

Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow..

A “How to” Manual for Stewardship



St. Paul's Episcopal Church

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Foreword

All good things come of Thee O Lord and of thine own have I given Thee.

BCP

A Collect for Stewardship

Gracious God, giver of all we have and hold as stewards; grant the people of this church a deep and abiding awareness that all things come from you - our health, our incomes, our jobs, our talents and our generous impulse. Send your Holy Spirit to help us as we swim against the rising tides of materialism, envy, individualism and greed in our culture. When we are tempted to think of money as a private matter, remind us that you have asked for part of what we are given, to be returned to you as a symbol of our awareness that you give all we have. And further, help us to help each other in this grace of giving, for you are the lover of our souls and call us to nothing less than transformation in Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

Introduction

We have learned that stewardship is the care of something that has been entrusted to someone, by another. A misconception is that stewardship is only about the church asking it's parishioners for money, but it is not. It is a spiritual, personal issue between you and God. The role of the stewardship committee is not to tell you what or how much your commitment should be, but instead our goal is to offer you insight into what stewardship is and hopefully provide some guidance as you find the level of commitment where you are comfortable. Your commitment should be based on how you plan on fulfilling Christ's mission & ministry in the world through the right use of ALL of God's blessings that have been entrusted to you, not just the financial blessings.

The following pages represent our attempt to provide you with a "How To" manual, on how to work towards accomplishing the goal of meeting our budget and using our other resources to grow and sustain our parish life here at St. Paul's.

*Praise God from whom all blessing flow
Praise Him all creatures here below
Praise Him above ye Heavenly Host
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.*

Chapter One – Mapping Our Priorities

By Bonnie Vallone

How many of us spent time this morning thinking about our ideals? Anyone? Well, our ideals are not something we generally spend a lot of time thinking about but we all have them. They change over time. For a five year old, an ideal might be when can I go out and play while a senior in high school is trying to determine where to go college. And I am trying to determine if I am ready to retire! So our ideals change as we go through the different stages of our lives. There are certain parts of our lives that shape those ideals and help us to map our priorities. The three key components are time, talent and money. All three of these key components are linked to Stewardship and we must consider all when we begin to prayerfully consider our pledge for the coming year.

Stewardship is something that we hear a lot of talk about, but sometimes I think not a lot of understanding. I believe that understanding what stewardship is and how it applies to our lives will change the way we make decisions each day thus affecting our ideals and priorities. If we really understand what it means to be good stewards we will begin to not only see our lives change, but also the world around us.

What is the actual definition of *Stewardship*?

1: the office, duties, and obligations of a steward;

2: the conducting, supervising, or managing of something; especially the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care (such as stewardship of our natural resources)

I like how it says “managing of something” because to me this implies that we have decisions to make and are responsible for that which we are stewards over. Just like a manager of a business is responsible for his/her department and employees, so we are with all that has been entrusted to us.

So what are we actually stewards over? Personally, I believe it applies to everything we have been given. Our time, our money, our God given gifts and abilities, our influence, it all comes from God. There are lots of stewardship verses that show us how we should act, but my favorite is the Parable of the Talents since it gives such a great illustration of what a good steward does and you can find it in Matthew 25:14-30. Jesus is teaching about his second coming and uses this parable to bring home his point that only faithful stewards will be prepared for his return. The parable involves three servants who each receive a large sum of money from their master before the master departs on a long journey. This is not just an act of generosity; this is an act of trust. The master has given each of the three an opportunity of a life time and a chance to prove themselves, test their skills and possibly rise to higher positions of influence and responsibility. Upon the master's return he discovers that two of the servants have invested the money and that one has buried it. Now I should point out that each servant was not given the same amount of talents. This is just the way things are. Not everyone is gifted in the same way, and that is okay.

Jesus makes it clear that it is not the size of the gift that is the important variable. What matters is what each servant does with what he has been given. The two who invest their talents are both praised with the same words: “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness.” In the final analysis you won’t be asked about what you did not have, only about what you did with the gifts you were given. Put simply, the good stewards were the ones who **took “risks” and action** in order to multiply what they had been given. The bad steward was the one who out of fear decided not to take a risk and was called lazy and judged for doing nothing. The faithful stewards were rewarded by the master and expected to do even more with what they were given. This reminds me of another scripture, *Luke 12:48: ...From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.*

Earlier I said there are three key components to stewardship that we must consider as we begin to pray about our 2014 pledge. The three components are our time, our talents and our money. Our finances tend to be the key area that people refer to when speaking of stewardship. I think the main reason is that often money is one of the most difficult things for people to give and for people to talk to one another about. I know for myself; I was okay giving my energy, time, or sharing my abilities, but money was not something that I was not too interested in giving away. But one of the things that helped me with this was to keep focus on the fact that I came into the world with nothing and would leave with nothing. After all, my possessions are merely “on loan” to me from God. When I began to think in these terms (and it took God awhile to convince me), it helped me begin to see myself more as a “steward” rather than a “possessor”. To illustrate this point I would like to relay a story I once heard.

