your judgments in that frame of reference, and if in general, the church represents the kind of life that you would like to live, then I think you can say to yourself honestly, "This is where I belong. This is my spiritual home"

IN CLOSING. In closing, I would just like to say this that I think it's good for us to occasionally take stock of ourselves and to ask ourselves where do I stand on some of these important matters of life. Do I stand over there with the materialists who think that this is all there is, and that there isn't any more. Do I stand with those who feel that expediency is the way, the truth and the life? Do I stand over there with those who say what's yours is mine if I can get it and hang on to it. That life has no meaning, and when a person dies that's the end!

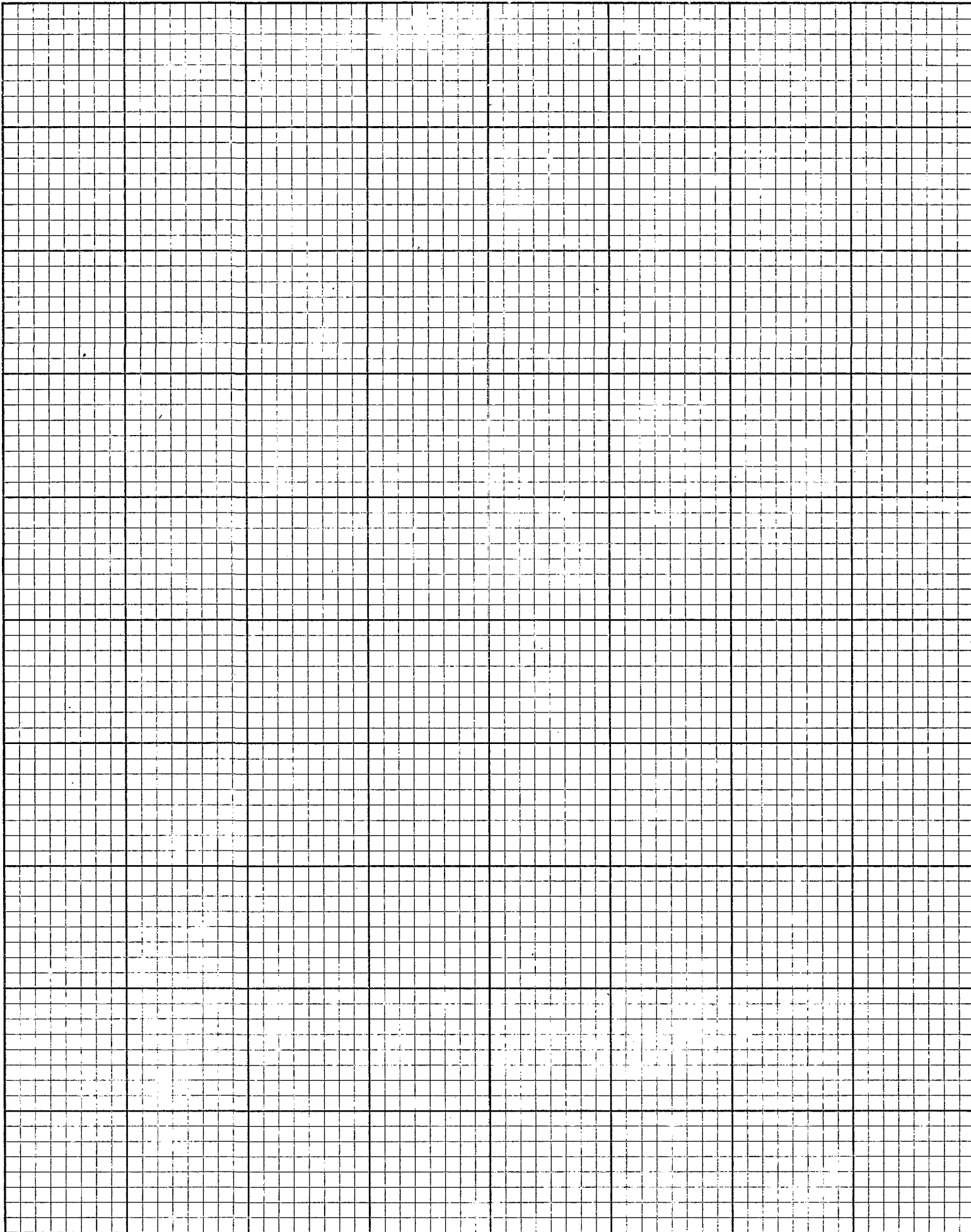
Or do I stand with those who believe in a God that has revealed himself to us in the order and the splendor of the universe, in science, in philosophy, and in history. In a God that has revealed himself to us at a particular time in history and in a particular personality. And do I believe in a God that is continuing to reveal himself to us through what man have come to call the Holy Spirit - that is, that divine presence of which we are aware in the high moments of life....that divine presence that comforts and strengthens us in moments of prayer. If you stand with those who believe this, then I think the normal and natural thing is to become a committed member of some ~~group~~ church!

Just after Christmas, I received a letter from a close seminary friend who is now the minister of a church in Los Angeles. In his letter, he went on to describe his church in this fashion. "I'M in my third year here at this church. It's a swell church. I've got a \$23,000 budget, a paid benevolence apportionment, 350 members, and one or two Christians. I'm having a great time. I now own five cars... including a Rolls Royce, and a Model T. Not being married, I can still afford some of these worldly pleasures." I wrote back to my friend, and now I'm not sure he is my friend, because I suggested to him indirectly that perhaps if he got rid of two or three of his cars, he might have more committed Christians in his church. I don't own a car, and I wouldn't want to trade him of the the committed Christians that I have in this church for ~~one~~ of his cars. Personally I feel we have a good group of committed Christians in this church. But the fact remains that if this church is going to continue to grow, then we need more. I suppose the danger in a city church is that people will feel

that they're never missed. Don't ever feel that way if you're part of this congregation. The church depends on its people, and the light of it will shine as far and as brightly as the commitment of its individual members will allow it. If you're still wondering what this church needs, above all else it needs you!

LET US PRAY:

Our Father, grant that we may commit ourselves to Thee and to thy purpose for us. May we go forth from this place strengthened, and renewed in body mind and spirit. In thy name we pray. Amen



We're always very happy to welcome visitors to our service of worship, and it is our hope that you find the service meaningful and the fellowship of our church family to be warm and friendly. If you're worshipping with us for the first time, may we encourage you to leave your name and your city address with us. And if time permits come and share in our coffee hour fellowship following the service.

There are several announcements in the bulletin which I would just like to draw your attention to -

The first concerns the Annual Church Meeting scheduled for tomorrow evening at 8 pm. An election of trustees will be held, and other important business matters will be considered. If you are a members of this church, we hope you will attend this meeting.

The second announcement concerns Lent which begins on Wednesday. The first of our mid week Lenten services will be held, Wednesday at 8 pm, when the Rev. George Balla of the Hungarian Baptist Church will speak on "The Prayer Life of Jesus". We invite all of you to come to the service.

The third announcement concerns the envelope which is attached to your order of worship. It is for your special offering in connection with the Week of Dedication. The accompanying pamphlet describes the project to which your offering will be sent.

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Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than it is to receive"
In this spirit, let us worship God with our morning offering.

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I think that all of you who saw and heard our Speech Chorale this morning at 10 on television were very proud of them. Some of you perhaps didn't have the opportunity to hear them, and so I asked the group if they would be willing to participate in our service and in place of our scripture reading, bring to us the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi....