

**Take the Next Step is an invitation for each of us to consider how we can grow in faithful discipleship to the Lord Jesus through our stewardship of God's gifts.**

The 2024-2025 Annual Membership Campaign calls us to a manner of life where we exercise our gifts in generous support of one another and of all who seek a place in the household of God.

Your generosity towards the *Take the Next Step* will help us to carry out this mission more effectively in 2025.

*"Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:13-14*

## CHRISTIAN FORMATION

Taking *The Next Step* in Christian formation involves deepening our relationship with God, maturing in faith, and growing in virtues that reflect Christ. Christian formation is a lifelong process that extends across all ages and generations. While the *next step* can vary for each person, as a parish we can support each other in several key areas:

- **Spiritual Growth and Life of Prayer:** We can *Take the Next Step* in Christian formation by cultivating a more intentional and disciplined life of prayer by providing opportunities for understanding the Scriptures, developing a daily habit of personal prayer, and encouraging contemplative practices like silence and mediation.
- **Christlike Virtues:** We can *Take the Next Step* in becoming more Christlike by living out the gifts of the Spirit: practicing the virtues of humility, patience, forgiveness and lovingkindness toward one another. *The Next Step* begins by discerning what specific area is an area for our spiritual growth and taking advantage of what St. Luke's offers to assist us in the progress.
- **Active Participation in Christian Community:** We can *Take the Next Step* by engaging more fully in the life of our parish and the wider Church: serving in ministries, joining small groups, or contributing what we can to move the church's mission forward.
- **Support for Children and Family Ministries:** We can *take the Next Step* by supporting and volunteering for activities that provide learning and spiritual development for youngsters and their families.

*Taking the Next Step* in the arena of Christian Formation contributes to the development of a Christ-like character and the fulfillment of the Christian mission to love and serve others. Supporting our parish's Christian formation programming is not only a way of living out one's faith but also a means of deepening and enriching one's own spiritual formation.

## MERCY WORKS

We can *Take the Next Step* into the spirit of service and compassion by serving others. St. Luke's offers many opportunities for service through outreach programs that touch members of the wider community. We can:

- *Give drink to the thirsty* through Tower Roast Coffee.
- *Feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, and clothe the naked* in collaboration with Lebanon County Christian Ministries and the Chestnut Street Community Center.
- *Visit the sick* by participating in our pastoral care program.
- *Give alms to the poor* through contributions to the Almoner's Fund.
- *Bury the dead* by supporting the grieving in the work of our Lazarus Care Team.

Your continuing financial support and donations of your time and energy in these and other programs of Lebanon County Christian Ministries (LCCM), our renewed initiatives with Harding Elementary School, growing partnerships with the Chestnut Street Community Center and other area organizations like the LGBTQ Center of Greater Reading strengthen St. Luke's commitment to bring the grace and love of God to a greater circle of God's children in our community.



## BUILDINGS AND PROPERTIES

The physical environment of our parish plays a significant role in shaping the experience and can influence people's perceptions of our faith community. Through our recent capital campaign, have taken bold strides in creating a physical environment that is welcoming, comfortable, clean, and safe for our parishioners, friends, and the wider community. However, we must be careful stewards of these resources with ongoing, effective programs of maintenance and repair. Regular maintenance and a program of incremental improvements will help us continually communicate the warmth and welcoming spirit of our community in the built fabric of our parish buildings.

## WORSHIP AND MUSIC

We can grow in our worship so that it becomes a reflection of our love for God and a source of renewal for our parish community. *Take the Next Step* in worship and music invites into a deeper relationship with God, a richer experience of Christian community, and a more meaningful expression of our faith.

We can *Take the Next Step* by:

- Committing ourselves to regular attendance at worship, even if it is only online. Engaging worship more consistently helps us to form a rhythm of faith and connection with our faith community.
- Participating more actively in the liturgy, whether through responses, prayers, singing, or reflecting more deeply during moments of quiet.
- Encouraging and mentoring younger members of our parish to take part in worship and music as acolytes, readers, and musicians, as we seek to help young people take ownership of their faith and foster growth for the community.
- Inviting friends, family, or neighbors to join us in worship. Sometimes *The Next Step* in our worship life is not just our personal growth, but extending the invitation for others to encounter God's love.
- Supporting our music ministries financially through contributions to The Friends of Music at St. Luke's. Your generosity can help ensure that St. Luke's continues to offer high-quality musical worship and bring the gift of music to others in the community as we seek to expand our music program.

Taking the next step in worship and music at St. Luke's involves deepening our collective experience of God's presence through meaningful, intentional participation in both personal and communal worship. Worship and music are central to the spiritual life of the parish, and they offer numerous ways to grow, connect, and engage more fully.

