

HE SAID/SHE SAID STEWARDSHIP STORY

HE SAID: We are Keith and Mary Lou Grothaus and we have been parishioners of St. Justin Martyr for about 37 years. Our daughters received all their sacraments here, including our oldest daughter, Brittany, who was married in this church in 2012. Additionally, our precious granddaughter Charlotte was baptized by Deacon Corney in January 2017. The family tradition continues. Mary Lou started teaching CCE in our home before our church was built, and continued as a catechist for more than 25 years. I started in the music ministry when we had our Masses at St. Kevork's Armenian Church, and have never stopped. And now our younger daughter, Katie, shares this music ministry with me. What a blessing. We have spent nearly our entire adult lives here at St. Justin.

We are grateful that Father Paul and the Stewardship committee asked us to talk about our personal experience with sharing our time, talent, and treasure. I still remember attending Mass at St Kevork's; the music group was rather small: a guitar and a few voices. Suddenly, the Holy Spirit spoke to me through Mary Lou's elbow when she poked me in the ribs, saying that I should join the choir. You see, I did have a guitar and had played in several bands in high school and college, but had never played or sang in a church choir. I felt as if I had nothing to offer and was sure that God did not need me to help with music because I had no experience and could not see myself playing and singing at church. Mary Lou continued to "encourage" me, as only a wife can do, to talk to the

choir leader about joining them for the Saturday evening Mass. I finally stepped through my fear and spoke to the choir leader; he was thrilled to have another choir member! Although I had no idea of what I was getting into, I trusted that the Lord knew what He was doing. I have been a part of the music ministry here at St Justin since 1983.

SHE SAID: I started teaching 3rd grade CCE in our home in 1983, and continuing the next year after our first child Brittany was born. My students would take turns holding her before and after class. I had never taught before! I was a speech pathologist and only worked with a couple of kids at a time! I taught in the hall behind partitions, in portable buildings, and, finally, in our beautiful CFC building. I taught elementary grades, Little Church, and when Brittany got into middle school, I taught her class until she graduated, and then taught Katie's class until she graduated. I didn't know anything about teaching religion. God called me. I just answered.

HE SAID: Many years ago, we were sitting over in this very church when we heard Fr. John Rouse, our founding pastor, make a plea for this parish to become a tithing parish.

I thought that was something that only Protestant churches did. You see, I grew up in a middle class Catholic family who placed a few dollars each week in our envelopes and dropped them in the collection basket. It is not surprising that when Mary Lou and I became adults,

and started giving to the church regularly, we just reached into my pocket and placed a couple of dollars in our envelopes and dropped them in the collection basket. We never gave any real thought to what we were doing or how much we should be giving to the church.

The characteristics of tithing that Fr. Paul has mentioned over the years include **proportional** (using a percentage), **sacrificial** (giving enough that you have to place your trust in God), our **first fruits** (not what was left over), and **regular** (giving as consistently as God has given to us). I can really only say our giving was regular, but I can't say that it was proportional, sacrificial or from our first fruits. Looking back, I can say that we were not meeting the requirements of true financial stewardship.

After Fr. Rouse's appeal, he handed out cards for each household to complete. We simply took ours home, because we weren't prepared to make our commitment just yet. Over the next couple of days, we did the math, first using 10%, and said..."Oh, that'll never work. Lord, we can't do that. We've got kids to feed, bills to pay, college to save for." You get the picture. Maybe you feel the same way right now.

I am in the real estate business, and in the 80's and early 90's my income was very sporadic. We never knew from week to week how much money we would have. Thank the Lord, Mary Lou had a "real" job and brought home a consistent income. Needless to say, the thought of giving 10% of our income to the church scared us to death.

SHE SAID: I was the one in charge of our household budget and paid all the bills. There was absolutely no extra money to give to the church. We would give what we could, and that was usually a small amount, a portion of what was left over. Many months we were struggling to pay our bills and the thought of giving more money to the church did not seem feasible. You see, our faith was not in a place that we could trust God to provide. All we looked at was what we **didn't have** instead of looking to God and have faith that He would bless us for placing all our trust in Him. As Keith and I continued to discuss this topic over the next weeks, we decided to place our trust in God and step out in faith and make a commitment to give to the Lord a percentage of our first fruits. As it is written in **Proverbs 3:9–10, *Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.***

So, what we really decided to do was give this tithing thing a “trial run” to see what would happen.

HE SAID: That “trial run” turned very quickly into a full fledge commitment. Every month we looked at what we brought home and wrote a check to the church right off the top. We took a huge leap of faith, and you know what happened? God blessed us every month with enough money to remain faithful to our commitment to God and still we were able to meet all our other financial commitments. If we had less money to eat out or do home

improvements that month...so be it. We became content with a standard of living that **God had chosen for us.**

After about a year Mary Lou and I were just dumbfounded by our many blessings. We discovered that it was impossible for us to **out give** God. We learned that God didn't expect perfection...He wanted us to be faithful. God saw our very childlike faith, and over the years provided us with more than we had ever dreamed.

And it continues for us to this very day. Father John Rouse taught our entire community the biblical principal of tithing. Over time Mary Lou and I continued to step out in faith, trusting that our God is faithful! Father Paul is now calling us to honor God with our first fruits of time, talent and treasure, and to render to God what is God's. I pray that we all will respond to the voice of the Holy Spirit and trust in God's everlasting mercy and generosity and not give God what is left over at the end of the month, but what is truly His, our first-fruits!

As our Parish celebrates Stewardship Weekend, we have the opportunity to consider the time, talent, and treasure with which the Lord has blessed us. Mary Lou and I have chosen to give from our first fruits of time, talent and treasure. How about you? Will you join us?

These remarks were taken from the witness given by founding members Mary Lou and Keith Grothaus on Stewardship Weekend, April 6-7, 2019.

