



Stewardship of Community: Part 2

By Jarrett Kerbel (11/14/25)

Against all odds, the early church survived and grew because followers of Jesus provoked curiosity; “Who are these people?” and “What made them this way?” Which gave the early followers of Jesus the opportunity to say, “Jesus,” “the Resurrection of Jesus,” and “the forgiveness of sins.”

God entrusts and empowers the church to be a visible and tangible outpost of God’s death-defying love in a world that rejects Godliness at every turn. Gratitude is our first response to this gift from God, and the second response is trusting God, i.e. faith, and the third response is eagerness to grow into the full stature of Christ as a community.

In other words, with God’s help, how do we become a beloved community that causes folks to say, “Who are these people?” and “What made them this way?”

Beside our marvelous Baptismal Vows, I use two skills I learned from Marsha Linehan to steer my behavior toward greater goodness. As promised last time, these skills take the form of two acronyms: GIVE and FAST. GIVE I will unpack this time and FAST next time.

GIVE stands for Generous/Gentle, Inquisitive, Validating and Easy Going. When I am operating from God’s healing grace and the wisdom God nurtures in my soul, I interact with everyone I meet through the practices of GIVE. I am generous and gentle; meaning I give people the benefit of the doubt, look for and affirm the values and concerns we both share, and interpret their statements with generosity rather than suspicion or antagonism. I am inquisitive and curious: meaning I want to explore what people say whether I agree or disagree. I really want to understand the person and make sure they feel seen, heard and valued. I am validating: meaning that I acknowledge, affirm and accept the feelings, thoughts and experiences of the person as valid for them. Finally, I strive to be easy-going. Leaning on God’s love and grace, leaning on God’s promise to give me the words and spirit I need for any situation, I calm myself through prayer and remind myself that God is in charge. Conversations are not emergencies or crises unless I make them so!

Now, I commend to you all the practices of GIVE for the stewardship of our precious community life at St. John's. At the current moment our society is experiencing an erosion of norms, an evacuation of virtue, and a cataclysm of degraded character. This means that every community needs to work on articulating healthy, sustainable norms and expectations for our institutional good and for the good of our wider communities. We can no longer assume normativity, we need to come to agreement on norms and enact them in accountable spaces.

Of course, whenever we set norms and expectations we immediately create a situation of accountability. You may say, "Well, Jarrett, you say you live by GIVE, but I see you failing that standard this way and that!" To that I say, "Good on you!" You have held me accountable and therefore I have the information I need to grow and change, especially if you use the GIVE skills when you give me this feedback.

One final point; St. Paul taught us that the human soul can turn any divine or human teaching or guidance into a stick we use to bludgeon ourselves and each other. In Paul's sense, law is punitive and grace is redemptive, law is accusative and grace is restorative. When we rise and set norms and expectations we must always proceed in a spirit of redemption and restoration, utilizing our skills in repentance, amends making, and reconciliation.