

Good Morning. By now, I think most of you know that I'm Mike Osborn and I am the chair of the Stewardship Committee for a third term this year. We are having the second and final lunch discussion group after the service today. All are invited to attend. The fare is simple – sandwiches, chips, and cookies – but since Weisey's deli is doing the cooking, they are sure to be delicious and filling. The topics will include Stewardship in general, and it is a time when you are welcome to bring questions about the overall process or about the budget and sources of income statement from the Sunday bulletin. More importantly, I think it will be an opportunity to hear more details about all of the ways in which Grace uses our financial gifts to enable the parish's ministries. We'd love to get your thoughts on this.

I wanted to take just a couple more minutes to update you on where we stand this year on our pledge campaign and then share a couple of thoughts about why giving to Grace is different from other types of giving you might consider, at least for me.

Over the past years that I have been the Chair, we've generally experienced pledge growth of about \$20,000 each year. That's roughly 5% and it has allowed us to do many things, perhaps most importantly raising our clergy salary to levels that are consistent with Diocesan guidelines for clergy compensation. About half of the pledges that are renewed each year include increases, some of them quite substantial in terms of dollar amounts. In addition, we have been blessed recently to receive some new and generous pledges. This year we're in somewhat of a different position. As you see in the Stewardship announcement in the bulletin, we're projecting a fairly significant reduction in expected pledged funding this year. If our expectations hold, our pledged amount will be about \$30,000 less than our pledge total from last year. And that is \$50,000 from where we want to be in terms of nominal growth in fixed expenses and our goals to fund new ministry initiatives. There are a handful of pledges which we know are declining for 2018. A few of the reduced pledges are from our most generous pledgers. The reasons for this vary, but in general, these folks are relocating or otherwise changing their parish home. And, the pledge increases we've received so far have generally not reflected the same level of growth as in previous years. The bottom line is that we're likely to face a fairly serious hole in our 2018 budget. So, part of my message today is to ask those who have not yet pledged for next year already, to please consider doing so soon. We know stewardship is not the favorite topic that folks come to church to hear and this is the last scheduled announcement from me on the topic for the year. We'd like to know your intentions by the Annual Meeting on November 19 – 3 weeks from now. If you can increase your pledge from last year, whether or not you've already turned in your card, it would help us out tremendously.

So, finally, why do I think pledging to Grace is different from other giving? If you are like me, you get many solicitations for financial support from different organizations. Our schools and colleges ask. Relief organizations need our help during times of natural disasters like recent hurricanes. SCPA, boy and girl scouts, advocacy groups for the hungry and the homeless, overseas relief agencies, NPR or CBN – they're all worthy causes. So: why Grace, or more generally, why your parish home?

For me, our local parish is the place that each of us becomes the members of the body of Christ that St. Paul teaches us about. A Church home is the place where we share our joys and trials; rejoice in good news and comfort each other in sorrows. For all the modern talk of "personal relationship" with Jesus, my view is that we are more likely to experience Him in community with each other. I certainly know

that I am more able to see God at work in the world when I watch what happens at Grace than when I attempt anything like it on my own. So, I think God expects us to be in community as a form of worship, thanksgiving as well as mutual support, growth, and accountability. If that's true, then our financial gifts should disproportionately seek to nurture that community and make it a vigorous and holy place.

One topic or question that always comes up at this point is the amount of giving. Our vestry has adopted a pledge to "proportional giving." What does that mean? In biblical context, it means that we give a direct proportion of our income to God's work. In the Old Testament, the proportion is 10% - otherwise known as a "tithe." Now 10% of our income is a big number for any of us. 10% is not something that most of us are actually doing.

The proportional giving concept is that we commit to a percentage, maybe 1% or 2% or 5% but then see how we can increase it over time to stretch toward a larger number. A percentage means that giving goes up when you get a raise or promotion, but it might also go down if you retire or take a lower-paying job.

The thinking that proportionality avoids is: "Oh, put me down for what I did last year. Maybe with an extra 100 bucks" Or: "I think I am giving pretty close to an average pledge so that's pretty good, right?" It is not about an arbitrary number or about what others are doing. No, I think God wants us to spend just a little more time thinking about His blessings for us and how we choose to use them as Christians. Luke's Gospel 12:48 says "Everyone to whom much is given, of him much will be required." You all know the parable of the Talents. The one who had 5 made 5 more. The one who was given 2 turned it in to 4. The one who buried his one talent was told that returning it, even with interest, wasn't serving the master.

For me, a pledge is about recognizing that we are created with many abilities and that God asks for a proportion back of what He provides through His grace and gifts to each of us. It is not just what might fit into what's left over at the end of the month. 1 Chronicles 29:14 is the phrase we selected as this year's campaign theme. It says "all things come of thee O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee." From that perspective, it's not hard to be generous with God's money when making a gift for God's work. Thank you.