

What Return Shall We Make

Vince Ambrosetti

What re - turn shall we make to the Lord, our God for
 all that God has giv - en us, for all that God has
 done for us.

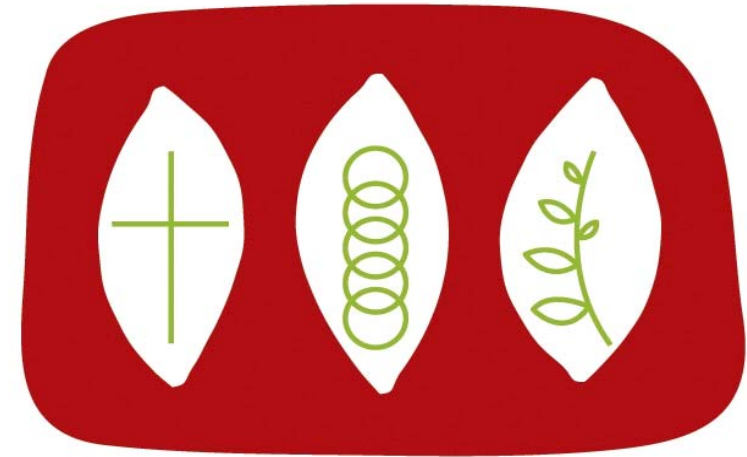
1. I will bless the Lord; I will sing his praise.
 2. I have made my vows; I will keep my word.
 3. Hap - py shall I live; hap - py shall I die.
 4. Priv - i - leged am I ser - vant of my God.

1. Of his love I will sing all through - out my days.
 2. In the ser - vice of my God, I give you my life.
 3. for my God has giv - en me the treas - ure of your love.
 4. I will of - fer thanks and praise blest am I to serve.

1. I will take his cup; I will call his name
 2. Pre - cious in his eyes are the faith - ful ones;
 3. Ser - vant of my Lord, I could want no more
 4. Priv - i - leged am I; stand - ing here with you.

1. and re - count just how good God has been to us. _____
 2. noth - ing have I sac - ri - ficed worth - y of your love. _____
 3. than to stand here with you, hum - ble child of God. _____
 4. I could want noth - ing more than to do your will. _____

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ADVANCING
THE MISSION

A Five Week Daily Personal Prayer Journey

for the
Stewardship Campaign:
Advancing the Mission



written by
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for the
Department of Stewardship & Pastoral Services

This booklet was designed to guide readers through the five weeks of the Inspirational Phase of the Stewardship Campaign: *Advancing the Mission*. The focus topics for the Inspirational Phase are:

Week One: Stewardship as a Way of Life
Week Two: Prayer
Week Three: Service
Week Four: Sharing
Week Five: Commitment/Pledging

It is our hope and prayer that your commitment to this five week journey of quiet reflection and contemplation on stewardship themes will lead you to new insights truly inspired by God.

References

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Points to Ponder

If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, and a roof overhead . . . you are richer than 75% of this world.

If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish some place . . . you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy.

If you woke up this morning healthy . . . you are more blessed than the million who will not survive this week.

If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pangs of starvation . . . you are ahead of 500 million people in the world.

If you can attend a religious service without fear of harassment, arrest, torture, or death . . . you are more blessed than three billion people in the world.

If you can hold someone's hand, hug them, or even touch them on the shoulder . . . you are blessed because you can offer a healing touch.

If you can read this message, you are more blessed than over two billion people in the world that cannot read at all.

Anonymous

Week Five – Commitment/Pledging
SATURDAY

The Hidden God

Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads,
Whom do you worship in this lonely dark corner of the temple with all the
doors shut?
Open your eyes and see that God is not in front of you.
He is there where the farmer is tilling the hard ground and where the laborer is
breaking stones.
He is with them in the sun and the rain and his garment is covered with dust.
Put off your holy cloak and like him come down on to the dusty soil.
Deliverance? Where will you find deliverance?
Our master himself has joyfully taken on the bonds of creation; he is bound
with us forever.
Come out of your meditations and leave aside the flowers and the incense;
What harm is there if your clothes become tattered and stained?
Meet him and stand by him in toil and in the sweat of your brow.

by Rabindranath Tagore

*“Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do
the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these.”*
John 14:12

Megan McKenna writes in her book *Send My Roots Rain*:

“Jesus’ own words vividly describe who we are and how we are to live.
Our times call for a response of Spirit and grace to the crying needs of
individuals and the world. We must begin with ourselves, our parishes, and
our communities.

The future of the church depends on each of us, each of our communities,
responding in the power of the Spirit, under the challenge of the Scripture,
with the support of other communities, to the realities of our times. No less is
asked of us, and no more.

What we do or do not do in the immediate future will say a great deal to
our children and to the earth. We must have something helpful and freeing to
say to them. We must offer ethical responses to the demands of our day. If we
are to follow Jesus so that others can see and take heart, we must begin again
at the beginning, as novices, new Christians, followers of the Way.”

How will you begin again?

What will you do now, not in the future, but now, today,
this week, in response to the stewardship campaign?



Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Nearly 2,000 years ago, Jesus challenged the
Apostles to go forward and make disciples
of all nations (Matthew 28:19). In doing so,
Jesus entrusted them with the awesome
responsibility of continuing his work, of
Advancing His Mission.

Here in our diocese, each individual and family has been asked to
consider prayerfully how they can assist in advancing the mission, to
renew and grow the Church. This stewardship campaign will afford
each member of the Church of Green Bay the opportunity to ask God,
“What do you want to accomplish through me?” Relying on God’s
will and grace on what is the personal answer to that question will
undoubtedly generate amazing responses, a deeper relationship with
God and a deeper relationship the Church.

Through prayer and reflection, we know that God has gifted us with
talents and resources that we can generously share with others.

This five week Daily Prayer Booklet has been designed to help in that
process; six to ten minute reflections on the stewardship themes of
prayer, service, and sharing are found within. I invite you to join me
in the use of this prayer guide. I am truly excited about the
possibilities that will unfold and be revealed to us as individuals, as
families, as parish communities, and as the Church of Green Bay.

Grateful for the belief that “Nothing is Impossible
with God,” I am,

Your Brother in Christ,

Most Reverend David A. Zubik



Week One – Stewardship as a Way of Life
SUNDAY

“The earth is the Lord’s and all it holds, the world and all who live there.”
Psalm 24:1

History. Some people find it fascinating. For others, the word alone causes shivers to run down their spines. Too many names, dates, and places to keep straight!

But history is not just about dates and events. History is actually a study of His-story, God’s story, because God is the ultimate creator of time, places, and people.

You and I - everyone – past, present, and future – lives in God’s story. And like the characters in the stories written by the best novelists, when our turn comes to enter the story, we each have a vital role to play.

