Lay Witness Talks: November 23 – 24, 2019

Saturday November 23, 4:30pm Mass - Ray Somogy

Hi, I am Ray Somogy and a parishioner here at Immaculate Conception. I would like to thank Father for allowing me to be here to talk with all of you about Stewardship. I have been a practicing Catholic all my life. I love the Catholic faith with all of its traditions, Scripture, Sacraments, and especially the Holy Mass.

Stewardship is about encountering Christ. We need to go to Jesus and rely on Him. I was praying on what He was asking me to do with my time, talent, and treasure many years ago. When I prayed, I heard a Catholic parody, Tithe After Tithe, by Nick Alexander, played to the tune of the song Time After Time by Cindy Lauper. In it he decided, after attending a Prayer Group, that he should give back to God what is owed to God, and thus decided that he needed to increase his giving. This prompted me to listen to a Scott Hahn talk on tithing—and in that talk, Scott Hahn mentions that the Old Testament states that if you are not tithing, then you are stealing from God. It’s not that Jesus wants to take my things away; He wants to bless me by trusting Him with everything. There is an attitude that everything comes from Him and the gifts we have are meant to be shared generously with others. When I started to live this way, there was a peace present and things would just start to work out for the better. Roofs, water heaters, furnaces, brake pads, tires, all started to outlive their normal life expectancy.

This does not mean we have not fallen on hard times. Just recently, during the last government shutdown, we had no pay check coming in. This could have been a little scary, but through God’s providential care, and through our fellowship activities, a parishioner offered us money to help us through the shutdown. We cannot explain to you the deep gratitude we have to God for our great friendships that have been formed here—friendships that were forged due to our willingness to give ourselves to what God has prompted us to do, in our tithing of our time, treasure, and talents.

Due to accidents and illnesses, I am not able to volunteer like I did when I was younger. Yet if you have an open heart to God, He will provide opportunities to serve, no matter your circumstances. At times, I sing up in the choir loft at the noon Mass. I am in a parish group that prays for the deceased, and I joined the Rosary Makers. I help sponsor Dinner and a Movie, the Sunday breakfasts, as well as other special events, for these events are all 100% parishioner-funded, and help bring fellowship to Immaculate Conception. This fellowship is what helps us to have companions on our journey while here on earth, for we are all brothers and sisters in Christ.

It is always amazing the miracles God is able to work when we allow ourselves to be open to Him. I run a Facebook Page called Catechism of the Catholic Church; it promotes reading the Catechism. Through it, I met a young man, Alexius, from the Philippines who was asked by his Bishop to promote the Rosary. Since I’m part of the
Rosary Makers, I approached Kathy Becker, who is in charge of the group, and she was more than happy to ship a box of rosaries out to the Philippines. Not long after, I was sent a photo by Alexius of an elderly woman embracing a rosary which was made here by the I.C. parishioner. Alexius said that this rosary is the first one that poor woman has ever owned. If it were not for the generosity of this parish group, she would never have had a rosary. He also used the rosaries to teach students how to pray the Rosary during their Faith Formation class at his parish’s school, which is called Immaculate Conception. There are no coincidences with God.

It has been said that when you sing you pray twice to God. When I am up there in the choir loft singing, when I hear people below singing—it is inspiring! When we are all raising our voices to God, together, it sounds amazing . . . for we all help each other grow closer to Him, when we are all wholeheartedly moving in the same direction.

Praying for the deceased parishioners of Immaculate Conception is, to me, an important program . . . as I can do this anywhere. It brings prayers to needed souls, who cannot help themselves. This program has eternal consequences, and like the Venerable Bishop Fulton J. Sheen [who will be beatified, or given the title “Blessed,” on December 21] once said, “As we enter Heaven, we will see them: so many of them coming towards us and thanking us. We will ask who they are, and they will say ‘a poor soul you prayed for in Purgatory.’” The love of God moves me to do this.

