

Parish Stewardship Update

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How Does Your Parish Share?

There are many creative ways that parishes share their time, talents, and treasure with others. Often, however, the methods and forms of giving are only quietly discussed in hushed tones in parish offices and at finance council or pastoral council meetings. Occasionally, parishes will inform the parishioners through the bulletin or through a Mass announcement about how they are sharing their financial resources. A number of parishes give a brief description of the organizations with whom they share and often include a dollar amount or number of volunteers who have helped out. I believe it is time to search for positive ways to share the message of how the parish is openly performing the works of mercy through giving.

In The Spirit Of Giving...

Most parishes have been very generous when there have been special collections taken for natural disasters such as floods, tornadoes, and hurricanes. There has also been a generous response to support the needs from man-made disasters such as war and bombings. While these responses are laudable, how are we doing at meeting the needs of those who are with us every day? The poor, the hungry, the depressed, the lonely, the grieving, the lost, the sick, and the dying all need the support of the people in our parishes. I would like to include in this newsletter a consistent section on creative ways parishes and their schools are living stewardship on a day-to-day basis. Please send your stewardship stories to my attention and I will try to include them.

One example is St. Rita parish in Rockford. With the east coast being the recent focus of financial need, especially New York City, St. Rita parish took up a special collection on Thanksgiving Day to be shared with two local ministries. The recipients were Fr. Wentink's Love Fund and the Rockford area Catholic Charities office. One week later, St. Rita parish continued in their relationship with St. Elizabeth Catholic Community Center in Rockford by having a giving tree with gift tags for many of those children who are served by St. Elizabeth Center. There were gifts purchased, wrapped, and delivered to the church; there was money donated for additional needs; and there were those who gathered, sorted, and shared their time in delivering the gifts to St. Elizabeth Center. There are also many examples of parishioners who regularly share their time and talent at the parish and around the community, and their gifts of treasure in the Sunday offertory. While not necessarily unusual, these are some of the stewardship efforts going on at St. Rita. The real story is that the "special" events are only a supplement to the ongoing day-to-day stewardship lived out by the people of St. Rita parish.

Good Stewardship Requires Practicing Our Faith...

There are two distinct ideas for practicing our faith as good stewards. The first is from the letter of James Chapter 2:17 "So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead." We often have spoken of stewardship as a faith response to God's goodness. In their stewardship pastoral, the bishops state "mature disciples make a conscious, firm decision, carried out in action, to be followers of Jesus Christ no matter the cost to themselves." Both of these quotes refer to responding with action. Living faith is a working proposition. In another document entitled "Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium," the bishops write, "In their work – teaching, cosmetology, medicine, the arts, house painting, real estate – laity discovers both meaning and a sense of mission, relating their work to their spiritual life. Their work paths, no matter how diverse, often help them to move beyond self-absorption toward active caring for others."

The second supporting idea for practicing our faith as good stewards is from our Catholic Tradition and that is the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. As defined in the Catechism of the Catholic Church the spiritual works of mercy are instructing, advising, consoling, comforting, forgiving, and bearing wrongs patiently while the corporal works of mercy are feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead.

How are you practicing your faith?

Where are the works of mercy found in the Catechism? When I searched for them, they were difficult to locate. Interestingly they fall into a section packed with stewardship ideas and quotes. This is how it would be diagrammed:

Part Three: Life in Christ

Section Two: The Ten Commandments

Chapter Two: "You Shall Love Your Neighbor As Yourself"

Article 7: The Seventh Commandment

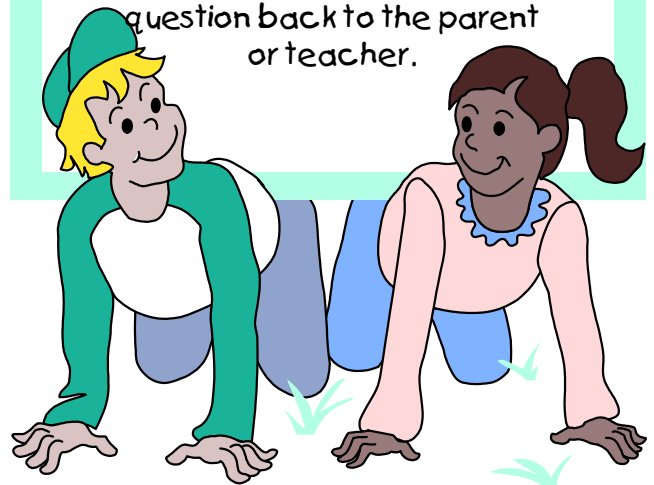
VI. Love for the Poor

2447 the works of mercy

Children's Stewardship Ideas:



As we finish the last formal celebrations of the Christmas season, parents and teachers can ask the children what gift they gave to Jesus? Prime the pump by offering suggestions of how some children visited the elderly in nursing homes or made Christmas cards for the homebound. Be prepared to give your own response to the question, as the children will often turn the question back to the parent or teacher.



Thank You!

Thanks to the 120 readers of this newsletter who have chosen to receive it via e-mail. It really helps our mailing costs and you get to see the newsletter in color.

If anyone else is interested, has an e-mail address, and can open and read files with the PDF extension, let me know. I will switch you to our electronic mailing list.