A well-known violinist was talking about his violin. The violin was a several hundred years old and worth many hundreds of thousands of dollars. The interesting point of the story was the way the violinist viewed himself as a steward of the instrument. He knew that many great musicians had played the instrument before him and he was also not naive to think that he would be the last to play such a fine instrument. He understood that it was just temporarily passing through his hands. This story showed the violinist’s outlook on his violin and really helped me get a better understanding of the role possessions should have in my life and your life. Changing our thinking in this way will affect how we handle our money. It’s not that having possessions is a good or bad thing, it’s just that we need to keep them in the proper perspective. A steward manages the possessions of another. We are all stewards of the resources, abilities and opportunities that God has entrusted in to our care.

Now I have an assignment for each of us to do. Look over your checkbook or examine how and what you spend your money on every month. Take a really close look at where you are spending your money. There may be opportunities for you to eliminate that spend and include it instead in your pledge to St. Paul’s. For example, my husband, Tom and I, go out to dinner quite often, usually a couple of times each week. Let’s say we spend \$30 for one meal out. If we take that \$30 per week and add it to our current pledge, we would be able to increase our pledge by \$1,560 for the year. There are approximately 60 pledging units for 2013 for St. Paul’s. If 15 of those pledging units could increase their pledge by \$30 per week it would be an additional \$23,400 of income for the church. If another 15 could do \$15 more per week it would be an

additional \$11,700 for a total additional income of \$35,100. For St. Paul's to support a full time priest we will need we will need to increase our annual income by \$45,000 which is equivalent to \$15 per week per pledging unit. (\$15 times 52 weeks time 60 pledges = \$46,800.) Now we all realize that everyone is not gifted in the same way and some will be able to do more and some less and that is okay. Go back to the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30). The master gave these talents and entrusted them to his servants. Two invest theirs while the third buries his to keep it safe. It is important to note here that different amounts were given to each of the three. Each of us needs to look at our own situation and prayerful consider what we can pledge. Keep in mind that during the year you may have unexpected income and while you can't include that in your annual pledge since it is unexpected, you can make a commitment to give 10% of it to the church when you do receive it as an additional monetary gift above your pledge. And remember, a pledge is made based on our situation at a given time. Should that situation change, such as a job loss, other hardship or winning the lottery, it is always appropriate to revise one's pledge. You simply need to notify the parish office and revise your pledge accordingly.

I also want you to think about your time and your talents. Our 2014 Pledge card will have a section for you to make commitments to participating in various functions and activities such as Altar Guild, Choir, fund raising activities, etc. We need your time and talents to be able to have all of these functions.

Mapping our priorities is a key first step as we each consider our pledge to St. Paul's for the coming year. It takes prayerful consideration of the three key components, our money, our time and our talents. In conclusion, please say with me our collect for stewardship found in the bulletin.

Chapter Two – Your Money’s Journey

By Jan Boyer

Each month when I write the check to fulfill our pledge for the current year, I don’t generally think about where it goes or what it does. I know that it goes into the church’s general fund and I’ll bet that is the same for most of us.

Well, this month I stopped to think about it a little and was surprised and what I found.

I knew that we used my pledge and yours to pay salaries of our Priest, office administrator, and a person to keep the church clean. For our priest it also pays health insurance, pension contributions, mileage, Social Security Taxes, and continuing education to name a few. The priest is important because he or she not only conducts our Sunday service but marries us and baptizes our babies, tends to our needs when we are sick or have lost a loved one and is always there when we need someone to talk with about a problem.

The office administrator keeps things running smoothly, prepares the Sunday bulletin and distributes the newsletter among other things. We are required to pay Social Security taxes and pay the IRS all other taxes.

Then I thought, well in order to have this we need to keep the doors open throughout the year. So, in order to do that, we need to pay the utilities, the same ones we pay at home; heat, electricity, water, and for our Church we have expenses on a Rectory as well (heat, electricity, water, garbage pickup). There are always some maintenance items that come along that need to be taken care of too, so my money and yours is stretched along way.

Then, I thought about Sunday school. We have to have an established curriculum for our children to learn about God and His graces. A good one of these can cost up to a thousand dollars for a year, pretty pricy! Supplies for Sunday school like paper, crayons, glue to name a few

And then, there are supplies needed for the church office paper, computer software, the telephone, postage cost of printing; boy, this list is really growing!

I almost forgot; we have a fair share pledge to the diocese. That amount is not negotiable and they determine the amount. This money goes to help keep our Diocesan offices open and staffed. The staff members are there to help us in many ways. One of the ways we are experiencing now is a staff member helping us in our search for a new priest. And speaking of that, there are additional costs to a parish when you are planning on calling a new Priest. Some of these are printing a profile that goes out to any candidates that might be interested in coming to our parish. Costs involved with visiting the parish of our finalists in that application process and costs to move the new priest here.

