

The Witness

Volume 25, Issue 12

Welcoming Worshiping Working

December 2021

Sunday

8:00 AM Service

10:00 AM Service

Tuesday

5:00 PM Centering Prayer
via Zoom

Wednesday

12:15PM Service

Merry Christmas
and Happy
New Year



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And What of The Holy Spirit?

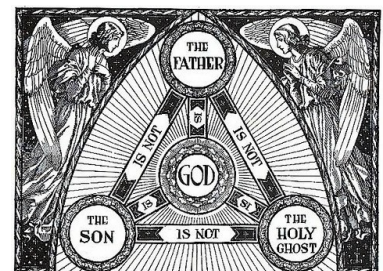
By The Rev. Ian M. Delinger, Rector

What you're used to...	What's to come...
<i>We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.</i>	<i>We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father.</i>

Aaaaaalllll that way back in 1976, The Episcopal Church agreed with the Orthodox Churches (*the Anglican-Orthodox Joint Doctrinal Commission*) that the filioque clause should be omitted from the Nicene Creed. Then, in 1994, The Episcopal Church resolved to remove the filioque clause from the Creed in the next Prayer Book revision. And finally, in 2018, Convention resolved to revise the Book of Common Prayer, the draft supposedly available in 2024 with full adoption in 2030.

So, what is the filioque clause and why the controversy? The original Nicene Creed, adopted at the Council of Chalcedon in 451AD, did not reference *filioque* [...and the Son] in what we believe about the Holy Spirit. Translated from Latin, it went like this (*in olde English*):

...and in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets."



Theologians of the Church in the West inserted "... and the Son..." in the 6th Century as a means to suppress the heresy of Arianism which denied the one being / co-eternity of the Father and the Son. In 798 the Emperor Charlemagne made the filioque clause permanent, which was finally established by Rome in 1014. [*The Church moving slowly is not a modern thing, clearly!*] The Church in the East never went through this phase, and have to this day rejected this addition to the Creed. So, like purgatory, the Filioque Clause appears to be "*a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture*", a reference to Article XXII of the 39 Articles of Religion that solidified the Church in England's separation from the Church in Rome.

(continued on page 2)

(Continued from front page)

So, we here at St. Stephen's are gearing up for that 2024-to-2030 timeline. The Rector, Director of Music and a few others are in the process of updating our service booklets which involves omitting some things that were found not to be useful, bringing together appropriate seasonal material and incorporating some of the changes that will be incorporated into the new Book of Common Prayer. You will note in the Advent and the Christmas & Epiphany service booklets, the Filioque Clause has been omitted. No doubt it will take awhile to get used to *not* say those three words. And that is what trial periods are for.

I wrote about the changes to the Creed exactly a year ago in *The Witness* for December 2020. I also mentioned that the Church is exploring more expansive language for God: God being unconfined should probably not be limited to just "He". We will explore some of this language throughout 2022 and see how it feels and fits. Other than that, our liturgy will feel 99% unchanged...we are *Episcopalians*, after all!

Advent Compline



Wednesdays at 8pm on Zoom. December 1, 8, 15 and 22.

<https://tinyurl.com/FrIanZoom> MeetingID: 491 276 0586 Passcode: 17

Compline is the last service of prayer for the day. It descended from the night prayers said before bed at the end of the monastic round of daily prayer. Compline is a simple office, and it can be said or sung individually or communally. During Advent 2021, Zoom Compline will be available to all. It will consist of the traditional form of the service with a short reflection and a time of silence. It will last about 20 minutes. The liturgy will be sent out later, in the Saturday email.

Hands on Stewardship at St. Stephen's

Thank you to the Packet Stuffers and Packet Deliverers – it was a BIG job!

Thank you to all the A/V Techs, Altar Guild, Ushers, Lectors, LEMs and Coffee Hour Hosts.

Thank you to the office volunteers who stepped in and helped while Stephanie was out.

Thank you to Kathleen Pennington for taking on November's Witness.

Thank You to Everyone who already donated or plans to donate to the For Kids From Kids Toy Drive.



Birthdays

4-Dec Eli Enney
5-Dec Stephanie Olsen
11-Dec Kathanne Lynch
13-Dec Andrew Johnson
15-Dec Isabelle Preston
27-Dec Larry Myrick



Anniversaries

23-Dec Dick & Kate Riggins

Are we missing your birthday or anniversary?

email office@ststephensslo.org
and we'll be happy to add you.

