

ON STEWARDSHIP
27/28 SEPTEMBER 2014

Each early fall we, as a parish, take the time to focus our attention on ourselves as *Christian stewards*. Next weekend we will be having our Ministry Fair, showcasing activities, committees, and opportunities for everybody's time and talents.

The face-page of our weekly bulletin carries a tag-line identifying St. Peter Church as "A Stewardship Parish." What does that mean? More to the point, what does it mean to you to be considered a Stewardship Parish? If we're honest with ourselves, most probably don't give the description a moment's thought – that is, assuming we even notice it on the bulletin. Still, there it is all the same: we boldly hold ourselves out proudly and publicly as a parish known for having embraced Christian stewardship.

Essentially, *stewardship is about doing justice*. "Justice is the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor." Today, I will emphasize the phrase, "constant and firm will to give" with a primary emphasis on "the will," on decision.

People are neither accidentally nor automatically stewards of anything. Stewardship is a burden a person consciously and deliberately chooses to pick up and shoulder. It is only intentionally that an individual can exercise stewardship.

We have to be *intentionally Catholic*. We have to be *intentional disciples*. It is not possible to be an unintentional disciple. Although one may argue that it is possible to be "culturally Catholic" (you might say, that is, unintentionally Catholic perhaps by an accident of birth to Catholic parents), the facts show that merely growing up Catholic is no longer a good indicator that a person will practice Catholicism as an adult. In the United States, only 30% of people who were raised Catholic now attend Mass at least once a month; another 38% say they are still Catholic but seldom or never attend Mass; and 32% of people raised Catholic no longer consider

themselves to be Catholic. It is becoming less and less possible to be merely culturally Catholic and impossible to be unintentionally Catholic. In this day and age, if someone wants to be a disciple of Christ and – in particular – if one identifies oneself as a Roman Catholic, then the only way he or she can do that with any degree of authenticity is *intentionally*, which is to say *consciously, deliberately* and *actively*.

How *intentionally* do you and I live our Catholic Faith or identify ourselves as “Catholic?”

In what ways do you and I reveal to people that we are truly disciples of Jesus Christ?

According to another national study, 6.4% of registered parishioners contribute 80% of the

volunteer hours in a parish; 6.8% of registered parishioners donate 80% of the financial

contributions; and 84% of the 6.4 and 6.8 are the same people. In other words, on average only

about 7% of Catholics are *intentionally, deliberately, actively Catholic* or (in Matthew Kelly’s

phrasing) are *dynamically Catholic*. That means 93% of Catholics are not meaningfully engaged

with or connected to their parishes; that 93% of Catholics do almost nothing in, or for, their

parishes in terms of time spent, talent provided, or treasure contributed.

Today, I’m issuing a challenge. I am challenging every parishioner to move more deeply into the mystery of the Church, to become more deliberate practicing the Faith, and to become more active as a steward of St. Peter Church’s temporal assets and liabilities. I am challenging each to become a more *intentional disciple of Jesus Christ*, a more *intentional Catholic*, and a more *intentional parishioner* by consciously assuming your share of personal responsibility for the needs of St. Peter Parish.

I’m asking everyone for small changes in your parish participation. I am asking every parishioner to set *time, talent, and treasure offering goals* for the coming year. Henry David Thoreau observed, “In the long run, men only hit what they aim at.” Set and aim at some

measurables in order to mark your progress in discipleship. I am **challenging every parish household to participate on average 1 hour a week (i.e. 4 hours a month) in a parish activity** (besides the hour you spend in Mass each Sunday, of course). It might be attending a talk, a program of study, or a retreat; coming to – or better yet – volunteering at Parish social events; joining the choir, attending Youth Group gatherings or STARS gatherings, becoming a Knight of Columbus: things like that. **I am challenging every parish household to offer on average 1 hour a week (i.e. 4 hours a month) some talent, skill, or expertise to the parish.** It might be a physical labor, an organizational knack, a professional interest: something like that. **These first two challenges emphasize time and talents, and the two might overlap, so understand that I'm not asking for a total of 8 hours of your time and talent, but only 4 each month.** Lastly, **I am challenging every parish household to contribute an additional 1% of your income to the parish collection. If you are not yet contributing at a 1% rate, please make an effort to reach that rate. If you are already contributing at or above the 1% rate, please make an effort to increase your rate to one more percent. The longer term goal I hope you will set is to increase contributions by an additional 1% each year until all registered households are tithing at 5% of their gross income to the present and future needs of St. Peter Church and it's parishioners.**

Be *intentional disciples*, be *intentional Catholics*, embrace Stewardship. After all, we do think of ourselves as “A Stewardship Parish.” The bulletin tells us so. Please make it mean something to you.

Thank you and may God bless you.

Fr. Mark Summers
Pastor, St. Peter Catholic Church

