

Dear Old Stone Church members and friends,

You have much to look forward to in the coming year. We want to move forward in spiritually, and in a financially, strong shape as Old Stone Church welcomes its new Senior Pastor. In that regard, I want to share with you some thoughts that I believe deeply. Love is at the center of Christian faith. When Jesus is asked what practice is the most important one, he responds in terms of two commands:

***“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” And the second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Mark 12: 29-31)***

Both commands are about love. Jesus calls us to take responsibility for developing lives of real love. I believe that stewardship of our wealth is part of that practical love.

1. **Love is at the center of our faith.** Loving God, and loving our neighbor is our call from Jesus. Why? Because God first loved us (1 John 4: 19). Look around in our lives. At every moment of our existence, we can see examples of God’s love for us. We are surrounded by the love of God.
2. **Jesus’ life is a message of love.** The heart of Jesus’ example of faith is the cross – which is to say, he lived a life of total self-giving love. Love is at the center of our experience of Christ. Love is our starting place and our goal.
3. **Giving is our response to God’s love.** We give out of the freedom that comes from having been loved so deeply. We pledge not out of guilt, but out of overwhelming joy (2 Cor. 9: 6-7).
4. **Faithful love is about a relationship.** When two people show that they love each other in everyday, practical actions, a feeling of loving and being loved grows. In a similar way, when we give to God, the feeling of being closer to God grows. And when we give to our neighbor, we feel closer and care more deeply what happens to them (1 Thess. 1: 2-7). Stewardship grows loving relationships.
5. **Loving our neighbor happens profoundly through the church.** As Christians give to their church, the impact of their gifts come together in a synergy of the Spirit that empowers them to do extraordinary things (Acts 2: 43-46). Through all the gifts given by present and past members, Old Stone Church is able to give over \$140,000 to the mission of the church, including 10 different organizations that help hungry and homeless people. The more that every member does their part, the more the Spirit multiplies the impact of this giving.
6. **Loving our neighbor happens inside of the church as well as outside.** Our love grows as we develop ministries of caring for the congregation, and so we support the ministries of the elders, the deacons, ministries of meals and building friendships together. Our love grows as we communicate well about the needs of people in the church, so we have a communications person on staff. Our love grows as we sing beautiful songs and hear the profound music of faith together, and so we have a full-time church music director. Our love grows as we care for one another in times of illness and loss, and so we have professional pastors. So many activities of the church happen because our stewardship empowers and expands our ability to love one another better.
7. **Pledging is a sign that our love is real.** Jesus called disciples. Disciples are more than wishful thinkers – disciples are disciplined believers. For our love to make a difference in the world, we have to grow stronger in our spiritual discipline of generosity. Pledging makes us stronger disciples. Pledging is not a legal contract. Pledging is a promise to God that we will discipline our lives to make our love real this coming year.

There are many people who have pledged to Old Stone Church in the past year. Every gift expands that synergy of the Spirit and grows our ability to love. Some people profoundly inspire the community with their commitment to tithe 10% of their income. Others give at a different level.

I want to challenge every member to pledge. And I invite you to give at a level that expresses your desire to grow in your love for God and neighbor. Whatever you pledge, do it with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. **Make love your goal!**

Sincerely,  
Rev. Dr. Andrew McDonald  
Interim Senior Pastor