I did forget about the choir we enjoy so much each Sunday. We have a director of music. She gets a salary and all taxes must be paid for her too. There is also the cost of music for our choir which is getting more expensive all the time.

We still have a mortgage on the addition and the bank expects that to be paid each month on time.

Wow, this list is really growing! And I haven't included the cost of communion wine and wafers or the oil for the candles or flowers for the altar. These things we see every Sunday and just don't think about how they got there because they have always been there.

I didn't even mention special services that have become tradition at St. Paul's, like the police memorial service and the 911 service. When we open the church for these special services there is a cost to us.

You know our money makes a lot of twists and turns on its journey from our homes to God's house. What we do with that gift, your pledge to our Church home, goes far beyond our walls. Sometimes it reaches out into the Community to help someone less fortunate than ourselves, or to provide counseling or moral support in times of trouble for a parish member or complete stranger.

We are blessed, by God, to have the financial ability to contribute on a regular basis to his work at St. Paul's. It's because of His great love we can do what we do. Your *pledge* is vital to our calling of a new priest, our community work and to our work in in the surrounding area.

In conclusion let's look at the various destinations for your *pledge*:

- ✓ Salaries for the priest including supply Priests), office administrator and choir director
- ✓ Pension contributions
- ✓ Continuing education for our priest
- ✓ Mileage
- ✓ Taxes
- ✓ Utilities
- ✓ Sunday school
- ✓ Church office
- ✓ Mortgage
- ✓ Diocesan fair share pledge
- ✓ Maintenance for the Church and Rectory
- ✓ Cleaning
- ✓ Music for the Choir
- ✓ Communion wine, wafers, oil for the alter candles, altar flowers

Your *pledge* is important. Responsible and disciplined financial *stewardship*, giving back to God a portion of what God has given us, is critical to spiritual health. Give freely, bountifully to God's work through the work of our parish, and we will all reap bountifully, internally, in running the parish, and externally in our many important ministries.

Chapter Three – Defining Spirituality and Stewardship

By Germain Ludwig

Let's begin by defining spirituality:

- Spirituality is a selfless sense of love and compassion for others, respect and concern for well-being and life, and reverence for the universe and its creation
- Spirituality is the search for **direction, meaning, inner wholeness, and connectedness** to others, to non-human creation and to a transcendent.
- Spirituality is the innate human need to connect with something larger than ourselves.

We have created governmental bureaucracies to define who owns the rights to something God created in the first place. We have mammoth storage files of registrations for: plots of land; whose idea it was to design something; where what language will be spoken; and where borders are, all in our attempt to preserve our separateness from each other. All of this instead of realizing we can have separation without separateness. We can exist as individuals and still be one with all. It has been this consumption with creating borders and individual ownership limits that has caused most of the strife and wars in our world. It has been the disputes and arguments about who owns or controls the God-given resources of the world that has led us to fight, maim and kill each other. In America we even went to war over whether one man had the right to own another.

There are always waves on the ocean and each wave has its own characteristics but the waves are never separate from the ocean. We can gather a container of ocean water and even redistribute what we have gathered to other containers, but each of those containers still have a part of the ocean in them. Although we can create separation by apportioning what we have gathered to individual containers we have not changed the fact that the individual collections are all still the ocean. That is the same for human beings; we all came from the same infinite Source and are all one with the Source. Regardless of how individually different we may appear or how many different containers we may be deposited in, we are all still one with the Source and with each other. Realizing this and making it a part of our being will revolutionize our concept of stewardship.

Realizing we can have separation without separateness is one of the steps we need to take in reassessing and revising our assumptions about stewardship and congregational life. Another step is to realize that, if can operate from the generative orientation, from possibility rather than resignation, we can win and *create* the future into which we are living, as opposed to merely reacting to it when we get there. If we take these two necessary and preliminary steps we can begin the shift in stewardship thinking to creating the congregational environment in which we, and others near us, can broaden our concept of what stewardship is and how we can participate in shaping our true congregational life.

It is interesting to note the parallelisms in the writings of noted authors and how they all address the misconception of separateness versus separation and the oneness with others and God. Each of these authors deal with the need to release ourselves from our ego-driven, dysfunctional assumptions and to bring new life to stewardship through spiritual and servant concepts of who we are. What they all espouse is the need to get beyond our self-serving, selfish outlooks to the selfless concern for others and to create our future rather than to resign ourselves to what is presented to us by happenstance. It is all about how we can be good stewards of what God has allowed us to come in contact and which we think we are in possession of.

We Were Born To Be Rich

None of us hesitates to create ideas of perfectly healthy living nor do we hesitate to pray for healing or perfect health. So why is it we do not think we have the right to think about and pray for riches and success? Somewhere we have programmed our prayerful self to resist praying for materialistic goals and prosperity.

As Ralph Waldo Emerson said “Man was born to be rich or inevitably grown rich by the use of his faculties”.

We were born to be rich regardless of our circumstances and/or environment. We came into this world having all the means to create riches and success.