What has been your role in God’s story?

Everything on this earth comes from God and belongs to God. This is fairly obvious when we marvel at the beauty of the sunset or the majesty of the mountains – things that no human is able to create.

Likewise, we often use phrases like “God-given talent” in describing the works of people like Mozart and Michelangelo.

But do we acknowledge (without being prompted!) that the crops we might grow and the skyscrapers we might build are also the result of “God-given talent?”

To paraphrase the song “Every breath we take, every move we make” is possible because God made it so and God wills it to continue; it is indeed, God’s story.

Thank you, God, for the air we breathe...

may we keep it smog-free!

Thank you, God, for the water we drink...

may we keep it pure and clean!

Thank you, God, for making ME...

may I never forget that all that I have

and all that I do truly belongs to you!

What could your role in God’s story be?

Week Five – Commitment/Pledging
FRIDAY

Fr. John Burger wrote in the February 2006 edition of the Columban Missions magazine:

“They said, ‘John the Baptist has sent us to you to ask, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?’ He said to them in reply. ‘Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: The blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.’” Luke 7:20, 22

As far back as the Exodus, there is plenty of evidence that God has been on the side of the poor and wants His people to be there also.

“You shall not molest or oppress an alien for you yourselves were once aliens in Egypt.”
Exodus 22:20

This short sentence is as full of meaning for us in our day as it was when it was written three millennia ago.

In Chapter 7 of the Gospel of St. Luke, the disciples of John came to Jesus, trying to determine what He was about. Jesus told them to make up their minds about Him according to what He was doing and who He was helping.

I think it would be truly wonderful if people of other faiths and no faith could look at Catholic Christians in action and from what they see, come to an understanding of what we truly believe. Let’s pray the day will soon come when the face we present to the world is the face of a people who, like the Good Samaritan, is moved by compassion.

But is our compassion genuine if our heart goes out to someone in a bad situation while we deliberately close our eyes to how that situation came about?

Injustice and poverty rarely come about only by misfortune or accident. They are precipitated by structural problems, such as corruption in society or the gross misuse of political and economic power. Poverty and the suffering that accompanies it are often the result of sinful societal structures. It is overwhelming, but we cannot allow it to overwhelm us.

The tradition we have received from the prophets and saints calls for us to reach out to individuals and groups who are abandoned, excluded and oppressed. They are special to God, and if we join forces with them, we will share His special blessing.”

When people look at you “in action” what would their conclusions be?

What will your commitment to prayer, service, and sharing look like?

Week Five – Commitment/Pledging
THURSDAY

Soup Suppers: Not Just For Lent Any More

Ralph and Judy had been taking their children, to their parish's Lenten Soup Suppers since the children were small. One day a week during Lent, the parish served a Soup Supper followed by Stations of the Cross. There was no charge for this simple meal of soup and bread. People were simply asked to make a free will offering, with the suggestion they give whatever it would have cost to feed their family that night.

Then came the night of the "dilemma" – actually two dilemmas. Joe's 12th birthday was on a Soup Supper night, but they always went to dinner at their favorite restaurants to celebrate birthdays. It was Joe that made the decision: "I choose St. Matthew's Soup Supper." So, that decision was made, but... how much should they put in the offering? The usual \$10? Or, the \$50 they would have spent at the restaurant?

Joe said, "It's a no-brainer, Dad. This is my birthday dinner. It would have cost \$50, so, \$50 it is." They felt so good that night that as each of their birthdays rolled around, they celebrated with a simple soup supper at home, donating \$50 to a local food pantry.

To continue their new tradition, once a month, they hold a family soup supper, and donate \$75 to the food pantry.

"He said to me: Son of man, eat what is before you; eat this scroll, then go, speak to the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth and he gave me the scroll to eat. Son of man, he then said to me, feed your belly and fill your stomach with this scroll I am giving you. I ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. He said: Son of man, go now to the house of Israel, and speak my words to them."

Ezekiel 2:1-4

Like Ezekiel, when we fill our beings with the word of God, it becomes second nature to us to do his will. Sometimes that might mean telling others about the wonders of God. More often, it means showing them God loves through our actions.

What actions of prayer, service, and sharing can you commit to in an effort to bring the love of God to others?

Week One – Stewardship as a Way of Life
MONDAY

In days to come, the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest mountain and raised above the hills. All nations shall stream toward it; many peoples shall come and say: "Come, let us climb the Lord's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths."

Isaiah 2:2-4

When I was a child, our family would take day trips from our home town to northern Minnesota. Because I was one of the oldest, I had the privilege of being one of my dad's map-readers.

Driving along, dad would ask for the name of the next town, the distance to that town, or the name of the next road we would cross. We would calculate the distance to our destination, or how far we would have to go if we took a side trip. Not only did I become an expert map-reader, but I learned many other life-lessons during these trips, such as:

- If you don't know your destination, you'll never know if you're on the right path.
- Many roads may lead to your destination, but some are easier to travel.
- Detours aren't necessarily a bad thing; they may hold an adventure.
- If you get lost, seek help!

When was the last time you checked to see if your life-path is leading you to your desired destination?

What can you do if the current life-path is not leading you there?

Ultimately, we each want to walk in God's path, to follow God's ways but sometimes lose our way

We forget the critical importance of that phrase from Isaiah "that he may instruct us in his ways."

Early Christians were often referred to as followers of "The Way" Scripture describes their life-style:

They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.

They would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's needs. Acts 2:42, 45

Instruction, communal support, sacraments and prayer, sharing possessions (not just "wealth" or "abundance" but basic necessities) concern for the needs of all.

How well do you follow "The Way" today?

Week One – Stewardship as a Way of Life
TUESDAY

“You have been told what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: only to do the right, to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God.”

Micah 6:8

If you live in Wisconsin, you know snow! Fat, fluffy flakes, soundlessly hitting the ground. What does a snowflake weigh?

Catch one. Catch two. Catch ten. Their weight is so miniscule, it’s indiscernible.

But, watch as hundreds fall, then thousands, millions... A shovel-full becomes too heavy to lift. Branches crack and break unable to bear the weight. Roads are clogged; walking takes more energy than it’s worth! And, when they melt, they fill the streams, saturating the ground so spring crops can grow.

We are like the snowflakes. Alone we might think we have no discernible impact on the world. But when we add our efforts to the efforts of others, the impact can be extraordinary.

Are you ready to add your prayer, your service, your sharing to help your parish or community impact the needs of those around you or the larger world? Are you meant to be that first snowflake, starting a new endeavor that will gather the resources of others together in addressing an unmet need?

Remember: It all starts with one snowflake!

Clear and concise, Micah 6:8 applies as much today as it did 2,800 years ago when first written.

“You have been told what is good...” We have been told by priests, teachers, parents, and TV commercials. Which voices are you listening to?