Because I work afternoons and am ill often, I am tempted to become idle and do nothing, for I have good excuses to turn inward. Then I pray and remember what Jesus asked the vineyard worker in one of His parables: “Why do you stand there idle all day?” We are all called to holiness; as St. John Paul II stated in one of his early church letters, “It is not permissible for anyone to remain idle.” We must all be like Christ and work for the salvation of souls. Just because I work afternoons and at times feel too ill to do anything, does not mean I can excuse myself from worship, stewardship, and fellowship.

I am so grateful to serve, and give, here at Immaculate Conception. Thank you for your time.
My name is Paul Sattler; my amazing and wonderful wife of 33 years, Annie, and I have been parishioners at Immaculate Conception for about 10 years. Prior to Immaculate Conception, we were parishioners at Holy Cross, where our three sons attended Holy Cross Elementary School, and after high school, each joined the Army. After serving 7 to 12 years, our sons have retired from the Army and are pursuing careers outside the military.

Okay, that was pretty easy; this next part is a bit more difficult: I was also asked to tell you about my faith journey, how God has blessed me and if I have witnessed lives being changed through bearing witness to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The short answer is yes, without a doubt; we have but to ask Jesus/the Holy Spirit for the opportunity and the words/deeds—then, trusting in Jesus, push out of our comfort zone and do it. The results can be amazing. Other times you may never know if you helped someone. Our job is to plant the seed and, as a fellow Christ Life attendee (Jeanne) told me, trust in Jesus to do the rest. What makes this part of the presentation difficult? I only have six minutes, so I am apologizing in advance for anything and anyone I have unintentionally passed over. There is just not enough time today to give a full accounting.

Up until Holy Cross Parish, I would best be described as a sometimes Sunday Catholic. My excuse was working 7 days a week milking 100 cows and tending to another 100 heifers and steers, while farming 600 acres. In the mid-1990s that excuse was taken away: 90% of the herd died as a result of a mistake mixing vitamins and mineral supplement at a feed mill. Believe me, God, His Son, and I had a lot of conversations after that. It was a blessing in disguise. With no way of rebuilding the herd, we decided to pursue manufacturing—something I knew a little about, and was not dependent on the weather and other variables totally out of our control.

It was around that time at Holy Cross I was blessed to meet Joe and Therese Whitenight and Steve and Ann Fox. Those men taught me the meaning of stewardship, coupled with patience, understanding, and trust in Jesus. I witnessed the Whitenights and Foxes and many others pour their time and talents into that parish. Most memorably, for 2 ½ years we worked with a small group of volunteer parents and work-release inmates to convert a convent into a library and fine arts building. As I have witnessed many times since Joe was asked to handle something by a priest, he had the vision of the end product and the rest of us followed. Joe gently steered the project and amazingly found a way to make every mistake we made work. Joe had faith it would all work out, and didn’t hesitate to remind us of his faith in Jesus Christ. I also recall he and Steve spent many nights after most had left undoing our worst mistakes. But most clearly I remember wanting the joy, love, and trust in Jesus I witnessed in these two families. I’m pretty sure the building is still there today.

After our boys were in the Army, I suggested to Annie we might consider Immaculate Conception more out of convenience than anything else. While the folks who ran Holy Cross, from the pastor to the employees and volunteers, were amazing, Immaculate
Conception just “fit.” This parish has been blessed with outstanding leadership, including our current pastor, Father Joe. You don’t have to look hard to see the enthusiastic work the employees and volunteers are doing in our parish—just look around you. This church is cleaned by a group of ladies appropriately called Loving Hands. The decorations are the work of inspired volunteers as well. These volunteers work as many others around the Mass and activities schedule to keep our church beautiful. Being a sacristan (another blessing that came from accepting an invitation from my dear friend Ray and okayed by Father Joe), I am blessed to be able to spend time with Jesus alone in church before Mass, and sometimes witness firsthand the love and reverence that they put into their ministry.