However, all too many people let themselves proceed along a life path thinking they are, and must remain, at or below the poverty level. They start pointing fingers at what they call their circumstances, or the environment or conditions they were born into, or the economic climate. They think there is no possible chance of them breaking free from this imagined prison and to become prosperous. And, what do you know, ---- they become what they think. Thus, for those who think in terms of lack and limits, the reality of prosperity and success are barred from their being, because they are not willing or are too timid to think of a rich life. Some people think of good fortune only as something that comes to us, like an unexpected mention in Aunt Tillie’s will, or an inheritance. However, good fortune comes through us, not to us. We control our powers and capabilities create a world of prosperity and success as our reality.

We all have something special to bring to the world. We are needed and no one else can give just what we have to give. This is something we need to remember and carry with us; we are unique special beings and we have been blessed with our very special skills, powers and abilities that must be brought forth for our being and outer self. We need to realize we are the experience of God’s abundance and that is our true being that needs to be demonstrated by and through us.

WHAT DID THE GOSPEL FOR TODAY HAVE TO SAY? -----

Too often we listen but we don't consciously hear what is said. There is no such thing as a meaningless experience. But, because we are not fully conscious of what has gone on we don't always see the significance or meaning of the experience. We can derive meaning from all experiences, even though we may not consciously be aware of it at the time. So, ---- we heard

the Gospel, we learned from it, but it may not be at a conscious level, it may be residing at our subconscious level.

How many of you were made uncomfortable when I asked the question of what was in the Gospel?

When I left a little bit of silence hanging in the air?

As you anticipated that I might ask you specifically?

Well, if you were uncomfortable, then I accomplished what I wanted. I wanted you to be uncomfortable, because we don't learn or change when we are comfortable. We don't learn when we are satisfied with the way things are. The time and way we learn or change is when we feel uncomfortable or dissatisfied or incongruous with our environment. When feel as though there is some mismatch or lack of fit between what we are doing, what we feel, what we think, what we perceive and what the world really is. In the case of my question on the Gospel you may have sat there and thought something to the effect that, Gee I should know that, I should listen more carefully, I say I am a good church person but maybe I don't have my mind on church when I am here, maybe I should look at the lessons and Gospel before coming to church, after all they are published in the bulletin. That is what I call shoulding all over ourself. We think about what we should be doing and but aren't and we are not satisfied, we are uncomfortable and I submit, are ready for learning or change to take place. Things are just not right with the way we see, do, feel, think, perceive, and what the rest of the world sees, does, feels, thinks, perceives, or is. So we have a misfit or incongruency and we can only resolve that by changing something about how we feel, think, behave, perceive, etc.. We change by learning, we learn by changing.

Going back to what I said about how we do things without really being aware of what we are doing reminds me of a story I heard.

A man named Bill, who was involved with the stewardship campaign in his church had just purchased a classic old car; a vintage Thunderbird. He and his neighbor Sam were admiring it one day. Soon, since they both went to the same church, their conversation turned to religion and stewardship. Bill said people really don't get involved in their church. They often attend but don't participate in the ministry of the church or congregation. He then began to argue that they don't even pay attention to the service or to the prayers. He said most people don't even pay attention to the Lord's Prayer. He said, "Look you really like this Thunderbird, right? Well if you can recite the Lord's Prayer without thinking about anything else, I will give you the car." This was really an exciting proposition and seemed so easy to do the neighbor was eager to take him up on it. Bill said, "However, if you can't you have to double your stewardship pledge." Well that gave the man cause to pause. But, after thinking about it briefly, he agreed to the conditions because it seemed so easy to do. So, his pledge would be safe for yet another year and he wouldn't have to increase it. So he started, "Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name; ---and if I do it twice will you throw in a new set of tires?"

Now let's get back to what was in the Gospel. Let me read it to you. ----- Quote Luke 16:19-31

At first reading of that Gospel you might think God has something against someone being rich. But He really is saying that if we are rich and do not share our riches, whatever they may be, then, we must suffer the consequences. Just as I said, we should all over ourselves; we also sometimes deceive ourselves, delude ourselves, paint a picture of something different or ----- make ourselves great. When in fact, we are not so great after all. But, we like to feel good, we like to feel comfortable. And, if we are comfortable with how much we are participating in the ministry of St. Paul's, if we are comfortable with how much we pledge, then we won't change, we won't do anything differently. We will preserve our sameness despite what may have changed in our world or the environment or the world of St. Paul's.

Experience is, first of all, doing something; second, doing something that makes a difference; third, knowing what difference it makes.

