

***“It is better to be satisfied with what you have than to be always wanting something else.”***

**Ecclesiastes 6:9 (GNT)**

Dear Partners in Ministry,

Recently, the narrative lectionary of our church drew our attention to the ten (10) commandments as recorded in the Old Testament book of Exodus. In the last commandment, we are asked not to covet anything that is not ours or anything that belongs to our neighbors (Exodus 20:17 NIV).

Over the years, I've come to realize that the antidotes to coveting are contentment and gratefulness. When we are content with what God has already blessed us with, happiness will find us. When we learn to count our blessings (take inventory of the gifts God has given us), life gets easy and better to live. Life becomes much more meaningful, fulfilling, and worth living when we learn to acknowledge, appreciate and be grateful to the one (God) who has given us all things for our good. This is where happiness, contentment, and fulfillment start. The Bible says in 1 Timothy 6:17 that God *“richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment”* (NIV). That's the kind of God we serve. He gave us the world for our enjoyment! But here's the problem: We're so busy getting *more*, or craving for the next big thing, or seeking after what we don't yet have that we don't enjoy what we've already got. The secret of contentment is to learn to enjoy what God has given you. Instead of grasping for more, pay attention to what we have now. Let's open our eyes, appreciate what God has already given us, and enjoy what we've got.

The first step to becoming a contented person is to stop comparing ourselves to others. The problem is that comparison is our favorite pastime! We do it all the time. We walk into somebody's house, and the first thing we do is make comparisons: “I like that floor! Look at that drapery! Wow, what a kitchen!” We think to ourselves, “My house doesn't look anything like this!” Or we walk past somebody and think, “I like the way she did her hair; mine looks terrible today.” We are constantly comparing, and it keeps us envious and frustrated. We've got to stop it! If we're going to learn contentment, we've got to stop comparing our lives to everyone else's. You are you and God made you to be you. You've got what it takes to fulfill God's purpose and plans for your life. Go fulfill it. Stop coveting. Coveting is sin.

It is not sin if we learn to admire without having to acquire. It is important that we learn to rejoice in other people's prosperity without getting envious and feeling like we need it too. That's hard to do in a world that attaches so much importance to material wealth, fame, power, and prestige. The more material

things we get, the more famous and respected we become. Ownership isn't the only way to enjoy something—we don't have to own it to enjoy it. For instance, if we love safari in Africa, we don't have to travel to Africa for a safari or own a vacation home there to enjoy one. We could drive or ride a train or the greyhound bus to an even better safari location somewhere in the United States to enjoy a life changing safari right here at home for far less. Here's a great principle that many people don't understand: We don't have to own it to enjoy it! Not making comparisons isn't just a good idea—it's a commandment from God. Exodus 20:17 says, "*You shall not covet . . . anything that belongs to your neighbor*" (NIV). Coveting is the uncontrolled desire to acquire. It's such an important sin to avoid that it's included in the Ten Commandments. The word *covet* in Greek means that you grasp something so tightly that you cannot let it go. If God ever gives you something and he tells you to give it away and you cannot, then you don't own it—it owns you. God is not saying you should never desire anything. Desires are not wrong. In fact, many of our desires come from God. But when a desire is uncontrolled, it leads to coveting; we compare ourselves to others and think we must have more. That uncontrolled desire for something that is not ours is sinful and leads to all kinds of problems. But desire isn't always negative. In fact, nothing can be accomplished unless we desire to do it. We can't become more like Christ without desiring to become more like Christ. We can't be a more loving person without desiring to be a more loving person. We can't be a more generous person without desiring to be a more generous person. Contented life only happens when we learn not to compare. When we compare, it often leads to coveting, and when we covet, we can't be content.

The book of Ecclesiastes says it simply: "*It is better to be satisfied with what you have than to be always wanting something else*" (Ecclesiastes 6:9 GNT).  
NOW, WHAT SHALL WE DO?

Going forward, I'm kindly asking (challenging) all of us to begin a month long "life-changing or spiritual exercise" in line with the THEME of our monthly newsletter. For this month, I'm asking each of us to "relearn" contentment and gratefulness (I know all of us are content and are grateful for all that we already have). This is just an exercise for the fun of it.

**EXERCISE:** Each morning before we leave home or before we step out of our bed, please count your blessings (do an inventory of everything that God has blessed or gifted us with), tell God thank you for each blessing and keep reminding ourselves throughout the day of God's goodness for our many blessings. Repeat this circle in the evening just before bedtime. Do this every day for the rest of this month. This exercise can be done individually, or by a

family, or a small group or by a congregation or by a community. Please contact me if you have questions.

Let us pray. God of all creation, thank you for creating the universe and all that is in it; thank you for creating me and entrusting in my care many blessings for the flourishing of the creation. Help us to understand and appreciate your love and grace and gifts so that we will be mindful and supportive of others and their opportunities and blessings for the good of all. Merciful and loving God, please help us to be content and grateful for all that you have given us and please guide us against coveting from our neighbors. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen!

The Rev. Dr. Alexander Y. Sumo  
on behalf of the PLUM pastoral team