CELEBRATING THIS MONTH

“All I want for Christmas is my Chancel Choir!”

The season of Advent is one of anticipation. Anticipation of the hope, love, light, and everlasting light brought to us through a baby boy named Emmanuel, “God is with us.” I feel like I have been living in anticipation for many months now. All of us have.

One of the courageous efforts I have made with my Cuesta Concord Chorus is to begin rehearsing in person. We are all vaccinated, masked, socially distanced, and have limited seating. I am thrilled to report that we rehearsed for three months with no outbreak. This success has given me hope for reuniting the St. Stephen’s Chancel Choir for Christmas Eve!

In this spirit of “anticipation,” I have designed a crescendo of Choral Scholar Singers through Advent arriving to a fortissimo choir on Christmas Eve. The First Sunday in Advent will be led by Choral Scholar, Grady Ahern. Each successive Sunday will add another Choral Scholar Voice, layering harmonic voices each week until Christmas Eve. Christmas Eve will showcase our Chancel Choir singing praises to the birth of Christ our Lord!

**Choir rehearsals will be: Sunday, Dec. 5 From 11:45am-12:30pm
Wednesdays, Dec. 8 and 15 from 5:30pm-6:15pm.
In Ramsden Hall.**

If you have ever wondered what singing with the choir is like, please come find out what the fun is all about! We will rehearse the hymns and anthems for the Christmas Eve services.

For those of you at home who would like to listen to the hymns and anthems I have chosen for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, I have created a YouTube playlist for you. Most of the hymns I chose include the lyrics so you can easily sing along. The music will be included in the December packets you will receive. I also thought it would be a fun way for our younger members to learn the hymns they will hear on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. You can search “St. Stephen’s Christmas Hymns 2021” on YouTube or Google. Or you can enjoy typing in this link: <https://tinyurl.com/SSEC-ChristmasHymns2021>

**We can’t WAIT to get to sing for you again!
–Cassandra Tarantino, Director of Music**



General Information

The Witness is a monthly newsletter published by St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church, San Luis Obispo, CA to provide information about the parish to the congregation. Subscriptions are free to anyone. Send request along with your name and mailing address to the church office. Donations to help offset distribution costs are appreciated.

Make checks payable to St. Stephen’s.

The Church’s e-mail address is: office@ststephensslo.org

Contribution of articles is encouraged. Please e-mail submissions to witness@ststephensslo.org

The deadline for emailed submission of articles is the third Friday of the month. Email any questions to witness@ststephensslo.org © Copyright 2021 by St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church. All rights reserved.

POSTMASTER: Please send address corrections to: St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church, 1344 Nipomo St., San Luis Obispo, CA 93401-3935

Save Paper!

Have the Witness emailed
instead of snail mailed.

contact
kapennington@netscape.net



Help with Relocating Afghan Families



Lauren Brown, member of SLO United Methodist Church, has raised the possibility of sponsoring one or two Afghan families in our area. Lauren is seeking interested persons to be part of the research and planning of this project, and has contacted Fr. Ian to see if any St. Stephen's members might wish to participate. He has contacted several other religious congregations that might wish to take part in this project.

Here is Lauren's statement describing the project briefly:

"Organize a broad-based community effort to facilitate resettlement of a small number of Afghans to our area. This effort would involve as many congregations in the faith-community as possible, Christian, Muslim and Jewish. We might also seek to engage service organizations like Chamber of Commerce and Rotary, as well as city, county, state and federal agencies. These groups might have access to resources that could supplement private fund raising.

This would have to be a long-term project, at least 2 or 3 years, to do the planning, fund-raising, finding support for housing, jobs and language training."

Preliminary meetings of a planning committee were held in October and November. Members of the committee have moved very quickly to engage key people in the project: leaders from various faith communities, business, contacts in local, state, and even federal government. The committee seeks to support this effort with a broad-based coalition of citizens and interest groups, and welcomes additional volunteers at this early stage of planning.

If you are moved to be a part of this, contact Kathryn Bumpass for additional information and email addresses for leaders of the committee.

Kathryn Bumpass
kathrynb@mail.fresnostate.edu
805-709-0840

Blue Christmas Service: December 22 @ 12:15 and 5:30pm

Christmas is sometimes difficult for people, and instead of the "happiness" that is forced upon us by the hyper-commercialization of Christmas, many people are "blue" during December.