Critical reflection is key to learning and change, it allows us to derive meaning from our experience and by doing so allows us to apply that meaning to the new experiences we have. I ask you now to critically reflect on what we have discussed here this morning and then to do the same for how it is that we participate in St. Paul's. I ask you to not just accept that all is well and that you are comfortable with how things are. I invite you to think about the messages we have been presenting these last few weeks. Remember what we have said about how your pledge works and try and seek out others and to talk with them about what is going on with St. Paul's. Perhaps you will find out about something you didn't know was happening or you will find out that something you thought was happening is stalled because of lack of support or interest. I challenge you to find some incongruencies, --- to be uncomfortable or dissatisfied with the status quo, to raise your readiness to learn and change. Then to do something about it, to increase your participation, increase your contribution of time and talent and, ---- to re-examine your financial commitment and determine what change is possible for you. Learn ---- learn how you can contribute even more to the ministry of St. Paul's in whatever way you can; your time , your talent, your financial resources, -----your stewardship.

And, --- if you do it twice, we'll throw in a new set of tires.

LET US PRAY

CONCLUDING PRAYER

I open my heart to the rich blessings of Spirit. To date I let go of thoughts of scarcity or lack until my entire mind with thoughts of my rich life---the life I am blessed with right now.

I open my heart and gratefulness as I call my blessings. I think of the people in my life, the places I have lived, the adventures I have enjoyed. Remember that topped gets loud received and given, and the love bug shared with friends and family. I remember times apiece filled relaxation, exhilarating fund and deep contentment.

My list of blessings quickly grows as more and more come to mind. My joy overflows. Thank you, God, for everything in my life. I am so blessed.

Dear Lord, Your gift to us is life, and we have the capacity to develop our lives. So, we begin the journey with Your guidance, we take whatever steps are necessary to further our unfoldment. Riches and honor are with us, enduring wealth and prosperity.

AMEN

LUKE: 16:19-31

“There was once a rich man who dressed in the most expensive clothes and lived in great luxury every day. There was also a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores; he used to be brought to the rich man’s door, when hoping to eat the bits of food that fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to sit beside Abraham at the feast in heaven. A rich man died and was buried, and in Hades, where he was in great pain, he looked up and saw Abraham, far away, with Lazarus at his side. So he called out, and said, Father Abraham! Take pity on me, and send some water to cool my tongue, because I am in great pain in this fire! But Abraham said, remember, my son, that in your lifetime you were given all the good things, while Lazarus got all the bad things. But now he is enjoying himself here, while you are in pain.

Chapter 4 – Across the Ages

For St. Paul's Youngest

By Logan Slother

Have you ever watched your parents fill out a pledge envelope and wondered, what are they doing? Well, each year the adults of our church pledge to give a certain amount of their money to St. Paul's, which is used for things that keep our church running. Not just adults can pledge, though.

The younger folks of our great flock can give their time, talent and treasure for St. Paul's too. The kids of St. Paul's will get their own special pledge card just like their parents. It shows some ways you can give back to the church.

You can help out at events and fundraisers like Fish Fry, participate in groups like FYMO, and give some of your allowance to the church. Something as easy as coming to church regularly can be part of your pledge. What might seem like the smallest gift you can give could really help out your fellow churchgoers.

Even the smallest of us can make a difference.

For St. Paul's Middle Youth

By Emily and Katy Shoop

No Matter how old you are the money collected from the pledges affects you. When we hear the word stewardship different people think different things. An adult might think of giving money to the church and a Sunday schooler might think of walking the hands up to the altar. But do any of you stop to think how this money you are giving affects our personal lives?

For me as a teenager, money from the church helps pay for youth activities such as camp, Happening and the Peach Festival float. I can't imagine my life without camp and Happening. I have made some really amazing friends and met some really cool people by going to these youth events. Some of the people that go to these events wouldn't be able to come if it wasn't for church money.

I have made many memories also. If the adults who pledged their time, talent and money didn't, I wouldn't have them.

Your pledge affects the youth more than you know!

The Joy of Giving

By John Rupnow

I am grateful and blessed for the brilliant presentations on Stewardship and St. Paul's church that have preceded my talk. They have lined out our needs and have spoken about our journey to the promised land of fiscal responsibilities to our Lord and His Church of St. Paul's.

My reflections today are on the joy of giving. We are children of God, disciples of Jesus Christ who feel called to a ministry of transformation through the joy of giving. I wondered when I first became aware of the joy of giving and made it paramount over the joy of receiving. My thoughts went back to the time when I was about 8 years old during the great depression when people were losing their jobs and homes and families were going hungry.

I remembered a family in my neighborhood that belonged to my church. One of the daughters was in my third grade class and there were 5 other children in the family. During the cold winter the father of the family got pneumonia. In those days before antibiotics, pneumonia was usually fatal and he died. I remember how sad I felt at his funeral – not only because he died – but as the family came behind the casket they did not have shoes, only rubber boots to wear and their clothing was threadbare.

After the funeral was over, our pastor asked the members of the parish for help. He asked them to increase their giving to help the family that we all loved. Those were the days before the community help organizations that we know about and use today.

