

October 2021

Greetings Dear People of Bethlehem,

We are writing to you as we near the close of yet another unprecedented year. And even though we are all sick and tired of hearing things like “unprecedented,” “ever-changing,” and “uncharted,” how truly descriptive of our experience have those words and phrases been. 2021 has held many different narratives and required a great deal of adaptability and flexibility. We have had to pivot more times than we care to count, and constantly, it seemed at times, reevaluate, and recalibrate our hopes and expectations for this life that we share. And you, dear people of Bethlehem, have risen to the challenges of this year again and again. You have shown resilience and commitment. Strength of character, and an abundance of faith. You have responded to every twist and turn with nothing but grace, compassion, and support. So, to begin, we must simply say “thank you.”

Thank you for the surprising and amazing ways that you have helped vision this congregation into each brand-new tomorrow, in a year that has been overly full of brand-new tomorrows. Your faithfulness and generosity have helped this congregation evolve in ways we, quite frankly, weren't sure were possible. And although our Sunday mornings might look and sound slightly different the spirit and identity of who we are, both as the people of God, and the people of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, has never been more evident.

We as a congregation have been sustained. By your faithful stewardship. By the diligent work of employees and volunteers. And most certainly by the grace of God. And so, fittingly, our theme for this year's stewardship season is *Sustained by Grace*. Like the varied landscapes of God's great creation that each follow their own cadence and rhythm, every one of us experiences different seasons of life – flourishing, fallow, growth, pruning – but the consistent undercurrent that carries us through it all is the sustaining grace of God. We have a God who is ever-faithful. A God who fills our lives with unconditional gifts of grace and love. A God who provides for us our daily bread through the one who is the Bread of Life. And this is a season where we take time to reflect on how we are sustained by that rich, deep, abiding presence.

Last year presented some particularly unique and difficult situations for our church financially. The full-stop closure of our preschools placed us in a precarious position. Thanks to your faithfulness, as well as substantial resources the church received through the PPP (Paycheck Protection Program), we were able to end the year ahead of budget with a surplus. A portion of that surplus was rolled into this year's budget to be

fiscally responsible, while still engaging in the broad range and depth of ministries that are integral to this congregation, and it appears that we will end this year in a very similar position to last year.

As we look ahead to what this congregation might be able to do in 2022, the ways we might bless one another, as well as those around us, we ask for you to consider how you might support our ministries. God calls us to live lives of faithful stewardship. To give thanks for the ways we have been sustained, by sustaining others in turn. If you are able to increase your pledge from last year, we ask that you prayerfully consider doing so. If this past year has left you in a position where you need to take a step back, know that we fully understand, and if we can be of any assistance to you or your family please reach out and let us know.

Please fill out the enclosed pledge card and bring it with you when you come to church, either indoors or out on the lawn, for Commitment Sunday on October 17th. You may also return it to the church office by mail, or fill out your intended pledge using the Survey Monkey link that was emailed to you through our newsletter mailing list and is listed below. Rest assured these responses will be safe and confidential.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FKTVCMR>

Thank you for all that you do, both within this community of believers, and in all the other circles that you bless.

In Christ,
The Bethlehem Lutheran Church Council
Pastor Sam and Pastor Laura