

Today is our annual Stewardship commitment. After the testimonies at our Mass, I will be asking you to make a pledge to support your parish. You will see that the commitment brochure has three parts: Stewardship of Time; Stewardship of Talent (Opportunities for Ministry Involvement) and Stewardship of Treasure (Taking a Step). I ask you please to consider each part separately.

First, what commitment of time will you make toward your spiritual life, your family and your neighborhood community? I hope everyone will check the boxes for attendance at Sunday Mass, personal daily prayer and prayer at meals. Beyond those basics, please ask yourself what prayer you will have with your family – perhaps in the morning or evening with children or to join hands as a couple to pray the Our Father. Consider also coming to the chapel for Eucharistic Adoration, saying the rosary in your car or on a walk and regular Scripture reading. I have placed in the pamphlet rack a program for reading the Bible and Catechism in one year. As Bishop Elizondo says, “Think about it.”

Second, regarding Stewardship of Talent, the brochure lists ministry opportunities at St. Mary of the Valley. The variety of ministries in our parish might surprise you. Please spend some time in prayerful discernment of where God is calling you to serve. If you are already active in particular ministry, please check the “A” box. If you are interested in learning more about a ministry, check the “I” box. Our Stewardship Council is working with leaders of various ministries to help facilitate participation. We need many generous hearts and hands to carry out our mission.

Third, Stewardship of Treasure: Every November, we ask you to make an annual pledge. For many priests this is one of the most difficult parts of our ministry – to ask you to make a financial commitment to support the parish. Recently, however, I was inspired by a brother priest who said, “I love to ask people to give money!” He explained it this way: We have a good cause, in fact, the best cause: bringing God’s Word and Sacraments to adults, youth and children. What people give will enable us to fulfill and improve that mission. And God will bless those who give. Especially in challenging economic times, we need greater solidarity. That priest had a good point. I can’t say I *love* to ask for money, but I realize it is an important responsibility as your pastor. In reading the New Testament, I am struck by how much Jesus talked about money and by how many his parables dealt with Stewardship. In addition, St. Paul devoted entire chapters of his letters to taking up a collection. So my friend is correct: speaking about money is an integral part of our ministry and by God’s grace, it should be a joyful task.

I ask you to consider the biblical tithe, which is giving the first ten percent to God. We do have people who give ten percent of their income to their parish. God bless them! Others tithe by giving the first five percent of their income to the parish. You will notice the brochure has a chart indicating how much five percent is on a weekly basis - according to household income. Those who give five percent to the parish then complete their tithe by giving the “other half” to Special Collections (Missions, St. Vincent de Paul, World Youth Day, etc.), the Annual Catholic Appeal and other charities. If you are not yet giving five percent to the parish, I ask you to consider taking a step in that direction. **If every family could give two to five dollars more a week than they did last year, it would make an enormous difference.** You can make your pledge on a weekly or a monthly basis. We are able to receive by Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) or by Credit Card. I personally prefer to give by EFT and I notice a number of other parishioners are using that method.

The bottom line is: We need your gift of time, talent and treasure – and it is crucial for the well-being of our parish that you respond generously to the call to give back those gifts to God. A couple of weeks ago, when we heard about Zacchaeus' extraordinary gift, we saw that Stewardship is really another word for salvation. It means a grateful recognition of God's free gift to us – and the joyful willingness to share that gift with others. As our Stewardship brochure says: God gives it all and then calls us to share.

Finally, some important reminders about parish events: Our **Men's Group** will meet this Tuesday from 7 to 8:30 p.m. On Wednesday, beginning at 5:45 with dinner, we will have our second **Generations of Faith**. Parish Council meets on Thursday evening at 7 p.m. On Saturday morning, from 6 to 9 a.m. we will have the first **Youth Empowerment Morning**. All high school students are welcome. Young adults will help with the coordination, and our Knights of Columbus will provide a delicious breakfast. That evening (November 20) all are invited to the **Cena Show** which will hold at Monroe High School. The Cena Show includes dinner ("cena") and entertainment. Funds will help children in other parts of the world, including families served by the Mary Bloom Center in Peru. And speaking of fund raising dinners: please, please, purchase your tickets now for the "**Chamber Christmas**" at Lord Hill Farms. If you do not run into any of our youth selling tickets to the matinee or dinner, you may call 360-794-8945, extension 20, for our "events" voice mail. I thank you for your support of young people who will be accompanying me to Rome, Assisi and Madrid for World Youth Day. Besides attending the Chamber Christmas, you can support them by purchasing Krispy Kreme donuts, First Aid Kits (they make practical Christmas gifts), by attending the **Holiday Craft Fair** (see flier in this week's bulletin) and by making a direct donation to an individual young person or to our World Youth Day delegation. Because all of this depends of prayer, I will be inviting you to join with me in a special at the end of the Prayers of the Faithful. May we all be generous and joyful Stewards of God's gifts! And may Mary intercede for us. I conclude with a picture of the model Steward – our Blessed Mother. I took this picture last week and thought it was significant that – even as we enter a colder season - a rose blooms at the foot of her statue.

