



ASHLAND PLACE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

September 17, 2026

Dear Family of APUMC,

As we approach our annual Commitment Sunday on October 18, I am grateful for the life we share at Ashland Place and hopeful for the future God is placing before us.

Our stewardship theme for 2026 is “**Lead Me, Lord**,” inspired by the traditional hymn associated with Samuel Sebastian Wesley and by the prayers of David:

I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety.

—Psalm 4:8

O Lord, lead me in your righteousness because of my enemies; make your way straight before me.

—Psalm 5:8

These verses hold together two deep longings of faith: to rest securely in God’s care and to follow faithfully wherever God leads. They also invite us to consider what it means to continue “to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

This year’s visual complement to our campaign is “Still Waters,” a painting by Karen Sandifer. In the painting, a river meanders through the wilderness. Its path is not perfectly straight, nor is the landscape without difficulty. Yet the river draws our eyes forward—to the horizon that is still ahead of us.

I find in that image a beautiful reflection of our life together as a church. The way before us may sometimes wind through unfamiliar or challenging places. We may not see every turn in the river, and we may not know exactly what lies beyond the next bend. But God is still leading us. The horizon remains before us. There is grace ahead.

Like the psalmist, we pray: *Lead us, Lord, to those still waters. Restore our souls.* Lead us in paths of righteousness. Give us the courage to follow, the wisdom to listen, and the trust to believe that your purposes for us are good.

But following God's lead is not a solitary journey. We are not meant to stand on the shore and admire the river from a distance. At some point, we have to get on the raft!

That is what stewardship asks of us. It is an invitation to place our resources, our talents, our time, and our hearts into God's hands. It is a spiritual practice through which we say, "Lord, lead us—and make us willing participants in the journey." As we give, we help provide for the ministries of Ashland Place UMC: our worship, our formation, our care for one another, our outreach, our witness in Mobile, and the work God is still calling us to do.

On Commitment Sunday, we will have the opportunity to submit our giving estimates for the 2027 ministry plan. These estimates help our church plan faithfully and responsibly for the year ahead. Our generosity enables Ashland Place to sustain its ministries, support those in need, maintain our facilities, and continue growing in grace as a community of disciples.

As you prayerfully consider your estimate of giving, I encourage you to reflect on the ways this church has been a place of still waters for you. Where have you found rest, encouragement, forgiveness, or renewed purpose? Who has helped you see God's presence more clearly? How has Ashland Place UMC helped you grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ?

I also invite you to look toward the horizon. What might God be preparing for this congregation? What new ministries, relationships, acts of service, and expressions of love may be waiting just beyond the next bend? We do not have to know every detail in advance. We do need to trust the One who leads us.

Are we ready to get on the raft?

By God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, I believe we are. If we so choose, I believe we can make this journey together—not because the waters will always be calm, but because Christ is with us. God's presence will guide, sustain, and restore us along the way.

In this packet, I include several data points that I hope will be helpful as we consider our current income and expenses and the ministry plan before us. I offer this information with help from our church administrator, Kim Brown, and with the guidance of our finance team and its chair, Mr. Matt Singleton. As people who have pledged to participate in the ministries of Christ through our membership vows, we are called to consider honestly what we are doing, where we believe God is leading us as a community of faith, and what resources we will need for the journey.

I share this information for transparency and as a starting point for prayerful reflection and conversation. Please feel free to contact me, Rev. Jennifer, Rev. Julie, or any of our lay leaders with questions or suggestions. Your voice matters. Communication is one way we experience communion with one another.

I look forward to seeing you in worship on Consecration Sunday, October 18, and at the celebration brunch at 10:00am between the two services. During worship, there will be an opportunity to bring your estimate of giving card to the altar as an offering of trust and commitment.

If you cannot be with us in person, we invite you to submit your information between now and then by mailing it with the enclosed return envelope, through the church webpage at www.apumc.com or by calling the church office at (251) 478-6356.

It should be a wonderful day—a day to rest in God's care, to renew our commitment, and to set out together toward the horizon God has placed before us.

Lead us, Lord, to the still waters. Restore our souls. And give us grace for the journey ahead.

To God be the Glory!