My first Bible study with Jane Mount 10 years ago introduced me to what being a Catholic meant to the earliest Christians. While St. Paul sat in jail, he wrote beautiful letters to Christ’s followers in Philippi. Paul’s letters of encouragement and love kept the Philippians close to Jesus, while they in turn did all they could for Paul. Paul understood his mission. Our mission is the same: to bring as many people to Jesus through our witness as possible. For in Paul’s mind, all things of earth were as dung, and all that mattered was saving souls.

In 2016 Father Joe asked me to fill out an application to participate in Synod 2016 as a representative of Immaculate Conception and the Blue Water Vicariate. My application was less than inspiring. First question was why I was qualified. My reply was that I wasn’t, or least I didn’t think I was. Second question: why was I applying? Answer, because Father Joe told me to. Under “Do you have any questions or comments?,” I wanted to ask who decided on November 15 (opening day of the firearm deer season) as the opening of the Synod, but I did not. Turns out this was one of the most humbling, enlightening, grace-filled experiences of my life. The theme was Unleash the Gospel through evangelization and personal witness. That weekend we broke up into small groups to discuss and vote on many propositions to, among other things, improve our parishes. There was much lively debate concerning the duties and roles of our priests. When it was my turn to comment, I suggested priests needed to tend to God’s work of saving souls, and it was up to parishioners to come with solutions, not problems, to the day-to-day, non-“church” issues that come up. I was soundly in the minority in our small group. Interestingly, in the big group discussion, I was in the majority. I truly believe the Holy Spirit was telling me what to say; I hope I got it right.

Side note: A week after Synod 2016 closed, I was blessed to harvest the largest buck I have ever taken, a 230 pound 12 point. I believe it was just Jesus’ way of saying thank you for opening my eyes, ears, and heart to His message.

Have I witnessed lives being changed through being a witness for Jesus? Yes, definitely—almost every day. This part could get lengthy so I will give only one example: my best friend Kurt. Kurt and I got to be friends through our sons’ wrestling; we moved and set up many a mat all over Michigan and other states. Kurt had 4 younger brothers and one older sister. Kurt was Catholic but had walked away from the Church and been mad at God since his youngest brother died twenty years ago. Kurt and I
hunted, fished, and talked endlessly about our kids and sometimes about religion. Back in December 2016, I asked him to help me with a small renovation in this church. It was Christmas Eve. While we worked, the church was being transformed for Christmas services. When we finished everyone had already left. I asked Kurt to come and sit in the front pew with me and just look. . . I remember saying, “Kurt, there’s something special here, and I like it.” He nodded in agreement, but not much more was ever said of it.

A few months later Kurt suddenly died of a brain tumor. At the funeral a woman I never met walked up to me and thanked me with a bear hug. It was Kurt’s older sister, and she wanted to know how I did it. Did what? I asked. She said she had been trying to get Kurt back to church for 20 years. She wanted to know how I did it. Turns out his sister lived in Florida, and they talked most mornings on their way to work. Kurt had told her what I had said, and he was thinking I was right. He told her that he need to start going to church again. Hours before Kurt died, I asked his son to have a priest administer Last Rites. He did. I pray often for Kurt and his family that the seed of faith I fumbled to plant takes root in Kurt’s wife and sons.

- We at Immaculate Conception are truly blessed to have Father Joe as a spiritual leader. We are also blessed with a great staff, both in the office and at our school.
- If you want to see the fruit of a Catholic education, please attend a school Mass held most Fridays during the school year. It is an uplifting and inspiring Mass. Introducing our children to Jesus’ love and mercy is the future of the Church; we have no higher responsibility.
- Our church has sponsored many opportunities for us to get together, learn, and talk about our faith in a like-minded, friendly environment. These are wonderful opportunities to grow our faith and receive special graces from God. It can also prepare us for evangelizing outside of our church community.
- The army of volunteers in our 30+ ministries work many hours to keep pushing us forward. If you haven’t considered it, or are considering getting involved, please do it. We need everyone to get involved in Unleashing the Gospel. I can say without reservation my life is better for it. There is a list of ministries in the pews for you to think about. Every ministry needs more volunteers.
- Our monthly Mass of Reparation [held on the third Monday of each month at 7pm] is another way to receive God’s graces, and pray for our country and its leaders.

