



TENDING GOD'S GARDEN

ST. STEPHEN'S ORINDA STEWARDSHIP CAMPAIGN

RECTOR'S REFLECTION

Nov. 7, 2022

Beloved family of God at St Stephen's,

Greetings in the name of Christ Jesus! I am writing this letter in support of the annual stewardship campaign, by which the members of St Stephen's pledge their financial support to ensure the good operation and financial health of the parish. If you've been paying attention these past seven years, you know that the good operation and financial health of the parish has thrived under the clear and purposeful guidance of many excellent leaders: Dan Swander, Roy Elliott, D.D. Felton, Guy Henshaw, Mindy Bush, and Betsy Biern all come immediately to mind as people who have worked very hard to ensure our continued prosperity. Everything I write today, I write in a spirit of gratitude for all their good and faithful work.

If you know me, you know that I love the Bible. Holy Scripture is the daily bread that I seek from God, and by which my soul is nourished and sustained. And the more I prayerfully engage with the stories and observations of scripture, the more I understand that they are not simply a record of past events, or an archive of religious rules from ancient history – they describe the eternal reality of everyday life and the universal human experience of it. All the highs and lows, all the victories and losses, all the challenges and blessings: the stories of the Bible cover and include it all.

These days the stories that are really speaking to me are from the Old Testament books of Kings and Chronicles. These books tell the story of the kingdom of ancient Israel and its various rulers: some of them good, most of them bad, a few of them very bad. Over generations and centuries from the anointing of the king Saul, the people of Israel suffer the roller coaster of fortune that characterizes life under a hereditary monarchy: mostly not great; occasionally prosperous and peaceful. The key is whether or to what degree the ruler remembers that their first obligation is to the Lord and the covenant God made with Moses on Mt Sinai. When the kings of Israel

remember God, they also remember the covenant, and the obligation they have to serve the Lord. When they forget God, they serve themselves, at the expense of the welfare of the people.

My point in relating these things in this letter is to honor those people who have served and led St Stephen's in their commitment to the parish and its prosperity: they have done so because they remembered God, and the commitments we make in our own covenanted relationship with God. They did not serve themselves, they served the Lord, and worked hard to provide for this parish so that this parish would continue as a place where people gather to worship, pray, serve, learn, and grow in faith and hope for themselves and for the world. They worked hard to support St Stephen's so that the future of Lamorinda would continue to include St Stephen's.

As we invite you prayerfully to consider how you support St Stephen's – with your money, with your volunteer commitment, with your participation in a life of prayer, devotion, and service – we invite you to remember and consider the example of those who worked hard and gave generously so that this parish would prosper and persevere. Like some of those “good” monarchs of ancient Israel, their efforts were so successful that even after twenty months of world-historical disruption due to a global pandemic, wildfires, and serious disruption of our civil and economic life, the finances and operational function of St Stephen's remain strong. This is evidence of a great faith, and we pray that your life has been positively affected by the faith, commitment, and generosity of those good leaders.

We also pray that you would see yourself as one who leads in such a way, faithfully committing to the mission of St Stephen's and supporting it with your time, talent, and treasure so that a future generation may come and be nourished by God's daily bread.

In gratitude and faith,

Rev Dr Stephen Hassett, Rector