

To those Beloved of God who are the Body of Christ, St. Peter's Church,

For over two decades, I have had the honor of offering greetings to the parishes I have served in preparation for the celebration of Christmas and the observances of Holy Week. There is perhaps no greater honor or opportunity I can think of than to be able to reach out to all of you and extend a blessing, and in invitation, in the name of our Savior, Jesus the Christ to make plans to join in praising God and to being together as the Body of Christ during these sacred times and seasons.

This year, though, there is something different about this letter. Perhaps you have already taken note: there is no envelope with the words "Christmas Offering" printed on the front. As your parish leadership looked to our Christmas gathering this year, and toward next year's Holy Week observances, we became aware that most of our mailed communications to our community entail a solicitation of support. That is not a bad thing, in and of itself. It is our sacred trust to call on the commitment to give for the support of the work and mission of the Church...but this year, we have something different in mind.

If we are to model what it means to embrace the mission of the Church; that is, to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ; then the call to our community should not just be found in an envelope returned, but in an invitation extended and received. That invitation is to a renewal of life and purpose through a relationship with each other, and with Christ.

To accomplish that goes beyond the faithful stewardship of our treasure, our time or our talents being committed to building up the Church. It is the extension of those beautiful blessings received from God into the world, into our families, our neighborhoods and into the wider bounds of our towns and boroughs.

Soon, we will gather with family and friends to mark the Christmas feast and to ring in the New Year. What greater note of hope can be sounded than the one we make together as the parish of St. Peter's, gathered in prayer and praise of the One who makes, redeems and sanctifies us for the salvation of the world? After every liturgy in our Church, the great doors are flung wide, and you are all sent forth to "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord."

With this letter, I am reversing that direction. Instead, *bring yourself* to Church at Christmas to love and serve the Lord...and instead of an envelope, bring someone who needs to know what hope feels like. Bring someone who would otherwise not have the chance to know what Christian-centered fellowship and communion feel like. Bring up again and affirm by invitation that ours is a Church that not only welcomes all, but seeks them out and invites them to a richer life in relationship to Jesus Christ.

There is no envelope this year in this year's Christmas letter. You are not being solicited for your support. That support, by God's grace, is instead being blessed by an invitation that you will extend to that person, or persons, who need to hear a word of blessing, of good cheer...and of the promise of a world renewed by the absolute love of God in the name of Jesus Christ. And so, until we are able to embrace with the exchange of peace during the Christmas liturgies, please know that you are all in my prayers. May we be one in person, even as we are one in spirit, this Christmastide!

In Christ's service to you all,

The Rev. Marshall Shelly

THIS YEAR'S SERVICES IN CELEBRATION OF THE NATIVITY OF
OUR LORD:

DECEMBER 24, ADVENT IV AND CHRISTMAS EVE

- 9 AM IV ADVENT
- 4 PM PAGEANT WITH CAROLS, HOLY EUCHARIST
 - 8 PM HOLY EUCHARIST WITH MUSIC
- 11 PM HOLY EUCHARIST (WITH CAROLS BEGINNING AT 10:30 PM)

DECEMBER 25, CHRISTMAS DAY

- 10 AM, HOLY EUCHARIST WITH CAROLS

December 31, FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

- 9 AM EUCHARIST WITH MUSIC