This extra offering covered the family's living expense, providing the housing and other necessities to survive. A member of the church owned a coal company and donated a ton of coal to keep the stoves warm and enough kerosene to keep their lamps aglow. Other members donated clothes, coats, scarves, hats and mittens to keep them warm. My Aunt, a good seamstress, made clothing for the children and other ladies knitted sweaters and took over boxes of canned goods every week, which in those days also included canned chicken and pork. The extra offering also provided shoes.

In those by gone years the tithe was the way of giving to support the fiscal needs of the Church and from time to time in emergencies members were called upon to increase their offering and give their time and talents to support the less fortunate. Those were the days before the Church fundraisers – all the members went to Fitches Tavern on Friday nights during Lent for fish and beer.

I don't want to bore you with nostalgia, but from that experience came a deep seated feeling of the joy of giving in Jesus' name.

I perused scholarly tomes on Christian Stewardship including several short paperbacks and I could not find one reference to the joy of giving. I have seen so many times the expression of joy on the eyes and faces of members of St. Paul's as they give of their time, talents and money in support of the work of Christ Jesus in the Church, the village and the world.

I saw the joy in the eyes and actions of Gloria when she made it possible for St. Paul's to have the luxury of a Tracker Organ. I saw the joy in the lives of Florence and Georgia and Dick when they spoke of giving to the Church of St. Paul's. I saw the joy in the eyes of the Sparlings when they made it possible for young people to attend Church camp and that joy was returned in the eyes of the attendees. I see the joy in the eyes of our Vestry in the mundane tasks of governing our Church, joy in the eyes of those who work to get our rectory up to standards, joy in the eyes of those who worked so diligently to call a new rector, joy in the eyes of those who give their time, talents and money to support the everyday needs of our Church and its fabric and continually support the work of Christ in the diocese and in the world. The expressions of joy are unlimited, endless in our parish.

We are children of God, disciples of Jesus Christ who feel called to a ministry of transformation through the joy of giving. We are sojourners who along with many others, have some sense that it is through the understanding of giving and a practice of gratitude and generosity, that we will all grow spiritually, that we will grow into the likeness of the divine generous God in whose image we are created and are called into the joy of giving by virtue of our baptism.

The most joyful parts of the Church year are the Christmastide when we celebrate the joy of God's gift to mankind, Jesus Christ and Easter and His resurrection.

The third most joyful day of the Church year should be Stewardship Sunday when we return thanks for our blessings and for our Lord and Savior. We take our pledge cards to the altar in the name of Christ Jesus for the support of the fabric and all the programs of our Church.

Perhaps we should have a New Orleans jazz band leading us on our way, playing "When the Saints go Marching in", to reflect the joy of being in that number.

One of my favorite English Writers, William Blake wrote: "We are put on this earth but a short time to bear the beams of love. Give your heart in service, love and joy."

So be it.

Chapter 5 – A Bountiful Harvest

By Marcie Lynch

When we hear the phrase “a bountiful harvest” it may bring to mind expansive fields of wheat, corn, fruit or vegetables just waiting to be picked and put to good use.

If we think of a bountiful harvest in relation to stewardship, we may think of our alms basins overflowing with financial support.

But to St. Paul’s a bountiful harvest hopefully means much more. As you’ve heard over the last few weeks and have hopefully noticed on the new pledge cards, our stewardship campaign this year is not just about making a financial pledge, it’s about considering sharing your time and talents as well. These three elements together should speak to our stewardship commitment.

We are all familiar with the parable in Matthew 13 about the sower throwing his seeds upon varying types of soil. We learn that just planting the seed does not make the plant grow; it needs the three elements of good soil, sun and water. Jesus tells us that if the soil is not rich and firm, the plants will not take root. If there is no sun, the plants will not bloom. If there is no water, the plants wither and die.

In stewardship there are also three elements. And if we were to view St. Paul’s as a garden that God has commissioned us to tend, we might see that the first element of Our Time may be compared to the soil. The soil is US - this community. We are rich and strong in our faith in God, love for each other and love for our neighbors. God planted us here to be the foundation of his work in this place. But imagine if you will, what our worship experience would be like without chalice bearers, acolytes, ushers or Sunday school teachers. How would people feel coming into our worship each week without an usher to greet them? How would it be if the priest had to light the candles, do the readings, prepare and distribute communion all by themselves? It sure wouldn’t be warm, welcoming and inclusive. Or if a new family came to seek out a place to worship and begin their child’s Christian education and we had no Sunday school to offer? Would they return?

The element of Sun could be compared to our talents. Our Wardens, Vestry, Treasurer, chair people and their committees, gardeners and handymen – they all have the experience and expertise to keep our doors open, our grounds clean, building functioning and our parish viable and healthy. As a visitor how would you feel approaching the church and seeing the gardens overgrown, the plumbing not working in the bathrooms or no electricity, because there was no one paying the bills? Would you want to continue coming here?