This service is an opportunity for those who find Advent and Christmas difficult to acknowledge that and to be held by God through our difficult times. It will be held at our normal Wednesday Service time and it will be a Healing Service.

A second service will be held at 5:30pm. Both will be livestreamed. Please email: Office@StStephensSLO.org or call the office at: 805-543-7212 to indicate in-person attendance.



For Kids From Kids TOY DRIVE!!!

Once again this year the Acolytes and Sunday school students of St. Stephen's want all of us to think of children in need around us and contribute to their Toy Drive. Donations of toys, games, clothes and gift cards will be collected at the back of the church at each service through December 14th.



Below is the wish list for children at 40 Prado, and the wish list for a family served by the Salvation Army will be available soon. If you'd like wish lists emailed to you, or would like to arrange to bring your donation to the church at a different time or have someone pick it up, contact Kathleen (kapennington@netscape.net, 805-546-0880)

Checks mailed to the church and online donations are welcome. When mailing a check, write "Toy Drive" on the memo line, and mail it to St. Stephen's, 1344 Nipomo, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401. To donate by credit card online, click the "donate" button at StStephensslo.org, choose "write a note" and enter "Toy Drive."

40 Prado Wish List: small gifts for children, gift cards for teenagers. If you wrap the gift, please label it with the age range and gender the gift would be best suited for, 0 - 1 year, 1 - 3 years, 4 - 6 years, 7 - 10 years, 11 - 17 years.



St. Stephen's Halloween Litter Pickup, October 31, 2021

Written for The Witness by
Kathanne Lynch



Instead of picking up candy on Halloween, eight of us picked up LITTER. The picker-uppers were: Cheryl and Craig McCollum; Kathryn Bumpass; Sophia Agbo; Kay and Clark Lewis; Amy Lewis; and Kathanne Lynch. They covered 17 blocks around the Church, gathering 27 pounds of litter from the sidewalk and street gutters. This was the second St. Stephen's cleanup in 2021.



It was inspired by the Creation Committee's workshop led by Kathryn Bumpass earlier this year.

Photos (clockwise from bottom left):

* Kathanne Lynch gathers all our trash

* Sophia Agbo and Kathryn Bumpass

* Craig and Cheryl McCollum * Kay, Amy, and Clark Lewis



Leaving A Lasting Legacy for Our St. Stephen's Church Family



Here are some ways that gifting can contribute to the work of St. Stephen's. Including St. Stephen's in your will or living trust will help perpetuate the Love of God that St. Stephen's shares with all of San Luis Obispo. Each of the options below can be designated to St. Stephen's in general, or to a specific fund or ministry of St. Stephen's. For those interested, it would be important to consult a financial advisor.

Naming St. Stephen's in your Will or Estate Plan – The "Simple" Plan:

Leaving St. Stephen's in your will or estate plan is the simplest way to leave your legacy. After caring for your family, you can name a percentage of your estate or a set amount of your assets.

Charitable Gift Annuity – Ensuring your own financial stability for life: A Charitable Gift Annuity pays you a guaranteed, fixed dollar amount each year for the rest of your life at a rate based on your age. Cash or appreciated securities serve as the capital. Upon your death, the remainder of the gift annuity transfers to the fund(s) at St. Stephen's which you have designated. You will receive an immediate, partial income tax deduction. The minimum of \$10,000 establishes a Charitable Gift Annuity.

Charitable Remainder Trust –The "Meal" is Yours; The "Leftovers" go to St. Stephen's: With a Charitable Remainder Trust, you also receive lifetime income from your gift. Upon your death, the remainder goes to St. Stephen's. Though more complex than the CGA, it can help minimize many potential appreciated asset issues. The minimum of \$100,000 establishes a Charitable Remainder Trust.

Retained Life Estate –The Big Gift: One or more of the assets which you own at the time of your death (home, farm or land) can be bequeathed to St. Stephen's, while retaining control of the asset(s) while you are living. Upon your death, the property transfers to St. Stephen's. At the time of the gift, you receive an immediate, partial income tax deduction for this future gift.

Required Minimum Distribution: For those seniors age 70½, contributions can be made directly from an IRA account to a charity without counting toward income. This mechanism disburses the contribution to St. Stephen's in the tax year. Discuss the options further with The Rector.

