***Praise the Lord, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples.***

***For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.***

***Praise the Lord.***

Dear Immanuel Family,

As 2024 comes to a close, the vestry has glad tidings to share with you. God’s Spirit is moving within our midst here at Immanuel, and we are experiencing His many, great blessings. There are too many spiritual blessings to list in this letter, but I’ll share them with you in the upcoming Annual Report for your encouragement. For now, it’s wonderful to share with you the financial blessings Immanuel received during 2024.

**You will notice** that this letter is very long, but the vestry made a commitment this year to increase transparency about Immanuel’s finances. Being good stewards requires the vestry to carefully make decisions about Immanuel’s budget and spending. Thank you for your patience with the length, as I have much to share and didn’t want to leave out important details.

**The letter is organized** by first describing Immanuel’s 2024 finances, spending, and blessings. The next section gives you information about 2025 pledging and proposed spending. The letter closes with a special message.

1. **Report on 2024 Finances**

**2024 Giving and End of Year Spending.** The vestry agreed to try a new financial management approach as 2024 neared its closing. I mentioned during the financial management presentations that we would test whether this new approach would lead to better vestry stewardship. Since Immanuel’s fiscal year ends on December 31, we must complete spending by that date or, alternatively, transfer any surplus to the building fund in early 2025.

Immanuel has been blessed so greatly through your 2024 giving to the Lord. Therefore, there were surplus funds available to test the new End of Year (EoY) spending process. Below are the steps the vestry took to try out this new process.

* In late September, the vestry prepared a list of potential items needed by the church. Criteria included: items had to be purchased before December 31; items should address our proposed mission statement, by helping us address the needs of our church, our community, and the world; items which could be funded in 2025, but might better be funded in 2024, which would improve our financial standing in 2025.
* We then waited to see if there would be a surplus (that is, more money than we planned for in our 2024 budget) to fund some or all these items.
* In late November, we met, discussed, and then prayed before we voted to prioritize these items. Once the Treasurer confirmed funding, we began making these purchases.

Here are some examples of items funded through the EoY process:

* **Portable kneelers**, which match the fabric of our chairs in the Nave; these are ordered for a January/February delivery. There is a deep yearning by many to be able to safely kneel during our worship service.
* **New, updated computer equipment,** including replacement computers, a new server, and a Video Conference System for Classroom 1. This purchase, planned for 2025, has been moved up to December and now frees up additional money for our 2025 budget. The equipment has been ordered and is arriving.
* **Special year-end gifts for our mission partners**, including Global Teams (Yvonne North), LifeFirst, and ACTS.
* **Performance recognition for our staff.** For the first time in many years, the vestry was able to approve end of year financial appreciation for those who serve us, including our clergy and staff members. This performance recognition demonstrates our gratitude for their ongoing, dedicated service to each of us in Immanuel. (**Note:** In previous years, the Senior Warden would offer an opportunity to the congregation to contribute to special Christmas gifts to our clergy. This year, you may also wish to give a special gift designated for Father Travis or Pastor Sallie --this is appropriate if your heart is led to do this – with the knowledge that the vestry also approved recognition from Immanuel’s financial resources on behalf of the entire church. Just be sure to clearly designate that you intend this to be a Christmas gift for Travis or Sallie.)
* **Support for our Diocese**. As with all parishes in the Diocese of the Mid Atlantic, Immanuel pledges and provides support to our Bishop and for the needs of the Diocese. The 2023 vestry made a promise to the Diocese to provide an increased amount to our pledge, at the end of 2024, if our financial status allowed us to make a supplemental contribution. Through the EoY process, we fulfilled that promise to the Diocese. We also added a special contribution to the Diocese for church planting. When Bishop Chris met with the vestry on November 23, he shared that the Diocese no longer had resources for church planting in its budget, although DOMA currently has 4 church plants that are growing. Instead, the Diocese established a special fund for Church Planting and a generous donor pledged up to $150,000, agreeing to match any gifts to this fund by 2:1. At the December vestry meeting we unanimously voted to provide up to $10,000 for this fund, depending on the advice of our Treasurer at the end of December. This contribution will result in $30,000 for church planting in DOMA, if we find it appropriate to fund the full amount at the end of the year.

Here were our reasons: First, we are giving back to God so His work can be expanded through the support and planting of new churches in a wider geographic area. Our hearts long for the lost and lonely to come to know Christ as we know Him. We also thought about Immanuel’s own children and grandchildren, who may find themselves in locations which do not have an Anglican church nearby. We believe, through faith, that we are supporting the flourishing and expansion of the Kingdom of God through this contribution.

