

November 9, 2020

Dear Friends,

Over the past eight months, I have learned more than I ever cared to about things like livestreaming and copyright laws, viral loads and positivity rates. **But the most important thing I have learned has to do with the importance of community.**

We had a new member class this spring—on Zoom, of course. There were ten or twelve people interested in joining the church at the time. I asked them, “Why in the world do you want to join a church in the middle of a pandemic when we can’t even meet together?” The answer was: “Because this pandemic has made us all aware of how important community really is.”



Adult Bible study on Zoom

And that is so very true. Unable to gather in the usual ways, many of us confined to our homes, not able to be with our friends and sometimes even our own families—it makes the connections we have with each other, the sense of belonging, so incredibly precious.

The theme of our *Good Stewardship* effort this year is, **“Sharing our gifts to build a better community!”** That means building up both our own community of faith, as well as the wider community outside our doors.

This past year—even despite the challenges brought on by COVID-19—we **have found creative ways to build up and strengthen our own community of faith.** Holding services and picnics out in Greenwood Park. Organizing a drive-by retirement party for Sheri Egge. Offering opportunities to gather on the patio or the bike trails. A group of residents at Scottish Rite Park meeting together on Sunday mornings for worship on YouTube. Adults studying the Bible together on Zoom. Children—all wearing masks, and their temperatures checked at the door—resuming Wednesday evening activities. A dozen middle school youth embarking on confirmation together out on the patio. Our deacons taking flowers each week to the sick or homebound, and planting signs in members’ yards that say, “We care about you!”



Youth art project



And we have also worked to minister to the wider community.

Continuing to provide monthly meals at the homeless shelter. Giving away hundreds of free masks in our parking lot, and making the local news in the process. Starting a COVID-19 relief fund, which has disbursed many thousands of dollars. Offering an educational series on racial justice. Organizing a Holy Walkamolies fundraiser event for mission work in El Salvador. Reconfiguring our tutoring program to be carried on long-distance. Hosting our denomination’s co-moderator for a session on Zoom. Participating in a Habitat build this month.

“We care about you!”

Our church has shown amazing creativity and resilience in adapting to these new realities. **And the truth is, none of that would have been possible without your generosity and faithfulness.**

As we turn our attention to the coming year, we are committed to remaining a strong and vibrant congregation that carries on the important work to which we are called.

Our proposed budget for 2021 has an increase of \$12,732 in spending. Virtually all of that is directly related to COVID-19: additional hours for our custodial staff to keep the building sanitized, a professional videographer to handle the livestreaming of our worship services, new technology to help us stay connected, and of course lots of cleaning and health supplies.



Mask giveaway



New video system

Our goal for pledges next year is \$581,303. That’s a 2.5% increase over the current year. We’re mindful that this year has brought financial challenges for a number of people. But we are hopeful that—together—we can reach our goal.

Enclosed is a pledge card for 2021. Please consider what you are able to give next year and return the card to the church office by the end of the month. I’m going to do the same, as I do every year. And I’m planning to increase my own pledge by 5%.

Sometime or other—hopefully next year—this pandemic will be behind us. And Central will still be here—a strong congregation, still reaching out to meet the needs of others. How we respond right now to these challenges will ensure that is the case. I invite you to be part of sharing our gifts to build a better community.

Grace & Peace—

The Rev. Wallace W. Bubar