Finally, I was blessed to participate in a three-ear study group called Divine Mercy. We read and discussed the Diary of Saint Faustina. The message? Jesus’ love and mercy are endless, and He only asks we become a joyful band of disciples—introducing those we meet to Him by our lives and actions. The first step is the hardest. Start simply, greet those around you with a smile today. Thank you

*Note: This is the full text of Paul Sattler’s planned talk, but the delivery was shortened due to time considerations.*
Good morning; my name is Jeff Wooten. My family and I have been very fortunate to be members of this unique and wonderful place called Immaculate Conception Parish since 2005. This wonderful place is the conduit for my faith and family’s faith in Christ. Father Joe asked me to provide a lay witness testimony at Mass this morning. How can you say “no” to Father Joe for anything? So here I am... and I was requested to keep it to six minutes long—so if anyone needs to use the rest room, now would be a good time. LOL

Growing up in the 60s, Gordie Howe and Bobby Orr were my hockey heroes, the Beatles came to Detroit, and the Tigers won the World Series, while we played curb ball and hide & seek from sunup until the street lights came on. Not to mention the USA landed a man on the moon!

I also remember the day JFK was assassinated, and more so the day of his funeral. The first thing that my impressionable young mind was thinking was simply, wow, the President was killed by someone. I didn’t know people killed people, let alone the President. But the second thing that I distinctly remember was the news media often mentioning the fact that JFK was Catholic, and what a loss it was to lose him. My thought was, Wow, being Catholic must really be something special. Another thing I remember in that era was how awesome the St. Isaac Jogues festival was in St. Clair Shores, Michigan! Again, being Catholic looked awesome—you guys have fairs and carnival rides! You see, my family was Baptist, and to this day I truly can’t tell you what being “Baptist” means—and I mean that with all due reverence and respect.

My neighborhood childhood setting looked a lot like the movie “The Sandlot,” and imagine that entire baseball team being Catholic, and there was one Baptist kid—that was me. Every single one of my friends was Catholic—except me! They got to do cool stuff like all go to Catechism together! Ha ha!

Well, fast forward to 2004 when my wife Colleen, a cradle Catholic, and I needed to decide where we were going to send our three children to school. Our oldest at that time was Keegan, age 5; then Reece, our youngest son, was 3, and our daughter Brynn was almost 2. There was the top-rated choice of Anchor Bay Public Schools, and a number of Christian-based academies and Lutheran schools. Colleen suggested a Catholic education, and my first thought was NO WAY, as I imaged nuns with rulers in their hands. That thought lasted about 10 seconds as Colleen had already done her research on the benefit and success of sending children to modern-day 21st century Catholic schools. The choice was easy; it was IC.

The next day I stopped by the old parish office, which was located in the old convent between the church and parish hall. I was greeted very kindly and graciously by a lady named Debie Hauer. Debie, by the way, is still working for the parish to this day. I asked Debie, “What do I have to do to send my children to school here at Immaculate Conception?” Debie said, “Are you Catholic?” and I said, “Not yet”—and we both
laughed. Not that you have to be Catholic to send your kids here, but it couldn’t hurt, right? You could say that at that moment, the 60s came rushing back and I actually thought to myself, “Wow, now I could actually become Catholic.” That single moment that Debie and I shared changed my life. That’s the way you and I can change people’s lives, just with one moment, with the Holy Spirit working through us: a smile, a gesture, a few words that can really brighten someone’s day.

We enrolled Keegan at IC and it was the best thing we as parents could ever have done for our children and our family. One year later Colleen reminded me that the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults—also known as the RCIA—was there for me at IC, where non-Catholics can become Catholic. I agreed to attend; after all, if we are sending our children to Catholic school, we should lead by example. Little did I realize that this was again the Holy Spirit continuing to nudge me to Him.