Christmas Services



December 24 @ 4pm – Christmas Eve Service
 December 24 @ 8pm – Christmas Eve Service
 December 24 @ 11pm – Midnight Mass
 December 25 @ 9:00am – Christmas Morning



We have added an additional service to accommodate for our limited capacity. Please, *please* reserve your spot by emailing or calling the office. Phone: 805-543-7212 or eMail: office@StStephensSLO.org

We do not want to have to turn anyone away, so reserving a spot will help us manage the numbers. Thoughts are still stirring for Christmas morning but will not be finalized until after the deadline for this issue.

Coffee Hour Hosts Needed!

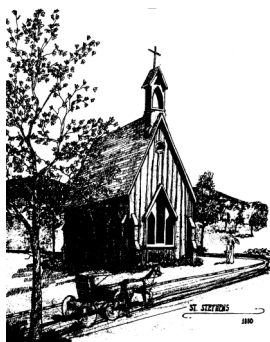


Coffee Hour is a time of fellowship over coffee and a light snack in the patio after the 10am service. In order to continue this tradition every Sunday, volunteers are needed to serve as hosts. It doesn't have to be anything complicated, and if you've never done it before, a more experienced host can help you.

5-Dec Liz Frost
12-Dec Charlene vonGortler & Marcy Paric
19-Dec Sophia Agbo
26-Dec Craig & Cheryl McCollum

December Coffee Hour Hosts

To volunteer or learn more about hosting coffee hour, please reach out to Liz Frost at either lizwfrost@msn.com or by phone at 805-594-0604. A sign up sheet is available in the kitchen in Ramsden Hall as well.



Victorian Christmas Historic Walk of San Luis Obispo, Sun., Dec. 19th, 5-6:30 p.m

Sierra Club guided stroll past 15 holiday-lit Victorian houses in the Old Town Historic District to recall Christmas customs, events, and locales of the 1890s.

Flashlights recommended. Masks required if not vaccinated. No reservations, free.

Meet in front of St. Stephen's Church, corner of Nipomo and Pismo Sts.

Leader: Joe Morris, 805-549-0355

Centering Prayer

Where: on your computer or telephone

When: Tuesdays at 5PM

How: Join Zoom Meeting

<https://tinyurl.com/SSECCenteringPrayer>

Meeting ID: 327 152 8720 **Password:** 0908

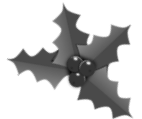
Dial by your location: +1 669 900 6833 US (San Jose),
+1 346 248 7799 US (Houston), +1 253 215 8782 US,
+1 301 715 8592 US +1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago),
+1 929 205 6099 US (New York)

Gifts

Flowers & Candles are given to the Glory of God by the Altar Guild in celebration of all birthdays and anniversaries for December.

Advent Retreat

One-Day Advent Retreat



Saturday, December 4, 10am to 2pm
Saint Paul's/San Pablo, Salinas & online
Register Here: <https://forms.gle/i3U9T9wrJ4wyRKBX6>

You are invited to join friends from around the Diocese of El Camino Real for a one-day Advent retreat. We will gather for Morning Prayer at 10am, and then have Bible study and reflection in small groups, plus quiet time for personal reflection and journaling. We will finish by 2pm. Please join us either in person at Saint Paul's/San Pablo in Salinas, or online (a Zoom link will be sent to you after registration). If you are coming in person, we are asking for a \$20 contribution to cover the cost of lunch (scholarships are available). If you have any questions, please contact Canon Martha Korienek at canonmartha@realepiscopal.org

Reports Due: December 31, 2021

Reports of Ministries for the Parish Annual Report are due on December 31. For those of you who lead ministries of St. Stephen's, please have your Reports to Fr. Ian, in electronic form, by December 31, 2021.

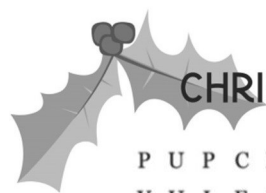
Support St. Stephen's Kids while Shopping for Christmas Baking

Take a look near the bottom of your last receipt from Ralphs. If it doesn't say "At your request, Ralphs is donating to ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH" you're missing an easy way to contribute to our Children's Programs.

St. Stephen's Children's Programs is a charity registered with Ralphs Grocery Stores, so when you're shopping for ingredients for your Christmas baking you can contribute to our children's programs while you shop.

