

## A CASE FOR SUPPORTING THE ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH FOUNDATION

What would Tallahassee and our world be like if there were no St. John's Episcopal Church? As parishioners at St. John's, we have always loved and cherished our church home here. Our priests, our fellow parishioners, the beauty of our grounds and buildings, our church music—all the things that make St. John's such a wonderful place to worship and grow spiritually. But an increasingly bright future for St. John's is not guaranteed. God is calling us to *remember the future*: to provide gifts that will ensure St. John's remains a vibrant community for generations to come. Planned gifts are how we as disciples plant the shade-giving trees under which future generations will sit. Imagine the steps of St. John's filled with children hearing the Gospel for the first time; picture youth serving our city in future community service camps; and envision adults going deeper in their relationship with God.

The St. John's Episcopal Church Foundation is a critical component of our Church. It is this Foundation that has its primary mission to provide the necessary resources that will keep our Church vibrant, growing, and leading our community into a brighter today and into a brighter future tomorrow. The Foundation seeks financial resources to grow an endowment that provides incredibly important support for many programs and activities of today's St. John's Episcopal Church. Planned gifts are a way to 'endow' our annual support for the Church and create a legacy of generosity: our planned gifts provide financial support in perpetuity so St. John's mission and ministries can flourish in the years to come.

Through earnings from this endowment, the Foundation provides support each year to a growing list of activities that are the underpinnings of our St. John's spiritual experience. Whether it is for support of curricula for our youth's Sunday School classes; or for need-based scholarships for high school students to enjoy the learning experience and excitement of spending time in Cuba, Ecuador, or other Latin American countries. It includes programs at the Ruge Hall at the Episcopal University Center near the FSU campus for college-age students, and for a range of materials for our youngest children to add to their spiritual growth and development. These dollars help support our Seminarians in their studies as well as securing the services of a sacred music intern from FSU. The less fortunate in our community are also high on the priority list. This financial support provides for summer feeding programs for hundreds of local children who would go without food during the summer months. Because of your generosity, the Foundation provides monies to pay for the incredible food, clothing, and housing needs of recent hurricane victims in our Panhandle region of Florida by making life-saving resources available to other local Episcopal churches in our region. These and many other projects and activities are supported each year because of planned gifts made previously to the St. John's Foundation.

These activities noted above, and many others, are supported in part or in their entirety by the St. John's Foundation. That Foundation, created in 1999, was started with the idea of providing the Church additional resources through the creation of an endowment. An endowment for the future mission of St. John's is modeled on the old Greek proverb: "Society grows great when we plant trees whose shade we know we shall never sit in." Growing an endowment has been a long and slow process—one that will provide the resources for future gifts and returns that we may never see.

Let's take a quick look back and see how we have progressed. Until the recent pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus-19, the Foundation's endowment had grown over the past decade primarily because of investment growth. Under the guidance and oversight of the Foundation's Finance & Investment Committee and the Capital City Trust Company, the Foundation's endowed funds had grown

substantially. Several years ago, in late 2016, a Spending Policy was developed and implemented which allowed up to 4% of investment earnings could be expended for programs and projects annually. The numerous projects (several noted earlier in this paper) have been supported each year since 2017; those projects have been recommended to the Foundation Board by the St. John's Vestry. Each year, as the endowment had grown, the amounts provided for projects and activities also had increased--from \$26,300 in 2018; to \$32,700 in 2019; and to \$38,588 in 2020.

Recently, the tremendous disruptions created by the COVID-19 world-wide pandemic has wreaked havoc on personal savings and retirement plans. It has also had similar devastating effects on our endowment. All of us now face both *short- and longer-term challenges* we must overcome together. We ask that you consider assisting us address the *short-term* drop in our endowment resulting from the economic impact of this terrible pandemic. One approach might be to use a portion of an Individual Retirement Account (IRA) through a Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) to re-build the St. John's Foundation endowment. Re-building that endowment would allow the Foundation to continue to increase the level of project support over the near future.

The Board of the St. John's Foundation has increasingly sought opportunities to talk with the parish about the importance of planned giving and its *long-term* impact for St. John's. We also have sought to explain how a planned gift to the Foundation by a parishioner will substantially contribute to the long-term health and future vitality of St. John's. Those planned gifts—left to the Foundation through a bequest in a will or other estate-planning techniques—will continue to grow the Foundation's endowment and allow more long-term funding be available to support St. John's Episcopal Church now and in the future.

The Foundation has created the St. John's 1829 Legacy Society—so designated to mark our Church's founding in 1829—to recognize those parishioners who have signed a Letter of Intent to leave a planned gift to the St. John's Foundation. This recognition is provided to our planned givers as a way of thanking them for their commitment to the future of St. John's. The parishioners who leave their legacy with one of these planned gifts can be described in Isaiah 61:3 which said, "They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory." Therefore, it is through these planned gifts that the Foundation's endowment will continue to grow, and St. John's will continue to prosper.

Our vision is that by 2029—the 200<sup>th</sup> birthday of our Church—we will have at least 200 members in our 1829 Legacy Society. With 200 planned gifts committed for the Foundation's endowment, just imagine that we could potentially have a \$10 million endowment (as compared to our less than \$1.5 million endowment now). Then imagine that, if we could provide St. John's Episcopal Church with 4% of that endowment each year, we would be adding \$400,000 in programs and activities to our Church above its approximately \$1,000,000 current annual budget. This would truly allow St. John's to grow and prosper spiritually and have an expansive presence in Tallahassee and in this region of Florida.

This Foundation and its Board are striving to communicate the importance of the Foundation's support to our St. John's Episcopal Church family. Our Core Values statement notes "Since 1829, we have valued faithful stewardship of the time, talent, and treasure with which God has blessed us. We seek to be good stewards, not just for our own benefit, but also for the well-being of generations to come, that future members of St. John's will share in our faith and love God and their neighbors."

It is our hope that, with the Foundation Board's strong management of the endowment, the integrity with which it conducts the business of the Foundation, and with the growing numbers of parishioners

who make a long-term commitment to become members of the Foundation's 1829 Legacy Society, we can and will reach our goals and fulfill the bold vision we have for St. John's Episcopal Church and its Foundation.