“...what the Lord requires of you” Not “recommends” or “suggests” but requires!

“... to do the right, to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God.” Only if you feel like it? Only when you want to? Only if you are as wealthy as Oprah?

Jesus’ answer to those questions has been referred to as The Golden Rule:

“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

Luke 6:31

What would Jesus do? Really, what *would* Jesus do?

Week Five – Commitment/Pledging
WEDNESDAY

“At the present time, with the development of more rapid facilities for communication, with the barrier of distance separating men greatly reduced, with the inhabitants of the entire globe becoming one great family, these charitable activities and works have become more urgent and universal.

Wherever there are people in need of food and drink, clothing, housing, medicine, employment or education, wherever men lack the facilities necessary for living a truly human life or are afflicted with serious distress or illness or suffer exile or imprisonment, there Christian charity should seek them out and find them, console them with great solicitude and help them with appropriate relief.

This obligation is imposed above all upon every prosperous nation and person.

In order that the exercise of charity on this scale may be unexceptional in appearance as well as in fact, it is altogether necessary that one should consider in one’s neighbor the image of God in which he has been created, and also Christ the Lord to whom is really offered whatever is given to a needy person.

It is also imperative that the freedom and dignity of the person being helped be respected with the utmost consideration, that the purity of one’s charitable intentions be not stained by seeking one’s own advantage or by striving for domination, and especially that the demands of justice be satisfied lest the giving of what is due in justice be represented as the offering of a charitable gift. Not only the effects but also the causes of these ills must be removed, and the help should be given in such a way that the recipients may gradually be freed from dependence on outsiders and become self-sufficient.

Therefore, the laity should hold in high esteem and, according to their ability, aid the works of charity and projects for social assistance, whether public or private.”

From the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity of Vatican Council II, No. 8

“I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, God’s dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away.’”

Revelation 21:3-4

What will you pledge to do to assist in bringing about justice and not just charity?

Week Five – Commitment/Pledging
TUESDAY

In 1952, C.S. Lewis wrote in his book “Mere Christianity”:

If you have sound nerves and intelligence and health and popularity and a good upbringing, you are likely to be quite satisfied with your character as it is, “Why drag God into it?” you may ask. A certain level of good conduct comes fairly easily to you. Everyone says you are a nice chap and (between ourselves) you agree with them.

You are quite likely to believe that all this niceness is your own doing: you may easily not feel the need for any better kind of goodness. Often people who have all these natural kinds of goodness cannot be brought to recognize their need for Christ at all until, one day, the natural goodness lets them down and their self-satisfaction is shattered. In other words, it is hard for those who are “rich” in this sense to enter the Kingdom.

If you are a nice person – if virtue comes easily to you – beware! Much is expected from those to whom much is given. If you mistake for your own merits what are really God’s gifts to you through nature, and if you are contented with simply being nice, you are still a rebel: and all those gifts will only make you fall more terrible, your corruption more complicated, your bad example more disastrous.

“Niceness” – wholesome, integrated personality – is an excellent thing. We must try by every medical, educational, economic and political means in our power, to produce a world where as many people as possible grow up “nice”; just as we must try to produce a world where all have plenty to eat.

But we must not suppose that even if we succeeded in making everyone nice we should have saved their souls. A world of nice people, content in their own niceness, looking no further, turned away from God, would be just as desperately in need of salvation as a miserable world – and might be more difficult to save.

For mere improvement is not redemption, though redemption always improves people even here and now and will, in the end, improve them to a degree we cannot yet imagine. God became man to turn creatures into sons: not simply to produce better men of the old kind but to produce a new kind of man. It is not like teaching a horse to jump better and better but like turning a horse into a winged creature.

“Much will be expected of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.”

Luke 12:48

What might be expected of you? Nice alone is not enough!

Week One – Stewardship as a Way of Life
WEDNESDAY

Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response, a pastoral letter written by our U.S. Bishops in 1992, is a very readable and inspiring work. It stresses the nature of true stewardship. From the introduction section:

“Genesis tells us that God placed the first human beings in a garden to practice stewardship there – ‘to cultivate and care for it’ (Gn 2:15). The world remains a kind of garden... entrusted to the care of men and women for God’s glory and the service of humankind. In its simplest yet deepest sense, this is the Christian stewardship of which the pastoral letter speaks.”

“Who is the Christian steward? One who receives God’s gifts gratefully, cherishes and tends them in a responsible and accountable manner, shares them in justice and love with others, and returns them with increase to the Lord.”

Take a minute to reflect on that last paragraph. Do you:

- receive God’s gifts gratefully?
- tend them in a responsible manner?
- share them in justice and love?
- return them with increase to the Lord?

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroy, and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroy, nor thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.”

Matthew 6:19-21

Hurricanes, tornadoes, mud slides, floods... All too often we hear stories of people hit by natural disasters. Generally, people have two reactions – often spoken in the same breath: “We’ve lost everything! Thank God no one was hurt!”

It is at those traumatic moments we become very aware of the real treasures in life: family, friends, relationships, love, faith, God.

What will you do to invest in the treasures that truly matter?

Week One – Stewardship as a Way of Life
THURSDAY

In her book, *Out of the Ordinary*, author Joyce Rupp writes:

“While I was deciding which cereal to eat this morning, you were searching the ground for leftover grains from the passing wheat truck.

While I was choosing between diet and regular soda, your parched lips were yearning for a sip of water.

While I complained about the poor service in the restaurant, you were gratefully eating a bowl of rice.

While I scanned the ads for a bargain on a new piece of clothing, you put on the same shirt and pants that you’ve worn for many months.

While I built a fourteen-room house for the three of us, your family of ten found shelter in a one-room hut.

While I went to church last Sunday and felt more than slightly bored, you stood on the land and felt gratitude to God for being alive one more day.”

“To the angel of the church in Laodicea, write this:

‘The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the source of God’s creation, says this: “I know your works; I know that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.”’ Revelation 3:14-16

Cold or hot... hot or cold...choose a side, form an opinion, do it or make a clear decision not to. Lukewarm... mediocre, not a “yes” or a “no” but “maybe, if I feel like it” or “maybe, if I have time” or “maybe, if I have nothing better to do.”

God would rather have you think, form an opinion and act or have a conscience concrete reason why you won’t, because opinions and reasons can be changed if they are wrong.

Lukewarm people don’t bother to investigate, analyze, reflect, and make firm decisions. Their lack of action, flip-flopping, and middle of the road reactions are at the whim of their moods at the moment.

On what issues are you hot or cold? Have you formed your opinions and based your actions on concrete information, prayerful reflection, consistent with the Church’s teachings?

When are you lukewarm?

What steps can you take to change the temperature?

