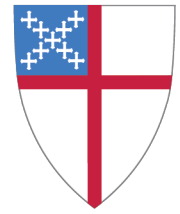




St. James Episcopal Church

knowing and serving God by serving others



3768 Germantown Pike, Collegeville, PA 19426

The Rev. Dr. Mike Sowards, Rector

To the faithful members of St. James':

My Church is! 2019 Stewardship Theme

Our stewardship campaign this year is centered on the idea of the many ways that St. James' touches our lives. St. James' means many things to many people. With this campaign we are being reminded of the multiple reasons why we give generously to the church. Giving has a practical aspect to it in that our pledges and offerings allow us to pay the bills and to maintain our historical properties. Giving also allows us to fulfill our Baptismal Covenant and our duty to each other and to the world as Christians.

Every time we renew our Baptismal Covenant, we are asked to make promises through the following questions:

- Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?
- Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?
- Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?
- Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?
- Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

The answer to each of these questions is: ***I will, with God's help.***

How important are the promises that we make to God? Are we living and striving with God's help to fulfil them?

Stewardship, the giving of our time, talents and treasure, is the instrument we use or path we follow to living the Covenant we have made with God. Being a Christian means that we are NOT living a passive existence. Every one of our promises requires an action on our part.

Without gifts of time, talent and treasure, St. James' could not provide:

- A place to worship and offer fellowship with others seeking a spiritual life, helping us be better equipped to resist the pressures and cares of this world.
- A place where you are empowered through the sacraments to go into the world and minister by Word and Deed a better way to live through Christ.
- A place for Christian education for youth and adults.
- A place to serve others. Through our Outreach ministries, we are providing food, clothing and spiritual guidance for those in need.
- A place for groups that strive for justice and peace among ALL people.

Yes, St. James' still needs to maintain buildings, pay salaries, pay for utilities, etc. We can't do that without your generosity. A generosity that allows the practical aspects to be taken care of while in turn allowing us to live out our mission *to know and serve God by serving others.*

As we sit and think and pray about how much we can give, it is important to remember that we are called to tithe. The tithe (an amount equal to ten percent) is to be thought of as the starting point in our giving. I also like to think of tithing as proportional giving. I have heard from many people over the last five and a half years that I have been here that the concept of tithing is foreign to them. I believe also that they may consider it unrealistic because they don't understand tithing in terms of movement toward a goal.

To begin the journey toward tithing is to begin a journey of stewardship. When we are young and just starting families, there are many things that need our financial attention. We need to ensure that our family has all the necessities of life including food, clothing, shelter and health insurance. You need to invest in your future by obtaining a mortgage, investing in your retirement and putting funds away for your children's education. Once all of these things have been accomplished, what is left is disposable income and from that you should prayerfully consider what your pledge should be. Once you have come up with an amount that you can afford, then the next step is to calculate what the percentage is of the amount you can pledge against what you bring home.

For instance, Let's say that your take-home pay is \$4,000.00 a month. After your mortgage payment, car payment and all other obligations you have \$300.00 left in disposable income and out of that you make a \$40.00 a month pledge. You could then safely say that you pay 1% of your take-home income toward your goal of 10%. As the

years pass and things get paid off or as you receive pay raises, you make a plan to increase that percentage by 1% or .5% a year. If you create a goal and work toward it, you will find that there comes a day when you will have enough disposable income that you can safely give the 10% without compromising your financial situation and/or your future.

In my life, this journey took 14 years.

When Sonya and I first had children we never thought we would see the day where we could tithe. We were able to start paying our tithes in 2004 just as we were going to Seminary and we have been paying them ever since. If tithing isn't possible now, it isn't an idea that you should give up on. Set a goal of when you anticipate you will be able to achieve 10% and work backward, determining how much to increase your pledge every year to achieve this. Secondly, evaluate where your current spending is going and try to find places where funds can be reallocated towards your tithe. Are those extra-large grande lattes really necessary? Do we need the extra sports package on the television cable system? Do we need to have the latest smart phone? We need to evaluate our priorities and follow the Gospel teaching to give in proportion to what we have been given.

Where are we spending our time and talents? Do we have something that could be offered for the greater good? Do we have an hour available for service in God's kingdom that would otherwise be spent watching the latest reality series on TV? Our calling into ministry for Christ is where our greatest passion meets the world and it's needs.

Please consider all these things when you are in prayer and discussing the best way to give to St. James'. Remember all that is currently being done and that which COULD be done by your generous gifts answering the question of *My Church is.....*

On behalf of the vestry and the leadership of St. James', I want to personally thank you for your support to the ministries of this special place in God's Kingdom. Please prayerfully consider your pledge to St. James' and let the Holy Spirit and your conscience be your guide. Together we will continue to be a home where the Holy Spirit has come to dwell and a refuge for those in need.

With a thankful heart!

The Rev. Dr. Mike Sowards
Rector

