

The 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost-Proper 23-Year A-Meade Brown, Stewardship Chair 10.15.23  
Meade Brown's Stewardship Homily

I am Meade Brown, your Stewardship Chair for Saint Augustine's 2024 pledge campaign. By now you've received your 2024 pledge packet in the mail. If not, see me at coffee hour and I will provide you with a pledge packet. Whoops, I shouldn't have said that, now no one will sit with me at coffee hour!

Your pledge packet includes a stamped return envelope to mail back your completed pledge card. The packet also contains a statement showing how much of your 2023 pledge is paid to date. If you pledged for 2023 but didn't receive a statement in your pledge packet, call our intrepid treasurer Nancy Ruff and she will make sure you get one.

Let's reflect for a moment on what a great pledge result we had last year. Our pledge campaign theme was "Our faith and vision will carry us through". You displayed your faith in and vision for Saint Augustine's future by pledging more than \$260,000 dollars to your parish, a 14% increase over the prior year's pledges.

The Stewardship theme for our 2024 pledge campaign is "Sharing the joy", a theme that encompasses many messages. Today I will talk about the joy of our fellowship, and the joy that your deeper commitment to this parish will bring to you.

Do you, like me, sense a rebirth of energy and joy within this parish? We are blessed with a wonderful new rector, and a wonderful new music director. There is another blessing that God has provided us, the joy to gather once more in fellowship. Because of the isolation we experienced during the worst days of Covid when no vaccine was available, we now have a greater appreciation of the joy that fellowship brings to our lives.

I am an amateur photographer, and I love this observation of life that employs photographic terms: "Isolation is a darkroom where negativity develops". I am so happy we are no longer isolated from one another! I never leave a church service without feeling more positive about the world. Do you experience the same feelings? If a stranger were to ask me to describe what our parish is like, I would tell them: "Whenever two or more parishioners are gathered together, whether at church, a picnic, at someone's home, or at Payless, there is joy among them." We are apostles of Christ commanded to bring the joy of the kingdom of heaven to this world, and this building, the house of the lord, is one of God's bases of operations. Each one of us need to support this operational base of God's joy with our time, our talent, and our money.

Our fellowship will bring you joy, but your making a deeper commitment to Saint Augustine's will enhance your joy. Before you enter the doors of Saint Augustine's, you see a banner that reads: "Wherever you are on your journey, you are welcome here". This is not only a wonderful message for newcomers, but for all of us. No matter how young or old we may be, we are all spiritual works in progress. Where are you on your journey? Are you ready to further your journey? I love this message that I read many years ago on a church message board in Garden City, New York: "Behold the turtle, he doesn't make progress until he sticks his neck out." Stick

your neck out and further your spiritual journey with a deeper commitment of your time, your talent, and your money to Saint Augustine's.

Let me share the paradox of my own journey of commitment to Saint Augustine's. In my early years at Saint Augustine's, my participation in parish life was so minimal that people at the Welcome Table would offer me a visitor's name tag when I came through the door, even though I had been a "member" for a couple of years. In those early years, I was a workaholic lawyer who viewed church attendance and participation in other parish activities as another stressful obligation in my over obligated "busy" life. However, a funny thing happened to me as I deepened my commitment of time, talent, and money to Saint Augustine's. My commitment to Saint Augustine's no longer felt like a stressful obligation, but instead, it brought joy to my life. Have you had a similar experience? Let me share a dirty little secret with you. People come up to me and comment, what a hard job you must have asking people for money, thank you for volunteering to be Stewardship Chair." You know what, I want to THANK YOU for giving me the opportunity to be your Stewardship Chair. I love this place, I love you guys, I am having fun! My support of this parish brings me joy, and I know you feel the same way, because YOU KEEP COMING BACK FOR MORE! Some people refer to Episcopalians as the frozen chosen. Hallelujah, that's NOT us. As Trevor Arnold knows, we can become so overwhelmed by the holy spirit that we sometimes even HUG each other! Remember, ask first before you hug.

I am encouraging all of you to further your commitment of your time, talent, and money to this house of the lord. No matter how young or old you may be, your spiritual journey has not ended because God has more joy to bring to your lives. Last year this parish increased its pledges by 14 percent and raised more than \$260,000, and you didn't even know who your new rector or music director would be! This year I ask you to increase your pledge by 15% or MORE, if you are able, so that we may raise \$300,000 for this house of the lord and continue our parish journey to financial stability. As your Stewardship Chair, I will share with you my deeper commitment to this parish and increase my pledge by 25%. Now you know why Stewardship Chairs typically retire from their duties after three years, they can't afford to serve longer!

I will close with another observation of life that again employs photographic terms. Our life here together is like a photo album with many pictures. Some pictures tell stories of shared happiness, and some pictures tell stories of shared loss. However, every picture also tells another story, a story of shared joy bringing God's heavenly kingdom into this world. Complete your pledge card so that our album may grow with many more pictures of shared joy.