Week Five – Commitment/Pledging
MONDAY

Every Christmas it was the same: piles of Christmas presents for the 25 people spanning three generations that gathered every Christmas Eve at Grandma’s house. Within a time span of one hour, there were mountains of torn wrapping paper to be gathered up.

Everyone had received a number of gifts, but most were items that weren’t really needed or even strongly desired.

A few days later, news of the tsunami filled the airwaves. Sue looked at the pile of gifts under their tree, appalled at her excess when others had nothing. A phone call to Debbie, then Dick, and a new plan was devised. All agreed the adults in the family would celebrate future Christmases quite differently.

Each family put money into a Christmas Club Account, as they had always done. But when the next Christmas Eve rolled around, each adult member of the clan randomly selected one box to open. Inside the box was a card saying: “A donation of \$100 will be given in your name to [charity’s name].” The person who wrapped the gift had selected the charity that would receive the donation.

The adults still had the fun of opening gifts, but now also had the satisfaction of knowing their “gifts” would help many other people in need.

A new family tradition was born.

“God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him. If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him?

Let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth.”

1 John 4:16b, 3:17-18

What new family tradition will you begin to share your love by sharing your money with those in need?



**Week Five – Commitment/Pledging
SUNDAY**

Our Baptismal promises contain this question:

“Do you reject the glamour of evil and refuse to be mastered by sin?”

The “glamour of evil” shows itself in many ways. One of the most dominant in this country is materialism – “wants” becoming “needs” so that your budget is stretched to the limit and you have no money to assist with the real needs of others.

We don’t think of ourselves as “greedy”. We’re just living like everyone else lives. Aren’t we? Right?

“Social statisticians tell us that if the earth’s population were a village of 100 people, there would be 57 Asians, 21 Europeans, 8 African. Only 14 people in the village would be from both North and South America combined. Seventy of the people in this village would be nonwhite. Seventy would be non-Christian. Seventy would be illiterate. Fifty of them would be malnourished. Fifty percent of all the money in the village would be held by six people – and all of them would be white, male Americans...”

National Catholic Reporter, Feb. 20, 1998

“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,’ but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

James 2:14-17

It could not be much more blunt than that. “Works” – assisting those who are in need – is not an optional dimension of our faith; it’s a fundamental part of being faithful to God.

What will you do to keep yourself aware of the daily needs of others?

What pledge are you ready to make, here and now, this week, to increase your commitment to the “works” of prayer, service, and sharing?

What return shall we make, to the Lord our God, for all that God has given us, for all that God has done for us.

Stewardship Campaign: *Advancing the Mission* Theme Song

**Week One – Stewardship as a Way of Life
FRIDAY**

Descartes, in describing what it means to be human, said, “I think, therefore, I am.” Other cultures have other ways of describing what it means to be human.

In Megan McKenna’s book *Send My Roots Rain* she tells us “ubuntu” is an ancient African word that means “I am what I am because of who we all are together.” It expresses how an individual’s identity is interlinked with the caring, sharing community, in which s/he participates. In other words, “I share, therefore, I am.”

St. Teresa of Avila expressed it this way: “Some people have all they require for their needs... As they avoid mortal sin, they think they have done their duty. They enjoy their riches and give an occasional alm, never consider that their property is not their own, but that God has entrusted it to them as His stewards for the good of the poor, and that they will have to render a strict account of the time they kept it shut up in their money chests, if the poor have suffered from want on account of their hoards and delay.”

How might you complete that sentence?

I _____, therefore, I am.

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’ He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.’” *Matthew 22:36-40*

Pop culture tells us that “Love means never having to say you’re sorry.” St. Paul set a very different standard:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, is not pompous, it is not inflated. It is not rude, it does not seek its own interests. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” *1 Corinthians 13:4-5a, 7*

Want to consider that question again?

I _____, therefore, I am.

**Week One – Stewardship as a Way of Life
SATURDAY**

Back in February of 2006 it seemed that everyone had an opinion on whether or not New Orleans should host its traditional week-long Mardi Gras celebration.

“How can they spend all that money so frivolously when there is so much clean-up that still needs to be done?” the opponents asked.

“Mardi Gras is a part of our identity; we need to host this celebration to remind ourselves that the good times will return some day,” the proponents said.

Three couples came up with this solution: they traveled together to New Orleans, enjoyed the Mardi Gras celebrations spending their money at the local businesses that had re-opened, and then stayed ten more days to assist with the ongoing Hurricane Katrina clean-up.

Practicing stewardship as a way of life doesn’t mean we become prune-faced people who give up all enjoyments in order to help others. Good stewards are able to enjoy life while providing for the needs of others.

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has looked upon his handmaid’s lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed. The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty.”
Luke 1:46b-50, 53

God could have chosen a wealthy home or family with status when it was time for Jesus to be born, but God did not.

God made his dwelling among the poor, the lowly, the needy. Most of Jesus’ miracles were focused on helping those in need.

How much of your prayer, service, and sharing is spent helping those in need?

What might you do yet this week to make some changes to your way of life?



**Week Four – Sharing
SATURDAY**

Janette had only been the parish bookkeeper for 3 months, but her curiosity was peaked, so she approached the pastor. “I know the parishioner’s private lives are their own business, but I’m curious. Each week, one of the parishioners puts \$6 and some change in her contribution envelope. Some weeks, it’s \$6.35, some times it’s \$6.25. One week it was \$6.75. It seems strange that she gives those odd amounts.”

Fr. Bill smiled. “Yes, that’s Molly,” he said. “She told me last year that she has made the decision to tithe 3% of her income to the church. Molly works as a waitress, so the amount of her tithe varies depending on the tips she receives.”

Molly has since married and now has two children, Max and Michael. Janette figures that both boys must receive an allowance of \$5.00 per week, as the parish receives 15 cents from each of them every Sunday in their children’s collections envelopes.

“You shall bring out all the tithes of your produce for that year and deposit them in community stores, that the Levite who has no share in the heritage with you, and also the alien, the orphan, and the widow who belong to your community, may come and eat their fill; so that the Lord, your God, may bless you in all that you undertake.”
Deuteronomy 14:28-29

People who tithe have learned a great secret: If you wait until the end of the month to tithe, there is never enough. However, if you take the tithe out first, somehow the money lasts as long as it would have if you didn’t tithe.

Start with what’s comfortable to you - 2% or 3% if you think you can’t afford more, and wait and see what happens.

If you won’t start now, start with your next increase in compensation. Give half of the increase, even if it makes you uncomfortable.



**Week Four – Sharing
FRIDAY**

Food was scarce. Cupboards were almost bare.

When the tattered old man wandered into town, everyone closed their shutters in the hopes that he wouldn't knock on their doors begging for food.

He reached the town square, and stopped to rest. Then, he got up to gather a few sticks. The children came over to see what he was doing.

