

Stewardship of Treasure Talk
By Mark Ludwig
November 1-2, 2014

Good Morning / Evening, Ladies and Gentlemen. My name is Mark Ludwig. My wife, Lisa, and I have been proud members of Sacred Heart Parish for over six years and our daughter, Tori, is a sixth grade student right here at Sacred Heart School. I'm so happy to be here today to speak with you for a few moments about stewardship, specifically, what the stewardship of treasure has meant to me and my family throughout our lives.

Now, please don't tell Father Steve, but when I was first asked to give this talk I didn't have a clue as to what the stewardship of treasure meant to my own life, let alone what it should mean in the lives of others.

Yet, I said "yes" and here I am...and for three main reasons...

One—I tell everybody all the time that I just do what people tell me to do...primarily God, Father Steve and my wife, rarely in that order though.

Two—I thought I might be alright if I focused on the "WHY" of treasure giving (specifically why do I give to Sacred Heart Church). Even without knowing the complete answer then, I hoped that I could soon figure it out.

Three—My gut told me that the stewardship of treasure begins with love and I really do love our parish, its pastor and its people with all my heart.

So here is my brief story of the "The Why" of my financial giving to God and Sacred Heart Church.

My very first memory of giving money to the Church is as a child growing up in New York. I can still see my father's signature on the check. It was never much money, but I knew that it was important. Occasionally, my dad would put me in charge of the collection envelope. Putting that envelope into the collection plate gave me so much joy. But is that why I give to Sacred Heart today, to experience joy?

While attending college in Washington, DC, I'd go to church often but gave zero thought to giving. I would toss a couple dollars into the plate each Sunday. That was really an effort to avoid embarrassment and guilt more than anything else. Is that why I sign a pledge card and give to Sacred Heart Church today, to avoid embarrassment and guilt?

My wife and I married soon after college and, embarrassingly enough, our financial contributions to God started out being based largely on how often we went to church and how much we enjoyed the service. It was almost as though we were at a show. Wow, what an incredible homily today, beautiful music too. Let's give a little something extra today. Is that why I give to Sacred Heart Church today, because I find the Mass to be adequately entertaining and inspiring?

My family and I finally started taking stewardship more seriously when we became official members of Sacred Heart Parish back in 2008. Our levels of giving were higher than they ever had been, but I'm ashamed to say that our giving was based largely out of a sense of obligation. You see, our daughter was starting kindergarten at Sacred Heart School. We completely understood that, as school parents, we were fully expected to come to Mass regularly at Sacred Heart Parish and to make regular financial contributions to Sacred Heart Parish. We felt obligated. But is that why I give to Sacred Heart today, out of a sense of obligation?

As the years went by at Sacred Heart, our relationship with Christ grew deeper. We finally began to gain a better understanding of stewardship giving. We subsequently began to pray mightily together as a family before making any major financial decisions. This actually led to a big family decision this summer to have me paint the exterior of our house instead of hiring professional painters. Some of you may know that I'm not exactly the handiest guy in town, but, even so, I soon found myself high up on a

ladder fighting off spiders and bees with my paint brush, trying desperately to get more paint on the house than on the spiders and me. Well, it's autumn and the rains have started and I'm still not entirely finished painting, but I do hope our decision to paint the house myself pleases our Lord. But is that why I give to Sacred Heart Church today, to please our Lord?

Ultimately, only by praying to our Blessed Mother, Mary, did I finally determine the definitive answer to the question of why do I give to Sacred Heart Church? WHY DO I GIVE? WHY SHOULD I GIVE EVEN MORE? IT'S BECAUSE GOD HAS ALREADY GIVEN EVERYTHING TO ME!

I don't want anything else. I don't need anything else. He's already given me everything and it's all inside of THIS building, Sacred Heart Church, right here, right now!

It's here—my wife and my daughter.

It's here—my friends, my fellow parishioners, my brothers and sisters in Christ.

It's here—my beloved priest, my pastor, my friend.

It's here—my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

And it's here—Our God in Heaven who gave His only son so that we may have the opportunity of someday entering into our glorious destiny known as Heaven.

I've never told anyone about this, but my family and I almost left Seattle for good soon after moving here. Oh, we gave it the obligatory eighteen months. But we still didn't really know anyone. We weren't really fitting in. We missed our lives back on the east coast and the rain, well, you know, the rain. Finally, we said, that's it. We're out of here. We wanted to move back before our daughter started kindergarten.

And then, truly and suddenly, God sent one of his faithful servants into our lives. We're still not sure whether to call her a living angel or a living saint, but this incredible woman, along with her amazing family, appeared out of nowhere and lovingly introduced us to the Sacred Heart community. If it were not for her and her family, our daughter would not be a student at our beloved Sacred Heart School. My family would not be Sacred Heart parishioners nor would we even be Catholic. And my family would undoubtedly not even be living in Seattle today. Thank you, dear Lord, for sending Sacred Heart parishioner, Patti Cook, and her family into our lives. For when they opened the doors of this church to us we had no idea as to the joy and the glory that awaited.

I've subsequently walked through these great doors countless times. From ordinary weekday Masses to the nights that my wife and I were confirmed into the Catholic Church and consumed the body and blood of Christ for the very first time, to our daughter's First Communion celebration, to the day that my wife and I renewed our wedding vows as our marriage was convalidated by our Sacred Heart pastor and the Roman Catholic Church and to the day that I fell down on my knees in front of the Blessed Sacrament as I prayed over the sudden death of my sister, Julie.

The Lord is always here for me (inside of Sacred Heart Church), no matter what. The only question is whether I am here for Him. I know that one of the best ways that I can be here for Him is by being a good steward of His treasure.

Fr. Larry Richards writes..."Our time on earth is not much time at all, just the blink of an eye...yet what we do in this little time on earth determines where our eternity will be." Let all of us here at Sacred Heart use what little time we have been given wisely...loving our Lord, our Church, our pastor and one another with all our hearts while being the best possible stewards of God's great gifts.

I respectfully ask that you reflect upon your own stewardship of treasure journey while ultimately finding your own answer to the question of "Why should you give to Sacred Heart Church?" I know that we'll never be able to even begin to repay God for all that He has given us, but we must nevertheless try with all our might. I can think of no better way to start than by submitting our Steward of Treasure Pledge Card as soon as possible. Thank you and may the Lord bless each and everyone one of you and all of your family members both here on earth and in heaven.