

Stewardship: A Foundation for a Healthy Parish

Why is stewardship considered so fundamental to the health of a parish? First, we'll look at stewardship strictly in terms of parish financial support. Then, we'll take a broader perspective.

Our basic guideline for practicing financial stewardship is to tithe—that is, to give 10% of one's income—using the following allocation: 5% to parish offertory, 1% to the diocesan Catholic Services Appeal, and 4% to other charitable causes. The ancient guideline of offering 10% of one's income to God can be traced to numerous Old Testament mandates to return one's firstfruits to God (e.g., Leviticus 27:32). In the New Testament, we see a much higher standard of giving practiced among early Christians, who shared everything in common (e.g., Acts 2:44,45).

Some simple calculations demonstrate that our parish offertory would rise dramatically if most of our parishioners followed the tithing guideline. Our parish has between 1,200 and 1,300 registered households. According to census bureau data, the median family income for Holland in 2012 was about \$64,000. So, if each parish family had had this income in FY 2014 and contributed 5% of it to offertory, our total offertory would have exceeded \$3.8 million, more than *four times* our actual FY 2014 offertory. Even if the income of many parish families is much less than \$64,000, we clearly have room for tremendous improvement in our offertory.

One advantage of a robust offertory is that, in addition to supporting regular operations, it would allow the parish to build up reserves for capital projects and hard economic times. This would reduce or eliminate the need for capital campaigns such as *Growing our Faith*.

But to view stewardship simply as a means of providing sufficient financial support for a parish would be a mistake. Stewardship is fundamentally a spiritual practice. A steward is one who manages another's resources so that they are used wisely. So, when we practice stewardship, we are acknowledging that everything we have—including our time and talent—is a gift from God and is to be used to enrich the lives of ourselves *and* others.

When we view our blessings as gifts to be shared, we live a life of gratitude, trust, and generosity. Our purpose in life goes far beyond fulfilling our own needs and wants. We become part of a community of believers who work together to continue Christ's mission of bringing abundant life to all. Our giving becomes planned, sacrificial, and proportional, but not burdensome.

Our weak economy and the lack of job security experienced by so many understandably make us nervous. The practice of stewardship helps to keep such concerns in perspective. We learn to place greater trust in God's providence and to concentrate on living as disciples of Jesus. This can only benefit us, both personally and as a community of faith.

How much should your family contribute to the offertory? That's for you to discern. For some people, tithing may be a goal to work toward, perhaps requiring adjustments in lifestyle. Others may already tithe and feel that their current offering is appropriate. For still others, a tithe might represent only surplus wealth rather than a true sacrifice. Please pray for guidance, while reflecting on your blessings, God's providence, and the needs of the church. May our generous offerings bear much fruit as we, the parishioners of St. Francis de Sales Church, continue on the path to the Kingdom of God.