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Dear Church Family,

As we have been relaunching as a church, we have been asking ourselves, “What does it look like for a church to live a common life and love their neighborhoods together?” There is not a single answer to this question but many, and some answers that have yet to be discovered. We already see some of the answers becoming reality, including The Market on Ridgeland, Ridgeland Cafe, and our Love Your Neighborhood Parties. As we look ahead to this fall, we are preparing for the launch of our NeighborLife Communities, the after-school TREK Mentoring program, and the return of Community Meals (potlucks) and Fall Fest!

Just as we have been relaunching ministries and community initiatives, we have been asking the same question regarding the stewarding of our financial resources. What kind of language should we be using when it comes to funding our ministries and initiatives? What does stewardship look like for a church that is pursuing living a common life and loving their neighborhoods together? We believe that the answer to this is the development of what we are calling the **“In Common Fund”**.

Our In Common Fund was inspired by those early followers of Jesus that we see in the Book of Acts, which chronicled the formation and growth of the early church. We initially see it in Acts 2:44-45 after a large influx of believers joined in community after the events of Pentecost.

“And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.” (ESV)

We see this reality of the community of believers reiterated in Acts 4:32-35 even after persecution and threats from the Jewish religious leaders at the time.

“All the believers were united in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had. The apostles testified powerfully to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God’s great blessing was upon them all. There were no needy people among them because those who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need.” (NLT)

From the very beginning of what we know of the church, followers of Jesus have been committed to give into a common fund to support the ministry of the church. Our In Common Fund seeks to simply do the same, as has been done in this church for decades and the big “C” Church for hundreds of years.

You may be wondering, “What exactly is the In Common Fund and how does it work?” Let me start with what our In Common Fund is not. It is NOT in addition to what would be called “tithes and offerings” - it includes tithes and offerings. Our In Common Fund is structured into what is called a One Fund approach. Rather than having multiple funds (general, missions, building, children’s, etc.), everything is wrapped into a singular fund with one overall goal. This means that if the overall funding goal is met, then everything that is resourced by our In Common Fund will be funded.

What exactly will be included in the goals of our In Common Fund? It has been said, “The budget of the church should be the church’s mission on paper.” If we were to take that seriously, then our budget should reflect our goal of accomplishing the key focuses of our relaunch that we believe embody our mission. As such, this fund would encompass 4 of the 5 key focuses (our 5th focus is in regard to our preschool) as well as adopting our global church’s commitment to missions.

Our In Common Fund would resource the following areas (in no particular order):

- Cultivating Caring Neighborhoods
- Investing in All Families
- Developing Community Wells
- Creating Meaningful Gatherings
- Supporting Global Missions

Homing in on these areas keeps us focused on our mission and vision to avoid drifting and yet still allows us freedom to continue to discover the answers to the question stated at the beginning of this letter.

Our church leadership values financial transparency and clarity, and these will be carried through into our In Common Fund. This means that every penny that you give will go directly to funding ministries and initiatives. Additionally, we are setting a fund goal that comes from our board-approved budget, so we know ahead of time the amount we need to raise. Any additional funds raised over the goal will go to enhancing or expanding ministries or moving up the timeline on a future initiative. In the spirit of transparency and clarity, we will be sending a monthly report of our In Common Fund to everyone who gives into it as well as posting the report on our website.

From July 2022 through December 2022, we are seeking to raise \$100,000, the entire breakdown of which can be found on the attached page. As a reminder, this is NOT in addition to tithes and offerings but includes everything you would normally give. To track our progress toward this goal, we are asking if you would be willing to make a commitment and let us know what your projected giving would be between now and the end of December 2022. If you already give to Ridgeland Church, it will simply mean adding up your regular giving amount along with any special giving that you typically give over the next six months and submit that number on the commitment card that is included in this envelope. If you are a new participant in supporting our mission, this is a great time to start with as little or as much as the Lord is leading you to contribute. Since I don’t believe that you should be asked to do something to which your leaders have not already committed, I want you to know everyone in active staff and board leadership has already made a commitment to our In Common Fund.

While we would love to receive commitments, you do not need to make a commitment to give into our In Common Fund! Any funds given to Ridgeland Church, whether in person, online or through the mail, will automatically be placed into the fund.

We truly believe that this goal is possible for us to reach, and we are excited to see what God does as His church pursues and invests in an in common goal, mission, and life. Thank you for your prayerful consideration on how you will be able to contribute as we seek to love our neighborhoods.

Grace and Peace,
Pastor Jared