

Stewardship Kickoff –

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I've been debating on what to talk about for this Stewardship Kickoff. I looked over the brochure for this year. I reviewed some of the past speeches. I thought about speaking to the numbers. How many people attend the church, how much we raise, how much we spend, how many people we help, how many people we feed, how many kids we nurture. Then I thought; that's something you can read for yourself, after all the brochure is nice. So today I'm going to talk to you a little about virtues, voices, and visions.

Giving began with God and is one of the main virtues of Christianity. Giving leads to joy, peace, and purpose. Generosity was one of the first lessons I learned in life. Not directly, but from witnessing how my mother and grandmother treated those around them. We didn't have much in Jamaica, but my grandmother always had food to spare for anyone in the neighborhood. My mother always gave of herself, even beyond comfort. She would give you her bed and sleep on the couch. That's the type of person she was. She would even explain it away as nothing even if it meant a hardship for her and she would say, "It's okay my son. God will bless you." I don't know how she does it, she always had faith her cup would runneth over and it has. As Anne Frank once said, "No one has ever become poor by giving."

Growing up how I did, I tended to hang on to things. We didn't have a lot and having something new was rare. So, you kept it new. You didn't use it, cause they it wouldn't be new anymore. When you make a little money, you save it. Don't spend it on the thing you want, because you might really need something later. This is a scarcity mindset and one that I've had a hard time battling in my own life. We all have a little voice in our heads. You know, the little voice that tells you what you should be doing, what you shouldn't be doing, do more of this, do less of that. My voice isn't that little and it's quite deliberate and insistent. It's told me how I got all this generosity in me from my family, but I fight it. I've heard it say, we are blessed and so we can bless others. It reminds me to give because we are not in place of scarcity. God's love and God's kingdom have no scarcity. When you give without expectation you are blessed. So, I finally started listening to that voice and we've been married for 15 years now.

Ayanna, voice now wife, found St. Gregory and we've been members for 13 years, about to be 14 come Easter. I remember Easter because our son was baptized at the Easter Vigil and we became members shortly after. Since then, we've become active members because St. Gregory's is not just a

church. It's our community and home because it's easy to see God here. A clear vision of generosity is apparent in everything we do. You can see it when you enter a service and are welcomed by a greeter. As you make your way through the line at Brother's Breakfast. You hear it in the updates about Bondeau and Toliara. You experience it when those less fortunate are helped by Meals with Meaning. You see it when our kids just are their generous selves whenever they interact with each other or someone new. I saw my daughter bringing extra snacks to school the other day. I thought she was just trying to have extra and asked her why. Her response. "I'm bring them in case my friends don't have a snack, so they can have one." From my grandmother, my mother, my wife, and our church community, we get this. The future generation, just doing, because they can. They love and they give and it's because they have seen it here.

Our theme for Stewardship this year is Rooted in Faith Living in Love. While I didn't always see myself as the rooted in faith type, I think I've been the living in love type. We've all had our own journeys with faith. Your journey is your own. But what we have in common is that we were brought here, to this place. God's plan and purpose. God's virtues, voices, and visions. The virtue of generosity is here. We can accomplish the many great things we do because of you. Your stewardship pledges allow us to plan for and execute God's work through our church. St. Gregory's lives God's vision every day and I could not imaging (or envision) a world where it was not here for my children and grandchildren. Luckily, I won't have to if we continue to give generously. Finally, when it's time for you to decide what your pledge will be this year, I hope you listen to that little, or not so little, voice. Is it telling you to make sure you commit or recommit to being an annual pledger, or to shift that plate offering to a pledge. Or maybe just maybe... bump up that pledge this year. Whichever it is, know it is appreciated.

I could have spent this time talking about numbers. I could have given you all the facts and figures related to the budget and outcomes. What matters though is the impact we have on our community and each other. You'll hear from other members over the next few weeks about what stewardship means to them and hopefully it helps you find out what it means to you. I'll leave you with a quote from Winston Churchill. "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."