



Three Stewardship Notions

When I think about the annual fall pledge campaign, it is a time of much excitement mingled with anxiety. What will the final results be? If the totals – pledges and dollars – are up or down, does that reflect people’s attitudes and feelings toward me, the rector or vicar? Will we be able to expand the scope and focus of our mission efforts both inside and outside the parish?

I find myself asking these and dozens of other questions in this season of the year. My time is probably better spent in prayer and Bible Study! While the flurry of activities and mailings that typically make up the “fall campaign” are underway, this is a good opportunity to remind ourselves what lies at the heart of stewardship and our journey with money: that would be our journey with Jesus. Jesus, we remember, talks more about money and possessions than any other single topic except the Kingdom of God. And when He speaks of the Kingdom of God, He often does so in parables that are also about money and wages and the like. So, if we are truly following Jesus, we are constantly being prodded by Him to think and talk about money.

For some reason this makes us uncomfortable in the church. Although I am pleased to see my name listed by categories of how much money I have given in the back of the program at the symphony concert or college annual report, I am not at all inclined to share what I pledge with those who make up my community of faith. And yet I know the money I give to the church reflects my commitment to Jesus and the work He calls us to do as his body in the world.

One: Accepting Grace For years now we have said that Good Stewardship means accepting that the difference between what we say and what we do is reconciled by God in Christ Jesus. This is the gospel we have been given to preach: a gospel of forgiveness and love, a gospel of Amazing Grace. The key word here may be “accepting.” I believe it is our acceptance of God’s forgiveness and grace that frees us to be more generous and giving persons ourselves. For it is in this acceptance that we come to both recognize and acknowledge all of life as a gift. Conversely, when we are in those times and places where accepting God’s love becomes difficult for us, we begin believing that we must earn and accumulate and hold onto whatever we can, since (we believe) that is all we will be given.

Two: Doing the Best We Can My personal corollary and mantra, following from an increased awareness of God's grace in my own life, suggests that everyone is already doing the best they can from wherever they are in their life in Christ. This is one way of saying that I am willing to offer toward others the same grace God lavishes on me. And, it is true. The most important dimension of all Stewardship work is bringing people into a deeper relationship with Jesus, helping them to take further steps in their journey with Him. Accepting this as our primary stewardship task brings us to the understanding that it is useless to think anyone can be doing any "better."

Three: No Average Pledge Which eventually lands us at corollary number three: There is NO average pledge. As tempting as it is to figure out and publish abroad what the "average pledge" in the parish may be, doing so is probably singularly unhelpful. We all know the story of the widow's mite. Her offering is way above average, even though on paper, in dollars and cents, it looked small compared to all those tithing Pharisees. My experience is that the idea of an "average pledge" tends to limit my capability to be more and more generous.

I hope that these three notions about Good Stewardship will be helpful for you and the members of your parish. Good Stewardship should be a means by which we are brought closer to God, closer to each other and ultimately closer to our selves: the selves God creates and wants us to be.

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