

Creative giving catches on during coronavirus pandemic Some Presbyterians are giving for the whole year to shore up their church's finances

by Tammy Warren Jim Gear, edit



NEW ALBANY, Indiana — The COVID-19 pandemic is encouraging new ways of giving among Presbyterians: in person, in the mail, cash, checks, on line...At St. John Presbyterian Church in New Albany, Ind., some members - of their own accord - have chosen to give their full-year pledge up front, said the Rev. C. Allen Colwell. "Pledges have been rolling in steadily. Half-dozen or so come straight from bank accounts, but others are faithfully mailed in every week. It's humbling."

Members and friends at St. John Presbyterian Church in New Albany, Indiana, are faithful with their giving. During this time of "virtual church," some are giving in advance to strengthen finances for ministry and mission. St. John celebrated its 200th anniversary in 2016. The church can trace its beginnings to eight members who formed the congregation, which was then Union Church of New Albany and Jeffersonville, in 1816. A year later, Union Church was renamed First Presbyterian Church of New Albany, **which was the first church in Indiana to have a Sunday school.** Twenty years later, in 1837, the congregation divided to establish Second Presbyterian Church at Third and Main streets, where they worshiped until the current St. John Presbyterian was completed in 1890. Since about mid-March members of St. John have been worshiping together through services on Facebook Live and YouTube.



"May we draw on the Holy Spirit to do what we can for one another, whether it's by wearing masks, making phone calls, sending cards or text messages, checking in on one another, or simply staying home and being faithful in prayer," Colwell said. At least four members of St. John are making masks for members and others who need them, he said. "One good thing about this virus scare is that it reminds us that we are in this life together. One change that Colwell hopes will come from all the social distancing is that people may become even more grateful for "community." He said, "I even pray for a revival of people who realize how much they miss having a church community."

St. John Presbyterian Church in New Albany, Indiana, celebrated its 200th anniversary in 2016. During the pandemic, services are being held via Facebook Live and YouTube. Once the stay-at-home order is lifted, Colwell said, it may be similar to the beginning of the Drew Carey TV show, where everyone pours out onto the streets at 5 p.m., singing and dancing to "Cleveland Rocks!" "I just imagine that's how we're going to be when we can all finally leave our homes," he said, adding that it's tough for a Cincinnati kid to use a Cleveland reference, but that's what comes to mind. "More than ever, I believe we need to see ourselves as brothers and sisters," Colwell said.