

October 2022

Dear People of Bethlehem,

Blessings in this Fall season. We want to take this opportunity to thank you for your faithful giving to Bethlehem, just as we do each Sunday. But in this single letter we send out each fall, it is also time to look together with you, toward all that lies ahead. What will we do together as a congregation to further the gospel in this place? How will we move forward after two years of a global pandemic, to be the church in these new times? How will we extend our welcome to all, and tangibly help our community, and offer hope and healing to all who enter our doors?

One of the ways to discern where we are headed, is to take stock of our core values as a congregation and look at where we have been. Over the past year, there is much to give thanks for, and much that we have been able to accomplish. Just a few weeks ago, we gathered together for Bethlehem Serves, a testimony to the ways in which service to our community is embedded in who we are. We were able to offer in person Sunday School, and our high school students were once again able to go on summer service trip, demonstrating our deep value for education and faith formation. Worship attendance, both indoors and outdoors, has increased over the past few months, bearing witness to the truth that the Gospel and gathered community are central to who we are.

There is no denying that the past two years have been difficult and our ministries have suffered, and we know that the same may be true for you and your families. And yet, we have been faithful, and resilient, and learned much along the way. These lessons will serve us well as we move forward and continue to be a congregation that blesses those within our walls and those beyond our doors.

We wanted you to know, that for the past two years we have ended the year with a budget deficit. The financial impact of those deficits was lessened thanks to surpluses from previous years, but those funds have dwindled. The constraints you feel in your personal budget with the increased costs of gas, food, and many other essentials, have been felt at church as well. Your council and church staff have been wise and careful with resources, particularly over the past two years of the pandemic, but in truth, we need an additional \$42,000 annually to meet increased real costs, as well as our desire to reach further into the North County community, and welcome more people into this joyous, blessed faith community.

As the current faithful stewards of the ministry of this congregation, and as we celebrate our 60th anniversary, we bear a great responsibility and a great joy. In our

hands, we hold a faithful legacy. How shall we live out that legacy together for the next 60 years? We thank you for all you have personally done with your time and talents to support this congregation. If you, and every giver in the congregation, could increase your pledge this year by \$25, \$50, or \$75 a month, we would be able to balance our budget for the coming year. If you can increase your pledge by more than this, we can do even more ministry. If you, like many in the congregation give online, it can be easy to overlook reevaluating your pledge each year, and yet we encourage you to do so. If you are unable to increase your pledge, or must reduce it, we understand and are here to support you, and the pastors are always available to you. Times are hard for so many. Please also know that the Bethlehem Cares fund can assist you financially. We are here to hold one another up in good times and bad.

Pledge cards will be mailed out to everyone on our mailing list, and they can also be picked up at church. We ask that you bring your completed card with you to worship on Commitment Sunday (October 16). If you are unable to attend, please feel free to return your card by mail, drop it by the church office, or pledge using the secure link below.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HXX7GMX>

As we say each week, thank you for your stewardship. Thank you for your voice, for your ministry, for your giving, and thank you for laying your faith life at Bethlehem. We wouldn't be church together without you.

In Christ,
Pastor Laura, Pastor Sam, and your Church Council