"I have a magic stone that makes the best soup in the world," he said. "I'm gathering sticks to start a fire." "Stones can't make soup," the children said. "This one can, because it's magical" he replied.

You probably know the story... The man asks for a pot and some water – that's all he needs to make the magical stone soup. After boiling the stone for awhile, he declares that it's coming along just fine, but if it just had a few carrots, it would really be great and he would share it with whomever brought him some carrots.

He continues to declare how marvelous it is, but it would be even better if it had just a little of this or a little of that. Each time, someone brings the needed ingredient.

In the end, all have shared from their meager cupboards and all share a truly marvelous Stone Soup.

"Give alms in proportion to what you own. If you have great wealth, give alms out of your abundance; if you have but little, distribute even some of that. But do not hesitate to give alms; you will be storing up a goodly treasure for yourself against the day of adversity.

Almsgiving frees one from death, and keeps one from going into the dark abode. Alms are a worthy offering in the sight of the Most High for all who give them." Tobit 4:8-11

Fr. George only talked about money once a year and his comments were always brief. "I don't want the food off your table or the blankets off your children's beds", he would say. "What I want is that carton of cigarettes, that bottle of booze, that concert or movie."

Who taught you about "giving alms?" Who has encouraged and invited you to share your financial resources? When have you felt generous? Can you cultivate this a bit further?

**Week Two – Prayer
SUNDAY**

"Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine, and being a priest of God Most High, he blessed Abram with these words:

'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, the creator of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who delivered your foes into your hands.' Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything." Genesis 14:18-20

Melchizedek was a man ahead of his time. While others were slaughtering animals to sacrifice to their gods, Melchizedek, a Canaanite king living 2000 years before the birth of Jesus, makes an offering of bread and wine.

There is no one "right way" to pray:

Some people pray best on their knees;

others pray best while walking in the woods.

Some people pray best when reading or reciting prayers;

others pray best by simply turning their minds to God in silent wonder.

Some people pray best in quiet solitude;

others pray best surrounded by fellow believers.

Whatever puts you in touch with God, is right for you! But, don't stop there! As you age in wisdom and grace, you may find other prayer methods that deepen your relationship with God.

"For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'"

"In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me'. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes."

"Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord."

1 Corinthians 11:23-27

The Eucharist... the ultimate prayer, a proclamation of Jesus' death, until he comes again in glory at the end of the world.

Each of us are given the great privilege, honor, and responsibility of participating in that amazing prayer, this proclamation of Jesus whenever we receive the Body and Blood of Christ.

How are you living out that prayer, the Eucharist, once you leave the church building and go forth into the world?

Week Two – Prayer
MONDAY

It started as a typical evening. A senior citizen couple had invited some of their children, grandchildren, and the parish priest to dinner. After dinner, everyone was sitting around, chatting, when suddenly grandpa excused himself because he didn't feel well. Grandma, one son and a daughter followed him from the room.

The situation was serious, so while the son called 911, the daughter dashed back to the family room, turned to her children and said, "I want you to pray as hard as you can right now for Grandpa!"

As she turned to leave the room, her 4-year-old son said, "What prayer should I pray, momma?" She admits her tone was abrupt as she said, "I don't care what you pray, just pray something!"

As she turned again to dash back to her parents' side, she heard her young son say, "Angel of God, my guardian dear..."

For most of us, in times of crisis, our thoughts immediately turn to prayer. How interesting, though, that the young woman spontaneously turned to her children, and not the priest, for prayers!

*"Let the children come to me."
Mark 10:14*

It says something about the importance of prayer for this family that a 4 year old would know enough prayers to ask the question, "What prayer should I say?"

And when left on his own, to choose the prayer that best fit the situation, he didn't pray any adult-sounding words, "*Our Father, who art in heaven.*" He didn't pray, "*Hail Mary, full of something called grace.*" The prayer that instinctively was on his lips was the most personal one he knew.

"Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God's love commits me here, ever this day be at my side, to light, to guard, to rule, to guide. Amen."

"*Angel of God.*" A 4-year-old asking that very special angel, the one God had sent to watch over him, to give that same care and protection to his grandpa. Could there be a better 4-year-old prayer than that?

*"Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."
Matthew 18:3*

Week Four – Sharing
THURSDAY

Thanksgiving Day had always been a day of jovial chaos. Uncles, aunts, siblings, spouses, children, tables and chairs covering just about every square foot of floor space.

That was then. Now, the children had grown, and most of the older generation were feasting on the heavenly banquet. Setting a table for 6 for Thanksgiving Dinner just didn't seem right.

A week before Thanksgiving, Marge saw an elderly neighbor at the grocery store. She was buying a Cornish game hen and can of gravy. It would be her Thanksgiving Dinner for one.

That's when the idea hit. Marge started making phone calls – elderly neighbors, single co-workers. On Thanksgiving Day, she happily set the table for 15 and gave thanks to the Lord that once again, her home was filled with jovial chaos.

*"He said to the host who invited him, 'When you hold a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your wealthy neighbors, in case they may invite you back and you have repayment. Rather, when you hold a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.'
Luke 14:12-14*

The next time you're planning a party, a special dinner, or just a backyard barbeque, look around your neighborhood, your office, your parish. Who are the people that seem to be alone?

Are you willing to set the table for one more?

Who feeds the poor when there is no holiday?

What might you and your parish do to insure:

- every child has a birthday party and gifts?
- no one is without heat in the winter?
- everyone is safe from heatstroke?

Week Four – Sharing
WEDNESDAY

“Those who make private property of the gifts of God pretend in vain to be innocent, for in thus retaining the subsistence of the poor, they are the murderers of those who die every day for want of it.”

Cura Pastoralis by St. Gregory the Great

Strong words! Words we’d like to ignore! And, the world has been ignoring them for 1,400 years!

“Social Justice”, “Stewardship”, “Social Concerns” are not new concepts. The Catholic Church has been speaking out on behalf of the poor for some 2000 years.

Consider these facts:

- * 240,000 people could be fed for a year with the food Americans waste each day
- * The United Nations estimates that providing basic education, health care, food, and clean water to every person in the world would cost an additional \$40 billion per year – which is less than 4% of the combined wealth of the 225 richest people in the world

[Statistics from Megan McKenna, p. 335, *Send My Roots Rain* © 2003. Doubleday, New York.]

“The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common. There was no needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale, and put them at the feet of the apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need.”

Acts 4:32,34

We tell ourselves this would never work in today’s world, and maybe we are right. But, the principle still applies.

How are you helping to take care of the needy in your family, your community, the world?

What does it mean to do this without judgment?

Week Two – Prayer
TUESDAY

Ruth was sick and tired of being sick and tired. The doctors told her to have patience, eventually the drugs and therapy would work and she’d start to feel better. But, “eventually” had gone on for months with very little change.

