



2023

ANNUAL GIVING CAMPAIGN

St. Stephen and the Incarnation
Episcopal Church

Stewardship Message from John Linn:

The prophet Isaiah says: Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

I am John Linn, and I've been attending Saint Stephen's since 2007, when I was still coming out of the evangelical religion of my 20's and 30's I somehow remembered the Episcopal church, in which I was brought up. I come to this place for community, to remember that I am not alone in the Universe. That the world is larger than my own problems. That I have God, and I have friends to help me through. How many times over the years has my life been rescued from the ashes, through relationships with friends and with God. People have prayed over me, when I felt lost or sick. Friends who would sit quietly with me in times of grief. The threaders knitted prayer shawls for me when I had kidney surgery. I formed deep community here, based on shared interests and values.

In a surprise bonus, I found my gifts here in the church. I did my first open mic in Boston with a friend from the church, Jonathan Callard, whose parents then coincidentally showed up here in DC and sang in the choir for years. Jonathan introduced me to songwriters, who encouraged me and helped me grow, dragging me along with them to songwriting camps and letting me sing back up at their shows. My first band formed here at Saint Stephens, with fellow choristers Laura Ettabbakh and Alys Wilman. A crisis in music leadership allowed us to sing here freely and often, and in many styles, and to develop our music together. Duane Bonds left me her two vintage Martin guitars in her will. I got a job teaching guitar, purely through serendipity. Susan Kyle randomly invited me to a New Year's Eve party where I met my wife, Amy. Over the years, I have seen so many surprises and coincidences come through church, that I developed a growing awareness that God is up to something in my life. And he is up to something in the life of this church. He wants me to identify my gifts, so God can grow and magnify them in the world. God will not let us stay the same. He wants us living into the best use of our natural gifts, the ones that help us shine and feel joy. The ones he gave us. The ones that only we can express. As the spiritual says. This little light of mine. I'm gonna let it shine.

I nearly left here after everything that happened with Padre Sam and the pandemic. It just seemed too much to overcome, and I was so hurt and angry. But I remembered that God is up to something in the life of this church. God is doing a new thing. He makes rivers run in the desert, and makes houses from the wood of shipwrecks, and he has done so for me, and he can

do it here in this place. So, here I am still. I have increased my pledge this year, because I am starting to believe in this place again, and in what God might do with our collective ashes. This can't be a church without you – your presence, your prayers, your service, and yes, your money. Every gift -- financial and otherwise that I have given to this place has been a source of growth for me. How might God help you grow into yourself with your next step of faith? Is it your development as a leader? Your creative and artistic talents? Is it gratitude and generosity through service to others and financial giving. I think God often wonders what we will do. What might God do with us and our next faithful step? I will close with Psalm 40, the verse of my own heart: I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.