

Good Morning.

My intent this morning is to describe the fall pledge drive and to talk a little about why I am here.

I think we all know how hard it is to talk about money. One of the goals Blair has set for us is that we develop a shame free environment for talking about money. A little over a year ago we had a forum where we were encouraged to share our money stories.

Part of my own story is that I was raised in something that looked a lot like poverty. I did not have an actual bed until I was a 12 and we moved to Minnesota from California. My mom went to the Salvation Army and bought beds for my brother and me. There were four kids in my family and we did not have a ball to play with, so my adult cousin went to a toy store, bought a ball and we promptly wrecked it.

But thanks to God's grace and many blessings, the most important of which was marrying Jane, she and I are able to give to St. Matthew's and those other causes which we care about. We are not even close to being St. Matthew's biggest givers, but I am so glad for what we are able to give. It is one of the most outward and visible signs to me of God's blessings on us. It gives me real joy.

If you were present at that forum where our money stories were shared you know that my story was by no means the toughest. There are money stories at St. Matthew's that are really difficult and even heartbreaking.

Jesus tells us "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head". Jesus was entirely dependent on the sharing economy. If generous people were not willing to take in Him and His followers, they were forced to sleep rough. My hope and prayer for all of us is that we can joyfully participate in giving that makes it possible for us to welcome the stranger, knowing that when we do so we welcome Jesus.

We all know that it is the giver who receives the gift; it is the person who feeds and clothes the stranger who is blessed. I believe preparing a home and a place for Jesus in our lives is what giving is all about.

When Blair and I meet in February we plan a pledge drive that runs all year. Hopefully what you see is not year-round messages about money, what you see are members of the congregation sharing what St. Matthew's means to them. You see ministry heads talking about the mission and ministry that is done in our names for others and ministries that serve us, the congregation. You see opportunities to gather as the Body of Christ in each other's homes. I believe these things are what bring us more closely into relationship with God. I believe our acts of community and mission drive our decisions about giving because we are excited about what else we know we can do.

This week you will all receive a letter from me with an invitation to build our community even more by acting as a Contact Person. Contact People are indispensable to our pledge drive and contribute greatly to the life of the parish.

Contact People have the mission of telling four other households or families about the key events in the pledge drive;

- The lunch after the service on Sunday, October 22,
- The arrival of Blair's letter and pledge card in the mail that week and

- The request that they bring their pledge card to church on October 29, Commitment Sunday.

If the household is unable to return their card on Commitment Sunday we ask the Contact People to call and find out if there is some way we can make it easy for them, for instance by providing a new pledge card.

In addition to sharing the above information with four households, we have seen the Contact People share information back from the household to the parish. This is a real two-way street and has helped strengthen the bonds that hold us together.

So thank you, bless you, and let us pray for a pledge drive that brings us closer into relationship with God through Jesus Christ.