**2017 Diocese of Virginia**

**Pledge Letter Information: Read This First!**

Length of Your Pledge Letter

The suggested pledge letters in the “All Hearts Open” program are too long. And this is intentional!

The current trend in pledge letters is that a letter be:

* no longer than one page
* include ample white space
* Some are even in 14 point font!
* Include bullet points of ministries that have made tremendous impact over the past year
* Include bullet points of how your church will serve your community if the budget increases

As you read the “All Hearts Open” program letters, craft them for the culture, context, momentum, and potential of your congregation. Pick and choose the paragraphs and sentences that work. Delete what sounds repetitive (and maybe used it in a different communication platform). Rewrite. Bullet point. Include a photo. Increase the font size. Then send us what works for you. We’d love to see it!

Ministry Minutes (referenced in paragraph 1)

Often a favorite element of annual giving campaigns is the Ministry Minute. This is a chance for church members to tell the story of how your church has transformed their lives. Ask members to prepare no more than a three minute conversation to share. They may do this during worship announcements, during a forum, through a video, or in writing.

These conversations can reveal rich stories that no one in the congregation has ever heard and draw people closer into the life of your parish. Plan ahead so your participating members have time to reflect and so your messages have a consistent rhythm. Folks will look forward to hearing the next story!

Impact Bullets (include this in paragraph 2)

Communicating the impact of your ministries is essential to a vibrant annual giving season. For parishioners who do not participate often, hearing about the transformational ministries at your church may call them to engage more deeply. For your most active parishioners,

learning more about the vitality at your parish will draw them even closer. And for newcomers, knowing your church is profoundly relevant in the community it serves is essential.

Vestry Commitment (the last full paragraph)

The last full paragraph of every pledge letter in this program references the commitment and early submission of pledge cards by your vestry and other ministry leaders. This effort is important, and it requires planning. Please see the separate document in this program on Vestry Commitments to get started and create a plan.

September 27, 2017

Dear Shannon and Pat,

We love witnessing how *hearts are open* at Grace Episcopal Church to ministries that transform lives at our church, in our local community, across Virginia, and around the globe. Over the next six weeks you will learn about many of these stories. You will read stories by people from across Virginia who reflect on how God calls each of us to open our heart, to hear God’s word, and to do God’s work. You will hear stories from people who share the pews with you at Grace, whose hearts have been opened through the many ministries here. And you will hear from God, who is speaking to you through each story of transformation and ministry.

*What is your story of God opening your heart?*

Our ministries at Grace are profoundly relevant …they are relevant to the lives in our congregation, to the community that surrounds us … and they are relevant to God, who opens our hearts, hands, minds, and mouths to do God’s work with those known and unknown. Our ministries open boxes of food, windows of hope, and minds of creative and joyous wonder. Our ministries open each of us to our own gifts, some yet unknown, and to paths not seen before.

*Our ministries embrace those whose hearts have been broken open.*

“All Hearts Open” is a call to action for each of us. It is a call to worship together and open ourselves to the Word of God, to know the presence of Jesus Christ in our lives, to respond to the nudges of the Holy Spirit. And it is a call to take God’s Word, Jesus’ presence, and all our holy nudges back into the world and make them relevant.

“All Hearts Open” is a call to respond in every way God gives you. We wonder … what does this look like in proportion to your whole life?

* If you reduced the hours you spend watching television by 50%, what would you do with this time and how could it serve God?
* If you read one more book a year, what would it be and how would the wisdom contribute to the people who surround you?

*+ If you pledged 2% of your income to Grace +*

*How much of an impact would that make on your standard of living … and how great of an impact would that make on God’s story among us?*

The mission at Grace Episcopal Church calls us toward intentional generosity, to include financial commitments. Some members tithe, giving ten percent of their income to the church, some members give proportionally, committing a certain percentage to our ministries, while others give as they are able. What is important is that you open your heart to God, beginning as you are able, to support and sustain our life of ministry in God’s Kingdom.

We invite you intentionally to do three things over the next several weeks. Sit down at your dinner table and prayerfully discern the impact that ministries at Grace offer to each of us and to our community. As you eat your meal, manage your calendar, or balance your checking account, prayerfully discern your responsibility to use the gifts that God gives you to do the work God calls you to do. Then come to Grace for worship, sit in your favorite pew, and open your heart to the exponential number of ways we are called into deeper relationship … and into greater relevance.

Enclosed is your 2018 pledge card. Between now and Grace’s Celebration Sunday on November 5th, consider how you might increasingly open your heart to God, to yourself and the gifts God has given you, and to others with greater intent. The vestry and other ministry leaders at Grace have already committed not to take their pledge amount from last year and simply write 2017’s figure on 2018’s pledge cards. Instead, they have each prayerfully committed, as evidenced in the vestry letter to the church, to tithe or give proportionally. Please follow their lead as you discern how God is calling you to open your heart more broadly into the generous life God gives to others through us. Join us in this commitment.

Your commitment to our pledge campaign is an essential gift that fuels Grace’s transformational ministries in Winchester and beyond. All Hearts Open!

Faithfully yours,

The Rev’d Rachel Faith, Isaac Lord, Sarah Church,

Rector Stewardship Chair Senior Warden