

Hello, my name is Tom Kelley and this is my wife Loretta. We are blessed with four beautiful children. We became members of Good Shepherd early in our marriage and have been parishioners' for about twelve years. Today, we are here to share with you our personal journey on the stewardship of treasure.

Stewardship is glorifying God with our time, talent and treasure. As defined from the United States Catholic Bishops pastoral letter, stewardship is "One who accepts God's gifts graciously, cherishes and tends them in a responsible and accountable manner, shares them in justice and love with others, and returns them with increase to the Lord." Stewardship is the acknowledgement that all we are and all we possess are gifts that God had given us for our temporary use and for our use in helping our fellow man.

I wish we could say that our journey with stewardship has been completed successfully or without struggle, but it is exactly that, a journey. Shortly after joining the parish, we attended a Christ Renews His Parish weekend, which helped us experience a true meaning of community.

James 2: 15-17 If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well," but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Within the community of Good Shepherd we find the works of the body of Christ and the call to participate within the efforts of the church and community as a whole. A call to live into the vocation of stewardship sharing our time, talents and treasures.

The journey has not been a straight shot from destination A to B. It has been a crazy, wild ride. Without the help of the community of Good Shepherd, we would not have grown and continued to grow. We have learned from the experience of parishioners. We have been directed and counseled in times of need. We have been taught by good priests and enjoyed great homilies. With every experience, our hearts have become less needy and wanting for ourselves and more for others. And so too, the desire and ability to give.

As our journey with stewardship began, we gave to the Sunday offering based on what we had available at the time. About a year after we joined the parish, we were advised to take a study called Crown Ministries to help us come to a better understanding of our finances. Crown is a biblically based financial study group. As a cafeteria Catholic, this was foreign to me. But to Tom, who was raised Baptist, Bible verses and tithing were not new concepts. We learned to manage our money and to give back to God what is His. From this, we began to contribute to the church in a more consistent way; however, we still struggled with all the demands and choices that our income afforded.

Within these struggles, we discerned to do with less income, so that I could stay home to care for our children. Isaiah 55:8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD." Learning to do things differently or going without was a new concept, and we did not always do this with grace. 1 Corinthians 10:13 "Every test that you have experienced is the kind that normally comes to people. But God keeps his promise, and he will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm; at the time you are put to the test, he will give you the strength to endure it, and so provide you with a way out."

As our family grew so did our desires to contribute more to the Church. With a new born baby in arm, we were visited by members of the church and asked to help the diocese fund the building of a Catholic High School. So with the hopes that one day our children would receive a catholic education, we contributed to the appeal, which was a commitment of several years. Gradually, our tithing and giving back to God increased. This opened our hearts to give in many ways, like supporting a child overseas, contributing annually to the Burse Club to support seminarians, Thanksgiving meals, Christmas angels, the PHI center, the Gabriel project, as well as the Sunday offerings and second collections. The desire to give and support the body of Christ grew as we grew in the understanding that yes we are the body of Christ. Just like each parish is part of the Universal Church, we as individuals are also called to be the Catholic Church. As individual parishes combine resources to more effectively carry out the missions of our faith, so are we called as individuals and family to combine our resources to help each other.

Our desire and commitment to support our faith has continued to grow over the years, like supporting the Building Fund, Catholic Sharing Appeal, and the Sharing the Vision and Growing the Faith campaign. Giving from our first fruits gradually became easier. We even started auto-pay for our weekly tithing, so our minds no longer wandered during the homily thinking about what to give at mass. We are gaining more confidence in knowing that we are giving back to God what is His. The fruits are immeasurable and giving can be difficult, especially in these uncertain economic times where it may even seem counter intuitive, at least by worldly standards. And this is where we are learning to lean into the Lord and follow His will. We are transforming our thoughts from it being our plan, to understanding it is really God's plan. Thank you.