

## **ICSC, San Francisco Stewardship Talk October 4, 2005**

ICSC invited me to speak about stewardship this afternoon. Often we find out that our definition of Stewardship is different from others. Clear communication of ideas is critical. There is a story about a man and his son. The 3 ½ - YEAR-OLD SON was eating an apple in the back seat of the car- when he asked, "Daddy, why is my apple turning brown?"

"Because," his dad explained, "after you ate the skin off, the meat of the apple came into contact with the air, which caused it to oxidize, thus changing its molecular structure and turning it into a different color."

There was a long silence. Then the son asked softly, "Daddy, are you talking to me?"

In talking about Stewardship we need to communicate with one another clearly. Stewardship has more to do with the vitality of this community of believers than with the dollars in the collection basket. Stewardship is about faith not just about money. It asks the question: how do we share our resources as Disciples? Our response should be one that we hear in the Gospel of the Good Samaritan. As we strive to live as disciples, do we have the attitude that God is in control or are our arms wrapped tightly around our fears about how others see us and our possessions? If God is in control, are we willing to act according to Sunday's reading from Philippians which said: "Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

If we are filled with this attitude, then we can recognize the main reason for sharing our gifts is that we give in order to respond to God's love. Matthew's Gospel from Sunday stated "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; by the Lord has this been done, and it is wonderful in our eyes?" Each of us needs to recognize God as the giver and true owner of all we have. Each gift of our time, our talent, our treasure and even our lives is lovingly given to us by God. If all of these are gifts, ask yourself the question, how do I respond? We can never repay God for our salvation but, individually, we can respond to God's love in gratitude.

Let me share a couple of brief personal stories with you.

A while ago, my wife and I decided that we were going to take the step toward percentage giving and attempt to tithe 10% to God's works so we opened a Tithing account and 10% or more of our income goes directly into that account. We call it God's Account. This gives us a real sense of freedom in being able to give to those in need from our first fruits and not just on what remains. We have never been in need and with our seven children we will continue trust in the Lord daily.

But that's not all, when I left an engineering career and began working for the church, my wife and I had been married for less than a year, we were expecting our first child and my engineering job was stable. Our family and friends were shaken by the idea because it didn't fit into the common sense and practical future planning design. The decision, however, was based on our relationship with God, our prayers, and our desire to follow the call. Not everyone is called to work for the church but each of us is called to become a more faithful disciple of Christ in our everyday lives.

Besides those fireworks, as you know, life does not come without challenges.

For our family, when my second oldest son, Micah, was ten days old, he stopped breathing and turned blue. Within one week's time, Micah scared the heck out of his parents, had major surgery, came home with new energy and has since turned into a wonderfully active, fairly typical 14-year old boy. Another challenge was when my daughter Veronica was almost two, she began having seizures. After a month in the hospital, she was released. Currently at twelve years of age, she still takes her daily medicine and we truly have no idea of what the future might bring but we continue to pray for God's will in our lives. On a more practical level my eldest recently acquired his driver's license. My wife and I have struggled with the simple fact of handing over the keys to our vehicle. Yet we both realize that this is the next stewardship act of raising responsible adults. With each of these children and all the others we have been constantly called to remember whose they really are. As parents, our role is to be the best stewards of the gifts God has given to us, beginning to realize God's priorities.

When we make God's priorities our priorities, we can see that each of our parishes exists to serve God. You are part of your parish and all you have and all you do is called to be used for the service of God. We can each serve God by being servants here on earth. By helping others. By sharing the good news. By ministering to the poor. By giving generously.

Today, we can look deep within and ask ourselves how do I serve God and how do I build God's Kingdom here on earth? Some answers are, by sharing my gifts openly with my family, with my church, within my neighborhood, within the larger community, and beyond.

Most of you recognize that the stories I have shared with you are simply my life experiences. I encourage you to share your experiences and your stewardship stories with one another.

I close with a quote from the Bishop's Pastoral Letter: "What identifies a steward? Safeguarding material and human resources and using them responsibly are one answer; so is generous giving of time, talent, and treasure. But being a Christian steward means more. As Christian stewards, we receive God's gifts gratefully, cultivate them responsibly, share them lovingly in justice with others, and return them with increase to the Lord."

***Ask yourself: How do I receive God's gifts gratefully? How do I cultivate God's gifts responsibly? How do I share these gifts lovingly, in justice with others? And, How do I return these gifts with increase to the Lord?***