

We often see the passage John 3:16 on billboards, in stadiums, and even on people's heads, as it is the summary of our faith: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son..."

It tells us that God gave us his son to save us, to show how much God loves us. As Max Lucado said: "There are many reasons God saves you: to bring glory to himself, to appease his justice, to demonstrate his sovereignty.

But one of the sweetest reasons God saved you is because he is fond of you. He likes having you around. He thinks you are the best thing to come down the pike in quite a while. If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. If he had a wallet, your photo would be in it.

He sends you flowers every spring and a sunrise every morning. Whenever you want to talk, he'll listen. He can live anywhere in the universe, and he chose your heart. Face it, friend. He's crazy about you!"

God loves us period! His love is a gift. God does not give to us because we have done anything to deserve it. His gift. It is not merit bonuses. We can't make God love us more.

God does not count, any more than we for our loved ones. You love your spouse, your children, not for what they can do, but for who they are. This love originates in God. God's love is invested in us, no matter how small we might feel we are. Your life is valued by God because God gave you this life for his purpose.

And in whatever state you are in, God loves you. Nothing you ever have done, or are at this moment, can separate you from the love in Christ Jesus. No matter what your upbringing, however dysfunctional and unloving, you are loved.

And if we find ourselves in a really good place, spiritually speaking, know that what we are, all that we have, all that we can become, comes from God's love for us. As Paul wrote, "For by grace have you been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God."

Because God is a giver, he calls all of us to respond with love, in a life of thanksgiving to God.

God calls you to be a generous person who is bringing blessing to other people. It calls you to be a giver to others—the kind of person that when you walk in the door, others say, "I'm so glad to be around you. You are such a generous-hearted person, such a generous-minded person, such a giver of your work and your time. You bless me when you come in the room."

We give and are generous with our time, talent and treasure because God was generous with us first.

We give in return because God has first given all things to us including our very lives.

When we give with generosity and a heart of love, it reminds our neighbors, our friends and families and ourselves of God's everlasting love for all of us.

And today is one way we can respond in love to our many gifts. This weekend we are conducting the 2018 Annual Diocesan Appeal – Building Our Family of Faith - and we are inviting all of our parishioners to make a financial commitment.

I want to thank all of you who have given to the Annual Appeal in the past. Your gifts are deeply appreciated by the thousands of people served by our Diocese.

The Appeal not only provides an opportunity for you to support important ministries that impact many programs outside of our parish boundaries, it also supports the services the Diocese provides directly to our parish such as youth and young adult ministry, retired or international priests who share in worship or the benefit of seminarians like John Minnich who was stationed at your parish this past summer.

The entire list of ministries supported by the 2018 Appeal can be found in the brochures that you have in the pew. Take a moment to read them over.

In addition, our parish receives back a portion of the funds collected. This year, the funds returned will be used to continue to promote our faith formation, worship and outreach ministries.

Whether you have contributed already or not, we ask a member of each household to please take a pledge envelope and a PEN at this time.

Our portion of the overall goal here at Cathedral of the Sacred Heart is \$48,520. Every gift, no matter the amount, makes a difference.

On the front of the envelope you will find some biographical information that we need you to fill out. Please take a minute to complete this information in its entirety.

Also, before opening the envelope, please make sure to check off one of the four squares indicating your gift intentions today.

Now I ask you to open the envelope. On the top flap you will find boxes with suggested gift amounts. Please check the amount that you wish to give.

In the event that you wish to contribute an amount other than the ones indicated, please check the blank box and indicate the full amount of your gift on the blank line to its right.

An excellent feature of the Appeal is that you are able to make a pledge in support of this effort. This means you do not have to pay the full amount today.

However, we hope you will put down as much as you can now as funds that are received are immediately spent on the programs and services supported by the Appeal.

The sooner we are able to collect on our pledges; the sooner help will be delivered to those in need.

In the event that you are making a down payment, write the amount of the down payment in the next box.

Subtract the down payment from the full amount of your pledge and note the remaining pledge balance on the line provided.

If you would like to make a one-time gift, please indicate that on the line provided.

Now find the "Payment Options" information located on the right side of the top flap as well as the entire bottom of the envelope.

You have six options and are asked to choose one.

The 1st is a contribution through a credit or debit card. If you are using this option, please fill in the "Credit Card" circle and fill in the required information.

The 2nd option is an auto-debit off your checking account. If you are selecting this option, please check the "Auto Debit" circle and then present the name of your bank along with your Routing # and Account #.

In addition, you can choose to donate securely online, receive a monthly invoice, enclose a check today (payable to the Catholic Diocese of Richmond) or donate via stock or securities.

Once you have completed your information, please seal the envelope. The ushers will now come around and collect them.

On behalf of Bishop Knestout and myself, I thank you for your contribution to the 2018 Annual Diocesan Appeal. May God bless you.

Here is a link to the Diocesan Annual Appeal Video <https://youtu.be/MSHwieEvYIM>