



STEWARDSHIP 2022: I'm In! INCARNATION LUTHERAN CHURCH

This is going to be a little different than most letters launching a yearly Stewardship campaign. Often, we focus only on the positive message and hope it encourages you to engage with your financial and service commitment in the upcoming year.

We're not doing that this year. Our Story is more complex than that, isn't it? Let's begin with a bit of honesty. This year has been hard. Culturally. Communally. Personally, for each of us, in our own way. No need to deny it. We wouldn't be telling the whole story if we didn't acknowledge the difficulty and division, the grief and loss, the broken dreams but also the burgeoning hopes we experienced.

That's our story. Raw and real. Confusing and confident. Painful and promising.

It reminds me of Paul's words in Romans 5:3-5, "suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

Here's the good news: I've sensed your endurance, the shaping of character, and, in the end, I've sensed the hope of Christ. Throughout, you proved to be faithful and forward looking, gracious and generous, patient and persistent.

- We strapped on masks for the sake of our neighbor and began to come back to in-person worship together.
- We began livestreaming worship for those who were not comfortable with public gatherings and those who are yet seeking a faith community like ours, centered on God's grace and love.
- We celebrated with fifty students and their families a next step on their journey of faith through their confirmation.
- We showed up for an experimental Feed My Starving Children MobilePack™ so that our ministry partner could learn how to expand their work in trying times.
- We gathered on Zoom or in-person or by Zoom and in-person because we longed for the transformative potential of community.
- We navigated the multiple staffing changes throughout this year, with all the accompanying uncertainty and possibility that brings.
- We fed the food insecure in our community to the tune of over \$36,000 and 500 pounds of specifically requested physical items through our Tons of Love campaign for the Ralph Reeder Food Shelf.
- We gave mounds of winter hats, coats, mittens, boots and snow pants so that those who've experienced homelessness, now families in transition, could prepare for an uncertain winter.

Friends, that too, in an unprecedented time in our communal history, is our story.

I think the character of a community is revealed most profoundly in its ability to adapt and newly imagine itself through times of crisis. Endurance producing character. Character producing hope.

On behalf of the staff and leaders of this community, I say thank you!

As we prepare for another year, we are realistic and yet, hopeful. Realistic because we don't know the long-term implications of COVID-19 on our ability to be together in the ways that are the most satisfying and encouraging. Hopeful because our revealed character as a community is faithful and forward-looking, gracious and generous, patient and persistent.

In 2022, we are going to lean into that adaptive character as we...

- Redefine our children's and student ministry around a simple motivation: "Learning to live and love like Jesus, for a lifetime."
- Expand the breadth of our musical experiences in worship with our new leadership team and create musical events for us to invite our neighbors and friends.
 - o This will include significant upgrades in the sound and lighting in the Sanctuary, and some needed organ repairs. (Note: A few generous donors have already begun to lead the way.)
- Continue to seek partner organizations or congregations that can expand our vision for our community work demographically, culturally, or socio-economically.
- Expand our work with our trusted ministry partners (Solid Ground, Ralph Reeder Food Shelf, Lifehaven, the St. Paul Area Synod, Feed My Starving Children, etc.) so that children will be fed, families will be supported in transition and our local community will be impacted by God's grace and love.
- Prepare for a Capital Campaign that will address some neglected facility upgrades.

That's our story. Raw and real. Confusing and confident. Painful and promising.

Throughout, you were faithful and forward looking, gracious and generous, patient and persistent. Well done, good and faithful servants.

As we turn the year, there is more work for us to do. We can only do what God is encouraging us to do with your ongoing generosity and active commitment to service. Financial and service commitment forms are available on the Incarnation website at <https://incarnationmn.org/stewardship-2022/>. Commitments can be made in-person or online anytime from now until Commitment Sunday, November 14.

A new chapter of Our Story awaits your response. Are you "in?"

Peace,
Kai Nilsen, Senior Pastor



In addition to a financial commitment, we are also inviting you to make a commitment of service for 2022. God calls us to serve one another following in the way of Jesus. Before his death, Jesus modeled service for his disciples, washing their feet: "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them" (John 13:15-17). Following this example, we are called to serve our neighbors—especially those most in need.

Service is an expression of the outward journey. When we share our gifts and talents in service, we participate with God in creating a better, more loving world. In the process, we are also changed.

We invite you to make a pledge of your time, gifts and talents, selecting from a variety of options, including opportunities to support the ministry inside the walls of Incarnation as well as outreach ministries, which serve those in need in our broader community.