I signed up for RCIA. We met on Sunday mornings at the 10am Mass. We’d start at Mass and then be dismissed by Father David (at that time) and go and be taught about Christ for that hour. My RCIA teachers (now realizing they are true disciples of Christ) were Deacon Ken, Jane Petipren, and Ron. Jane became my godmother and sponsor, God bless her.

So about the 3rd week I came home after RCIA and told Colleen, “I’m just not feeling this whole Catholic thing,” hinting that I might not want to continue with RCIA. Colleen suggested I give it just one more week, so I agreed. Again, little did I know that this too was a defining moment in my life with Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

The 4th week changed everything: I learned about Apostolic Succession, and that St. Peter was the 1st Pope, followed by St. Linus, St. Anacletus, St. Clement, all the way to the present day Pope (John Paul II at that time). This absolutely proved to me beyond a reasonable doubt that Jesus Christ was here on earth; these men were smart, they witnessed Christ and were assigned Christ’s ministry, just as we are, to carry it on.

So here we have factual evidence that Jesus Christ as here and lived among us. Your faith can be strong! One of those items of factual evidence is this Apostolic Succession that we say we believe in the Creed. Think about it: all these men were taught by Jesus Christ, and it has carried on through now, and we are His modern-day apostles and disciples. It’s on us, but what an honor. He was here and He died for our sins so that we may come to Him and be forgiven. He walked this earth, He came as a human incarnate sent by God the Father, to prove to the world His love for us and to die on the Cross for us. He did this because He knew we were born into original sin and needed forgiveness to enter Heaven through Him. Again, an even bigger “wow” moment when you really accept as fact—these Disciples and Popes are proof Christ was here!

I’m thinking, “Yep, I want to be Catholic—these Catholics just laid it all out for me!” Finally, somebody explained all this to me, and then I got it; I “got” Christ. I’ll never forget Easter that year: I made all my Sacraments. Baptism and First Communion were
among the fulfilling and joyful moments of my life. And guess what—*now* I’m Catholic! I actually am! Amen!

I became Catholic in 2005 and *it is truly the best thing I’ve ever done for myself*, or could ever have hoped to do for my wife and family. Since then, we have put all three of our children through Immaculate Conception School, from pre-K through 8th grade. There were some very lean years that we simply couldn’t afford it, but it seemed like the more we put into the parish, the more we were always blessed by the good Lord, and we made it. By far, the greatest gift to our children from my wife and I is their Catholic education.

IC provided every element of preparing kids for life in the 21st century: grounding them in Christ, IC formed their spiritual character—what could really be more important? They are now all high achievers, carrying all honors and AP courses, all four years of high school and continuing this honor curriculum in their college years. IC gave them the academic foundation they needed to be successful in these courses, while educating them on Jesus Christ and the 11th Commandment: to love one another as Christ loves us.

Fast forward to 2019. Immaculate Conception is our second home. My wife Colleen was fully involved in PTC when our children went to school here; she was one of the original creators of the IC Winter Wine Down—which will be making a comeback this February, by the way! She is an Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist, the Fish Fry chairperson (aka “Fish Fry Queen”); she is in her 14th year as a recess mom, our parish’s “Protecting God’s Children” coordinator, and a whole bunch of other stuff!

Our sons Keegan and Reece both did their BSA Eagle Scout projects here on campus. Keegan restored the baseball diamond, and Reece did the pavers and flag pole in front of the church. Our daughter Brynn wanted to do a service project for IC, too, so she and her best friend Sophia Gafa (also an IC alumna) did a fundraiser to pay for the extension of the choir loft wall with a beautiful custom-made wrought iron railing, named in honor of our fantastic choir director Mr. Austin.

I tell people I have two Eagles and a Dove.

