

## Scam Update - October 2022

The good news? This isn't something affecting us (yet). Bad news? A new scam like the email one that has affected us is starting to be used at other churches. It is like the email one where someone impersonates the pastor or a staff member of the church and tries to trick someone into purchasing gift cards.



In the past it has been only emails. In this most recent one (which happened to another UCC pastor in the Cincinnati area), they are now impersonating via text messaging. It is the same as in the past - scammers are using information publicly available on church websites to scam people. But same thing applies... If you ever get a message that seems "fishy" it probably is. Even if you don't think it is suspicious, it would be better to contact the person directly using a known email or phone to confirm. So, let's give a simple scenario.

1. You get a text message from a phone number you don't recognize with a message that says something like "Hi (your name here), Please return my text when you get it, I have a favor to ask. Blessings, Pastor Keith, St. John Church"
2. If you get this, first I hope you think...hmmm that's weird and ignore it...that's not from Pastor Keith's phone that I have in my contacts. And you just delete the message and block the number. End of story. But if you think, "Well, maybe it is from Keith..." and you reply...and get a message back that says something like, "Glad to hear from you NAME. I am in a meeting; I would have called but calls are not allowed. I need to get an Amazon gift card today for some women battling cancer at the hospital, but I can't do that right now because of my busy schedule. Can you get it from any nearby store now? I will reimburse you later with cash or check. Blessings"
3. DO NOT REPLY TO THAT MESSAGE. Instead call me at the phone number you know is mine or call the church office or email me at [Pastor@StJohnChurch.net](mailto:Pastor@StJohnChurch.net) and ask, "Did you send me a message a little bit ago asking about Amazon gift cards?" I'll say "Nope" and then that's the end of it. Delete the message and no harm done.
4. A reminder that none of us at St. John Church would contact you in this way. So, if you get a request like this, it is not from us.

Gratefully, this is not affecting us but given what has happened in the past and is happening in our area, sadly my gut tells me that it is only a matter of time.

As we close another message about scams, take a moment and pray for those perpetrating these scams. I don't know their situations but pray that God will work in their hearts to see the errors of their ways and provide them better and honest ways to make money that do not hurt others.

Blessings, Pastor Keith (yes, really it is me)