* **Additional Acolyte robes and cinctures**.
* **And 11 additional items.** Please contact me or Scott to receive the entire list, if you wish.

Early next year, the vestry will coordinate with the Treasurer and the Bookkeeper to evaluate how the EoY process worked and what changes are needed in the future. I invite your thoughts and observations, too.

**Thanksgiving for Special Monetary Gifts from Those Who Love Us.** In 2024, Immanuel was blessed with beautiful new sanctuary furniture, special music, and needed tree removal and landscaping improvements through designated gifts. We are very grateful to these givers for their love and concern for our congregation.

1. **Report on 2025 Finances**

Here is where Immanuel stands with respect to our 2025 pledges as of Sunday, December 15.

* **Operating Fund for 2025**. Sixty-six (66) pledges have been received, with a total annual pledge of $399,077. This is a significant increase from 2024 pledging, when Immanuel received 53 pledges totaling $361,956. The 2025 budget approved by the vestry totals $488,051. Since the 2025 pledged amount (as of this date) is less than our planned budget, it will be the vestry’s responsibility to monitor spending every month and adjust or reduce our planned budget, if needed. That said, the giving over the course of 2024 has been astonishing, far exceeding the pledged amount. The vestry is confident in the God of the universe to supply our needs, and we are very grateful for all you have pledged and given to the Operating Fund.
* **Building Fund for 2025.** Fifty-two (52) pledges have been received, with a total annual pledge of $179,274. This is also a substantial increase from 2024, when Immanuel received 36 pledges to the Building Fund amounting to $156,384. Since our monthly mortgage payments come from the Building Fund, our hope is to reach a giving goal of $185,046. The pledged amount is a small shortfall, especially compared to our Building Fund budget for this current year. Thank you!

**(IMPORTANT NOTE:** Please understand there is no request here regarding your giving. This is simply a status report for you. Our purpose is to be transparent, so you are informed about Immanuel’s finances.)

**If you have not yet submitted a pledge for 2025, please consider doing so to help the vestry with Immanuel’s financial management.** We recognize that not everyone is comfortable pledging, but please think of it this way: When you fill out and submit a pledge card, you are simply sharing your “giving plan” for the upcoming year. As 2025 progresses, you might need to reset and reduce your plan or reset and increase your plan. Both of those actions are appropriate. Our Pledge Records Secretary Lydia Schnack is happy to receive a revised pledge card from you anytime during the year.

If you decide to share your giving plan by completing a 2025 pledge card (which you can find on the Ushers’ table or request from the office), it helps the vestry be better stewards of the gifts given to God, gifts which support His mission within our church and to the world.

As Immanuel’s vestry, we give praise and thanks to God for how you have given in 2024 –- and plan to give in 2025 -- to meet the needs of Immanuel. Thank you.

***Please talk with me, Scott, or any vestry member if you would like to learn more about this financial information or vestry decision-making. We welcome your feedback, thoughts, and suggestions.***

1. **Special Message: Extension of the Junior Warden’s Term**

During October, a beloved member of our congregation approached Scott Ankers about remaining on the vestry for an additional year to continue serving as Junior Warden. After prayerful, humble consideration, Scott agreed he was willing to have this recommendation presented to the vestry for its decision.

The possibility was thoroughly debated and discussed in two separate vestry meetings. Immanuel’s bylaws limit a vestry member to a maximum tenure of four years and our Articles of Incorporation prohibit any vestry person from serving two consecutive 3-year terms. Therefore, the recommendation was within our rules and made it possible for the vestry to deliberate and determine how to proceed. On November 26, the vestry voted to extend Scott’s vestry term and service as Junior Warden for one year.

Immanuel’s vestry traditionally consists of 9 vestry members, and 3 new members will be elected by the congregation at the Annual Meeting in January 2025. Since the bylaws allow for a maximum of 12 vestry members, there will be 10 members in 2025, until Scott leaves the vestry in January 2026 when the vestry will once more consist of 9 members.

***Again, please speak with me or any member of the vestry with your questions or thoughts about our decision. We welcome your inquiries.***

**Please know:** Mortal words cannot express how greatly God has blessed Immanuel in 2024. Dear friends, you have been faithful witnesses to Him throughout this entire year. Your gifts of time, service, and treasure have accomplished His purposes.

Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Thank you for following Him so closely.

May the Lord deeply bless you and those you love during this Christmas season, when the Father so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Always remember…

**You are loved.**

Your sister in Christ,

Deb