If you haven't already registered your club card for Ralphs with St. Stephen's, please do so before shopping for all those ingredients for Christmas baking. Register at www.ralphs.com by clicking on "sign in", then signing in if you already have an account with Kroger/Ralphs or selecting "create account" and completing the information requested.

After you're signed in choose "my account" from the drop-down menu under your name and then choose "community contributions" from the column on the left. Search by name, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, or our code number, CV931, and Ralphs will donate from 1 to 4% of your purchase to our children's programs.



CHRISTMAS WORD SEARCH

P U P C H R I S T M A S N D N L I C
Y U L E T I D E O M H F C P U U F E
L D C T I N S E L C O K R R T M R L
I E A E I M Y N P Z L E H E C V U E
G C R G U L I J O L L Y O S R C I B
H O O G I X A S Y W Y S L E A L T R
T R L N N N N B T R F N I N C X C A
S A E O O H G D M L R L D T K C A T
F T R G E M E E G C E M A S E Y K E
E I S B L S L O R M I T Y K R C E K
S O S N O W M A N B Y T O B E L L S
T N K V M X H D L Y R A W E Z S G T
I S V C H E S N U T S E J I N G L E
V O R N A M E N T S C G A R L A N D
E P M P O I N S E T T I A D T R E E

Words to Find

Angel	Jingle
Bells	Jolly
Carolers	Lights
Celebrate	Mistletoe
Chesnuts	Noel
Christmas	Nutcracker
Decorations	Ornaments
Eggnog	Poinsettia
Festive	Presents
Fruitcake	Snowflakes
Garland	Snowman
Gingerbread	Tinsel
Holiday	Tree
Holly	Yuletide



Bible Selections for December

	5-Dec-21	12-Dec-21	19-Dec-21	26-Dec-21
	Advent 2	Advent 3	Advent 4	Christmas 1
1st READING	Malachi 3:1-4	Zephaniah 3:14-20	Micah 5:2-5a	Isaiah 61:10-62:3
PSALM	Canticle 16	Canticle 9	Canticle 15	Psalm 147:13-21
2nd READING	Philippians 1:3-11	Philippians 4:4-7	Hebrews 10:5-10	Galatians 3:23-25;4:4-7
GOSPEL	Luke 3:1-6	Luke 3:7-18	Luke 1:39-45	John 1:1-18

A CREATION CARE CHRISTMAS

T'was the night before Christmas, and all through the house,
we had a small eco footprint, as small as a mouse.
The stockings not new, but used year after year,
a few holes and snags, but St. Nicholas won't care.

No plastic trees nor ornaments here,
not even a real tree was wasted this year.
Instead, just a wreath made from cuttings of pine
allowing the tree to grow new branches in time.

No plastic made tinsel nor chemical snow
to decorate now but never decompose.
The lights that decorated our windows and porch,
were powered by solar, and shined bright as a torch.

No gift cards were purchased, no large dollars were spent,
Instead, we chose a local charity to which we'd all give.
Our presents to each other, quite simply to show love
for the birth of our Jesus, our real gift from above.

We were all sound asleep in our foam free beds,
with visions of God's child filling our heads.
The heater was set at 60 degrees,
and our bodies all warm in our organic cotton jammies,

When a sound in my yard and from my dream I awoke,
and out the front door, my head I did poke.
And there, bright and shiny, on my lawn I did see,
Santa's new e-sled, plugged into my electricity.

"No reindeer to pull? No Rudolf to guide?"
I asked the big man as I strolled up to his side.
"No", he told me, "they were allowed to stay home,
for their scat creates methane and other gasses that warm"

So, he charged up his batteries for his long night's
ride while I brought him some tea and cookies with pride.
His sleigh fully charged, he was ready to go,
so he thanked me kindly and he climbed aboard.

And as he flew off silently into the night sky,
I heard him whimper, it was almost as a cry
"Merry Christmas to all and take care of God's Creation
that it may be shared with all future generations."

