Good morning.

My name is Mike Calwas. I am on the Order of Worship as “Stewardship Focus.” When I was asked to do this, I wasn’t really sure what that meant. I am still a little bit fuzzy on the concept, but let me explain why I think I am here by describing an experience that most, if not all, of you have had at least one time in your life. So, let’s say you are at home in the evening and you are wondering what might be good on TV. Your favorite TV station, of course, is Channel 11, WTTW, Public Television for Chicago. You remember that your favorite show is on tonight. You quick grab the remote and flip the station over to Channel 11. But wait a minute – that’s not your favorite show. What you see is a row of people talking on the phone. And in front of them is some guy with perfectly coifed hair delaying the start of your favorite show for 20 minutes because he is asking for money. I assume this has happened to you. A guy with perfect hair holds up the show to ask for money. Well, that’s my explanation of why I am here. I am just like that guy. Yes, I am just like that guy with an entire can of hairspray in his perfectly coifed hair – oh, hold on, for those of you watching at home who are expecting to see perfectly coifed hair, do not adjust your set. OK, maybe we don’t have the hair thing in common. But I am like that guy in another way because we are both holding up the show for 20 minutes. Hold on – this just in – I have been given only 3 minutes to speak. And don’t worry – the sermon will be seen in its entirety after this brief interruption. I know I am like that guy somehow. Oh yeah ---that guy is asking for money – hold on, I am not asking for money.

OK, bad analogy. Maybe I am not exactly like that guy on TV.

All kidding aside, I am here to share with you HOW and WHY I donate to Countryside. You might be thinking, “Mike, HOW you donate is simple. You write a check. Done!” Ah, but it’s not that simple. Remember, donations can come in many forms, including time, talent, or treasure, and all three contribute to making Countryside what it is.

The first donation I want to talk about is that I grow vegetables in the Countryside vegetable garden. I am part of a group of gardeners who work the soil, plant seeds and plants, pull weeds, water, and harvest the vegetables. We donate most of the vegetables that we grow to the Palatine Township Food Pantry. Last summer, the gardeners donated 378 pounds of organically grown vegetables to the Food Pantry. Why do I work in the garden? First, it is very rewarding to know that I am helping someone in need get good, healthy food. I also do it for the camaraderie. Most of the time when I am out in the garden, there are other gardeners out there as well. We catch up on each other’s plants, what’s doing well, what’s not doing so well. We also joke around because, hey, we are outside in the fresh air in the summertime, so why wouldn’t we laugh a little? Finally, Hilary is always telling us that we need to take our values and principles and turn them into actions outside of these four walls. Gardening does exactly that. So that’s one way that I donate my time and talent.

Another donation I make is that I am a bartender at the Time & Talent Auction and also at Music with a Mission, which is the totally fun and cool event that’s coming up on March 7 when Atherton Hall becomes a nightclub where you will hear a wide range of musical styles. (Yes, that was a shameless plug.) Why do I do this? Those events raise money for our service partners. The bar usually makes a decent profit that goes to our service partners as well, so my efforts go to a good cause. Plus, working as a bartender at those events is a ton of fun. If you watch us for a while, it may look like bedlam. “Who took the corkscrew?” “Do we have any IPAs left?” “Where did you put the case of Caffeine Free Diet Coke?” There’s money flying around. Glasses are being filled (or overfilled, if you are lucky.) You may think that it is anarchy behind the bar, but trust me: the bartending team is a well-oiled machine. And if you watch us, you will see that we are always smiling or laughing. So WHEN you are at Music with a Mission on March 7, stop by and say “hi” and buy a beer or wine or a soft drink. The money goes to a good cause.
One last donation I want to talk about is something that I have in common with each and every one of you here today. That donation is that I attend Sunday services. Granted, it would be a bit of a stretch to say that I am donating any talent when I do this. And if you have ever sat next to me and heard me sing, you would REALLY know that I am a bit short on the talent donation. So I guess this is more of a pure “time” donation. The HOW I donate is simple – I walk in, I sit down, I enjoy. Here is WHY I attend Sunday services. First, the sermons are always interesting and thought provoking, whether they are given by our ministers, guest ministers, or lay people. Second, I love the music. Whether it is the incomparable choir, or the Sundays when Jeff Philips and/or Tom Dempsey get the band back together, or the special treats when Janice, Karen and Alan play the piano, violin and cello, the musical talent and variety at Countryside are unmatched. And then, if that’s not enough, after the service is the coffee hour. I have a great time catching up with friends and it seems like most Sundays I meet someone new and share a laugh with them.

I have talked a lot about time and talent donations. As you recall, there is a third leg to the donation triad, and that is treasure. Earlier, I said that I would not ask you for money like that guy on the TV, and I won’t. Besides, my director behind the camera is giving me the “You’re almost out of time” signal, so I will try to get through this part quickly. I want to share with you my process for deciding how much treasure to donate to Countryside. First, I actually read the letter and the form that come in my pledge envelope because that is the official position of Countryside and I believe that I should know what that position is. Second, I think about all of the activities that I do that are related to Countryside and how much I enjoy them. I also think about what it would mean to me if Countryside no longer offered those activities and how big of a hole that would leave in my life. I then take a look at my treasure. Now the funny thing about treasure is that it comes and goes. Sometimes you have more, sometimes you have less. Sometimes you have infants and toddlers and you have big doctor and day care bills. Other times, the kids are in grade school and the day care bills disappear. Sometimes you buy a house and the mortgage is a big chunk of your disposable income. Later, after a few salary increases, the mortgage is relatively less of a strain. Sometimes you are paying for two kids in college -- at the same time. Other times, the kids are done with college, gainfully employed and self-sufficient. Sometimes the family has two paychecks. Sometimes there is only one. Sometimes there is none. During the 24-plus years that I have been a part of Countryside, I have experienced almost all of those financial ups and downs. When I had less, I gave less. And when I have a little bit more, I give a little bit more. I do this because I know that there are people at Countryside who have a mortgage payment and car payments and kids in college and had to buy a new roof this year, so they can’t give as much as they would like to. So I donate a little bit more treasure so they can experience the joys that Countryside has to offer. And I do it because when I was giving a little bit less, I know that there were people who were giving a little bit more, and I would like to pay that forward. And finally, I donate a part of my treasure so Countryside can continue to have a garden that provides vegetables to the Food Pantry; so Countryside can continue to have events that let us support our service partners; and so Countryside can continue to offer a place where we can go Sunday mornings to expand our minds and share a laugh.

So that’s kind of a long-winded description of my thought process around my treasure donation. I would like to sum it up by reading a proverb that condenses this thought process into something that is easy to remember and easy to follow.

“If you have much, give of your wealth; if you have little, give of your heart.”

We now return to our regularly scheduled program.