The third element - the water can be equated to our treasure or our financial support. To fulfill our mission and if we expect to grow or even just maintain our membership, we need a priest, an organist, choir director, a parish administrator and of course there are the expenses that are

necessary to keep us going. How could we expect to grow or even maintain our membership without these key people or without a functioning worship and fellowship space? Think about what type of statement it would make if our ushers had no bulletins to hand out? If we could only offer Morning Prayer instead of the holy Eucharist each week, how many visitors would return? Or if our worship space was reduced to only the chapel because the expense of lighting and heating the main sanctuary was too great. Would this send the message that we are a healthy parish or one just trying to survive?

Just having a church or “garden” in this case, with these elements does not guarantee success in fulfilling our mission either. We must also know and understand our environment and our strengths and weaknesses.

Over the last few years I’ve planted a vegetable garden in my backyard. For the first couple of seasons, I tried to plant bell peppers. No matter how much care and tending to them that I did, they never seemed to produce. The few I did get were small and bitter tasting. Even planting them in the same section where other plants thrive, I could not get a good result. Even though I love bell peppers, I finally had to give up on planting them.

Well, sometimes we have what we think are wonderful ideas for programs, events or activities and we spend a great deal of time, manpower and sometimes money to put them together but the result is less than we expect. We keep trying and trying but the result doesn’t seem to change. At some point we must realize that although the idea sounds good and has worked elsewhere, it just may not be right for us. We shouldn’t be discouraged by this or view this as a failure, but rather see it in terms that we are able to see our parish for what it is and what we are capable of and build on that.

In my garden, I also grow tomatoes, something that flourishes. And it just figures, I don’t like raw tomatoes. However, because my plants grow so plentiful, I have to find other ways to prepare them that make them worthwhile to grow. I usually crush them and freeze them to use later for sauce for spaghetti and other dishes that my family and I like. I also give a lot away to my family and friends. Even though raw tomatoes are not something that I like, they sure don’t go to waste.

St. Paul’s may have programs or activities that do not interest you and you may think “why are we doing that or investing time and money in that?” We, as a congregation represent varying age groups and interests and what appeals to me may not appeal to you or vice versa. But that’s ok as long as we realize that we need to feed and nourish all our members, not just a select group or not just our own needs. Some may like serious bible study, some like fun activities that include all ages, some may like activities only for their own age group, and some may want programs for the youth or programs for our seniors. It is ok if a particular program or event does not appeal to you, because the next that comes along just may be the right one for you.

Here in our St. Paul's garden, we can already see some fruits to be thankful for, our beautiful worship space, a great space for fellowship downstairs, our kitchen as a means to feed the community, all our wonderful dedicated volunteers during worship, activities, fundraisers and those that dedicate so much of themselves to the leadership of our parish.

So as you prayerfully consider your promise with God for your commitment for the coming year, please remember that whatever commitment you make it can only enhance what we already have. Remember stewardship is the care of something that has been entrusted to us. As our New Testament reading this morning from Timothy said "Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us".

Let's keep tending God's beautiful garden so that we may see the fruits of our labors and enjoy - a bountiful harvest – indeed.

Chapter 6 – Stepping Up to the Plate

By Teresa Carter

Hearing the phrase “stepping up to the plate” for me brought to mind a softball or baseball game. The batter, who is only one member of an entire team working together, steps up to home plate to do his/her best to further the team in hopes of making that difference it takes to win the game.

It’s not very different for us. Each one of us is only one member of St. Paul’s, but working together as one we can make that difference it takes. Over the past few Sundays we’ve heard from members of our stewardship committee. Our hope is to bring to heart and mind a true understanding of what “stewardship” means, and how important it is for each of us to be active, engaged members of St. Paul’s.

Chapter 1 Mapping our Priorities: This chapter talks about the true or actual definition of “stewardship”. The conducting, supervising, or managing of something, especially the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one’s care. We heard about a violinist who, knowing the value and historic importance of his violin, chose to view his possession of the instrument as a responsibility of preservation for those who will come after him, rather than seeing it for its monetary worth. He was a good steward of his violin. We can do the same with St. Paul’s. We can chose to treat our church with that same sense of responsibility.

Chapter 2 Your Money’s Journey: Here we are reminded of where your pledge dollars are spent. The list is long, very long. There are utility bills, personnel costs and buildings to maintain. We have a mortgage to pay, a Christian education program, a youth program and a music program to support. We host special services and take opportunities to reach outside our church walls to bring God’s love to the community. Our mission is to share the word of God and minister to those who can’t, for whatever reason, come to us. Having a healthy parish is vital to carrying out our mission. The journey your pledge takes is full, and every destination is important to life at St. Paul’s.

Chapter 3 Defining Spirituality and Stewardship: In this chapter we’re given three definitions of spirituality. All are worth repeating, but I’ve chosen two: 1 - Spirituality is a selfless sense of love and compassion for others, respect and concern for well-being of life, and reverence for the universe and its creation. 2 - Spirituality is the innate human need to connect with something larger than ourselves. What I take from these definitions is that by God’s design we simply need each other, and we need to belong to something that creates a “greater good”. It makes us whole. We all possess individual characteristics, but at some point, because we all come from God, we have to come together for the same purpose; the purpose of putting ourselves aside to live out the plan “He” intended for us. You could think of stewardship as how you give of “yourself”, and how you share who you are. Look around you. Everyone you see has been blessed with a talent or gift. Imagine the result if we came together as one.

