

A Stewardship Testimony Letter from Nicole File

Like most everyone here, I've sat through a LOT of stewardship campaigns, in a number of churches. There are only so many ways to ask for money, so I'll leave that to Father Paul and the Stewardship committee. Instead, I'm going to write a very different sort of letter, focusing on something that really changed the way I think about stewardship. (And it only took me until last year!)

Here it is: One of the most important, most neglected parts of stewardship is letting the church know how it can make my life more abundant.

Like many people, I've made the mistake of thinking that church resources should only be called upon in times of critical need. If I'm not having trouble keeping food on the table or the lights on, or if somebody's not in the hospital, or if I'm not about to actually die of stress, then why should I bother anybody or use precious resources? But does that seem like Jesus' idea of a sound church, or even a good relationship with God?

Jesus said He came not only to give us life, but to give it more abundantly. Not just preservation of our existence, but real provision in a holistic way. What would it mean if we at ECA confided in each other about what our real needs are -- and what if we offered to meet those needs for others? How much money, time and effort would it really cost?

The theme of this year's stewardship campaign is "Every Perfect Gift," and that speaks to me so much. It's not just about the gift of check-writing, though as a nonprofit leader that's one of my favorites. Please don't let me talk you out of it! But I have a large circle of friends who have taught me a lot about what "Every Perfect Gift" really means. If we're traveling, we might ask to use their guest room. Or if our kid could stay with them while doing an internship. Or for company after a rotten breakup, mentoring for our kids, job connections, help caring for elderly relatives, moving assistance, help from various professionals, someone to talk to, non-drinking socializing to keep from drinking after work, or whatever. And, we often call in favors for people outside our group as well; members of our own larger communities. We give "every perfect gift" to each other, and sometimes it costs money, but often it doesn't.

I've seen so many great examples of this in our church over the past year, and I'm grateful to those who have modeled that for me. Andrea Lovett thought to call us when her work schedule changed and she needed rides to school for her son for several months. I know some people have reached out asking for rides to church or other events. And some people here have been great examples in actually telling me how they're doing when I ask, reminding me that "Fine, thanks" is not the only correct answer. This is the stuff abundant life is made of.

What does all this have to do with ECA's stewardship campaign? I found a definition of Christian stewardship that I like: "The responsibility of maintaining and using wisely the gifts that God has bestowed." Somebody said once, "Programs don't make disciples. Disciples make disciples." As the vestry liaison for the Reach committee, I've learned how the best outreach is relational, and the best relationships lead to excellent outreach. We cannot address needs we don't know exist, and using resources is as important as raising them.

When we combine ECA's sense of community with our "It's What We Do" action-mindedness, we are at our very best. So the question I've been asking myself is: "How can ECA make a God-sized impact in my life, and how can I make a God-sized impact in the life of ECA, and in the surrounding community?" Yep, that's all one question, when you're a journalist.

I'm very familiar with Father Paul urging us to speak about spiritual things only with "I" language, so I will: In this time when risk aversion is very necessary and good, I realize I have let caution infect me spiritually and emotionally in unnecessary ways. So here's how "I" plan to take action in this area of stewardship that scares me more than any other:

The risk of Intimacy – what am I willing to reveal to others about myself?

The risk of Intelligence – what am I willing to learn about others?

The risk of Insight – how does what I learn about myself and others change my perspective?

The risk of Implementation – what actions am I willing to take in light of what I know?

The risk of Being an Instrument – How willing am I to be “taken advantage of” in both good and negative ways?

The risk of Imperfection – how willing am I to embrace failure – my own or others’?

All these add up to the most daring and rewarding risk of all: The risk of Involvement. And there is no stewardship without involvement.

That word “abundant” that Jesus used means “much more than expected.” It implies fullness, a deep security, and a blossoming of everything meaningful—where better than church to find that? In Corinthians 2:9 Paul says, “No eye has seen, nor ear has heard, nor mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.” In Ephesians, Paul also tells us that God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think. So I plan to focus on this in the coming year: How can I bring that abundance into your life, and how can you bring it into mine? If you ask me how I am and I say "Fine thanks," please call me on it. Expect me to call on you for company, conversation, or favors, and I look forward to you calling on me too. And yes, Wanda, don't worry, I do plan to pledge money to help pay for the privilege!