

## Christian Stewardship – Some Essential Understandings

1. Stewardship is the role humankind plays with the many gifts God has given us – the planet earth (environment), our relationships, our jobs and the right use of money, education, and care for the poor, young and elderly and so on. So stewardship is the responsibility we humans bear for being created in the image of God and being God's stewards or caretakers of his creation and one another. We are freely invited to be abundant givers in life, as God is generous with us.
2. Stewardship assumes that God loves us and has provided abundant resources for the human race, if wisely and compassionately managed.
3. Stewardship calls forth the best in us and the best in us is gratitude. We give what we have been blessed with back to God through the church because we are filled with gratitude for Jesus, for our many blessings, and we desire to advance the work of the church. The Holy Eucharist means the Great Thanksgiving, our central act of worship.
4. Stewardship is living faith. It is what we do after we say "I believe". It is our way to move from stating our faith to living our faith. It begs the questions – how will I spend my time and money, how will I use my talents, now that I have committed my life to serving Christ through this church? As Jesus taught, "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."
5. Stewardship teaching offers perspective about our material possessions, "you can't take them with you..."
6. Stewardship is a spiritual issue of the highest importance for Americans because of the absolute centrality of money in our lives. Interestingly, Jesus talked about the right use of money and possessions as much as he talked about the Kingdom of God. Jesus saw that many people put their trust in money more than in God and saw money as a grave impediment to faith, if not generously managed and shared.

### How do we give to the church?

1. The traditional standard of giving in the Old and New Testaments, and the express teaching of the Episcopal Church is to give proportionately to God's church from your income. Proportional giving is percentage giving and the standard is called the tithe or 10% of your income. The assumption in this is that the steward is keeping the other 90% and will value the 90% more having honored God with the first 10%. We think of this as *returning to God 10%* of what God has blessed us with. I believe that the tithe is reasonable because it is fair, it is attainable by most of us, and it is freeing.
2. The method of giving is to fill out a pledge card stating what you "pledge" to donate to the church in a calendar year, January to December. The idea is to give joyfully, freely, without guilt or compulsion. The pledge card represents your desire to serve and lead, to love and be loved in this particular place at this particular time. Church staff and lay leaders use the pledges to make plans for each year and to fund the mission (what we do together for the sake of those outside our walls) and ministry (how we minister to and with one another). Pledge cards are sent to church members each year in September and are laid on the altar in a public act of worship a few weeks later. The pledges amounts are confidential.
3. The idea is that each individual or couple or family gives proportionally from their income, based on their commitment to God, their joy in life, and their desire to be generous and hopeful. Though certainly important, the church's budgetary expectations should not drive pledge decisions. Your pledge is not a tax, an assessment or dues. The church will provide budgetary information for accountability and to encourage your

- involvement. Proportionate giving assumes that each pledger will tithe from their income based on their faith and freedom and desire to give.
4. Though the standard is 10% of income – many people are unable to pledge 10% of their income in the beginning. Jesus recognized “proportionate giving” as being more important than the size of the gift itself. Perhaps in the first years one can only give back 1% or 3% or 5% of their income. Each of us will decide based on our situation. However, most of us need to grow. Spiritual formation is a continuing growth process, and our stewardship follows the same pattern. If you are currently pledging, but not at a level you would like, set goals for yourself that are inspiring. We received over 290 pledges averaging \$3,200 per pledge for 2006, but we have no information on what percentage of household income that might represent.
  5. Stewardship is teaching responsibility with money. We are blessed to live in this country and to enjoy a high standard of living. We are encouraged to wisely and prudently manage our assets. We shouldn't hear a message in this that we should abandon our basic obligations to our family and future in order to make a pledge to the church. Properly managed, our giving to the church can be a growth experience for all members of the family, even the very youngest who delight in placing a check from Mom or Dad into the plate and watch it move to the altar to be given to God. They want to make small donations themselves. Kids understand.
  6. Church leadership, staff and volunteers, consider the gifts from the family of God to be sacred. Tremendous efforts are made to safeguard all donations, to account for them to support your financial records, and to manage and spend the monies received with the highest standards of accountability and good stewardship. We know that you want to understand how your money is put to work so the Vestry aspires to create more useful budgetary documents, like program or narrative budgets, that will tell the story of how St. Matthew's serves one another and the community. Never hesitate to speak to me or our Senior Warden, Kevin McGillicuddy, or Junior Warden Babs Clendenin, or Business Manager Dave Bowman, if you have questions or desire to see comprehensive church budget information.

### For what am I grateful today?

*Crystal and I tithe to St. Matthew's out of our love and faith. In this season of Lent we wait for Easter and I think of the baptisms that will take place on Easter Eve. I think of those we buried from the church yesterday and the day before, gently offering them back to God as their stewardship takes new forms in the life to come. I think of those seminarians like Eric Liles and Phil Webster, that the church raises up for the next generation. I think of the couples that kneel at our altar to be blessed in Holy Matrimony. I think of the outpouring of support for victims of natural disasters. I think of the Good Faith Fund and how we respond to the needs of those who call the office for support. I think of the Heifer Project and trips to Honduras to share our gifts. I think of our commitment to El Buen Samaritano and the many working poor Hispanic families in our midst. I think of our beautiful children and the depth of our hospitality. I think of our Sunday Eucharist – word and sacrament – sustaining us for the journey. I think of those who visit the sick and bring them Holy Communion. I think of our Seniors that gather for pleasure and learning and exercise week by week. I think of our Day School and the children, so many children! I think of our mission, “to know Christ, grow in Christ and to share Christ's Love.” I think on these blessings when I think about giving to the church.*

Faithfully, Merrill Wade,

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