## OUR COMMON LIFE

No matter how we are "wired"—introvert, extrovert, socially adept or socially awkward—something in our soul longs for meaningful relationships with others. We long to know others and be known by them. We treasure friendships that allow us to truly "be ourselves." In many ways, this is the essence of the Church — a fellowship in faith that grows in the love of Christ. Like all communities, we need a support system to sustain our common life. This includes the faithful presence of clergy, the administrative demands of effective communication and interaction, as well as our relationship to the larger Church, to name a few. Without these supports, we may not be able to become that "spiritual house" that God seeks to build.

Vestry and its committees, clergy, and lay staff carefully manage our resources to provide the services we need to grow strong bonds of love and friendship. Your continuing support makes this possible.

## TAKE THE NEXT STEP: PLANNED GIVING

An appropriate program of planned giving ensures long-term financial health and stability of our parish. It allows us to continue our mission even when economic conditions are difficult. Here are several key reasons why our members should consider planned giving as an important element of their financial stewardship:

**Consistent Future Funding:** Planned giving, which includes bequests, trusts, and other legacy gifts, provides a parish like ours with a steady flow of donations over time. This type of giving helps secure future income, making the parish less subject to fluctuations based on attendance or economic conditions.

**Financial Flexibility:** Planned gifts are often unrestricted, meaning the parish can allocate these funds where they are most needed. This flexibility allows us to invest in new ministries, repair facilities, or expand outreach programs without the pressure of immediate budget constraints.

**Engaging the Congregation:** Promoting planned giving encourages our members and friends to think about their long-term legacy within the community. It offers us all a meaningful way to contribute beyond our own lifetimes, which can deepen commitment and connection to our parish.

**Sustainability in a Changing Donor Landscape:** As generational wealth is transferred, a focus on planned giving can help us tap into significant financial resources. This is vital for our future as younger generations engage with churches differently, placing less emphasis on traditional forms of giving.

**Economic Resilience:** Planned gifts provide financial stability during times of economic downturns. Since these gifts often come from estates or planned financial instruments, they are less vulnerable to immediate economic shifts, providing a buffer during lean times.

An effective planned giving program is our *Next Step* to ensure our long-term mission and vitality. For more information or to discuss this opportunity further, please contact the Church Office.

## THE OUTLOOK FOR 2025

The total pledged in 2024 was \$ 185,000. So far this year, we have maintained a giving rate that will significantly exceed that amount by the end of the fiscal year!

In 2024, there were 56 individual pledges of support:  
The average pledge was \$3300.  
The smallest pledge was \$250  
The largest pledge was \$18,720

Projected expenses for Fiscal Year 2025 indicate that we will need a steady increase in revenue if we wish to fully fund normal operations. We are all aware of recent increases in basic costs like utilities. We face other challenges from the diminishing number of regular contributors.

We continue to rely on other sources of revenue to meet our continuing needs. However, the most important source is *you*.

As Episcopalians, we do not recommend a standard level of giving. Instead, we leave it **entirely up to you** to decide *how much you can give* and *what is appropriate* given your monthly budget.

As a parish community, if we all increase our level of giving by a modest amount, we hope to meet a 2025 goal of  
**\$ 210,000**

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT PLEDGING

*Why should I pledge?*

- Pledging helps our leadership team and staff plan for the year ahead. Making a pledge is part of a larger spiritual practice of giving your time, talent and financial resources. Pledging is making a statement that you are a part of this faith community.

*Do I have to pay my pledge all at once?*

- No. Many people fulfill their pledge weekly, monthly or quarterly. Some use offering envelopes while others set up a regular payment schedule by automatic bank payments.
- For your convenience St. Luke's has the ability to accept periodic or one-time online payments.

*What if I need to change my pledge amount?*

- Not a problem! Simply call or email the parish at any time. We realize that people's financial situations change over time, both up and down, and we keep all stewardship related conversations/materials confidential.

*I've filled out my pledge card. Now what do I do?*

- Thank you and congratulations. You have made a choice and a commitment!
- Place your completed pledge card in a sealed envelope into the offering plate or mail your pledge card the parish office by In-gathering by Sunday, October 30th.

*How can I include St. Luke's in my will or estate plan?*

- At St. Luke's, part of our Finance Committee is ready to provide you with information to guide you through the planning process. If you are interested in this topic, please contact the Church Office.



*Take the Next Step:  
Growing in Discipleship*

**Annual Membership  
Campaign  
2024-2025**

**St. Luke's Episcopal Church  
Lebanon, PA**