

Good morning!

My name is Adrian Velazquez. I have been a parishioner here at St Elizabeth since 2008. My wife, Bernadette, became part of the parish after we got married in May of last year. Last week I was offered an opportunity to talk a little bit about Christian stewardship by Carrie Madden. So, here I am.

In today's Gospel we heard that we are all invited guests to the kingdom of heaven...everyone... however, not all of us are prepared. Studying this scripture I was made aware that it is supposed to serve as a reminder that our outward actions must grow out of the faith in our hearts.

Christian stewardship is just that...our outward actions rooted in faith. We correctly put God first in our lives when we prioritize to joyfully show Him gratitude with our "first fruits" ...the best of what we have. We, of course, do this by giving back portions of the very same gifts he has bestowed upon us. Then, when we take it to the next level...true

sacrifices...of our time, talent, and treasure...we truly bring Him into our hearts...no longer someone we visit only on Sundays...but someone we have a relationship with. How do I know this? Well, that is why I'm here.

My desire to finally be a good steward...was re-ignited a few years ago when my best buddy, Chad, was helping me with my taxes. When we got to the part about charitable giving he asked me how much that was...I hesitated...he looked at me...waiting...and I said put down nothing. Chad said "What??" ...I was embarrassed. He said that did not sound like me. Then in his kind, Christian way he got me thinking about why I wasn't giving back...anything?

My early childhood was spent living with my mom. Like so many kids I remember asking her for a little cash to drop in the basket at Mass. We did not have a lot of money back then. However, mom always gave what she could even if it was just a couple of dollars.

When I bought my first house here in Waldo in 2006 I was comfortable and pretty happy with myself. I pretty much kept to myself...kept everything to myself...and stayed away from everyone. It was rough period in my life. However, little by little I realized how blessed I was to have chosen this neighborhood and community. What began with a friendly hello from my neighbor's child soon became entire families ringing my doorbell to invite me to come out and spend time with them.

Today, my wife and I have great friends in all our neighbors. We see Christ in every one of them and we hope they see Him in us. The four kids on our block attend St Elizabeth's and we feel grateful knowing that our weekly contribution helps fund their Catholic education. I now volunteer at the Jackson County Jail a couple times a month and help serve meals at St James Place. I joined the Knights of Columbus last fall and just recently was asked to join the parish council by Father Bruce. None of this would be happening without first considering what true Christian stewardship is...a wellspring of our faith.

This is our story. We invite you to join us by making Christian stewardship a way of life for you, too, because we are all invited.