



ST. EDWARD'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The Reverend Dr. Richard C. Bauer, Rector

December 2022

I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other. – John 15:5; 16-17

Dear fellow parishioners of St. Edward's,

As we journey in Advent, it feels right to reflect upon what we've built, and what we're building, as individual disciples and as a faith community. I'm profoundly humbled in the recognition that we're creating something quite wonderful together here at St. Edward's. Every time I enter our sanctuary, I can feel the presence of our living Lord in the reverent beauty of our sacred space. And as our relationships evolve and deepen through the mutual trust we earn with time, consistency, and other-oriented concern, my spirit rejoices in the privilege of being here...now...as pastor, priest, and administrator. Through disruptive hardship and unprecedented challenge, in times of socio-political turmoil and global pandemic, we've managed to persist and to grow in number through our shared commitments to our spiritual home in our first three years together.

From the dignity of our memorial garden to the majesty of our stained glass, and from the spiritual formation that we engage in groups to our congruent messaging rooted in the teachings of Jesus, I see our church standing with skill and poise in a social landscape largely overwhelmed by distrust and pervading cynicism. And through the life-giving empowerment of our mutual ministries and shared leadership, we're exercising initiative to feed the hungry, to welcome the stranger, to advocate for non-violence, and to question the underlying attitudes that separate us from one another. This is well worth naming, and well worth celebrating. We have a story to tell, and together we're helping one another to trust the future, to place imperishable stock in the blessed assurance that all shall be well if we lean into the fundamental principles of our discipleship.

In light of the work we've engaged together thus far, I've found myself invited to revisit some of the conceptual frameworks that I studied during my doctoral work at Duke in Christian Leadership. Because it occurs to me that I've been watching my academic study come to life as our senses of shared purpose evolve at St. Edward's, that we've been working skillfully together in the realm of (what scholars call) "traditioned innovation." This is a place from which people commit to learning and a growth mindset, to shifting "we can't because" to "we can if." It's a place from which people commit to living in tensions that integrate the counterpoint of stability and change, where folks curate together a sense of culture with a communication style, a message of substance, and a "vibe" that can be experienced and felt. As I ponder the stuff of "traditioned innovation," I think that we're asking ourselves how our church can make a difference in our wider community, and that we're cultivating a public witness that communicates the values of Jesus as a teacher beyond the confines of our worship space. I think that we're headed somewhere good with God's help.

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At the heart of this evolving sense of shared identity and purpose, I'm drawn to the essence of Jesus' message as articulated through the Ubuntu adage: that a person is a person through other persons: that "I am...because we are." And as we embark on a new liturgical year, a new lectionary cycle, and the planning of a new budget, I'm starkly reminded that our path as a parish is forged through our collective efforts and our shared commitments to the mission and the ministry that we engage as a body. More than ever before in my life, I believe that I'm a part of a church that can make a difference in the lives of its members, sharing Christ's light and love with those around us.

As we lift up the importance of stewardship this month, articulating the financial resource needs required to maintain our current levels of ministry, it will be up to each of us to freely choose whether we'll play a role in the present and future mission of St. Edward's through the practice of pledging. Under the guidance of a talented and fiscally conservative Finance Committee, we carefully craft our annual budget based on the pledge commitments of our parish community. And through the sharing of our collective resources, prayerfully discerned, we do our very best to balance our income and our expenses. As a non-profit organization without a sizable endowment to draw upon, caring for our physical plant, paying our employees, and funding our ministry efforts is entirely up to us. And with the rising cost of doing business, particularly sharpened in a time of high inflation, we need the help of every member of our parish family to meet our financial obligations as a church.

Please pray friends. Please thoughtfully and heartfully contemplate stewardship this month and ponder what the life of our parish means to you. If you currently pledge financial support to St. Edward's, we thank you, and we ask that you please wonder about the feasibility of a 10% increase in your annual giving. If you're new to our parish family, please consider helping us to persist through supporting our mission and ministry in the form of a financial pledge. I trust that our shared life matters deeply to each of us, that our collective awareness and generosity will raise our senses of necessity, enabling us to close the gap between our income and our expenses. I trust that we're invested in our relationships, in our discipleship, and in the flourishing of our spiritual home. And so, may the Lord bless our efforts and continue to enliven our hearts through the abundance of our shared lives in Christ.

Please complete the enclosed pledge form and return it via mail, or place it in the Sunday offering plate, by the Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 18th.

With love and appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rick Baugh" with a small "+" symbol at the end.

Rick+