Part of my witnessing today is to talk a little about my involvement in the parish, and like most people I don’t like to talk about myself, so I’ll just kind of rattle these off. I’m a Lector, a member of the Long-Term Planning Committee, a member of the Worship Commission, and on the Art & Environment sub-committee that decorates the church. I’ve recently become a 4th degree member of our local Au Lac Council Knights of Columbus. For the 6th year in a row, I attend (and very much look forward to) a silent retreat for Catholic men at Manresa Jesuit Retreat House in Bloomfield Hills. Who’d have thought it! More than anything, *I now truly believe in Christ*, and have witnessed not only myself change, but the way Christ can change everyone, if we give Him a chance, and a little time every day.
Praying the Rosary is a great way of spending time with the Lord, but my favorite biblical Scripture is the 23rd Psalm, that starts out “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. . . .” If you know it, then you know it. If you don’t, do yourself a favor and look it up; it will give you peace and solitude. It is there for you; Christ has your back.

The good Lord has brought my family and me through a lot—the recession, for example. I can’t tell you the amount of times I sat or knelt, praying to our Mother Mary, as I sat in the pew during the 10am Mass for what seemed like endless recession years, wondering and praying how we were going to keep three kids in Catholic school, and what to do about a mortgage that a few times got to be three months behind or more. I’ve been self-employed since 1993.

The Lord saved us; He comforted us. “And wise men still seek Him.” He says, “Peace be with you,” and He means it.

Believe in Him and keep carrying the baton of Christ and Catholicism. We’re Christ’s modern-day apostles and disciples. If not us, who?

I guess there was something to my idea and notion way back in the 60s that it is really something to be Catholic—and you know what? It is.

Thank you very much for being here today and every Sunday you’re here, supporting Christ’s True Church. Thank you very much for being a soldier for Christ during the week—it isn’t easy. And thank you very much for hearing me out; I hope it helps you in some way become closer to Christ.

In closing, I’d just like you to think about the fact that Catholicism touches every single one of your five human senses, by design. Think about it: the Eucharist, the Blood, the bells of the Holy Spirit ascending upon us, the beauty we can behold with our sight, and the touch of a Rosary bead.

Things go better with Christ. Trust in Him.

Note: This is the full text of Jeff Wooten’s talk, but the delivery was shorted due to time considerations.
My Catholic story starts with a guy. I would like to say this guy was Jesus, but that wouldn’t be true. This guy was tall, devastatingly handsome, and probably one of the most stubborn humans I have ever encountered, and when we talked about marriage he had one unwavering condition. I needed to become Catholic.

At the time I was attending what I call a Rock & Roll church. Have you ever been? They literally had a stage and every single service was like a concert. The lobby had a free snack section filled with sugary, carb-laden treats that you could take with you, and most “homilies” were centered on self-help and the human condition. I absolutely loved it. But as much as I loved my Rock & Roll church, I loved this guy more, and I was fairly confident I could find Jesus in the Catholic Church as well as I could in Rock & Roll.

My name is Amber Arnold, and this is my story. And even though the story started with Jeff, my still-devastatingly handsome husband, it is a story about the last ten years in this faith community at I.C.

When my kids were in early elementary school, a fellow parishioner bought me a joke coffee mug that says, “Stop me before I volunteer again.” I do enjoy volunteering. Some of the volunteering hats I currently wear include lector, recess mom, secretary of the school advisory council, and Lenten fish fry chair. I’d like to tell you that this is because I’m a super-altruistic human, but that would be misleading. It is not the whole truth.

There is a business catch-phrase I hear thrown around all the time called ROI: Return on Investment. Basically, anytime I want to spend any of my company’s money, I need to determine the ROI. This is good business practice. It makes sure I am not being wasteful with company resources. The funny thing about work is sometimes it follows you in other areas of your life. Here are two cases of ROI at home. One of my children never hangs up the bathroom towel. I have spent hours of trying out different words, different consequences to change this outcome. Thus far I have been unsuccessful. My ROI has been zero. Conversely, this child likes to cook. The hours I have spent in the kitchen teaching have paid off tremendously! The ROI is that now he can independently prepare dinner. 100% success, huge return on investment.

