

For all who don't know me, my name is Jake Napolitan. I am a lector and commentator here at St. Luke and I have been a member of this parish for all 17 years of my life. My parents, Larry and Shelly, have been parishioners here for over 20 years, and it is through their influence that I have been intimately involved in activities at St. Luke since I was very young. I went to school here until sixth grade, when I attended the newly formed Lakewood Catholic Academy. I am currently a junior at St. Ignatius High School, where I continue to heed God's call to serve those in need.

This year's stewardship theme is "Let Your Light Shine!" This theme has a unique meaning to each and every one of us that can be applied to our daily lives. Each of us has special talents, passions, or gifts that can be shared with those around us, and advent is the appropriate time to make them known. A personal passion of mine is service, which, with God's help, has led me to become involved in various service projects throughout my high school experience.

I first discovered my love for service in my freshman year, when I became involved in the Arrupe Partnership, a service organization that helps underprivileged inner-city students in the St. Ignatius community. My first activity with this organization was called Homework Club, where students from Ignatius as well as local Catholic girls' schools tutor these kids in academic subjects and help them with their homework. In retrospect, it is hard to believe that such a small and simple activity would have such a profound impact on my understanding of what it means to be "poor." The conversations I had with these kids gave me a firsthand account of how impoverished people in Inner-city Cleveland lived. They were subjected to dangerous neighborhoods, broken families, poor education, lack of inspiration, dilapidated living conditions, gang pressure... The list goes on and on. I had never faced these situations before, and these kids were only in middle school.

My first thought was: what can I do for these kids? What significance could I possibly have on children who need so much and have so little? I couldn't give them money, nor could I move them to a safer and more secure neighborhood. I thought that there was nothing I could do for them that would make a difference. However, I learned to see things differently. Giving money, food, clothing, or supplies to the poor is awesome and should be encouraged, but the real thing these kids want is somebody, *anybody*, to love and care for them. That's what service is about and that's exactly what they need. *Somebody*. For Sophomore Service credit, in the summer before my sophomore year, I did the Arrupe Summer Program, which is a mentoring program for middle schoolers in the area to keep them occupied during the summer months. My kid's name was Tyler, and through all the frankly horrible things he told me about his life, he taught me about what service really was all about. He was difficult to deal with and wasn't very trusting of people who were not like him. I, being a White, middle-class suburbanite, attending a private Catholic high school, was possibly as different as could be. But by the end of the summer he told me that he didn't want it to end, that he wished he could come see me every day. That moment, as well as that entire experience, taught me that service is all about giving your *time* to those in need, and that is God's call to us as Christians.

At another service activity that I was involved in last year, the Christmas Food Drive, I saw again that the poor valued the time you spent with them over anything tangible you could give them. Along with other students, my sister and I drove around Cleveland delivering baskets of

food to people who desperately needed it during the winter months. The families simply wanted to invite us in and talk, to see what was up at Ignatius. One particularly poor family nearly forgot about the food they were supposed to receive.

One final thing that I give my time to helping out with is the annual Bone Marrow Drive here at St. Luke. My mom runs it and, with the help of volunteers from St. Luke, it has been quite successful in the 2 years we have held it. My friend Rob was diagnosed with leukemia my freshman year, and though he is in remission, he always has a marrow donor he can fall back on. It feels good knowing that you are helping hundreds like Rob receive this life-saving gift, and hopefully, parishioners, there will be another big crowd of people willing to donate next summer.

We all have special gifts of time, talent, or treasure that can be used to make a difference in the world, no matter how small. God's challenge to you in this season of Advent is to not be passive, waiting for others to take action, but to offer our gifts to those who are in desperate need of them. Jesus once said, "You have seen the way of service in my life among you, and blessed are you who will have the gracious courage to serve." Let us follow the example of Jesus this Advent season, as we await His coming.

Now please join me in reciting the Stewardship Prayer found in the back cover of the Hymnal...

Please take a moment now to prayerfully consider what gifts you will bring to Jesus this Advent that will Let Your Light Shine.

Thank you very much.