Monday morning, her sister Ellie called her. “Would you like to go with me to ‘Women at the Well’ this morning?” Ellie asked. Women at the Well was a women’s prayer and Bible Study group that met once a week. Every week Ellie invited Ruth to come along and every week Ruth said, “maybe next week”. To Ellie’s surprise, this time Ruth said, “I guess so.”

The other women in the group were pleased to meet the sister that Ellie had been praying for every Monday. Together they spent about 15 minutes on intercessory prayer and were about to move on to the Bible Study when one of the women said, “I think Ruth needs an extra measure of prayer.”

All the women gathered around Ruth, placing their hands on her shoulders and head. They prayed for her healing and then blessed her with Holy Water.

When the morning ended, Ellie drove Ruth home. “How are you feeling, now?” asked Ellie.

Ruth replied, “Sick and tired... but peaceful.”

Ahh, the power of prayer!

“Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray. Is anyone in good spirits? He should sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven.” James 5:13-15

Sometimes, physical healing comes to those who are anointed or prayed for. When physical healing doesn’t come, it doesn’t mean the prayer or anointing “didn’t work”.

Often a healing of the mind takes place. Stress is dissolved. The person feels at peace, able to cope with the physical difficulties.

The power of prayer is real!

In many parishes, the older parishioners or those with conditions that prevent them from serving others in a more physically active manner, are the prayer team of the parish. This spiritual stewardship of prayer grounds everything the parish community does.

Is there someone you know who might become involved with the Stewardship Campaign parish prayer committee with a little bit of encouragement?

**Week Two – Prayer
Wednesday**

Prayer is not just spending time with the Lord. It is partly that – but if it ends there, it is fruitless. No, prayer is dynamic.

Authentic prayer changes us – unmask us, strips us, indicates where growth is needed.

Authentic prayer never leads us to complacency, but needles us, makes us uneasy at times.

Teresa of Avila

A quick Our Father or Hail Mary... a few minutes spent praying the rosary... all prayer is good. But, when you pray, do you take the time to listen for God's answer?

It might come in the form of words.

It might come as a feeling, a sensation, a mood.

It might come as an image of someone who needs your help,
or a thought of how you should spend your afternoon.

When you pray, take the time to sit quietly and really listen to God;
you might be surprised by what God tells you!

*“My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me;
yet not as I will, but as you will.”*

Matthew 26:39

Short, simple, straight to the point; “I don't want to have to do this, but...”
The one thing Jesus was NOT going to do was to slink away, hide out,
pretend that God the Almighty did not really matter.

What burdens of this world are you willing to bear, knowing that God
has prepared a place for you at his side for all eternity? Spend some time
praying about it this week. Give God some extra time to respond.



**Week Four – Sharing
TUESDAY**

*“You are not making a gift of your possessions to the poor person. You are handing over to him what is his. For what has been given in common for the use of all, you have taken to yourself.
The world is given to all and not only to the rich.”*

St. Ambrose

Most people, when they read that quote, are a little disturbed by it... until they get to the last line. “Whew... it's not really addressed to me! I'm not rich.”

If you have running water in your house,
by the world's standards you are rich.
If you have a refrigerator in your house,
by the world's standards you are rich.
If you have more than 2 changes of clothing,
by the world's standards you are rich.

Say, “By the world's standards, I am rich.”

Now shorten it and simply say, “I am rich.” Is it hard to say? How does it make you feel when you hear these words about yourself?

So... read the words of St. Ambrose one more time. Now what do you think?

“The crowds asked him [Jesus], ‘What then should we do?’ He said to them in reply, ‘Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise.’” [Luke 3:11]

Go to your closets. Count the number of coats, jackets, and sweaters that you own. Even if you rationalize that you need a coat or sweater for each of the four seasons, what might Jesus say to you? What changes might be in order?



**Week Four – Sharing
MONDAY**

“Share everything with your brother and sister. Do not say, ‘It is mine alone.’ If you share what is everlasting, you should be that much more willing to share things which do not last.”

Didache, chapter 4

(a brief early Christian treatise (c. 70–160), containing instructions for Christian communities)

Side by side, elbow to elbow, rich next to poor, man, woman, child, teen... Church is the great equalizer. Regardless of the differences between us., we worship together.

We hear the Word proclaimed by readers, we receive Communion from lay ministers, without a thought to their age, sex, or social status because we look beyond the person to God within them.

How do you react and respond when you see the homeless on the street?

How do you react and respond when someone “different” moves into the neighborhood?

“Consider this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each must do as already determined, without sadness or compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

“Moreover, God is able to make every grace abundant for you, so that in all things, always having all you need, you may have an abundance for every good work.”

2 Corinthians 9:6-8

“Sows” – an action word. There is nothing to reap if nothing has been sown.

Whether you have a little or a lot, when is the last time you evaluated what you might be sowing?

What legacy will you leave your heirs to harvest?

How will your investments provide abundance for good works?

**Week Two – Prayer
THURSDAY**

To counter the commercialism of Christmas and instill in the children a spirit of giving, Janet, the director of religious education, decided to revive the ancient tradition of Spiritual Bouquets. She set up the life-sized statues of Mary and Joseph from the outdoor Nativity set and cut flower petals and stems from colored paper.

Janet gave each child the name of a senior citizen parishioner and explained the concept of a Spiritual Bouquet. Then, she knelt with them by the statues and together they said a prayer.

Besides praying at home, for the next 4 weeks the children dashed into the parish center before Mass or before their classes to kneel by the statues and pray. Some even convinced their parents to wait after Mass or class so they could pray again!

Just before Christmas, the Spiritual Bouquets were delivered to the homes of the senior citizens with this note:

Mary and Joseph knelt and prayed when Baby Jesus was born. During Advent, I knelt and prayed for you. After I said each prayer, I placed a petal on one of the flowers. These flowers are my spiritual bouquet for you.

I hope your Christmas is filled with the love that Baby Jesus has for us all. Merry Christmas, from ____ in grade ____.

*“Listen, my faithful children: open up your petals,
like roses planted near running waters;
Send up the sweet odor of incense,
break forth in blossoms like the lily.
Send up the sweet odor of your hymn of praise;
bless the Lord for all he has done!*

*Proclaim the greatness of his name, loudly sing his praises.
The works of God are all of them good;
in its own time every need is supplied.
So now with full joy of heart, proclaim
and bless the name of the Holy One.”*

Sirach 39, selected verses

Something happens to us when we lift up our hearts in prayer. Burdens can seem lighter; minds may feel a moment of peace.

Who needs some prayers, some burdens lightened, some moments of peace? Bring it to the attention of the Lord today through your prayers.

Week Two – Prayer
FRIDAY

TGIF – Thank God it’s Friday!

