

Dear Friends,

I want to share my heart for our 2021 stewardship emphasis for St. James. It has certainly been a challenge to do ministry differently in the midst of a pandemic, but I am so proud of each of you for the ways you have continued to be the church in the community and beyond. You have been faithful in your worship attendance – even online, in your giving – even electronic or through the mail, in your discipleship – even on Zoom, and in your outreach – even socially distanced. Even though we are physically apart, we are still a part of what God is doing in the Kingdom and here at St. James!

2021 holds the hope of turning a new page, but it also carries some uncertainty. Questions remain about when it will be safe to fully gather together and open up all our ministries on campus. The denominational struggles that were tabled when COVID-19 struck are still with us. We still owe a little over \$2 million on our loan, debt remaining from the last couple of building projects around our campus. Given these realities, as well as financial uncertainties for many families during this pandemic, we will need to be extremely prudent in how we budget.

The 2021 budget will still include great ministry worth getting excited about! We are committed to completing our strategic plan that will guide us in our efforts *To Know Jesus Christ and To Make Him Known*. We will be hosting another Ozark Mission Project camp in the summer, a group of youth and adults making a difference in the community. We hope to relaunch our Special Needs ministry, continuing to provide an environment that is welcoming and inclusive so that people of all abilities and gifts can participate in the life of the church. With the certainty of greater digital ministry, we will continue to upgrade our technology that enables you to connect with St. James in a variety of ways.

Pledged gifts will be more important than ever in the coming year. Your willingness to make a faithful 2021 pledge will help the church plan effectively for our programs with understanding of resources. In the past, there has been a significant gap between dollars pledged and actual dollars received. For example, our 2019 pledged amounts were only 63% of our total amount given. I do understand why some people give but do not pledge, and I am extremely grateful for all these gifts. However, we'd like to narrow that gap and move our pledged amount closer to the total amount we will receive.

So, if you made a pledge to St. James in 2020, thank you! If you gave to St. James in 2020 in any amount, thank you! If you have not been in a position to give financially, thank you for what you *are* able to give in other ways! I want to challenge each of us to take a step forward in 2021. If you are a pledged giver, would you prayerfully consider continuing that pledge and possibly even increasing your pledge? We anticipate some might not be in a position to pledge at this time due to changed circumstances as a result of COVID-19 or other situations. If you are a regular giver who does not pledge, would you prayerfully consider filling out a pledge card this year that reflects your gifts so that we might narrow the gap? If you have never given financially to the church, would you prayerfully consider taking a small step of faith by filling out a pledge card and beginning your stewardship journey? Even a small gift back to God of \$25 a month makes a difference. We have 800 families who currently do not give at all; gifts of \$25 a month could accumulate to \$240,000 added support for our ministries!

Enclosed is a pledge card for 2021. This is a covenant between you and God, a commitment to taking another step in your faith. On Sunday November 1st, we will have a time of commitment in both in-person services. You will also have the chance to turn in your pledge card when you come for Drive-Thru Communion at noon. We have made it even easier to pledge online: Go to the website and click on the Giving tab to fill out your pledge card.

Thanks again for all you have done this year to keep St. James ministries and programs strong through challenging circumstances, and thank you for the privilege of being your pastor. Ashley and I count it a true honor to join you in making a financial pledge for 2021, and we can't wait to see where God leads us as we all find our fit!

Together on the Journey,



Rev. Carness Vaughan
Senior Pastor