

Planned Giving News



Office of Stewardship Development

Summer 2010

Dear Reader,

I took (or should I say I gave you) a mini-break this spring from my normal monthly eNewsletter. I hope you had or are planning to have some "down time" to refresh yourself and get ready for the busy fall season at the parish. As is customary, there were many reassignments of priests this past July. My colleagues and I in the Stewardship Development Office would like to welcome those priests to new assignments. Please remember that our office is here to help you and your parishioners to grow in Christian stewardship: Giving back to God a portion of what He has given us through our gifts of time, talent, treasure, and assets.

I have included below an article written by Dan Conway. Dan was recently invited to make presentations at two different Protestant stewardship conferences. In his article, he shares some thoughts on Christian stewardship offered by our Protestant brothers and sisters. I encourage you to take a few minutes and read this great article.

Lastly, I have included several announcements that I encourage you to have placed into your weekly parish bulletins. Reminding your parishioners' to remember the parish in their estate plan will plant the seeds that will yield a bountiful harvest over time. If you haven't held an Estate Planning (Will) Seminar at your parish within the last two years, I encourage you to consider doing so. Call me for details.

God bless,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg Urban".

Deacon Greg Urban

Stewardship Means Getting Out of the Rat Race

Last month I had the privilege of participating in stewardship conferences sponsored by two Protestant denominations. *Rethinking Stewardship: Our Culture, Our Theology, Our Practices* was the theme of a conference held in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, July 19-21, 2010, and sponsored by Luther Seminary. *Grace, Gratitude and Generosity* was the title of the 2010 Stewardship Conference

sponsored by The Episcopal Network for Stewardship (TENS) which was held in Indianapolis, Indiana, July 30-31. Both conferences called attention to the challenges associated with teaching and practicing stewardship in an affluent, consumer-oriented society. In fact, "consumerism" was clearly identified as the chief obstacle to living Christian stewardship today.

Mark Allan Powell, one of many excellent speakers at the Lutheran conference is a professor of Old Testament studies and an author of many books on biblical and stewardship themes. Reverend Powell challenged the participants - most of whom were stewardship committee or pastoral staff members in Lutheran congregations - to change the focus of their teaching about stewardship in three ways: 1) from talking about how much we give to talking about how we live, 2) from talking about obligation (guilt) to talking about privilege (good news), and 3) from a sense of duty to an experience of delight (the joy of giving). Powell stressed that stewardship is not the means to an end (increased participation or financial support). Stewardship is an end -- a life of faithful Christian discipleship.

David Lose, a homiletics professor at Luther Seminary, offered similar insights into the challenges facing Christians who wish to practice stewardship as a way of life. Professor Lose observed that three cultural shifts have taken place in our society that have fundamentally changed the Christian experience of stewardship. First, we are now encouraged to give not out of a sense of obligation but as a matter of choice. Free decisions rather than a sense of duty motivate most people today.

Second, Lose pointed out that whereas in earlier generations people received their identity (their station in life or vocational calling) from their family, their church or their society, today people are urged to choose who they are, or want to be, from a seemingly infinite array of possible choices. In this context, Christian life becomes just one of many options, and stewardship as a way of life can seem to be a very remote and discretionary option -- even for Christians.

Finally, Lose notes that tradition does not have nearly the power it once had. In our contemporary culture, personal experience is much more valuable than the received wisdom of past generations. That's why Christian values, including the stewardship virtues of gratitude, accountability and generosity, frequently take second place when compared to the "new" experiences and opportunities that seem to be promised by our secular culture.

Speaking to Episcopalians meeting in Indianapolis, Reverend Dr. Walter Bruggemann, a scripture scholar and author with self-identified "Calvinist leanings," said that stewardship represents a fundamental choice between two ways of living. "Stewardship is the big either/or," Bruggemann says, "between living a life of covenantal fidelity and obligations or living as an autonomous agent who is unencumbered by obligations to God or to anyone else." Bruggemann sees stewardship as a choice that Christians make to "get out of the rat race" and to live lives of quiet fidelity to the Gospel.

Most of the speakers at the Lutheran and Episcopal conferences agreed that stewardship is countercultural-an antidote to the poisons of consumerism, materialism and individualism that have thoroughly infected our society. "Affluenza" was a term used by more than one speaker to characterize the negative influences of our affluent society on the simple life of responsibility for others that Christians are called to live on a daily basis.

My contribution to both conferences was a reflection on the U.S. bishops' pastoral letter, [Stewardship: A Disciple's Response](#), and the stewardship message of the late Archbishop Thomas J. Murphy. Our Catholic theology adds a profound Eucharistic and sacramental dimension to the important biblical stewardship perspectives espoused by our Protestant sisters and brothers. We believe that all of creation is the gift of a good and gracious God. Disciples of Jesus Christ are called to receive God's gifts gratefully, cherish and tend them in a responsible way, share them generously with others out of justice and love and return them to the Lord with increase. Christian stewards do not reject money or material things. We develop and share them for our own good and for the benefit of others.

This is the spirituality of stewardship taught by the American bishops' in their stewardship pastoral. As Catholics, we embrace a countercultural way of living that rejects the "isms" of our time (relativism, materialism, individualism, consumerism) -- without ever condemning our culture or the material gifts and possessions that we need and enjoy. With all our brothers and sisters in the one Body of Christ, we Roman Catholics wholeheartedly affirm the Lord's admonition: Seek first the kingdom of God and

his righteousness, and all the rest will be given to you (Mt 6:33).

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Bulletin Blurbs

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