



2023

ANNUAL GIVING CAMPAIGN

St. Stephen and the Incarnation
Episcopal Church

Modified text of John Payne's stewardship announcement from 10/22:

"I first started coming to St. Stephen's over ten years ago. I was born and raised here in Washington and spent seven years in Chicago and during my time there I hitched my career to the rising start of a local politician with a funny sounding name. You probably don't remember him, but he ran a couple fairly successful presidential campaigns. I moved back to DC in 2010 and into Columbia Heights in 2011 and began church shopping. I knew almost right away that St. Stephen's was the right place for me. The mix of high and low church, loaves and fishes, the emphasis on social justice all made it feel like home. And most importantly, it let me be an introvert. My job at the White House was demanding both physically and mentally and I already had several local communities baked into my life. What I needed was a place where I could worship God, ground myself for the week, and then go home. St. Stephen's gave me that.

Several years later, I found my circumstances had changed. Several of the communities I was a part of had dissipated, as they are wont to do in DC, and a change of job made outside of work much easier. I began attending coffee hour, joined the young adults group, and became part of this community. As my life continued to change, I found that St. Stephen's continued to support me. When I became unemployed in 2017, book groups and volunteering at Loaves and Fishes helped give my life structure and meaning. During the pandemic, the evening compile kept me connected to friends and parishioners while providing daily solace in an uncertain time. And when my apartment flooded during the pandemic and I couldn't have anyone enter it to help me, several St. Stephenites showed up at my door with plastic bags full of towels and rags along with several cans of beer. At the time, I didn't know which of those items I appreciated more.

Now, as I begin to look to the future, I am excited for this community as I begin the next steps of my life. As my girlfriend, and since last Saturday now my fiance, Sarah and I think about the family we want to create together, I want St. Stephen's to be a part of our children's lives. I want them to sit in front of the altar during communion and look up at Simon just like he does now to the older kids. I want to take them to Loaves and Fishes to understand the importance of giving back and how it can change them. I want them to know the radical love of

God that exists in the Gospels and this place and be radicalized by that love. And I know that my story is not unique. I've heard from so many of you as a member of the vestry, finance committee, stewardship committee, or just at coffee hour how our church has transformed your life.

Even with all these factors however, making a pledge is still hard. For my generation and the one's coming up after us, the cost of living is rising faster than our income can keep up. The cost of housing especially makes it difficult to live in or close to this community. And with what disposal income we have, there is need outside of this church too. Climate change creates new and worse disasters each year. Friends and family post new gofundme for people they know that are suffering. And it can be hard to think about the future of this place as we are still looking for permanent leaders in our church. But when I think of all that St. Stephen's has done for me, has done for all of us, and the potential for what we can do in the future, the question transforms. Just like the Eucharist transforms us each week and God's love transforms us each day, the question becomes not "how can I give?" but "how can I not?"

Every Sunday when I come to church, I sense a growing and passionate desire to continue stepping forward and building God's kingdom here and now in Columbia Heights, Washington D.C. I felt it when I first walked through the doors over ten years ago and I still feel it today. And I feel it's been growing over the past months as well. I hope that even as this campaign ends, you will continue to think about how your donations and talents can help us take that next faithful step.

Amen."