

Why 1 Church Cut 320 Members a \$500 Check

Churchgoers often grumble that they always get hit with pleas for money. But congregants at a Chicago church this month got a surprise: They each received a check for \$500, with instructions to go out and do something good with it.

“I was just in disbelief,” said Valency Hastings, 42, when she got her check from the nondenominational LaSalle Street Church on the city’s near north side. “The enormity of the responsibility of it has begun to sink in.”

The money was the result of a real-estate windfall—back in the 1970s, LaSalle Street and three other local churches had helped support a multiethnic, multi-income housing development.

The development was sold in June in what is now a pricey neighborhood, and LaSalle Street got \$1.6 million. Senior Pastor Laura Truax and church elders decided to take a tenth of that money and give it to 320 members and regular attendees. The church as a whole will decide what to do with the rest of the money.

Along with the so-called loaves and fishes checks, named for the biblical miracle in which thousands were fed with a small amount of food, recipients were asked to pray about how they could best spend the money.

“We asked people what they feel they’ve been called to do,” Truax said. She said LaSalle is a strong social justice church, and “we had this amazing opportunity to invest in the kingdom in a big way.”

People who received checks have started sharing their thoughts about using them on an “idea wall” in the church basement. A

group of doctors suggested sending the money to an Ebola clinic in Sierra Leone. Others plan to support CeaseFire, an anti-violence group.

Truax said congregants vary from the wealthy to the homeless, so if someone wants to use the money for rent, that is OK, too.

Hastings, a freelance graphic designer who is planning her wedding, said she is “in debt up to my eyeballs” but hopes to overcome the temptation to use the money for bills. She is thinking about using it to aid homeless gay and lesbian youth.

Truax said the money is an example of the God-given gifts people have that they need to use well.

“That’s what Jesus is offering us every day,” Truax said. “You have this incredible gift in front of you.”

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