

Stewardship Sermon 2014
12 October 2014
What Happens the Rest of the Week

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1. I remember ... years ago, my sister-in-law asked me what it is like to be a priest. "I know what you do on Sundays. What do you do the rest of the week? *Anything?*" Over the years, people have asked me this question regularly, or they've at least intimated that I must live a very quiet and easy life. **Hah!**

2. **But the question itself – is worth asking** – Not about what I do, but what it is ***we do*** - a church – St. Stephen's ... **What do we do the rest of the week?** I especially want to know the answer to this when it comes to giving – and stewardship. What *really happens* around here?

A couple years ago, a St. Stephen's parishioner commented on her pledge – she is generous, and she told me why she chooses gives so much – it's because the church makes a difference – in peoples' lives – **reaches beyond itself – is here for others.**

Some people treat church like they treat the movies. You pay your own way – buy a ticket for the shows; you pledge for the Sundays you attend – But your pledge is far more than that – is a gift **to others.** -it is a gift **for the rest of the week.**

Let me **me tell you** about Sundays **and** the rest of the week -

3. **Worship.** St. Stephen's is primarily a ***worshipping community***, meaning the primary **activity** of St. Stephen's is what you'd expect: ***worship.*** Every other activity - social justice, helping those less fortunate, building community – even Christian education – every other activity is a spoke extending from the **hub of Sunday worship.** I've seen many churches lose its way – and almost always, they do so by losing their **core essence, the beauty of holiness.** So first, we ***Worship God. Adore God. Unabashedly. With Joy and in hope.***

4. And **At St. Stephen's, we worship well.** This past year – we held 147 worship services – Including

- regular Sunday services,
- EvenSpark,
- evening prayer,
- Holy Week services,
- special outdoor services,
- weddings and
- funerals –

Each of these worship services is marked by both **quality and a sense of awe.**

Quality Music. We have *the best music program* in Marin, **bar none.** The choir is extraordinary and full – and now we have this growing children's choir. Thank you, John.

Sermons. I like to think you get to hear – ***thoughtful sermons – and I’m not talking about from me -*** from a wide variety of preachers – Shari, Richard Schaper, Stacey Grossman, Elaine Reichert, Jaida Im of Freedom House, Bill Rankin of GAIA, Sally Bingham of Interfaith Power and Light, Alan Jones, and others ...

Innovative Services and Sundays. Pirate Eucharist, Bee Sunday, Thanksgiving in the Wilderness, the Easter Vigil, EvenSpark, and Bicycle Sunday, just to name a few.

Totals. 21,000 times – people have worshipped in this space this past year, 21,000 times.

5. Education -

Adult: By my estimate – you could have attended twenty-five different adult education classes this past year, including

- Karl Belgum’s book offerings,
- Joe Jennings’ Readers’ Theatre,
- Zoila Schoenbrun’s classes on prayer,
- the Earth and Altar Lenten Series,
- Gospel introductions,
- open forums, and
- newcomers classes.

I estimate that at least 100 of you have participated in adult education this past year, as a way to **explore** your faith.

There is also **Anasazi** – with its 15-20 regular attendees, And weekly **Contemplative Prayer**.

Children’s education – Did you know about 80 children and teens are enrolled in St. Stephen’s Sunday School?

- This past twelve months, there were about 2000 kid attendances.
- 11 teens were confirmed.
- 9 teens went on mission trip to build Habitat for Humanity houses.
- 23 teens went on the overnight to Alcatraz.

e. Personal Care. Did you know parishioners care for other parishioners and people in need?

- **Soul Food** – delivered 30 meals and drove 15 times.
- **Elder care** – about 100 visits, cards, etc. (5 months old)
- **Clergy Visitation** - Shari and I also visit homebound parishioners regularly, and those in the hospital when we know about it. We visit and pray with *those who are dying*, and those *who are afraid they might be dying*. Your stewardship pledge makes that possible.

Do you realize how much it meant this past year to the man whose wife committed suicide, to be able to turn to St. Stephen’s? He was able turn here **because you pledge?** Many people turn here when life gets tough – and they can turn here because you keep the lights on.

f. **New Member Ministry; outreach** – Your pledge also makes it possible to reach out and welcome new members – with visits and welcoming parties.

We reach out in other ways, too – Oktoberfest and the Labor Day Parade are not just to have fun, but to invite others to experience grace.

You've reached out in very tangible ways, too: this past year you fed groups of homeless men and women 30 times – about 500 meals - do you *realize* how often parents tells me how invaluable it was to their teenager to sit across the table from a homeless man, and eat supper together?

- This year, we installed the **Earth and Altar garden** that has grown tomatoes, chard, and kale that have fed people through Ritter House and the food banks.
- St. Stephen's Gives Thanks, and Soles 4 Souls, Siempre Unidos, and donations to help fight human trafficking.
- **Your Thrift Shop** – provides clothes and household goods at low cost to those in need.
- And don't even let me get started about **Camp Create** – hosting 75 kids and teens for the summer arts camp. **Your pledge makes it possible** for Shari to organize and run Camp Create.

3. So – **when people ask me what I do – what we do - on the other four days**, I look at them like they are from some a different planet – because the question isn't four days or seven – but where can we find a few more days, to fit it all in? **And your church stands tall, as a symbol of hope, to a broken world. The promise that life is not meaningless, but grace-filled.**

4. **That is why I ask you to pledge generously**. Not to pay for services rendered. Not to punch your ticket. I ask you to pledge generously because that is what you do, who you are: You are a people who give away from themselves.

5. The *average* St. Stephen's pledge is \$3000. The highest pledge is in the tens of thousands of dollars, and the lowest pledge is \$20. These numbers are higher than they would be if every family pledged or gave regularly. But some do not pledge, and some are in the position to pledge more. So this year - my request is simple: that you use only one standard – and that is generosity. ***Pledge generously. Because nobody ever went wrong being generous.***

5. Conclusion: Despite all the bluster in this morning's parable – one point comes across loud and clear: you and I – the church – are to go into the highways and byways, inviting people to grace. Your pledge is a piece of that – a fulfillment of your responsibility not just to the church, but to this community. I hope this year you will fulfill that responsibility proudly and generously.