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The Parish Paper

OF
ST. JOHN'S CHURCH
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The Gift of Giving

Our Preservation Campaign proceeds with joy and thanksgiving. The different goals of the campaign have been described in various mailings and articles in The Parish Paper. Other events are forthcoming which will update you on our progress.

It is with profound delight that I report to you that in our initial phase, which includes some of the leadership of our Church, a contribution from the ECW, and members of the Vestry, over a million dollars has been pledged.

What is most gratifying about this tremendous start is the love that the leaders of our parish have shown for their church. Perhaps there are some who will give out of vainglory, and others who will begrudge every penny. But for most, the desire to give comes simply from love for their Church.

Any gift that stems from love comes freely. In our preservation campaign this has been so from the beginning, supremely evident in all of those who have worked so selflessly. There is a free and generous devotion to our parish. They have held one objective in mind, and that is to pass on to the next generation the same blessing that they experience as St. John's Church.

I am sure that parishioners every-where feel this way about their churches. On a conscious level, this devotion may derive from an attachment to family or a particular religious heritage. Or there may be a particular event that recalls great happiness. But whether such love stems from familial roots, an association with Anglicanism, a baptism or a marriage, the church is the locus of spiritual identity.

And spiritual identity reaches very deeply into the soul. Often it is not the object of reflection. It is more given than that, a kind of bare fact, enabling us to say that we are what we are. One cannot quite get behind spiritual identity, because it is a gift. When we make a conscious choice to receive and therefore to be what has been given to us, then we name ourselves accordingly.

For members of St. John's, this self-identity includes its noble church, worship defined through the Book of Common Prayer, and splendid music. But none of these stands alone. They all work together to reveal a singular substance, the reality of the thing signified in noble structures, in words of wisdom, and in melodious tones. God is

worshipped in spirit and in truth, and the identity we find in the life of this parish, at whatever level of participation, is evidence of the Spirit of God seeking us.

Simply put, God gives us Himself. "And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." In giving us Himself God gives us His own freedom, the same freedom of love to give now in our particular time, as He freely gives to us, now and forever.

And so it is that God gives Himself to us in the peculiar gift that is St. John's. Our gift is what we have known and loved as this parish church. Ours is not the exact same as others. There are other ways God gives Himself to other parishes and churches. But St. John's is our particular and peculiar inheritance. It is our way of living in the vineyard that will become the chosen identity of some but not all, although it is certainly open to all, and welcomes everyone with open arms.

As you begin to consider the gift that you will make to the campaign, I hope that you will first of all consider the gift of giving. You have received God's own gift of Himself through the peculiar gift of St. John's. And now in a special way it is your opportunity to contribute financially to her preservation for future generations.

Of course, this is only a small portion of what you have done and will do. Most importantly you give the Lord what He desires most and that is your heart and soul and mind. Next the motions of your heart are shared in concrete activities. You share the talents He has bestowed upon you. You serve tirelessly with the time He has granted you. Now in addition to your usual financial support, there is the opportunity to establish a means to pass on the great gift of God's love to those who succeed you.

It is an opportunity of joy. And in this we must be very careful as a parish. There is no other circumstance in which people can more easily become petty and ugly than in the midst of raising money. But this need not be. Ours is an occasion to rejoice in what we can do if we will. And as we do so, we remember that methods of fund raising and monetary goals are always secondary to the primary task we have as Christians to love one another, as God in Christ Jesus has loved us.

So then, as you prayerfully consider what you should do and want to do, please remember that it is your freedom to give. No one expects anything more than that we do, each one, what we can. And then we shall all together be thankful for the abundance of God's bounty, and give our gifts cheerfully.

In the final analysis, "All things come of thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee." We could never give back to God, what He has given to us. And that is why we love and adore and worship Him in the majesty of His magnificent glory.

The Rev. Dr. Michael L. Carreker

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