

**Last Pentecost  
November 25, 2018  
Stewardship – The Green Book**

**In the name of the God of all Creation,  
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,  
And the power of God known in the Spirit.  
Amen.**

As many of you know ... during this holiday season with our downtown flooded with visitors during the Nights of Lights ... St. Cyprian's is the host site for Dining With Dignity on Fridays and Saturdays. So, on Friday afternoon ... as I was putting up the "Welcome Dining With Dignity" banner outside on the corner ... a man came by and asked about the sign. He was from out-of-town visiting family in the neighborhood for Thanksgiving and he was curious about the church. I told him a little bit about our congregation, and I unlocked the doors to show him our sanctuary. Like so many others who see our church for the first time he commented on the beautiful woodwork and the stained glass window. He then asked about the steel tension rods crossing the nave, and I explained about the renovation of the church in the late 1990s and a bit of the history of St. Cyprian's.

I also shared with him my belief that our wonderful woodwork is more than just a visual experience. These walls have absorbed all the joys and all the tears ... all the laughter and all the quarrels ... all the courage and all the fears ... of generations of faithful people who have preceded us in this congregation. There have been countless baptisms, weddings, and funerals in the 118 years this building has been here. And the spirit of that holy life is infused in every bit of this sacred space. I went on to tell him that this present incarnation of St. Cyprian's now has the honor of being the stewards of that hallowed history ... that is why we do things like host Dining With Dignity. He then said something I have heard before: "If I lived here, this would be my church home."

"The Green Book" ... a highly acclaimed film about a piano prodigy named Don Shirley whose career was impeded by racial discrimination ... was released this week. It is an unlikely but basically true story of the friendship between Don Shirley ... an African American musician from Harlem ... and Tony Vallelonga ... a working-class Italian-American from the Bronx ... who was hired to chauffeur Don Shirley on a 1962 tour of the Jim Crow South.

For African-Americans traveling throughout the United States, especially in the South from 1936-1966, "The Negro Motorist Green Book" was a must-have. The book provided listings of businesses ... lodging, tailors, barber and beauty shops, gas stations and restaurants ... who would welcome them in a time when discrimination was rampant. It is this "Green Book" that is the source of the movie's name.

What makes this movie of interest to us at St. Cyprian's is that Don Shirley's father was an Episcopal priest ... the Rev. Fr. Edwin Shirley ... and he served this congregation of St. Cyprian's during the years of World War II. It was local historian David Nolan who shared this information about Fr. Shirley and his son Don ... and about the movie "The Green Book" ... with me several months ago, and as I explored the story, it became clear that this was larger than just an account of a movie that had a remote connection to this church. What I found was a link to the fight for human justice and radical hospitality that is embedded in this sacred institution of St. Cyprian's.

This may seem to be a strange way to start a stewardship sermon ... a sermon asking for your financial support of our operating budget. However, "The Green Book" movie shines a light on the reality of life for African Americans in this nation, our own state of Florida, this City of St. Augustine, and for the people of St. Cyprian's in the past. Those spiritual ancestors of this present congregation were stewards of God's justice in this place, and we have inherited that legacy. The people of St. Cyprian's today stand on the shoulders of people like Fr. Edwin Shirley. The fact that Fr. Shirley's son Don was also a gay African American man only adds depth to the legend.

We don't have much of a record of Fr. Shirley while he was here at St. Cyprian's. His son Don would have been a young man during his father's tenure in this church, so it is doubtful that Don Shirley the musician and subject of the movie ever lived in St. Augustine. However ... according to Fr. Shirley's obituary ... Fr. Shirley moved to Ft. Lauderdale after his tenure here, and he was very involved in programs addressing poverty and civil rights. In an interview in 1966 he said, "We are working hard to convince the people that being poor is no crime." Two of his other sons, Calvin and Edwin Jr., were physicians in Ft. Lauderdale and Miami, and Dr. Edwin Shirley was Martin Luther King's physician and friend until King's death. That tells me that Fr. Shirley's ministry in this place was a powerful influence upon the congregation and the entire Lincolnville neighborhood.

One aside about the "The Negro Motorist Green Book." In the 1949 edition the Green Book listed two "Tourist Homes" in St. Augustine. One of them was on Bridge Street next door to Cora Tyson's home. The other was 132 Central Avenue. Central Avenue is now Martin Luther King Avenue and 132 is the dilapidated building next to St. Cyprian's Mission House.

