It’s that time of year … the fall, when many churches observe a season of stewardship. If you’ve been part of an Episcopal congregation before, you’ve probably heard about this; but for people who haven’t, “stewardship” and “pledging” can seem like code words for insiders. So, let’s break the code.

The meaning of “stewardship” sometimes is sadly diminished, especially when churches use that word when what they really mean is financial giving. Actually, stewardship is a rich theological idea describing the relationship between our lives and God, the ultimate provider. The idea is that God gives us everything we have – tangible and intangible blessings – and that God asks us to manage, or steward, what we’re given in ways that reflect God’s desires for us and for the world. Part of our holy management of God’s resources is giving back to God, as a thank offering, some part of what God first gave us. So, stewardship does involve making gifts to God from our time, talent, and treasure. But the idea is much bigger – that everything we have comes from God; that God entrusts all those blessings to us; and God asks us to use those blessings to bring God’s desires to life.

So, during “stewardship season,” many churches (including Episcopal congregations) ask their members to make a “pledge,” or a financial commitment to the church for the coming year. The pledge reflects our thanksgiving for all that God gives us to steward; it’s an outward and visible sign of that gratitude. Practically, pledges are also an essential part of how church leaders steward the church. Members’ pledges are the basis for each year’s budget. So, we ask members to make a pledge as a token of their thankfulness, as a sign of their commitment to this parish family and God’s work through it, and as a practical estimate of giving to help the church build a budget for the coming year.

Of course, the question arises: How much to give? Traditionally, churches have said the Bible describes grateful giving at the 10-percent mark, but immediately we wonder, “10 percent of what? Net income? Gross income? Wealth?” I think a more helpful way to think about it is to make a pledge that’s proportionate to your income and reflective of your gratitude for the gifts God gives you. Someone blessed with resources can probably give a higher percentage of income; but a comparatively small gift may reflect a deeply loving and sacrificial commitment for someone who struggles to make ends meet.

So, let me leave it this way: I hope you’ll consider making a pledge to St. Andrew’s for 2020 of whatever seems appropriate for you. Literally, a pledge can be for any amount. How about $5 a year? We would welcome that! The size doesn’t matter. What matters is the gratitude and the commitment that a pledge reflects – and you’ll be amazed at the return.

God’s peace,

The Rev. John Spicer, Rector