

Stewardship of Treasure Witness Talk 2017
By Eric Adams

Good evening/good morning. I promise to take less than 10 minutes of your time today (trust me, my kids timed me). My plan is to quickly introduce myself and then share with you an update from the parish finance council. Sound good?

My name is Eric Adams. I am blessed with four daughters. My oldest graduated from Sacred Heart School last year and is now a freshman at Holy Names Academy. My other three daughters still attend Sacred Heart School. My wife, Cathleen, of 21 years *this week*, is the Kindergarten room parent at the school, sits on our parish Pastoral Council, and also teaches Holy Yoga here. As for me, I sit on the school Technology Committee and also have the *privilege* of being the chair of our Parish Finance Council.

So, when I got asked to get up and speak to all of you about money, *once I got myself out of denial* - the *second* thing I did was look at the readings for this weekend to get a sense for what I was following. From the Second Reading reference to “those who have fallen asleep” and the sacrament of last rites - to the Gospel reading and its reference to “bridegrooms” and the sacrament of marriage, today’s readings really helped *frame* for me what I want *my* Stewardship of Treasure talk to be about.

Let me explain what I mean. For me, I see finances as an *input*, as a means to achieve *something* else. *Of course* I am interested in how much our church has, but I am *far* more interested in what the church is *doing*, with what it has. Said another way, what are the *outputs* of our financial *inputs* – things like, the sacraments – baptisms, confessions, communions, marriages – *those* are what matter more to me. If we just focus on the finances, then it feels like we are church building, *but*, when we connect the finances with outputs like these, then, then we are kingdom building.

Let me get even more specific. When I contribute to the church, I don’t see it as something I am just *giving away*, I see it as an investment. An investment that is returned to me when I proudly watched my daughter Erica and her friends graduate from Sacred Heart School in this church. When I get here early so I can watch my daughter Katie, greet parishioners and hand out missals on their way into Mass. When I watched my daughter Faith and her classmates gather here nervously for their first confessions with Father, and then a little while later receive communion - for the first time, here in this church. Watching my littlest one, Ellie, grinning as she walks out with all our kids for the children’s ministry downstairs. Those are just some of the returns, on my investment, into His kingdom.

And of course, in the end, we need both, right? We need the financial inputs into the church, so we – *as a church* – can participate in the building of His kingdom. So, how are we doing?

Let me start with our overall church finances first. I’ve been on the Finance Council coming on a year now and I can tell you *without hesitation* that Father Steve and John Meyer – the church business manager – are excellent stewards of the church finances. What I find most impressive is that in the last few years they have brought the church budget down \$200K, from \$1.7M to \$1.5M, *while at the same*

time spending over \$200K to stop all of the roof leaks in the Narthex. On top of that, our parish has no real debt to speak of and has over 6 months of cash on hand in case of emergency. Overall, I give a Father and John two big thumbs up.

Now, how are we doing as a congregation? Overall, the year on year trend is that *unfortunately* fewer of us are giving, but, fortunately – those that *are* contributing – are giving more. Let me break that down a bit. One fourth of the congregation doesn't financially contribute at all. Now, while the other three-fourths of the congregation *does* give – for any variety of reasons I suppose – only one half of us actually fills out a **Stewardship of Treasure card** and pledges. Even then, our *total* number of pledges is down, - but thank goodness – pledge *amounts* are up by 5%, with the average pledge at \$36 a week.

As I suppose you'd guess – I'll be coming back to the importance of pledging in a moment, but, for now – *in summary*, those are our financial *inputs*.

OK, so how about - our *outputs*?

Let me start with the sacraments. I'll go from the most – to the least frequent – in the last fiscal year, and let you draw your own conclusions. We had 714 confessions, 61 first communions, 30 funerals, 26 baptisms, 4 marriages and 5 new Catholics join the church.

How about beyond the four walls of this church; how are we being His hands and feet in our community?

We have 14 Eucharistic Ministers who bring the Body of Christ to 40 home bound parishioners, in addition to patients at Overlake Hospital, every week.

Every month, our church provides 2 cart loads of groceries to the Hope Link Food Bank – through parishioners grabbing and returning those brown bags in the Narthex after Mass.

Close to 1,500 meals are prepared and served by 100s of parishioners throughout the year – with the highest number, in this month - November – for homeless men at the First Congregational Church in Bellevue.

Next month, our Christmas Giving Tree, will give 500+ gifts to the needy, from as many parishioners.

And our own Sacred Heart middle school students performed over 4K hours of service last year.

What about beyond our immediate community? How are we being disciples out in the world?

Last year 8 parish youth and 2 adults went on mission in Tijuana, Mexico. Another 8 parish youth and 3 adults served migrant workers and their families in Skagit Valley, and 7 parish adults went to South Dakota to mentor and serve an emerging parish.

There is a lot of goodness in there; it doesn't cover everything. But they *are* examples of how we – as a church – are participating in kingdom building. The church's finances balance, with \$1.5M in and \$1.5M out. Now for me, the bigger question is, does our *kingdom building* balance sheet do the same? Any of those numbers seem low to you – surprise you? Are there needs you know of, causes you care about, that aren't being served? Ways you can be His and hands and feet, but currently aren't? Those are just a few questions for each of us to consider.

Now, let me circle back to the importance, that each and every one of us, fills out a **Stewardship of Treasure** pledge card, and drops it in the basket today – *if you haven't done so already*.

Here's *my* take on it. This **pledge card** is *less* of a financial commitment, and *more* of a statement of faith. I say this because, guess what happens if you miss a contribution or end up giving less than you thought you could, *nothing*. No one is going to call you, no one is going to email you, no one is going to follow up with you. That's not what pledging is really about. Filling out a **pledge card** and dropping it in the basket is a statement of your faith, in our God, to provide. Like we'll pray in few minutes – “to give us this day our daily bread”. This **pledge card** is an opportunity for you, to demonstrate your faith, in Him. So don't delay, fill out the card, please pledge *today*; there is *zero* down side and all *up* side in doing so.

Alright, one last ask, then I'm done. One third of our congregation has moved to online or automatic – what the **pledge card** calls “simplified” – giving. *Yes* – this gives the church a more predictable and regular income stream, and that is good and important – but once again, *to me*, that is not what it's entirely about. Online and automatic giving is about demonstrating to God that He comes first in our lives.

Let me give you an example. It may sound silly but it has to do with my phone. I made a commitment a few years ago, that the *first* thing I'd do, on my phone each morning, is to read the daily Mass verses. Before I check my work email, or scan the news, I'd read scripture, I'd read His word. So I downloaded an app – and that's what I do. It's my way of demonstrating to God that He comes first in my life, before work, before the world.

I see online and automatic giving the same way. I get paid once a month. I don't know about you but once that paycheck hits my account, *swoosh*, it's all gone. Online giving is my way of writing the first check of the month, to God. My way, of demonstrating, that He comes first in my life. So when you go home today, please take the 10 minutes – which is all it's going to take – to register for online giving, **attach a check or fill out the “simplified giving” section of the pledge card**; use this as an opportunity to demonstrate to God, His priority in your life.

Well, that's my update from your parish finance council. Thanks for listening. I hope each of you took *something* away from it. If you ever have any questions or feedback, my email is on the first page of the bulletin. God bless.