Much has happened at St. Cyprian's since the time of Fr. Shirley. Here in St. Augustine ... after the Civil Rights era of the 1960s ... the remnant but powerful Jim Crow element in this town made it very difficult for people in Lincolnville. It was tough for African Americans to find jobs locally, and it was challenging for residents to obtain loans to repair their homes. Many who could find jobs elsewhere left Lincolnville and the community suffered. St. Cyprian's deteriorated as the neighborhood declined, and by the 1990s the congregation had dwindled to just a few. With the church falling apart ... both literally and figuratively ... people from Trinity Parish helped put it back together. Then, just as St. Cyprian's seemed to show signs of recovery, the congregation split over the issue of gays and lesbians in the leadership of the Episcopal Church.

That schism was 12 years ago today ... on Christ the King Sunday. The factional congregation joined the newly formed Anglican Church in North America and named themselves “Christ the King Anglican Church.”

However, the resilience of the small remnant of parishioners at St. Cyprian’s prevailed in reinvigorating the congregation in the values it has upheld from its origins in the 1890s ... social justice and radical hospitality ... a welcome to those who are marginalized, disenfranchised, and excluded elsewhere ... and a commitment “to respect the dignity of every human being” as we “strive for justice and peace among all people.”

Who we are today at St. Cyprian’s is built upon the work of our spiritual ancestors. Their stewardship of the faith we share, the justice we seek, the radical hospitality that we offer is the foundation of our life today. That is the connection we have with Fr. P. W. Cassey, the first clergy to serve St. Cyprian’s early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. And, that is the connection we have with Fr. Shirley who served St. Cyprian’s some 40 years later. We have inherited their legacy, and it is our turn ... our opportunity ... to be the stewards of this small corner of God’s vineyard. We are the stewards of the spirit that has been bestowed upon us, and we are the stewards of the legacy of those who have gone before us.

Now for the financial part. We are now the stewards of this sacred space ... this physical space ... and that requires financial resources. We have the responsibility of the ongoing maintenance of this campus. We have utility bills to pay, office supplies to purchase, and staff to compensate. Our 2019 annual operating expenses are estimated to be \$150,000 to \$160,000. Our major revenue sources are the pledge payments from the congregation, our weekly loose plate offerings, and fees for using the church for weddings. So this is our plea to members of the congregation to make a pledge of financial support of St. Cyprian’s for 2019. Pledge letters ... with pledge cards to be returned to the church office included ... will be mailed this week. I hope that you will respond generously.

A brief comment about our annual pledge campaign. For several years in the 1980s, I was the Chair of the Diocesan Commission on Stewardship in the Diocese of North Carolina. I was invited to be Chair because I seemed to be successful in the stewardship campaigns that we had in my parish. The role of the Stewardship Commission was to share schemes and strategies of how to run successful parish stewardship campaigns ... and we had bunches of them. Every Member Canvasses where Vestry members literally spent an afternoon knocking on the doors of parishioners and asking for their pledge of financial support. There were phone campaigns, and ministry fairs, and all sorts of special mailings. These were all clever strategies, but they weren’t always successful.

However, I found out one thing that always worked. Trust. Trust in the church’s mission and vision. And, trust that the mission and vision was commonly held, and that the mission and vision was acted on with integrity by the clergy and lay leadership of the parish.

Ten years ago ... when I began my ministry at St. Cyprians ... we were receiving \$30,000 a year from the Diocese of Florida to support our annual operating expenses. Within three years we were off the dole and paying the Diocese our share of their operating expenses for the first time in our history. In the past decade this congregation has never had to adjust its operating budget because of a shortfall in pledged income. That is because you ... the people of St. Cyprian's ... trust. You have participated in creating our mission and vision. You believe in our mission and vision. You participate in our mission and vision. You support our mission and vision ... and you see it happening at St. Cyprian's all the time. You trust. You trust in each other, and you trust our lay and clergy leadership. For that trust I am honored.

We are the benefactors of a long history of social justice and radical hospitality in this sacred space and holy community. Those spiritual ancestors who came before us were the stewards of that spirit in their time. Now it is our time to be the stewards of that legacy. I encourage your generous support of our stewardship responsibilities.

Amen.