

Stewardship Letter 2021 (2022)

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship,
to the breaking of bread and the prayers. -Acts 2:42*

Dear Holy Apostles,

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Autumn is my favorite season here in Penn Wynne, and it has finally arrived bringing cool temperatures, changing colors, and the opportunity to settle into something of a routine. At the time of my writing, cases of coronavirus are declining and while we strive to be careful, we are all trying to find ways of creating routines that take into account new realities - health-related, economic, emotional, and spiritual - as well as trying to return to some of the good things of life that have been disrupted by the pandemic.

Speaking of routines, this time of year is stewardship season at Holy Apostles. Stewardship season is a period of reflection and prayer about the ways in which God might be calling us to support this parish family in the coming year of 2022. The theme of this year's stewardship season is **Commit to Connect**.



Here is why I chose this theme: it has become abundantly clear over the course of the last two years how important connection is. Isolation and loneliness comprise a shadow pandemic that is stalking our society, our families, and ourselves. Isolation and loneliness are deadly.¹ Our young people are the most digitally connected generation of all time, they (and we) have unprecedented communications capacity, and yet young people today feel more isolated and lonelier than ever before.² And it is not just them. Folks of all ages and all walks of life have reported feeling more disconnected from others, especially but not only because of the pandemic. We've all felt it. We are all made for connection. This is God's intention for us: "it is not good for humans to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). Here is my bold claim. **Your local parish church is the best way to foster connection, with God, with each other, and with our communities.**

Personal feelings of isolation and loneliness are connected in disturbing ways with the divisiveness and disunity that our nation is experiencing. Some pundits have opined that we are already living in what amounts to be two different countries, and that the political and societal divisions we face are insurmountable. Civility is in short supply in our public discourse, and that "supply chain issue" has been a crisis for some time now. What can you do about it? Commit to connect. Fostering a connection with your local parish church is the best avenue you have to prove the pundits wrong on the local, grassroots level. From a purely sociological perspective, local institutions (especially ones like us with broad regional, national, and global networks) are essential components in rebuilding the torn and tattered fabric of mutual trust and common good in our communities. It is also true that when they function in divisive and sinful ways, churches can do more harm than almost any other institution, but that only proves the point. Our society needs strong, healthy local churches right now more than ever. And our local parish needs YOU to be part of us so that together we can be part of the strong glue that holds communities together.

We can't stop at the sociological level, either. Our problems are spiritual as much as anything. Our society needs grace. We need grace, and communion. God has not abandoned us. God is reaching out to us, in word and sacrament, in the face of our neighbors, in the face of those who are different than us. God is speaking to us, calling us to wholeness and renewal. God is offering grace and communion in answer to our brokenness, isolation, and fear. All we must do is decide to receive these gifts from God by showing up to receive them. Another way of saying it, we must choose to connect, commit to connect. During this stewardship season we will explore three aspects of this commitment: connecting with God, connecting with each other, and connecting with our neighbors. I invite you to come to church, reconnect in person if you have not been in a while. Do not neglect your prayers. Do not neglect the fellowship of your siblings in Christ. Disconnection is a killer, but God offers communion. God offers life, and life more abundant.

Pledge cards were sent out in the November newsletter and are also available on the table in the narthex. I am asking you to pray with this pledge card. Slip it into your Book of Common Prayer, or your daily devotional booklet and spend a few days or weeks praying about what God is calling you to do in support of what God is doing at Holy Apostles. When you're ready, either mail the pledge card or bring it to church and place it in the offering plate. **We are collecting pledges until Sunday, November 21st.** In addition, we are offering a "digital pledge card" this year in connection with our new church management software..

Stewardship season coincides with the work of the vestry and the finance committee of putting together our parish budget for 2022. I am so grateful to them, especially Matt Dupre, our treasurer, Judi Kraft, our Accounting Warden, and JT Wertz, our pledge recorder. We are blessed. Our overall financial situation has been stable this year despite pandemic disruptions. Substantially, this is because you have been faithful in continuing to support the parish and its ministry. We've also continued to receive rental income and we've benefited from payroll grants from the federal government. We've been able to attend to some necessary building maintenance and repair, including repainting the church façade, installing new doors to the undercroft, and renovating the rectory bathrooms. But, we are not only - or even primarily - about balanced budgets, rental incomes, and well-maintained buildings. We are the local outpost of the kingdom of God.

Our purpose, which includes the purpose of our buildings and budgets, is to worship God and love our neighbors and communities. We've never stopped fulfilling our purpose during the pandemic, though we have innovated and adapted. We've never stopped worshiping God, praying for the life of the world, and caring for our neighbors in tangible ways. Stewardship season is our God-given opportunity to reflect personally and corporately on our priorities and renew our commitment to what God is calling us to do. Thank you for your faithfulness and commitment. May God who is faithful bless you in ways that you can't even imagine by the power of the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sincerely,

James+

¹<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/campaigns/unlock-loneliness/research-briefing>

²<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0140197121000853>