

Stewardship Message

03 November 2019

Good morning. My name is Mike Armour and I've been asked by Roger York, our Stewardship Chair, to give you my perspective on the importance of Stewardship.

This was a rather late request by Roger, for which he has appropriately apologized. So, if you like my message, just think how much better it would have been if I'd had more time to prepare it. If, on the other hand, you don't care for my message, just think how much better it would have been if I'd had more time to prepare it.

Roger – bus. Bus – Roger. To paraphrase our Savior, “No Stewardship Chair is honored in his own congregation....”

As an Episcopalian of approximately 24-hours (more on that later) I thought before lecturing you I'd be well-served to first understand how the Episcopal Church views Stewardship. So I of course went to Google, typed in “Episcopal Stewardship” and the following definition popped up at www.episcopalchurch.org

“Stewardship is about being grateful, responsible stewards of the gifts we receive from God. The tradition of giving back to God and to the church comes from the Biblical practice of “tithing,” which means to give back a tenth of our earnings to God (Numbers 18:26). The Episcopal Church sees stewardship as more than simply contributing money to the church; it’s also about contributing time and talents, and volunteering for ministry and mission. It’s about reaching out to build relationships from a perspective of abundance instead of scarcity.”

So, when I boil this definition down, I'm left with the admonition that I should be a grateful giver to St. Mark's. And, it would seem fair to assume that the more grateful I am, the more I'll want to give.

Or, as the real Star Trek (the original TV series) Mr. Spock might have said, if given the same stewardship request, “It's only logical Roger, that before I can determine how much I give, I first need to see what I'm grateful for.”

If that attempt at humor makes you wince, you should know that my first instinct was to channel Scotty, because like certain people who believe they have “the best words”, I believe that I have the “best brogue” as you shall now unfortunately hear:

“Roger, without more dilithium crystals and a healthy stewardship program, I don't know how much more St. Mark's can take!!”

So, let's add up just a few of the many things that I'm grateful for at St. Mark's:

- An invitation to be joyful in the worship of God: I'm guessing that many, if not most, of you leave St. Mark's after a Sunday service, having experienced joy. Joy in the words of good news and hope found in the gospel message. Joy in the redemptive power offered through holy communion. Joy in the ethereal music offered by unbelievably dedicated

and talented musicians. Joy in the friendship, laughter, handshakes, and hugs that you share with your fellow parishioners.

- An accepting and affirming church and congregation: While going through the recent Inquirers Class, I struggled to articulate what was different about the Episcopal Church in general, and St. Mark's specifically. The word I kept coming back to was "inclusiveness." However, Father Christian offered what I believe summarizes what I was calling inclusiveness best. He said that the Episcopal Church accepts AND affirms everyone. This is sincere acceptance without condition and not merely tolerance marketed as acceptance.
- A dynamic and growing Outreach ministry: Many of the churches I've attended through the years were wonderful at providing love and support within the congregation, but less so for those outside the congregation. One example of true outreach is how St. Mark's has made the support of our homeless neighbors, through Breakfast Café, Spa Days, and countless other programs, central to our ethos.
- A healthy and growing congregation: In the 2+ years that our family has been attending St. Mark's, the growth has been remarkable. Don't show up at 10:20 expecting to get a parking spot. While other churches are shrinking or closing, St. Mark's defies the trend and gets healthier. People attend churches that feed their souls and their children's souls and that doesn't happen without a clergy, congregation, and staff inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Having managed to come up with a substantial sampling of things that I'm grateful for at St. Mark's, I'd now like to share how that gratefulness has been manifested in my giving. Trust me, I didn't come to St. Mark's with a "participation" agenda. But, through innocent (or so it seemed at the time) requests for assistance, I slowly got drawn into more and more opportunities to share my time, talents, and money. And....I liked it!

Fixing a few things around the church resulted in me being recruited by the Property Ministry. Participating in the Property Ministry led me to being asked to become part of the Vestry. And a "just for a couple of weeks" fill-in for Breakfast Café led to months of 6:00 am until 10:00 am interaction with some of the most down-on-their-luck, but inspiring and interesting people I've ever had the honor to meet. And...I liked it!

I found that the more I gave, even when I wasn't all that enthusiastic about the prospect, the more I wanted to give. And the more I gave, the more grateful I became, and so on...

You'll be shortchanging yourself if you give based only on what you hear on Sunday's. I say "only", realizing that it's a magnificent "only." But I would encourage you to give more of yourselves than seems comfortable or convenient at the time to realize how grateful you truly are.

And now, more about my being an Episcopalian for approximately 24 hours. Yesterday, St. Mark's put forward over 22 members at the 145th Diocesan Convention for confirmation, reaffirmation, or reception into the Episcopal Church and I'm proud to say that I was one of those received into the Episcopal Church by our Bishop, and kindred comedian, Wayne Houglund.

I was baptized and confirmed in the Lutheran Church in the 1960's and it wasn't until 1980, when I started dating a young woman who was Episcopalian, that I first worshipped in the

Episcopal Church. I found that I liked the church just fine, but really liked the young woman and if the Episcopal Church was ok with her, it was ok with me. And in June of this year Anne and I have been married for 36 years.

So, for nearly 40 years I have been a member of Episcopal Churches in the U.S. and Anglican Churches overseas. While I always enjoyed worshipping in the Episcopal/Anglican tradition, it was as someone who for reasons of stubbornness, laziness, procrastination, or lack of conviction, never made the commitment to move from the Lutheran Church to the Episcopal Church. Never, that is, until I started attending St. Mark's.

I have found that my growth as a Christian has risen in lockstep with the amount of time, talent and money that I have offered to St. Mark's. And it is because of St. Mark's that I can proudly say today that I am – finally - an Episcopalian!

St. Mark's needs every person in this church to give as much as possible in any way you are able to sustain our growth and to contribute to each one of those things for which each one of you is grateful.

To summarize, I've come to believe that the more you give, the more you'll want to give. My prayer today is that it won't take 40 years for you to come to this same realization.