Chapter 4 Across the Ages: We have the pleasure of hearing from our amazing young adults in this chapter. This year there will be special pledge cards for our youngest members. These pledge cards were designed by the young adults on our stewardship committee (very cool!). One of the messages from our teens is how your pledge has led to friendships developed at camp, Happening and through helping with the float. Being able to provide scholarship support makes a positive impact on the personal lives of our teens. They're building friendships through our financial support, and our willingness to organize opportunities to bring them together.

Next we have words of wisdom **for** our youngest members **from** our oldest teens; "you can help out at events and fundraisers like Fish Fry, participate in FYMO and give some of your allowance to the church. Something as easy as coming to church regularly can be part of your pledge." Who can argue with that?

To all St. Paul's young people: We know your involvement depends on your parents, grandparents or other family members being able to bring you to activities. Some things are beyond your control. We love seeing you with your families at Church. It's great to see you carry the hands up to the altar. When you acolyte and help our ushers, it means a lot to us. You may not realize it, but you are making a big difference. When you participate in a service or help at an event, you're helping our church carry out its mission to serve God. You're helping God. We appreciate each one of you, and we want you to know St. Paul's wouldn't be the same without you.

Chapter 5 A Bountiful Harvest: For some, talk of Stewardship brings to mind financial giving. Chapter five brings to light, and reminds us there are other elements to stewardship; other ways we can give. Yes, we need financial support to pay the bills. As long as St. Paul's is open, there will be a need for financial support (and I'm not trying to talk you out of it). We need our utilities to make coffee for coffee hour, to heat the building during the winter, to make our bathrooms functional, and so on...but we are *so much more* than that. We are programs, services, outreach, a church building, a Rectory, and a family and sense of security for some. Making all of that happen requires the other elements, the human elements; time and talent. We need Sunday school teachers, study group leaders and grounds keepers. We need someone to clean, greet our guests and pay the bills. All of that can't happen by its self. That's where we come in. There are opportunities for both long and short term commitments. You could help once a week, once a month or once in a while. Could you offer a few minutes to help clean up after coffee hour? We're working at the Rectory. Do you have a flair for interior design?

It simply can't be done by one person, or small group of people. St. Paul's needs all of us. Please take the time to consider how you can help. Each one of us has something to offer. We want to continue, and hopefully add to our ministry here. To do this we have to come together. Each of us, with our own talents and gifts can make that difference by "Stepping up to the Plate".

Epilogue

Words for Thought

From The Secret Daily Teachings

The fastest way to receive is to give, because giving starts the reciprocal action of receiving. We all receive according to how much we give. Give the best of you everywhere you go. Give a smile. Give thanks. Give kindness. Give love.

Your giving should be a giving without expectation of return - a giving for the sheer joy of it.

May the joy be with you,

Rhonda Byrne

The Secret... bringing joy to billions

PROSPERITY

I give generously and receive abundantly.

God is the great divine energy present everywhere. As a creation of God, I am immersed in and part of that energy. It is in giving generously and receiving fully that I connect with the God-energy in me. When I act thoughtfully towards another, I receive thoughtfulness in return. As I give love to others, I feel more fully loved. As I circulate my financial resources with joy and gratitude, I find that my life is richly blessed with experiences and sustenance that bring me even greater joy.

I give thanks for friends and loved ones, for joyful activities and for all the good that life offers. I give generously, receive abundantly and my life is truly blessed.

But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all things will be given to you as well. ---Mathew 6:33

PROSPERITY

I live in an abundant universe.

Jesus taught a very simple, profound truth: When you give generously and joyfully, you will receive in equal measure. My life is filled with opportunities to give to others, and as I do, the universe blesses me in abundance.

When I smile and say hello to a stranger or open a door for a fellow shopper, I am taking part in life's flow of giving and receiving. My mind and heart are attuned to the many opportunities I have to give and share. I give generously and appreciate all I receive.

In meditation, I send powerful affirmations of abundance to anyone struggling with thoughts of lack. As I give, I receive, sharing in the abundance that blesses us all.

Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap.—Luke 6:38

PROSPERITY

Divine substance overflows into my life.

Prosperity means many things to many people. To some, prosperity means employment, to others a home, to others more money in the bank. These all signify prosperity, but prosperity is more than outer manifestations. Prosperity is the inner, underlying substance of God that permeates and penetrates all, the substance out of which all things are formed.

Material good is but evidence of the all-providing substance of God. Outer conditions come and go; they fluctuate and change, but the substance of God is enduring and unchanging. It can be depended on at all times, in all circumstances.

I am not anxious about my life, because my good is centered in God and I know my needs will be met.

All these things will be given to you.--Matthew 6:33