

## We Face Insurmountable Opportunities

***We believe in God***

***We believe in Jesus, the Son of God***

***We believe in the Holy Spirit, the giver of life***

Those are the essential components of the Church's statement of faith. In Nicene Creed there are a lot of other details in between each of those three statements that make many of us pause and scratch our heads and wonder just what it is we are signing on to. That's fine. It's a good thing to argue with your faith. It's a good thing to argue with the statements given to us from people, like you and me, who have argued with their faith, too.

But in the arguing there is still the basic three tenets of what we sign on to as Christians and in our baptism. This is what we give our heart to – one God who is expressed in Jesus and continues to move through our days in the presence of the Spirit.

This community of St. Luke's is a community of faith. It is a people who declare, each time we meet, what we give our hearts to and what we give our hearts to is the real presence of a real God in real time.

We give our hearts to this and because that we also promise that we will do whatever we can to keep that flame of love and commitment burning bright.

We promise to show up for each other and for the world.

We promise to pray for our needs and for the needs of the world.

We promise to break bread and continue to develop our faith.

We promise to stand up and alongside people who the world is trying to beat down and ignore.

We promise to make this world a better place, by being a voice of hope in the presence of hopelessness, by being possibility in the presence of despair, by being pardon when all around there is the call for revenge.

We promise to be light in the darkness.

We promise to carry with us the peace and joy of life even in the presence of sadness and discord.

The questions of our baptism, the questions we are asked each time we baptize someone and the questions that are at the heart of our reason for being the people of St. Luke's are these:

***Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers?***

***Will you persevere in resisting evil and whenever you fall into sin repent and return to the Lord?***

***Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?***

***Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons loving your neighbor as yourself?***

***Will you strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being?***

This is who we are the people of God, as the baptized. Our working on these promises, day in and day out, is love in action. It is love incarnated. The working of these promises day in and day out is the purpose of St. Luke's.

Last year three areas of intention for the coming year was presented at the Annual Meeting.

I told you that we were going to develop a strategy for the overall mission or purpose of St. Luke's. Second, we were going to work on the mission or purpose of our community engagement, also known as the Outreach program and third, we were going to continue our efforts to develop a plan for the financial sustainability of St. Luke's.

What I can tell you after a year is that all of those initiatives are still in play. As to the first – the overall strategy – that one feels a lot like building a bicycle while we're riding it. The demands on this and every church are high because of the ever changing culture and the moving parts of society.

How are we to be the church in a culture where many people don't trust the institution or seem to want or need the institution or know what a community like ours has to offer?

How are we to be the church in a culture where most people are not in church for worship more than once a month?

How do we plan Christian Formation programs for children and adults in a situation where people are not able to commit to every week, every Sunday experience?

The custom of the church has been to have church on Sunday is that still the model to follow?

If we had the resources could we reach more people in more creative ways?

We live in an on demand culture, is there a way to create community and match that on demand life style?

What is clear from the many interview we did of many of you is that you and the greater community do have a need to know that we are not alone.

We are not alone in our busyness and the press of too much on our calendars. We are not alone in our financial concerns about ourselves or our parents or our children. We are not alone in our loneliness despite all the people that surround us on every side. We are not alone in our concerns about what happens in the world around us and the confusion this often brutal and uncertain world brings.

The Episcopal Churches, nine of them, in Central Montgomery County have just begun to redefine and reimagine what it looks like to be the church in this day and age. The clergy of those churches have gathered and begun to talk about how we might collaborate in being the church. It's a daunting task to reimagine but we know if we're to do the work of God and if we are to be true to where God calls our hearts reimagine we must. Each of us has to be willing to accept what we do well and share those gifts and let go of those ministries we don't do well or have the support in resources to sustain. How do we, collectively, in central Montgomery County be the church in this day and age?

With that understanding and together we will continue to work on programs outside of worship and the way we shape our worship that will respond, reassurance and reconnect us, one to another. We can't change the many pressures and concerns that come with being human but we can walk together

and share our pressures and concerns and even dare the Holy Spirit to show us remedies that we couldn't find on our own.

We are not alone for we are a community who gives its heart to God.

Last year we started a process of serious discernment of where God is calling us in community engagement. That process continues with the leadership of Elliott Milhollin and the Community Engagement committee. The proud tradition of St. Luke's response to the world continues and what we've done so well in past we hope we can do even better.

And, finally, last year we began a serious discussion of finances at St. Luke's. That's a harder nut to crack. We are in discussion about the best ways to move forward in securing the financial future of this church.

All this being said I've sense a renewed spirit this past year especially these past few months. Renewed spirit. The spirit is alive and well at St. Luke's showing itself in new ministries this year. The first two ministries are focused on the 55 and older crowd. The Explorers are exploring who they are and what service they might offer to others. The Senior Ministry group, initiated by Don Park, is a well-defined gift to seniors who may need rides to church or information about resources available in this area to older adults. The third new ministry is the serious, yet whimsical, "Beer and Bible" a time to share thoughts about scripture in a fun way, led by David Davies. Plus, there are good evangelist among you. People are coming here because you're handing out St. Luke's calling cards and inviting them to become part of this great adventure of God.

There is no other community I would want to be part of and no other church I want to lead. Every day I feel the grace of God moving through this church. I know you take your faith seriously and your joy abounds even and despite the heartbreaks you may know. I know you care about one another and will care about those we haven't met yet.

I also know it takes all of us to make the light and love of Christ grow. It takes all of us to make the community of St. Luke's strong and vibrant. It takes all of us to make a community that reaches out to the lost and lonely give them a place to be and become.

What I ask of you this day is that you take hold of the confidence God has in you and shine that light of Christ brightly in all aspects of your life.

What we face are insurmountable opportunities.