Serving the Jersey Shore since 1865! Sirviendo a la costa de Nueva Jersey desde 1865!

Christ Episcopal Church Iglesia Episcopal Cristo

415 Washington Street Toms River, New Jersey 08753-6742
732-349-5506 ChristChurch@ChristChurchTomsRiver.org www.ChristChurchTomsRiver.org

October 25, 2026

Dear Christ Church Family,

Grace and peace to you as we enter this season of giving thanks. Before anything else, thank you. Thank you for the ways you show up for one another, for the prayers you carry, and for the countless quiet kindnesses that make Christ Church feel like home.

Deacon Carolyn kicked off our 2027 ministry year with the twenty-second chapter of Matthew's Gospel. A group of questioners tries to trap Jesus by asking whether it is lawful to pay taxes to the emperor. Any answer seems to get him in trouble. So, Jesus asks for a coin, holds it up, and asks a simple question: Whose image is this, and whose inscription? "Caesar's," they answer. And Jesus replies:

> *"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's;*
> *And unto God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:21)*

The questioners walked away amazed. I hope we can linger with his answer a little longer than they did.

We often hear this verse as a lesson about taxes, or about church and state. But I think Jesus is really asking about image. The coin belonged to Caesar because it bore Caesar's face. So, what bears the face of God?

We do. "So, God created humankind in his own image" (Genesis 1:27). Every one of us carries God's likeness, not stamped in metal but woven into who we are. The coin belongs to Caesar, but we belong to God, wholly and lovingly. That is what we offer back: not a slice of our lives, but all of it. Our time, our gifts, our hearts, and yes, our resources.

Seen this way, a pledge isn't a bill or a membership fee. It's a thank-you note to God. It's a way of saying: everything I have is a gift, and I want my giving to show where my heart is.

And what a difference your giving has made this year. Together we have maintained care for our facilities, kept our buildings and grounds safe, welcoming and accessible; supported our clergy and staff in providing meaningful worship services, pastoral care and coordination of operations to serve both congregation and community; enriched our worship through music, continued our outreach and mission to those in need, and provided opportunities for children, youth, and adults to grow in faith and fellowship. Behind each of these are people whose lives were touched because this congregation chose to be generous.

Your pledge also helps our Vestry plan with confidence. Knowing what we can count on lets us care for our staff and our building, support our mission partners, and dream together about new ministry in the year ahead.

We'll be honest: pledging isn't always easy for us either. Both of us on the Stewardship Team have sat at the kitchen table with a pledge card and a pen, doing the math, wondering what next year will bring. Prices go up, jobs change, children need things, and committing to a number for a whole year can feel like a leap. But again and again, we've found that the leap is part of the gift. Pledging asks us to trust that God, who has provided so faithfully, will keep providing. That trust is something we're still learning, and we're grateful to be learning it alongside you.

So, I invite you to prayerfully consider your pledge for 2027. Before you fill out your card, maybe take a moment to look into a mirror and ask Jesus' question of yourself: Whose image is this? Let the answer, and the love behind it, guide your gift. Some of you may be able to grow your giving this year. Others may be in a season where a smaller gift is a true sacrifice. Please know that every pledge, of every size, is received with deep gratitude.

We'll dedicate our pledges together on November 15th, Ingathering Sunday. You're welcome to:

- Place your pledge card in the basket that Sunday, or
- Mail it to the church office at 415 Washington Street, Toms River, NJ 08753

If you have any questions about pledging or giving options, Deacon Carolyn or I would be glad to hear from you:

- Deacon Carolyn dcncarolyn@christchurchtomsriver.org
- Denise Henry denise.a.henry@gmail.com

Caesar may claim our coins, but God has already claimed us, in love and for good. Thank you for all the ways you render to God what is God's, and for making this church a living sign of that love.

With gratitude and every blessing,

Your Stewardship Team

Deacon Carolyn Bradley
Sr. Warden Denise Henry

