



"Sing to God a new song, for God has done marvelous things.  
Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy."

+ Psalm 98

## STEWARDSHIP 2021

Good Morning St. Johns family,

For those of you who I have not had the pleasure to meet, my name is Rhonda Tucker and my husband, Parker, and I have been official members of St. John's for 30 years, unofficial for about 32 (I was 5 when we joined? That joke never gets old. I stand here thanks to the members of Genesis, my Sunday school class, the leaders of Bible studies, pastors, participation in VBS, lifelong friends, my covenant group, along with countless conversations and meetings, I have been encouraged and challenged to grow in my faith. To borrow from Tori Lambert, I have more questions and less answers now than I did when I began my journey. I think that is good as it continues to keep me open to hearing the whispers that lead us to grow. That growth is part of what has led me here today. I have the honor of serving as your Lay Leader.

I come to you today with a stewardship update. Not the traditional type of update. I have listened to, at best count, 35 years' worth of stewardship campaign statistics on the number of pledges, percentage of pledgers, pledged income, non-pledged income, falling from heaven money, etc. And each time my question has been and continues to be ... What is the bottom line? I am so grateful for and in awe of those of you who can look at the spreadsheets, budgets, projections, percentages and make sense of them. I am not one of those people, and I am good with not being one of those people. My chat today will be to those of you who are like me. My goal is to spell it out as simply as I can. Consider this the Children's Sermon version: simple, to the point and hopefully short.

Bottom line, we have had an amazing stewardship campaign in light of what has become the "year of all years." Thank you, thank you, and thank you again to the 93 people/families who have already pledged. The pledges total \$404,320.00. While those numbers are amazing and wonderful, **the unfortunate, and simple truth is that without additional pledges we will not be able to support two full-time pastors.**

I know that is hard to hear - take a moment and breath. St. John's we have been here before and we survived. We will move forward from here.

If you are like me you are back to asking, what is the bottom line ... what do we need to move forward from here fully staffed? It is hard to give an exact figure or "bottom line." At this point, it's not possible to be exact, but our best estimate is we still need about \$40,000-\$60,000 in pledges. I know that sounds like a lot, but it adds up quickly. Every little bit helps. Look what we have done with 93 pledges. We have over \$400,000 in pledges.

Throughout the stewardship campaign in all the letters and chats, we have hinted at the possibility we would have to make some very hard decisions. Today we are done hinting. The Staff Parish Relations Committee met this week and discussed a contingency plan, should we not get enough pledges for next year's budget. The Associate Pastor Position cannot be funded in a fiscally responsible fashion. I, we, everyone on SPRC, Finance, and Stewardship believe you deserve to hear that reality outright not just through hints but in simple straightforward terms. While I know this comes as a shock to many of you this is not something out of left field. No one likes this idea. We all love the person who fills the position, and that does not change no matter what we look like going forward.

As Lay Leader, I serve on a number of committees, like Finance, Staff Parish Relations, and the Church Council. What I've learned from Finance is that Pledged giving right now is strong and we anticipate ending the year "in the black," (that is a good thing - for those of you who like me always has to stop and think, is that good?) and

*possibly* with some carryover/rollover, in part, because of the PPP loan we received this spring. The PPP is the Paycheck Protection Program. St. John's qualified for and received PPP loan. That loan covered THREE months of salaries for the entire staff. By all accounts we should not have to pay that loan back as it should become a grant. While pledged giving is solid, we cannot count on unpledged giving like we used to before the pandemic. We just aren't seeing as many people in worship-as we did before the pandemic. And so, we have seen a steady decline in non-pledged giving throughout the year.

Our pledges are the lifeblood of the church. We will be counting on pledges more than ever before in 2021, because it's the source of funding that's most reliable. Thank you again to all of you who have pledged and are regular givers.

I have been amazed and impressed with St. John's, as over the years we have faced many budgetary challenges. I appreciate the practicality of our family. Be upfront, share the news, and be transparent. We are all in this together.

For anyone wondering, the budgets from 2020, the pre-COVID and the COVID versions are available to study, review, and dissect. While the Finance Committee is tasked with creating the budget, the Church Council will ultimately approve. As part of the Finance Committee I can guarantee we have looked over each and every line item. St. John's, we run lean in all areas. We have looked at every program/mission. Unfortunately to cut spending in any of those areas would be to lose them. Even if we were to cut several programs and missions we would still fall short of our needed funding. That is why the full-time Associate Pastor Position is the area we may not have enough funding to keep.

My standing here, talking in simple terms, is not a call to crisis, a bribe, a guilt trip, or any form of coercion; it is speaking the reality of where we are at this time. We may have to make some hard decisions. I have personally lived through the pain of what happens when an organization does not make the hard, but necessary, fiscally responsible decisions. That organization shut its doors. Families were left without a school, teachers were left without jobs, and students were left without a school culture that they helped build. I have had to look into the eyes of students that I love like my own and watch their pain over losing their community. The physical plant of that organization sits empty today. To drive by the grounds of what was once an area filled with loving people, laughing children, and lifelong learning is heartbreaking. St. John's cannot make the same poor choices. We stand on the corner of Renee and Highland as a community that feeds people spiritually and physically. That cannot end. God has called us here.

My pledge to you is we will not make fiscally irresponsible decisions. We will be faithful stewards of the tithes and offerings you pledge and give. **Plain and simple: in order to fund our budget, more pledges are needed.** If you have not pledged please consider pledging. If you have pledged, but realize that you could increase your pledge, please do so. It will take all of us to support a balanced budget and a fully staffed church.

As Christians, we walk a fine line. We are called to be good stewards and to walk by faith. Along with your pledges, we covet your prayers. If you have any questions or ideas, any of us on the Finance Committee would love to hear from you.

We have pledge cards available on the tables by the exits and in the church office. You can make a pledge online, or you can email your pledge to LeAnn Davis. I wish this conversation and the decisions that will be based on pledges could be put off for another three months; however, that is not a possibility. Time is of the essence.

Before I go, please let me remind you and me. We are not alone, God has brought us here to this place and God will lead us forward. It is His glory we are here to celebrate, and that will not change.

Thank you.

Rhonda Tucker, St. John's UMC Lay Leader  
Sunday, November 15, 2020, during worship