Good morning everyone. I’m David Bielenberg.

I’m here today as a member of the Stewardship committee to ask you to give prayerful consideration to your financial commitment to Brown next year – 2018.

For the next four weeks, you’ll hear from me and other members of the committee about how and why your pledge is important to our daily, weekly and monthly work together – the work of changing and growing together, deepening our love for each other and the world around us, and struggling for justice.

You’ll be receiving a letter and pledge card in the mail in the next few days – OR – you can find one in the blue folders right now. As part of your thoughtful consideration of how much to pledge, we also ask you to share with us on the back of the card, “WHY” you give to Brown. Your notes will remain anonymous, and will offer us real, personal, and meaningful reasons to share with others the many and varied reasons Brown is so important to each of us.

For example, just a few of the reasons my husband and I give to Brown are:

Because the rainbow flag above the front door and the “immigrants and refugees welcome” banner out front are true signs of what and how we live and preach and act as a community. All ARE truly welcome here.

And because we know that it’s not just about what we share and experience here, it’s also about the young people that are tutored each week, and the students at Eutaw Marshburn that Michael and others mentor, and the work that Andrew and others do to support BUILD and other efforts in this city.

We give because we believe in this church’s mission to be ‘Alive in the City and the World.’ And we also give because we know that as members of this community – as stewards of this beautiful building, our talented and resourceful staff – we each need to do our part to ensure that we take care of what we have been given.

The reality is that without paying the electric bill, or for heat in the winter, or for health insurance and appropriate salaries for our gifted and deserving staff, and yes, ongoing maintenance to our historic buildings, our work here, on the corner of Park Avenue and Lafayette, AND in the city and the world would suffer.

On the announcement pages of your bulletin is a snapshot of our annual budget for 2017, outlining where our money is coming from and how it is being spent. This year, our collective giving – pledge & plate – was flat with the previous year’s. That makes giving the staff even a cost-of-living raise a challenge.

And for too many years, we have been using money – above and beyond our annual recommended or ‘allowed’ draw – from our endowment fund to balance our annual budget. Session and our investment committee have agreed that we must reduce the amount of “extra” draw from the endowment over the next five years. The only way to do so – while maintaining our current level of operations – is for us ALL to increase our annual support.

This week, most of you will receive a letter asking you to make a pledge to the 2018 annual fund. Please join Greg and me in making a pledge. If you’ve never pledged before, please consider doing so. It is a great assistance to Session as it prepares the budget for the coming year. For those of you who do currently pledge, thank you. I ask today that you not only renew your financial commitment for another year, but also consider an increased gift for 2018.

There are many ways that gifts can be made – a weekly offering, a monthly electronic funds transfer, or even gifts of appreciated stock or other financial assets you may have. Feel free to speak with me or Sharon Lucas, our Financial Administrator, about the many ways you can fulfill a pledge to Brown.

Stewardship Celebration – or Giving Sunday is in 4 weeks – Sunday, November 19 – just before Thanksgiving. I hope you will join me in giving thanks for all of God’s blessing to us, by pledging an annual gift to Brown for 2018 in return.

Your gifts will support who we are and all that we do together to be ‘Alive in the City and the World.’ Thank you.