For many the “work week” is done. Your time is your own, until Monday morning rolls around, again!

So... how did you spend your week?

How many hours did you spend at work?

at play?

eating?

sleeping?

watching television?

checking emails or surfing the ‘net?

talking with your family?

talking with God?

60 minutes in an hour; 24 hours in a day; 7 days in a week...
all given to you by God.

“Praise the Lord, my soul;

*I shall praise the Lord all my life,
sing praise to my God while I live.*

*Happy those whose help is Jacob’s God,
whose hope is in the Lord, their God,*

*Who keeps faith forever,
secures justice for the oppressed,
gives food to the hungry.*

*The Lord sets prisoners free;
the Lord gives sight to the blind.*

*The Lord protects the stranger,
sustains the orphan and widow.*

*The Lord shall reign forever,
your God, Zion, though all generations!*

Hallelujah!”

Psalm 146

How much time did you turn back to the Lord in prayer this week?

Might you think of some strategies to utilize next week
in an effort to increase your prayer time?

Ask the Spirit for some inspiration.

Week Four – Sharing
SUNDAY

Dwight D. Eisenhower –anyone over the age of 70 remembers him as one of the U.S. generals who led the Allied countries to victory in World War II. Anyone over 50 remembers him as president of the United States of America from 1953 to 1961.

As the Korean War was drawing to a close, Eisenhower made this statement on April 16, 1953:

“Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.”

An amazing comment from a general!

“There was a rich man whose land produced a bountiful harvest. He asked himself, ‘What shall I do, for I do not have space to store my harvest?’ And he said, ‘This is what I shall do: I shall tear down my barns and build larger ones. There I shall store all my grain and other goods and I shall say to myself, ‘Now as for you, you have so many good things stored up for many years, rest, eat, drink, be merry!’” But God said to him, ‘You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?’

“Thus will it be for the one who stores up treasure for himself but is not rich in what matters to God.”

Luke 12:16-21

How would you re-write that story so that instead of God saying, “You fool, God might say instead, “I bless you, my good and faithful servant!”

Which story – the original or your new version –
will be the model for your life?

What steps must you take in order to accomplish this?

It appears one is foolish when one spends too much time preparing
for the future and too little time in the “now”.

Wrestle with this tension.

How do you plan for the future and yet live as if you will die this very night?

**Week Three – Service
SATURDAY**

Picture the scene: The angel Gabriel has just told Mary that she will be the mother of God. Gabriel adds that Elizabeth is also pregnant with a son “*for nothing is impossible with God.*” And then the angel departs.

What does Mary do next?

Does she run to find Joseph to tell him what happened? Does she go to her parents to share the news? Or, with a touch of pride, tell her friends? No, none of these: Mary’s first response is to go to Elizabeth.

“Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, ‘Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.’” Luke 1:39-45

Elizabeth is in her sixth month, so Mary knows that Elizabeth might need her help. Without a thought about her own situation, the mother of God goes to serve Elizabeth.

But, it’s clear from Elizabeth’s greeting to Mary that Elizabeth will be as great a help to Mary as Mary is to Elizabeth, for Elizabeth understands Mary’s situation more than anyone else can or will.

It is Elizabeth who first recognizes God’s promises from ages past will be fulfilled in this young woman as Elizabeth utters those now famous, sacred words,

“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.”

Both will go down in history as being blessed with miracles. But back then, they were simply two women, in recognition of God’s blessings, serving one another joyfully.

What joys have you experienced when you stepped forward to serve others?



**Week Two – Prayer
SATURDAY**

Mike was leading the 11th grade confirmation retreat. Things had been going well until they started discussing the Gifts of the Spirit – four gifts to know God’s will (wisdom, understanding, knowledge, right judgment) and three gifts to do God’s will (courage, reverence, wonder and awe).

Mike tried to ignore the whispers, but it was getting more and more distracting. Finally, Mike looked at one of the teens, and simply said, “Is there a problem?”

The teens exchanged a few glances, then Joe spoke up. “I guess we were just wondering, if everyone receives these Gifts of the Spirit at confirmation, how come all Catholic adults aren’t full of wisdom, understanding knowledge, and all the rest?”

Good question! God doesn’t interfere with our free will, so when the Spirit brings these gifts, they come to us in “seed” form. We have to cultivate those seed-gifts in order for them to blossom and grow in us.

What are you doing to cultivate these precious gifts that God has given you? Which are blossoming in you? Which need more watering and tilling to reach their potential?

*“If you receive my words and treasure my commands,
Turning your ear to wisdom, inclining your heart to understanding;
Yes, if you call to intelligence, and to understanding raise your voice;
If you seek her like silver, and like hidden treasures search her out:
Then will you understand the fear of the Lord;
the knowledge of God you will find;
For the Lord gives wisdom,
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.
He has counsel in store for the upright,
he is the shield of those who walk honestly.
For wisdom will enter your heart, knowledge will please your soul,
Discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you.”
Proverbs 2:1-7,10-11*

Receive God’s words... treasure the commands... turn your “ear” and open your heart; God wants to give you these gifts, these treasures.

Are any of the commands falling on deaf ears?
Ready your heart through prayer.
Talk with God, let God know you are listening.

Week Three – Service
SUNDAY

In late March of 1998, a major tornado struck southern Minnesota, leveling homes, churches, schools, and businesses in a number of towns. The small rural farming community of Comfrey, Minnesota, population 550, was almost completely destroyed.

Anna, a 9th grader in a small Wisconsin town, felt an enormous compassion for the people of Comfrey. She told her pastor that something needed to be done to help them. Initially, the priest explained that the parish did not have enough staff to organize and coordinate relief efforts. Then he issued Anna the following challenge: “All of us are called to help our neighbors who are in need. If you are willing to put in the time to make the phone calls, to organize your friends and their parents, I will give my full support to your efforts.”

And that’s exactly what Anna did! With the help of her friends and some parents, the parish and town rallied behind Anna’s project.

Within three weeks, over twenty people from the Anna’s parish were heading to Comfrey with a semi-load of food, water, blankets, and clothing. They spent a week assisting with the clean-up efforts, handing out supplies, and helping to feed those who had lost their homes, farms, jobs and schools.

“He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and dry them with the towel around his waist. When he had washed their feet... he said to them, ‘Do you realize what I have done for you? I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.’”
John 13:5, 12, 15

Anna understood this message of service to others and had taken it to heart. Anna honored God by honoring others, especially those who are the most in need of aid.

We honor God when we get down on our knees, not just in prayer, but also in service to those who need a caring hand, a compassionate smile, a listening ear. The opportunities to serve others—locally, regionally, nationally, globally—are endless. No one can do everything but everyone can do something.

Consider some new ways you might honor God through acts of service.

