St. Stephen's
EPISCOPAL CHURCH
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

Growing in Grace Annual Campaign for 2027: the *Why* and *How*

Campaign information

Where may I read about the Growing in Grace campaign or make a pledge? Printed pledge packets are available at the Giving Central table, next to the fellowship hall. The QR code to the left offers information about the annual giving campaign, or visit **ststephensrva.org/annual-giving**. At the QR on the right, you can offer your pledge.

Pledge now

How is giving connected to my faith, and why is it important? Giving is a deeply scriptural (Matthew 10:8, Hebrews 13:16, Luke 21:1-4) and spiritual practice that consciously involves choosing how one responds to God's generosity. Generosity changes the shape of the giver's heart and shapes one's relationship with the one who created, sustains, and upholds us by grace. At St. Stephen's, everything we offer is open to all people, yet all people do not pledge. Worship, outreach, programs, musicians and staff, utilities, building repairs, all of these cost $4.2 million in 2026, paid for mostly by pledges from 838 households.

What is a "pledge"? It is simply a promise to give the church a specified amount of money in the coming year. **How is it used?** The parish's elected leadership, called the vestry, and senior staff rely upon pledged financial commitments to develop St. Stephen's annual operating budget, which at St. Stephen's account for nearly 90% of all available resources. The budget directs how the community's resources will be used to maintain the physical facilities, fund programs, and pay personnel who support or lead ministries. **How are pledges different from gifts placed in the offering basket?** Unpledged gifts, though greatly appreciated, cannot be counted upon for planning and budgeting.

How are pledges paid and what if my circumstances change? You determine the particulars about when and how to honor your pledged offering. Some pay all at once at the beginning of the year; some give weekly or monthly, either in an offering plate/basket (identified as a pledge payment) or using an electronic option like a recurring gift via credit card or automatic bank draft; some make gifts of stocks or other assets. Your pledge is not a contract or a bill; it represents a portion of your life, your livelihood, offered for the life and mission of the church of God at St. Stephen's. You may change a pledge when needed, no questions asked, by notifying Kathleen Wilson, executive director of finance and administration at kwilson@ststephensRVA.org.

How is membership tied to pledging? When you pledge, you share in sustaining St. Stephen's ministries and mission regardless of membership status. Some who pledge here are active members elsewhere or in other denominations. Membership centers on one's commitment to following a specific way of being Christian in the Episcopal tradition. All are invited into that relationship, so speak with a member of the clergy to learn more.

Growing in Grace – Contemplative Prayer Practice

The Celtic Evensong and Communion worship service is contemplative at its heart. It invites us to slow down and notice; slow down and pray; slow down and open to eternal God's presence; slow down and listen to the Spirit. Each fall, alongside the community-wide invitation to take part in annual giving, we offer a brief contemplative prayer practice to open you to more wholeness, clarity, and compassion for yourself and others with, in, and through Christ Jesus.

Practice

This is about a seven-minute practice, ideally prayed daily. Limit distractions as you are able, especially on smart watches and phones. Earlier in your day is best. Use a timer as is helpful (check your smartphone).

Have at hand a journal or notepad and pen. You will write a little every time you pray this practice. You are invited to save all your writings to bring to the ritual burning of prayers that follows the Celtic service on November 22. At no time will you be asked to share your writings.

To begin, trust that Christ already is fully present with you. Trust in this.

Now, near the top of your notepad, write "hope" and "concern" divided by a small line so there is space to write beneath each heading.

Seated, begin your timer. For the first minute or two, settle and relax. Take several full and deep breathes; then shift to breathe naturally. As you notice tension in a part of your body, gently soften it. You are safe.

When settled, inwardly offer this prayer: "right now, my hope is for…", then wait in silence and listen without thinking about an answer. When you become aware of a response, write it, unvarnished. When you stop writing, take a cleansing breath, pause, then pray: "right now, my concern is for…" Listen for the response. Write all that arises.

When your timer ends or sooner if you finish writing, pray: "Lord Christ, I offer you the hopes and concerns of my heart. 'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.' Amen."

Go gently with yourself and let go of expectations you may bring to the practice. Trust in God's presence and work within you. Abiding with Christ in your prayer practice and offering the Lord your hopes and concerns opens you more and more to grow in grace and receive the grace of Christ's companionship, compassion, and risen life.

Remember each time you pray to save of your writings to offer at our ritual burning after the Celtic service on November 22. When we gather in the courtyard, all will be invited to place their prayers into the flames, mixed with incense.