



ST. MARY CATHOLIC CHURCH

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April 21, 2009

Dear St. Mary's Parishioners,

Diocesan Stewardship 2009

May the Lord's blessings be with you! Once a year we are asked to pledge our support for our diocesan ministries and programs. The theme of this year's appeal is "Sow Bountifully, Reap Bountifully," taken from St. Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians (9: 6-8, 11-12).

Many lives are touched through the ministries and programs of our Diocese. Our support helps to make that happen. This Annual Appeal funds seminarian education, our Family Life Office, College Campus Ministries, Lay Ministry Formation Programs, the Permanent Diaconate Office, Catholic Charities, Youth and Young Adult Ministry, and many other vital ministries and programs. I've included a "question and answer" page in this mailing that responds to questions that parishioners have asked me about the Diocesan Stewardship Appeal and the ministries that are funded by it.

Each of the 105 parishes in the diocese is given an amount which it needs to raise. This year, our parish is being asked to contribute **\$224,217.00** as our fair portion of the overall diocesan budget for the next fiscal year. Any funds raised over that amount are returned to our parish which we will use to reduce the debt we owe on the church building. Any shortfall will need to be made up from our operating budget. The April 24th edition of our diocesan newspaper, *The Observer*, which will be sent to all registered members of the diocese, will contain the diocesan budget. Our bishop has reduced the diocesan budget by 2.75% (\$179,865.00) from the previous year in light of the tough economic climate.

For those who would prefer to have a suggested gift level, **please prayerfully consider** an average pledge of \$300, or \$30 a month for 10 months. We speak of an average pledge because some are able to pledge far more than \$300, while others may need to give less. **Your participation at whatever level is what is most important**, so let's work together to attain our goal as we did last year.

We'll be taking some time at all Masses the weekend of May 2-3 to pledge our support for the annual Diocesan Stewardship Appeal. I'd ask everyone to do their best to participate so that we can make our goal for the good of our diocesan Church. If we all work together as the Body of Christ, our Church will become stronger and more alive. May the blessings of our Risen Lord be with you now and always!

In Christ,

Fr. Steve Knox
Pastor

Questions and Answers about the Diocesan Stewardship Appeal

1. Which diocesan ministries and programs are funded by this Annual Appeal?

The April 24th edition of our diocesan newspaper, *The Observer*, will list the diocesan ministries and programs and how much they are receiving from Diocesan Stewardship 2009. Some of these include: The Bishop's Ministry, our Vocations Office and seminarian education, and the Permanent Diaconate Office. Educational services encompass oversight of the Catholic school system, Youth and Young Adult Ministry, parish Religious Education, College Campus Ministry, Lay Ministry Formation, the Respect Life Office, and ethicist for health care issues. Our Family Life Office is funded through this appeal as are many social services offered through Catholic Charities. There are many other important ministries connected with this appeal so please take a look at these when you receive your April 24th *Observer*.

2. How is the target goal established for each parish?

Each parish is assigned a mandatory goal for the appeal. This amount is determined by using a formula based on the parish's ordinary income (Sunday and Holy Day collections). Since our parish has grown in recent years, as have our collections, our target goal has increased proportionately.

3. If a parish has 4,000 registered households, and has a \$200,000 target goal, isn't it best to divide that target goal by the number of households and make that amount (\$50) the suggested donation amount?

That is not a good idea for two reasons. In any parish, some parishioners are very well off while others may be struggling to get by because of illnesses, job losses, or a variety of other reasons. This method would suggest an amount unreasonably low for people of higher means and may be unattainable for others. Secondly, in the vast majority of Catholic parishes, roughly 50% of registered parishioners do not support the parish financially, nor do they attend very often. This percentage would probably be similar in Protestant communities. Those who are not participating need to be invited and encouraged to participate in the life of the parish. People tend to support what is important to them, so the Church always needs to be helping its members grow in their relationship with God and their connection to the parish.

The scriptural way to determine one's gift level is to prayerfully reflect on the blessings one has received from God, and then make an appropriate response in a spirit of gratitude to help support the ministry life of the Church. Many practice proportionate giving. They give a percentage of their income to support the works of the Church and other charities.

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4. It's a tough economy out there; has this been taken into consideration with this year's appeal?

Bishop Doran and the Diocesan Finance Council are very much aware of our country's economic struggles and how they are impacting many parishioners. After lengthy discussion, the Finance Council voted in favor of lowering the diocesan budget by 2.75% (\$179,865.00) from the previous year's budget. Bishop Doran agreed and made the decision to approve it.

5. Does our parish benefit in any way from this Annual Appeal?

We are blessed to have three priests at our parish. Seminarian education is funded through this appeal. We are also blessed to have six permanent deacons and two parishioners who are preparing to become deacons. The Permanent Diaconate Office receives funding through the appeal. We have had many parishioners participate in the Lay Ministry Formation program over the years. One of our parishioners works in the Catholic Charities office in McHenry and sees firsthand the many people who are helped because of this appeal. Many parishioners have also participated in the programs and ministries connected with our Family Life Office. These are just a few examples that demonstrate how our parish life is positively impacted through our support.

6. What does the word "stewardship" mean?

According to the 1992 U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, a steward is defined as a disciple of Jesus who "receives God's gifts gratefully, cultivates them responsibly, shares them lovingly in justice with others, and returns them with increase to the Lord." Stewardship is a way of life and is best understood within the context of conversion and evangelization. The disciple is motivated to share his/her time, talent, treasure, and assets with the Church and other worthy causes from a deep sense of gratitude and in a planned, proportionate, and sacrificial manner for the greater glory of God.

These reflections were put together by Fr. Steve Knox and Dave Hougan, who serves as the Director of Stewardship Development for the Diocese of Rockford. If you have any other questions about the Annual Diocesan Stewardship Appeal, please contact Fr. Steve at 847-669-3137, ext. 103 or via e-mail at frsknox1@aol.com. Dave Hougan can be reached at 815-399-4300 or at dhougan@rockforddiocese.org.