

Dear Colleagues,

The challenge of the coronavirus pandemic requires many of us to learn new skills and ways of doing ministry. I'm deeply encouraged by the creativity and ingenuity I see across our congregations. And with so many virtual services, I've enjoyed stopping in to worship with friends near and far.

Sometimes what we learn to do involves implementing best practices that existed before the pandemic. This certainly applies to communicating our gratitude and inviting support for the church.

Research by the Lake Institute makes clear that most congregations only acknowledge a gift once a year. That means a donor who stretches now to support a congregation would not get a thank you letter until January 2021. We can do better. Take time this coming week to thank your donors.

I've provided a sample letter that can be adapted to fit the story of your local congregation. Send a version of this in the next week in order to acknowledge gifts your congregation received from January 1 to March 31. Include a gift summary report if applicable and a return envelope.

I structured the letter to make several points:

- Name the challenge of this moment to make clear that we're all in this together
- Explain how the congregation responds and adapts
- Thank people for their commitment to the congregation
- Acknowledge that some face financial challenges and what the church is doing
- Invite those who can to make an extra gift
- Reaffirm again that we're all in this together

Most importantly, avoid language like "the church has bills to pay." Instead, talk about all the ministry we do together and how it matters, now more than ever.

Your work does deeply matter. People need the connection, hope, comfort, and inspiration of church. A pandemic strains community relationships and leaves us isolated. The ministry of our churches – your work – sustains people in this challenging time.

Please reach out if I can be of assistance.

Yours in Faith,

Andrew Warner

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Adapt this letter to your own congregation. Send it out as a thank you to anyone who made a gift in the first quarter (for any fund) and everyone who pledged (regardless of any giving year-to-date).

Dear [name of adults in household],

What a month this has been. I can't recall a seminary class that could have prepared me for the challenges the Coronavirus and physical distancing brought to my 'normal life'. So, if you're feeling overwhelmed, afraid, angry, or in shock... I get it. So much feels different.

And yet some things remain: the abiding love of God, the connections of friendship and prayer within our congregation, and our commitment to reach out in service to our neighbors.

Here at St. John's, we are learning new ways to still be the congregation you treasure. Our music director and I began offering virtual services on Facebook Live. Our Deacons started a calling tree to make sure every household would receive a call at least once a week. Edna Smith, our steadfast hospitality leader for the last 50 years, adapted to this new moment by becoming a "virtual barista" with a zoom coffee hour every Sunday and Wednesday morning. We don't need a building to be church, but we do need each other to be St. John's.

I want to thank you for your commitment to St. John's. [For those who've made gifts in first quarter: Your gifts this first quarter help sustain the faithful mission and ministry of our congregation.] Your support is critical to our sustainability.

Some in our community face personal economic challenges because of this pandemic. Please reach out to me if you need support. The Trustees created an Emergency Fund so that we can help each other through this time.

If you find yourself able to make an additional gift beyond what you normally give or to continue your usual contributions, know that your donation is deeply felt and lasting.

Together, we can support each other through this difficult time. Together, we can answer God's call to mission and ministry. Together, we can be spiritually united even when physically apart.

With gratitude,

[name of pastor]