-Craig McCollum



St. Stephen's

Episcopal Church

Welcoming Worshiping Working

1344 Nipomo Street
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401-3935

805-543-7212
office@ststephensslo.org
www.ststephensslo.org
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St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

You can scan this QR Code
with your phone and be
taken directly to our PayPal
site or go to
paypal.me/ststephensslo



Christmas Decorations

Each year the Altar Guild decorates our church with beautiful greenery and vibrant flowers for the Christmas Season. If you would like to donate toward the Christmas Decorations, please fill out this form, enclose a check made payable to St. Stephen's Altar Guild, place it in the offering plate or mail to: St. Stephens, 1344 Nipomo Street, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

Name of donor (s):

Memorial or thanksgiving which will be noted in the Christmas Bulletin:



Giving Out of Abundance and Out of Poverty

A Sermon Preached by The Rev Ian M Delinger, Rector

November 7, 2021 – Proper 27, Year B, Track 2: 1 Kings 17:8-16, Psalm 146, Hebrews 9:24-28, Mark 12:38-44
Watch at the 23:00 mark at <https://tinyurl.com/StStAGC21>

It's the middle of the Annual Giving Campaign, and The Widows Mite is conveniently the Gospel! Jesus watched the crowd putting in money and many rich people put in large sums. That is the aim of the Annual Giving Campaign, so do follow that lead.

But the widow gave out of her poverty. And Jesus holds her up as the model. How do we give out of our poverty? I don't know what any of you contribute. Those numbers are strictly with the Treasurer and the Annual Giving Campaign Team. And I certainly don't know what any of your incomes are. I don't want to know any of your financial situations because that's between you and God. I am confident, though, that many of you could increase your annual pledge without decreasing your lifestyle. And many of you give to other organizations and to special fundraisings that we do here at St Stephen's, which is all right and proper, and I am thankful. Thank you. Next year, we will be raising a considerable amount of money to rebuild the parking lot, and we will be relying on your generosity – above and beyond your pledge – to make that expensive undertaking a reality.

But what can we learn from the Widow giving out of her poverty? I'll share 2 stories about giving out of poverty. The first is how we traditionally think of poverty: economic. I was on a summer placement with the Anglican Diocese of Perú in 2003. The Bishop asked me to visit all of the parishes, which at the time was 8...in the entire country. Lima was around 10M inhabitants, about 9M of whom lived on less than \$2/day. There were 2 middle class, or affluent, neighborhoods, and then the rest of the city was made up of varying degrees of *pueblos jóvenes*, or slums. The dwellings in the outer slums were made of panels of raffia tied together with twine. As you traveled down from the Andean foothills toward the ocean, the dwellings in the neighborhoods were made of increasingly sturdier materials: corrugated sheet metal, wood scraps, and eventually bricks...but a house made only partially of bricks, and also of those other materials was more the norm than an anomaly. Scene set.

All of the congregations except the Cathedral were in the *pueblos jóvenes*, so that's where I spent most of my first couple of weeks. The abject poverty didn't make me feel uncomfortable. I knew that abject poverty existed, so as a Christian and a responsible citizen of the world, it is my responsibility, if I experience it, to then effect change. What did make me feel uncomfortable was the hospitality shown to me. On a number of occasions, when visiting the home of one of the faithful, I was offered food and drink. That sounds pretty normal, right? Not when you are in a dwelling that is half brick – laid by the owner, not a professional bricklayer – and half corrugated sheet metal precariously held together. The food wasn't stored to North American refrigeration standards, and neither was it prepared to the hygiene standards any of us would be used to. None of that bothered me. The issue for me was that offering the food and drink to me meant someone in the household wouldn't eat, or the family as a whole would each eat less that day. Yet, if I didn't accept the offer, they would be greatly offended. The poor of the *pueblos jóvenes* in Lima knew what it was to live and give like the widow in today's Gospel. *Out of their poverty they gave much of what they had, all they had to live on.*

Most of us at St Stephen's give out of our abundance. That is certainly the right thing to do. Rightly, you want to know what you are getting for your money. The Annual Giving Campaign Team included a ministry-focused budget so you could see what your money is being spent on. But what if you were less concerned about what your money was being spent on, and instead, focused on – or rather, prayed for – what we do at St Stephen's to be abundant, the Welcoming, Worshiping, Working to always be expanding to and for yourselves and to and for the Good People of San Luis Obispo? What if you gave more, not to balance the budget, but to be a part of what God and we can make possible together?

