

My name is Gloria Smith and I have four children Steven, Jr., Debbie, Christine and Angela. I am here today to share my personal story of stewardship.

Stewardship is the generous sharing of our time, talent and treasure. Stewardship of time is how we structure our lives to be able to worship and spend time with God. Stewardship of talent focuses on sharing our gifts with others through service. And, stewardship of treasure is the way we return to God, from the fruits of our labor, both money we have earned and our material possessions.

The focus of today's talk is the stewardship of time and talent. This focus is part of the overall stewardship effort beginning today with the Ministry Fair. In February we will focus on Stewardship of Treasure. All three are important and one does not substitute for the other.

I grew up as a cradle catholic, in Miami Springs, FL. My family was always involved in helping out at the church and my father was one of the few people who actually tithed in our parish. I can remember spending many hours just hanging out at the church as my dad help refinish all the classroom desks for the school. When I got married and we went out on our own, we found our parish and followed in my parent's footsteps. We spent hours on end working up at the church. However, my husband and I began to have financial struggles which ended in a separation. So, here I was, raising my children on my own. Struggling to pay all the bills and have time at home. It was very difficult and I didn't go to church much during that time.

When I did go, I always felt that the church owed me something; because I was the one they were talking about, you know...the single mom trying to support her family. I didn't feel like I needed to give of myself at that time.

In 1996 I became ill. I had Hodgkin's disease, cancer of the lymphatic system. The tumor infiltrated my lung and I spent a month in the hospital. I finally came home on oxygen and underwent chemotherapy and radiation. At that time, God placed someone in my life who reached out to me when I couldn't even take care of myself much less four kids. Tony and Mandy started picking us up to take us to church and they were there when I needed to talk.

In 1999, we moved to Tallahassee and started attending Good Shepherd. At Good Shepherd I decided to get involved. The first thing I did was go to a TEAM, the Tallahassee Equality Action Ministry, Listening Process meeting and I started going to some of their other meetings. I attended other classes and learned more about my faith. All of this, my spiritual journey, helped me understand that I must follow the will of God. That it is not what I can get out of the church; but what I can give back to my parish, to my parish family and to the community. I kept praying for wisdom and understanding. I wanted to get involved and I wanted to do a lot of hands on charities to be out there with people. I didn't realize at the time that there is a very big difference between charity and justice. Charity, feeding and clothing; and justice, changing the system for the better so that we don't have to do as much feeding and clothing. And God requires us to do both,

not just one or the other. And, God kept drawing me back to that original group, that first meeting I went to with TEAM.

One day I was at a TEAM meeting and one of my daughters said: Mom, that's what you should be doing, organizing for TEAM. I told her naw, that's not me. However, I googled: a community organizer. I saw the qualifications and thought that there was no way I was qualified to do this sort of work.

But, God had other plans. Two months later, the TEAM staff member called me up to tell me that they had a position available. That night I prayed and prayed: Lord, is this what you really want me to do? I realized that everything I had done so far in life lent experience for this job.

Now when God wants something, he doesn't play around. I had been working in my brother's jewelry store and he would have to make some major changes before I could leave. In addition, I had to go to a week of training, and my daughter was getting married on November 30<sup>th</sup>. Just being mother of the bride alone was enough; but God made everything go so smoothly. My daughter got married on Friday, November 30, and I started working at TEAM, the very next Monday! If I had to do all this on my own, with out God having a hand in it, it would have taken me a year to accomplish all that.

So, I can safely say that I know without a doubt I am doing what the Lord wants me to be doing. I did indeed answer his call after a journey of prayer and service. I am now Lead Organizer for TEAM, the Tallahassee Equality Action Ministry, doing what the Lord requires of me: To do justice, to love charity and to walk humbly with my God. I am loving every minute that I spend talking to people and serving them.

I would like to leave you with a prayer so that you might be able to discern where to spend your time and talent for the Lord:

I'll say, "Yes, Lord, Yes," to Your will and to Your way,  
I'll say, "Yes, Lord, Yes," I will trust you and obey,  
When the Spirit speaks to me, with my whole heart I'll agree:  
And my answer will be "Yes, Lord, Yes!"