Dr. Darren M. McClellan
Senior Pastor



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A BREAKDOWN OF OUR CONGREGATION'S GIVING PATTERNS

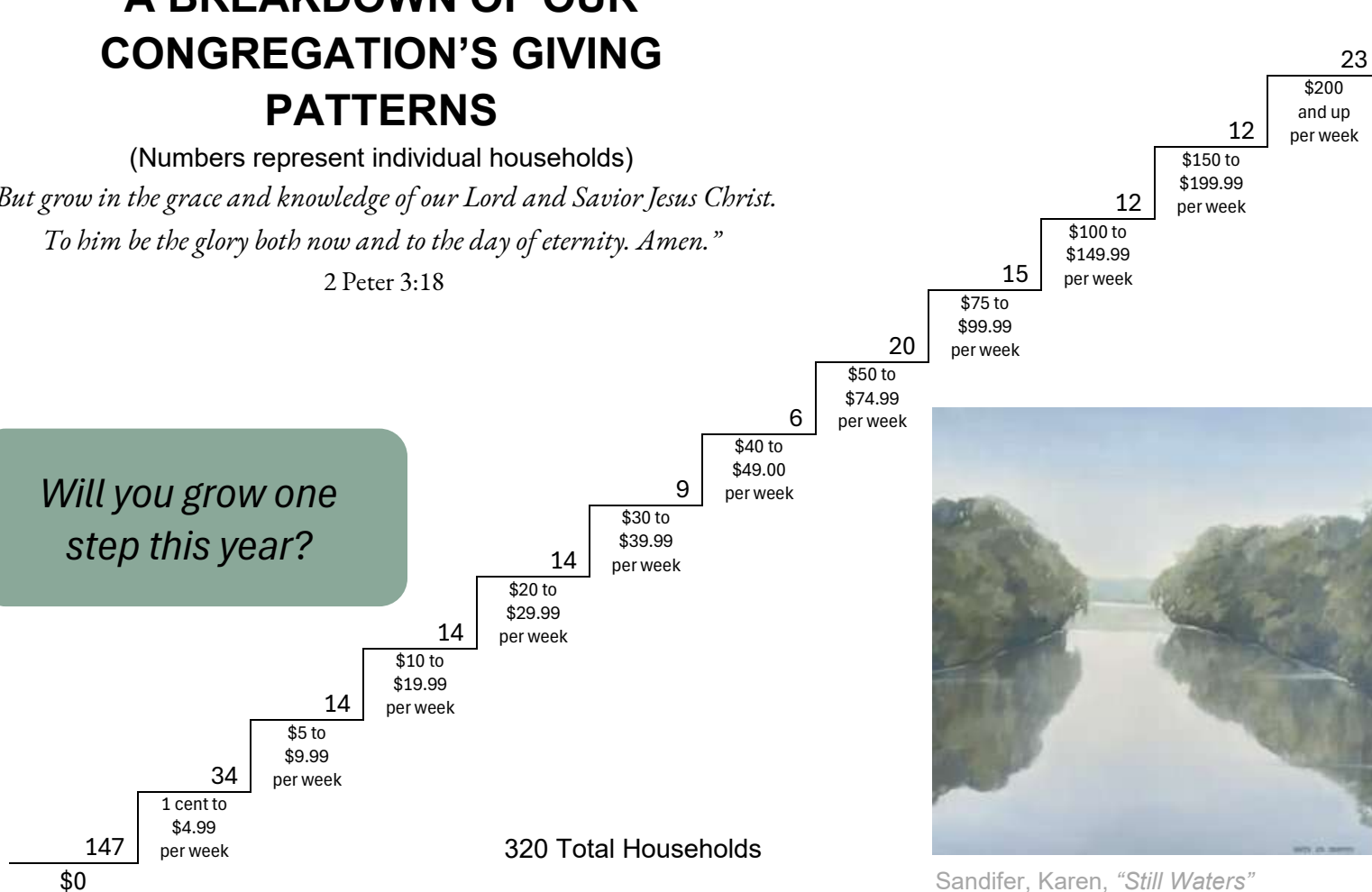
(Numbers represent individual households)

"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen."

2 Peter 3:18

*Will you grow one
step this year?*



Sandifer, Karen, "Still Waters"