

What my pledge means to me

A sermon by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson in Saint John's Episcopal Church, Franklin, Massachusetts, on September 27, 2009, the Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost.

The duty of all Christians to follow Christ, to come together week by week for corporate worship and to work, pray and give for the spread of the Kingdom of God. (Page 856)

Having been born at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point where the motto is Duty, Honor and Country, I was raised with a strong sense of duty. Let's face it; duty is not a popular virtue. We don't like to feel obligated or pressured to do things, but there are times when our only motivation is a strong sense of duty. Were it not for that, many tasks would never get done, whether paying bills, balancing the checkbook, preparing our taxes, cleaning out the garage, the oven or bathrooms, taking out the garbage, disciplining a child or having to work with difficult people.

In the Book of Common Prayer we read that it is the duty of all Christians to follow Christ, to come together week by week for corporate worship and to work, pray and give for the spread of the Kingdom of God. (Page 856) Giving for the work of God is our emphasis these next weeks. The question for all of us is whether we will make our pledge out of duty or out of desire.

Stewardship is based on the belief that all we have comes from God and we return a portion of what we have to do God's work, not because we have to, but because we want to. It is simply a matter how we express our thanks for what we have been given by God in the use of our time, our abilities and our money.

It helps me to understand stewardship to think about a steward on a ship or a flight attendant on a plane who is responsible for the distribution of the supplies for the duration of the trip. If they are not responsible in their duties, they run out of provisions before the end of the journey. All that we have, whether earned or not, is from God. Each of us has been given the gifts of our time, our talents and our treasure. Our time and our talents are obvious God given gifts and the money we earn is also given by God. What we do with what we have been given is our gift back to God.

We are free to do what we want with our resources. We have the means to make a strong witness in a world very much in need of Christ. We have the resources of our faith and education, outreach opportunities, our fellowship and the responsibility to manage finances for a healthy, Christ-centered church. We have all that it takes with the availability of funds. The only thing separating our checkbooks and the offering plate is our commitment. Making a commitment need not be intimidating. We make commitments all the time, when we get married and begin to raise a family, when we take out college loans, sign contracts for jobs and mortgage loans that we know will take years to pay off. We make commitments everyday and each carries a certain amount of trust and risk. In being asked to be good stewards of our resources, we are talking about our commitment and pledge of all our gifts God has given us. The church relies upon our pledge to know what to expect in the way of a budget on which to operate in the coming year.

For me, my faith is reflected in how I live out my life. Faith can't be quantified. God has given me far more than I have earned. Faith enables me to do even more than I think possible. We have been given this place of worship inherited from a previous generation and as stewards of this gift, we must keep it in good condition for this and succeeding generations. There is nothing impossible with the power of God working in us. No matter what we are able to accomplish in

God's service, it will always be imperfect. God is never in our debt, but we are in debt to God for all we have been given.

I know that for personal reasons there may be some of you who may feel you are not able to make a pledge at this time, but everyone can participate by pledging something. It isn't so important how much you pledge as it is to support the work of God's church. I would like to see one hundred percent participation in this effort. Whether or not you are able to support a future priest in charge and staff and program depends all of you. If you only give when you attend, the church never knows what to expect. Your pledge allows the church to plan and maintain a budget. When only the minimum is pledged, only the minimum is accomplished.

Let me share with you why making a pledge is important for me. I pledge not just because it is my duty, but because I want and need to give. I make a pledge for the support of the church because I believe in what we are all about and I want to witness to what Christ means to me. I pledge because of a profound sense of gratitude and thanksgiving for all I have. I pledge because all I have comes from God and what I return is a portion given not reluctantly or out of fear or pressure or compulsion or guilt, but out of gratitude. I support the church out of gratitude for being personally forgiven and loved by God. My relationship to God is deeply personal and more important to me than anything else. This is a great parish and I am glad to share in your ministries. It is an adventure of the Spirit to be part of this parish family and I invite you to join me in this journey in Christ. I want you to join with me in the commitment to make Christ's presence more visible in the world. The priority of stewardship in my life is symbolized when I sit down to pay bills and begin with my church pledge rather than leaving it for what may or may not be left over.

I am proud of the stand our church takes on the issues of peace, justice and the concern for the environment. I am glad to be part of a church that reaches out to assure the dignity of every human being. I am glad to belong to a church that focuses on the interpretation of the scriptures through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I make my pledge to the church because I know that when Christ is central in my living, he is central in my giving. I ask you to join me in that effort.
