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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Saint Andrews Presbyterian Church votes 'yes' to Matthew 25**  
*Raleigh church votes to address systemic poverty*

**RALEIGH, N.C.** — The Session of Saint Andrews Presbyterian Church unanimously passed a motion May 18, 2022, accepting a denomination-wide invitation, designating itself as a Matthew 25 congregation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The decision comes after nearly a year of study and deliberation.

"There is so much that divides us, that separates us in these times," said Rev. Dr. Tom Watkins, senior pastor of Saint Andrews Presbyterian Church. "I am excited about something actually uniting us."

The denomination writes on its website that the Matthew 25 scripture "calls all of us to actively engage in the world around us, so our faith comes alive and we wake up to new possibilities." Recent General Assemblies, the highest council of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), called on its member churches to eradicate systemic poverty, dismantle structural racism and build congregational vitality. Saint Andrews Presbyterian Church joins over 1,000 congregations, Presbyteries and Synods in the initiative, including two other congregations in Raleigh.

"Matthew 25 is not passive," said Erica Knightstep, who serves as the Clerk of Session. "It compels us to seek the betterment of our siblings facing poverty, racism, food insecurity, homelessness, violence and other marginalization."

Saint Andrews Presbyterian Church presently partners with Meals on Wheels, Brown Bag Lunch Ministry, Loaves and Fishes, Rise Against Hunger and North Raleigh Ministries, among several other partners, to assist those living in poverty or faced with food insecurity. Since organizing in 1977, the Church has donated more than \$2 million to its local, national and global mission partners.

"Recent events like the COVID-19 pandemic, economic instability and conflicts bringing refugees to the United States remind us of the urgent and immediate needs of our community," said Jeff Adkins, an elder who chairs the church's Mission and Outreach committee. "Our mission partners provide us opportunities to respond to Jesus' call in Matthew 25."

The congregation looks to combine its ongoing efforts in Mission and Outreach with new strategies to combat the various root causes of poverty and food insecurity. The church's Committee for Social Justice, chaired by Elder Mike Schley, has operated since 2020 to do just that. "Part of our Mathew 25 vision is to address not only the immediate needs caused by poverty," said Schley, "but also the underlying causes that make it difficult for people to break the cycle of poverty."

The church will use its existing partnerships and resources to explore this new call.

"Our Matthew 25 initiative is designed to engage the many corners of our whole church," said Watkins. "Such a focus will allow for diverse responses, greater learnings, and, perhaps, even a bigger difference in our community."