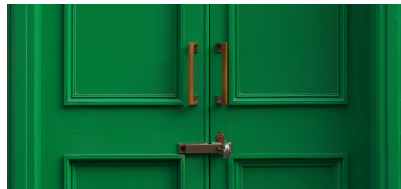# SHADY GROVE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH | SHORT PUMP

October 2023

Dear Shady Grove Church Family,

We can drive by our neighbors' homes, but we can't know our neighbors by looking in from the outside. Only as doors open, can we begin to know one another.

Actions open doors. Consider our neighbors' faith actions and church engagement.

○ The Pew Research Center shows Americans choosing distance from Christian faith (and faiths in general). In 2020, 64% of Americans claimed Christian faith and 30% claimed no faith, down from 90% of Americans who claimed Christian faith and 5% who claimed no faith in 1970.

Surveys open doors a bit also, giving added insights about our neighbors.

○ MissionInsite survey data indicates that neighbors living in a 5 mile radius of Shady Grove who are considering not participating in church are looking for 1) welcome, 2) a community of friends, 3) support, 4) opportunities to engage in meaningful ways and grow with others and 5) the chance to explore, dialogue and question.

These two snippets are part of a larger phenomenon studied by Dr. Diana Butler Bass. Since the time of Jesus, Christian communities have gone through cycles of vibrant faith which, eventually, gives way to stale institutionalism, until hunger for vibrant faith leads to renewal once more. Our founder John Wesley started a revival movement in the Church of England because "institutional" Christianity wasn't changing lives after Jesus' life and love-giving way. At the same time, he saw spiritual longing all around. So, Wesley gave them Jesus through authentic, growth-full, supportive communities of devotion and service.

Our Short Pump community today is ripe for renewal. We've see this through the wonderful 2023 ministry year which God and you made possible through your generosity. Thank you! In the year ahead, God calls us to offer the Jesus-community life and love that

many of our neighbors long for, and God has equipped us with this mission: "Discovering and living the love of God through sharing, serving and connecting with all peoples."

Right here, right now, renewal is more than possible because Jesus says, "Look at me, I stand at the door. I knock. If you hear me call and open the door, I'll come right in and sit down to supper with you" (Rev. 3:20, The Message). Maybe you know Warner Sallman's painting of this scripture in which Jesus knocks on a door with no doorknob? This image beautifully answers the faith fears and hopes of our time: God is with us! Real connection is possible! God doesn't force us, God invites us--each one!

Joyce Rupp teaches that when Jesus knocks at our doors and we open up, Jesus helps us discover the potential for freedom, passion and hope **within us**. And we can share the freedom, passion and hope we've found with our neighbors just by opening our doors to them! This is what it is to live Love, love Life.

Each fall, we listen for Jesus knocking at the doors. Jesus invites us, "belong, become and bless with me." This is our whole ministry plan: To "knock on doors" in our community offering welcome, support, service and growth together in Jesus. To prepare for this, our siblings serving on the Finance Team invite each of us to ask God what we may be called to give in 2024. Enclosed is an Estimate of Giving card. Please don't be afraid to fill one out. It's an estimate, a best thought--knowing that the year ahead is not in any of our control. Yet, even these best guesses added up together, can help this team chart a course with God for our shared ministry. The hope is to get Estimates of $750,000 toward the General Operating Fund and $250,000 to the Caring for Our House fund.

- On October 15th, we'll have a Celebration Sunday of 2023's ministry.
- On October 22nd, we'll have a Vision Sunday to share a look ahead at 2024.
- On October 29th, we'll have a Consecration Sunday to offer our estimates as **prayers of hope** for the renewal God is bringing and **prayers of thanks** that we get to be part of it!

In vibrant hope,

Chris McLain, Lead Pastor   John Lancaster, Finance Chair