Title: “Leaning in to Stewardship”

Subtitle: “How the AdventistGiving app is changing one millennial’s view of mission”

By Diana Santos Smith

Turns out I am more of a millennial that I thought.

As a millennial, I don’t take things at face value. Skepticism is very much a part of my DNA. Appeals based on historical precedent or past performance are only as good as the real value they show today. The currency of my world is spending money on experiences instead of things. I crave the lifestyle flexibility of entrepreneurial ventures that create impact.

My millennial mindset reveals itself in another way. My parents’ and grandparents’ generations had an established sense of duty, but the word “duty” is pretty scarce in my vocabulary. Baby Boomers bought into establishments and their support. Not so much millennials. We find that participation in civic duties and government don’t meet our expectations. We center on items involving personal choice. Is it any wonder that consistent financial engagement with the organized church is at an all-time low? For us, tithing is a personal choice, not a Christian duty.

However, I believe the word “duty” connotes diﬀerently today. Talk to me about duty in the form of encouraging accountability and initiating change and I’m in! I find that to be especially true with those in my generation who are still engaged in being a Christ-follower. We vote with our dollars on what we perceive as important to our values, not because of any institutional loyalty.

It’s not like I’m unengaged. I was a missionary kid in post-communist Europe, helped plant a church in college, and even did full-time Bible coaching for three years before I got my MBA. After I married, my husband and I made a decision to live 3,000 miles away from our family and friends for the primary purpose of helping a five-member church community grow in post-Christian New England. And, yes, I still sometimes struggle with giving on my own terms to whom and what I value, not out of any objective Christian duty.

What’s been stretching my mind lately is the idea that the individualism leading us to participate out of preference and not duty can come at a cost. After all, what survives if all of us are isolated in our own bubbles of preference? As Os Guiness, author and social critic, brilliantly summarized, “Without individuals nothing happens, without institutions nothing survives.”

The Jesus story that blew my mind on this dimension of faith is the one where Jesus commends the *sacrificial giving* of the poor widow to an institution that was planning His death (see Luke 21:1-4). There is no question in my mind that Jesus was challenging the religious leadership of His day. His very life was a 180-degree contrast to theirs. His words were powered by The Word and not by policy. Yet, He remained spiritually, physically, and financial engaged while modeling a drastic diﬀerence. Jesus’ making the giving widow a model of faithfulness is a revelation that faith’s priority is our heart. And my faith response to Him as reflected by my time, talents, and finances is the currency of freedom that vindicates to the universe that God’s ways of other-centered love wins!

Selfishness looks for every excuse to opt out; faith looks for every reason to lean in. *That is Messiah-driven Mission*. It beckons us to something greater than ourselves. It is a response to being radically loved, called, and chosen. It is what it takes to fully engage the human heart—millennial or not—at a level where time, talents, and finances are poised for action.

**Reframing Stewardship**

Last year, I had the privilege of being asked by North American Stewardship Ministries to “lean in” to help create strategy and synergy around the challenge of re-framing stewardship for the next generation. I was encouraged to see administrative leadership questioning their own assumptions, thinking outside the box, and earning trust by sharing the mic—capstoned by the AdventistGiving app that leverages technology to connect you to your local church’s oﬀering plate and broader Adventist-coordinated missions. The AdventistGiving App\* is not revolutionary; it’s leveraging technology to empower our funding of Messiah-driven-mission. I’ve never been more excited about a simple app since forever and a day! I celebrate the tool that leverages tangible faith. But that’s not all. The app will share inspiring stories from the lives of everyday Adventists. Featured as *I am a Steward,* twenty-four stories will be released in 2019, twice a month, sharing the stories of everyday millennial Adventists, be they an engineer, farmer, lawyer, chef, social worker, or entrepreneur.

These are real stories of real people engaged in God’s redemptive economy by experiencing God personally and professionally. All twenty-four stories reveal that engaging with the mission of reflecting Christ’s radical commitment to us is practical and even sometimes dirty. This messiness is driven by leaning in to the trenches of an imperfect world and, yes, an imperfect church. It doesn’t lessen my responsibility to reflect God’s ideal of total engagement in Messiah*-*driven mission.

Stewardship is the act of carrying out mission in our everyday lives. I trust that like me, you too will be challenged and inspired by the experiences of the real people in these stories. Everyday people leveraging time, talent, *and* finances to make a diﬀerence in God’s redemptive economy.

It has been a privilege to lean in to the ongoing opportunity to reframe stewardship because I’m like everyone else. . .

I am a Steward.

*\*AdventistGiving is a ministry of North American Division Information Technology Services*

BIO: *Diana is an impact strategist consultant who along with her food craftsman husband, Kasee, live in New England where among other social-entrepreneurial ventures, they are helping build spiritual community in the tiny tourist town of Shelburne Falls, MA.*

SIDEBAR: AdventistGiving Facts

* Members will pay no fees to use
* Recurring donation option available
* Everyone with a checking account or credit card is a potential donor
* AdventistGiving follows the highest standards of security
* Donation information only disclosed to church treasurer
* AdventistGiving App available from iTunes and Google Play
* AdventistGiving App is a free download from app store