In the OT Lesson, the widow is abundantly aware that her resources are scarce. There's more scene setting to do here. Ahab, the King of Israel, has just married Jezebel, and they are worshiping Baal. We all know that worshiping Baal is about the worst thing that the Ancient Israelites can do! So, Elijah tells Ahab that there is going to be a drought. Not a popular prediction, so God sends Elijah to live at the River Wadi where ravens will bring him bread and meat twice a day, and he can drink from the river...while everyone else is in drought. Eventually the river dries up, and God sends Elijah to this widow who, coincidentally, lives in the homeland of Queen Jezebel.

In Elijah's day, Men of God were often poor. They were supported by others, especially women. So, God sending Elijah to this widow doesn't faze him. What he doesn't know is that she is rather destitute herself! So, he is surprised when he asks her for water and bread that she exclaims that she and her son are starving. The widow uses the same exclamation that Elijah did when he predicted the drought to Ahab: *"as the Lord your God lives!"* So, that must have hurt a bit. But, with trust in God and the assurance of *"Do not be afraid"*, the widow is able to produce an endless supply of food. God, the prophet and the laywoman work together to produce an abundance.

What if you were to think of your annual pledge in those terms instead of in budget spreadsheet terms? **What we are doing together with your time, your talent and your money, and with God is an effort to produce an abundance! An abundance of what? Well, let's pool our resources together and get Welcoming, Worshiping and Working, and let's discover together what abundance comes out of all of that.**

Both the OT and the Gospel Lessons are examples of giving out of poverty, and financially, most of us at St Stephen's give out of our abundance. Thank you! There is never enough thanks! You are very generous. **My goal is to encourage you to be even more generous, but with a mindset of what we can accomplish as God's People, as the Body of Christ**, not a mindset of *"What can we pay for"*.

Perhaps what we have a *"poverty of"* is a poverty of initiative and/or enthusiasm or maybe even a poverty of confidence in what is possible. Certainly, the pandemic has caused my rivers of initiative and enthusiasm to experience drought-like conditions! It has been very challenging to know how to lead you all into being the Body of Christ while we spent more than a year at home and now 4 months with some of us partially in the building and partially not, some of us spending pre-pandemic amounts of time in the building, and some of us still waiting. We have no idea if many of our members have drifted away permanently. We did really well at last year's Annual Giving Campaign, with a few more pledges and about 105% above the year before. That was my assurance that the St Stephen's Family was still intact. But I also thought there would be an unrestrained and unencumbered grand reopening when everything would be as free-flowing as December 2019. We are not there yet, and because of that, some of our Family may have chosen a different spiritual path.

So, it's understandable if we have a poverty of initiative and enthusiasm or a poverty of confidence. **Give financially out of your abundance, and let's learn together how to give out of our poverty of initiative, enthusiasm or confidence. Amazing things can happen within a community when we recognize our weakness and commit to one another to overcome it.** For Elijah and the widow, it was an unending supply of food. What will it be for us?

One quick story about giving out of the poverty of enthusiasm – my second story for you. Back in 2008, I discovered a pea-sized lump just under my jawline. [Note: *It eventually disappeared, about a week before scheduled surgery.*] I had just moved to the University of Chester Warrington Campus, but hadn't found a local doctor, so I had to take the train 15min into Manchester and then a 25min bus ride to Chorlton, my old neighborhood. I was the last appointment of the day, which we all know is awful, but I was finally seen about an hour after my scheduled time. It was about 6pm, and I knew that my doctor had been there since at least 8am. And on top of not being scared but actually being scared, I was annoyed that I had been sitting in the waiting room for over an hour. I was called into the exam room, where I waited a bit longer. And then my doctor entered with a big smile on her face. She sat down on a stool across from me. And with that big smile, she said, *"How can I help you today?"*

That is what I remember from that doctor's visit. Out of her exhaustion and depleted patience, she smiled at me and treated me for the next half-hour as if I were her first patient of the day. I can't do that! Some of you know that if you're in a meeting with me at 6pm after a day of back-to-back meetings, I'm not going to smile at all! Out of what I assume was a poverty of enthusiasm or patience or energy, she gave an abundance of care, which is *exactly* what I needed from her at that moment.

So, today, this month, this pledge drive, I want you to give out of your financial abundance so we can discover together what abundance comes out of all of that and out of the time, talent and out of the initiative, enthusiasm and confidence we can scrape together to continue being the Episcopal Branch of the Jesus Movement, Welcoming, Worship and Working for, with and among the Good People of San Luis Obispo.

Amen.