

Saint Barnabas Episcopal Church
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The Reverend Michael J. Bordelon, Rector
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Dear St. Barnabas Family,

It is no secret that we are in the midst of our stewardship drive. If you have spent any amount of time as a member of the church, you know that the fourth quarter means the church is asking for money. You may be thinking, "Fr. Michael is up there doing his same song and dance. He knows and I know exactly what I'm going to give or not give. Why do we even go through this every year?"

I think this is worth addressing and to do so I want to talk to you about a shift in the way I approach being your priest. St. Barnabas is a congregation with a lot of visitors. This tells me that even though we live in a part of a world often called the "Bible Belt," we still have large parts of our community who are hungry for faith, who are thirsty for a church community, and are yearning for the presence of Jesus Christ. I see brand new faces walking through the doors of our church every single Sunday morning. Currently about 25% of these visitors become members, and while nationally that's a good statistic, I feel like we can do better.

Over the last few months, I've brought together a team of diverse parishioners with the purpose of getting really honest and looking inward, examining how we invite people into our congregation, welcome them once they get here, and connect them to ministries within our church and community. We have learned a lot about who we are as a congregation, what we do well, and where there is potential for growth. And while Bishop Jake likes to brag on St. Barnabas and speak to how the way we "do church" is a model for other congregations – which I really don't mind – I also believe that we're just scratching the surface. The shift in the way that we do ministry here is going to come from being more intentional about moving visitors of our congregation to becoming members, then to invite them into the rooted life of becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ is what I want for all of us. One of the ways this occurs is on Sunday morning after the peace and before Eucharist starts, when the collection plates are being passed through the congregation, a visitor might feel as though we're collecting money to then deposit into our bank account, end of story. But since we are a group of disciples, we know that the story does not end there.

In that moment, the Book of Common Prayer says, "representatives of the congregation bring forth the people's offering of bread, wine, money or other gifts and presented to the Celebrant...on the altar." (BCP 361) We are gathering up an offering! We are gathering up our offering to be laid on the altar, which is our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving given over to Jesus Christ! And when we are offering ourselves unto Christ, what we find in that moment is that Christ is forever offering himself to us in the Holy Communion.

When you fill out your pledge card you're not just writing down "here's some of the excess cash me and my family have this year that we would like to give to St. Barnabas." When we fill out our pledge cards, we are pledging what of ourselves, what of our worth, what of our aspirations can we lay at the feet of Jesus Christ in thanksgiving for all that we have received for the hope of building the Kingdom, supporting this faith community, and being a beacon of love in Lafayette.

When you fill out your card, I want you to ask yourself: What sort of a congregation do you want St. Barnabas to be? Who do you want us to become? Who do you need us to become? And maybe most importantly, who does our community need us to become? And then...what of your treasure can you give to help make it so.

Farewell in Christ, our shared hope,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael J. Bordelon".

Fr. Michael J. Bordelon, Rector