Now let’s talk about return on investment at Immaculate Conception. This is where the math gets a little bit mysterious. I would like to tell you about one of the best days that I had this year. And I am so blessed, I have had the opportunity to go with my family to visit my father-in-law in Utah, and I have had the opportunity to take the train with my family to Chicago to see my daughter’s favorite band. I have had many, many wonderful days. But the day I am speaking about happened during Lent in the I.C. school kitchen, and it was the day three of us cleaned the fryers. Sounds awful, right? How can one of my best days involve tedious manual labor? Cleaning out the fryers is not difficult; it just take muscle, patience, and about three hours of your time. And I have tried scientifically to explain what created that magic day. We listened to music, which was nice. We
talked and had wonderful fellowship, which was also lovely. We worked in silence sometimes, too. But that is not the ingredients for a day that is stamped the BEST day of 2019. Our reward that day was the peace of God that passes all understanding.

Our lives are so busy. Peace often seems elusive. You tell yourself, “I’m just going to get one more thing accomplished and then I can relax, then I can have some peace.” And yet that moment never seems to come. So how is it possible that we experienced that peace cleaning fryers? I suppose that’s why it’s the peace that passes all understanding. It doesn’t make sense to our human reasoning. And let’s talk about that peace for a second. It deserves conversation. It is what we all want, we all crave. It’s what we try to fill with another purchase on Amazon, another piece of cake, another title at work. Don’t get me wrong; the piece of tiramisu I had at the Olive Garden last week was super delicious and I enjoyed it immensely, but I would give it up forever if instead I could have a continuous, all-the-time infusion of God’s Peace. But as of right now, in my faith journey, I am not there.

If this was the only time that the peace of God that surpasses all understanding came to me while I was volunteering, it may be easy to pass off as an unlikely chance occurrence. But God’s math is not my math. It does not make sense, and yet it happens again and again. The return on investment is often much more than 100%. It doesn’t make sense on paper. But it’s real, and thus it compels me to say yes: yes to the needs of this present moment, yes to what He is asking, yes to life and right now.

And I know why that peace isn’t with me always the way I desire. We operate in a scarcity model. If I give there is less for me, or if I give I may put my family in jeopardy and not have enough next month. That’s how my brain thinks. But God is constantly proving my brain wrong. God’s model is more like when I would drop off a $4 prescription at my mother-in-law’s. I would leave her house with a pot of chili, a pan of brownies, and her electric wok because she didn’t want it collecting dust at her place any more. And how did she know that I was eyeballing a wok on Amazon? She didn’t, but God did, and that is how His abundance works.

I have a role model that lives by God’s abundance. She is so joyful and giving and generous. You would think she has a huge bank account. She does not. She is always saying yes: yes to more children, yes to adoption, yes to loaning her van to her parish for a mission trip. She couldn’t go because at that time she had eight small children at home, but she could definitely lend her van. She confided that money was often tight, but the Lord always provided abundantly and so she just didn’t worry about it. She allowed God to worry about it. She confided that a long time ago when they only had four children, her husband lost his job. They prayed. They made a decision that she was still going to stay at home. He got a job delivering pizzas for a while. And during that time, they still tithed to their church. God provided. Eventually her husband got another engineering job that was a better opportunity than the last. My friend said this period of hardship was instrumental for their faith and their family.
I want to end with one last story. A beggar had been sitting by the side of the road for over thirty years. One day a stranger walked by. “Spare some change?” mumbled the beggar, mechanically holding out his old baseball cap. “I have nothing to give you,” said the stranger. Then he asked, “What’s that you are sitting on?” “Nothing,” replied the beggar. “Just an old box. I have been sitting on it for as long as I can remember.” “Ever looked inside?” asked the stranger. “No,” said the beggar. “What’s the point? There’s nothing in there.” “Have a look inside,” insisted the stranger. The beggar managed to pry open the lid. With astonishment, disbelief, and elation, he saw that the box was filled with gold.

We are the beggar. The box we are sitting on is God’s abundance. See the wealth that we have right here in our faith community, and let us open it up to each other and to those we encounter. Pray for us that we have the faith to look inside. . . .