Week Three – Service
FRIDAY

| | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Parish Committees | Cancer Walk |
| CROP Walk | Bowl-a-thon |
| Bike-a-thon | Faith Formation Programs |
| Children’s Marathon | Big Brothers/Big Sisters |
| Parish Choir | Project Rachel |
| Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts | Homeless Shelter |
| Literacy Tutors | Humane Society |
| Children’s Museum | Funeral Dinners |
| St Vincent De Paul Stores | Food Pantry |

No matter what your interest, what your passion, there’s an organization or community project out there that can use your prayers, service, and sharing. If not, organize one.

“Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve him completely and sincerely. Cast out the gods your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. If it does not please you to serve the Lord, decide today whom you will serve, the gods your fathers served beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose country you are dwelling.”

“As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

“The people promised Joshua, ‘We will serve the Lord, our God, and obey his voice.’”

Joshua 24:14-15, 24

Notice it doesn’t say, “As for me and my household, we will **worship** the Lord.” Too often, we worship God for an hour on Sunday and then return to our normal lives without much thought about God when the worship ends. The Mass is never ended; it must be lived.

Joshua had a different view of what God expects. Every action of every day, should be weighed against what God has said is good and proper. If it passes the “God test”, just do it. If not, then don’t. In a nutshell, that’s serving God in word and deed every minute of every day.

Mentally, review your day. What’s your score on the “God-Test”?

How have you and your household served the Lord?

**Week Three – Thursday
SERVICE**

It started almost by accident. The new pastor decided he needed to lose some weight, so he bought a bicycle. The director of religious education was trying to figure out how to get the high school confirmation class to meet during the summer as the confirmation date had been suddenly moved up from November to September. Thus, the Spirit lead open minds to a creative solution to what was once a temporary dilemma: the weekly Bible Bike Club.

Once a week from June through August, over one hundred people of all ages gather for morning Mass. About sixty of them come with their bicycles and divide into three groups: one for the adults and teens who are avid bikers; another group for adults and teens who ride for recreation; and a third group just for children.

Each group has at least two adults who know how to do minor bicycle repairs and at least one adult for every six children or teens. Each group bikes for a while, then stops at a predetermined park or the grounds of another church for snacks where they meet back up with the forty or so non bike riders who have set up snacks and refreshments. Discussions and age appropriate lessons are provided based on the readings all heard in the morning's Liturgy. After the refreshments, review, and renewal, the riders bike back to the church.

Many of the adults serving in this innovative program had never been involved in the once a week school year religious education program. The parish discovered a marvelous new way to serve the children and teens while involving great adult role models whose gifts and talents are not necessarily associated with "traditional" faith formation classroom settings. Everyone, including the non-riders, gets an opportunity to appreciate God's gift of the great outdoors, discover new meanings in the Scriptures discussed, and build a stronger sense of intergenerational community.



*"God has given each of you special abilities;
be sure to use them to help each other."*
(1 Peter 4:7-11)

How might the Spirit be calling you to new service opportunities?
Can you transform a problem into an opportunity?

**Week Three – Service
MONDAY**

A rally was planned to protest the cuts in programs to the poor and homeless. Mary spread the word to her friends that she was planning on attending.

Some voiced their support and said they would join Mary at the rally, but Kathy was hesitant to get involved. She knew the cause was important, but sometimes rallies of that nature get out of hand. Kathy didn't want others to think she was an extremist or a law-breaker. Kathy said, "I can't join you at the rally, but if you need my help, call me. I will give you a ride, even bail you out of jail – whatever you need."

Sometimes we have difficulty moving out of our comfort zone to help others. Sometimes our fear of what might happen or what others might think prevents us from reaching out. Sometimes we have trouble focusing on the nameless "poor."

Kathy took a new first step that day by offering her behind-the-scenes support to those who would take a more active role to help the poor.

What new first steps are you willing to take to move out of your comfort zone to help those in need?

"Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me. Amen I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least of mine, you did for me."

Matthew 25:34b-36, 40b

None of us are expected to overcome poverty, hunger, disease or homelessness by ourselves. But just imagine, if every person reached out to help just one other human being every day, the physical needs of the world could be met. Really take some time to consider the possibilities. Talk over your ideas with the Lord, a family member, a friend, a co-worker, members of your parish's social concerns committee, your priest. Be open to where these discussions may lead you. Listen with your heart.

**Week Three-Service
TUESDAY**

There is a Legend of the Light, told by many Native Americans, which describes how light was brought to the world.

Once upon a time, before any humans existed, the world was totally dark. Some of the birds had seen light from a fire far in the east when they soared high in the sky, so the animals decided someone should go to the east to bring back light.

One by one the fastest, strongest animals volunteered to bring back the fire, but none succeeded. Some got lost. Some dropped the fire because it was too hot. Others were too fast; their speed created too much of a wind which blew out the fire.

Finally, Grandmother Spider said she would give it a try. Slowly, she headed east, leaving a trail of thread so she could find her way back.

As she traveled she picked up some clay and formed a small pot in which to carry the fire. Though it took many days, she succeeded where the others had failed, bringing back fire in the little clay pot.

The lesson of the legend teaches one need not be the biggest, the fastest, the youngest, or the strongest. All of us have something we can do for the good of others.

Most people know the story of Naaman, the commander of the army of the country of Aram (modern-day Syria). Naaman was afflicted with leprosy. After presenting himself to the prophet Elisha, and following Elisha's directives, Naaman was healed.

But why would a foreigner, who didn't particularly like the Israelites, go to an Israeli prophet to be healed? 2 Kings 5:2-3 explains:

"Now the Arameans had captured from the land of Israel in a raid a little girl, who became the servant of Naaman's wife. 'If only my master would present himself to the prophet in Samaria,' she said to her mistress, 'he would cure him of his leprosy.'" [Note: Samaria was part of Israel at this time.]

Here we have a young girl, a captive, taken far from her home, now a living as a powerless servant in a country that hates her homeland. Yet, she still believes in the power of her God. She responds with compassion to the plight of her master, asking nothing for herself, but simply doing what she can to assist him in his need.

No matter what the circumstances of our lives,
we are called to care for others; no one is exempt.
How might you respond to this call today?

**Week Three – Service
WEDNESDAY**

Prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Peace isn't always easy to come by. Illness, acts of nature, and the foibles of ourselves and others can bring turmoil and stress into our lives.

St. Francis reminds us of the age-old truth. It might not make sense to the logical mind, but when you're down, the best spirit-lifter you can find is to reach out to help others.

"In giving of ourselves...we receive."

This is a core stewardship belief and promise.

How will you give of yourself today?
What sense of peace might you receive in return?

What return shall we make to the Lord our God? For all that God
has given us, for all that God has done?

Stewardship Campaign: *Advancing the Mission* Theme Song