

A Program
To
Encourage
Joyful Giving
In Your Parish

STEWARDSHIP



“For your heart will always be where your
riches are”
(Luke 12 :34)

**Stewardship Development Department
Diocese of Toronto
August 2018
Covenant Sunday Edition**



Diocese of Toronto
Anglican Church of Canada

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Giving Joyfully – A Personal Witness

For many parishes in our diocese, autumn is the time of year when activity flourishes as congregants return after their summer vacation. It is also a time of angst for many a treasurer, warden and incumbent as they grapple with ways of balancing the ledger. Often they are forced into making a desperate plea for funds in hopes of balancing the books. And yet it doesn't have to be this way.

In 2004, the Stewardship Development Committee developed a resource to specifically address concerns related to under giving in our parishes. This resource, aptly named "A Program to Encourage Joyful Giving in Your Parish," has been used widely in our diocese and beyond for nearly ten years now. To date, over 130 parishes in the Diocese of Toronto have used the program successfully with increases ranging from 10% to 30% in one year. It has become the single most popular stewardship program used annually in our diocese.

"Our giving is at best a response to the fact that God has already given to us. If God had not already given, we wouldn't have anything to give. We talk about how much we give and how often we give, forgetting that God is the first and greatest giver."
(William D. Watley, "Bring the Full Tithes", 1995)

The Reverend Canon Richard Miller, Incumbent at St. Peter, Cobourg, believes that one of the real strengths of the program is its theological base. "Everything about Joyful Giving originates in scripture. We're not making this stuff up on the fly. Jesus spoke about giving from our substance all the time. However, over time we as a church haven't talked a lot about the importance of individual giving and the role that each one of us plays in supporting the ministry of the church. When I came to St. Luke (Dixie South) in 2007, I found that many here had not been challenged to give proportionately and generously for some time. Many give at the same level today as they did ten or fifteen years ago even though Jesus gives abundantly all the time."

At six weeks in length the program is sufficiently intensive to focus a congregation's attention on the merits of Joyful Giving. "We did the program in the spring of 2005," explains the Reverend Andrew Sheldon, then Incumbent at Church of the Messiah in Toronto. "Our motivation was to make up for a deficit in operating costs. We had not done a focused giving campaign in some time. As a result, we confirmed an additional \$30,000 in pledges." For new parishioners coming to our parishes, the key is consistency. "We need to keep teaching the message of giving of our first fruits and we need to appeal to the congregation each year. I even recommend doing some sort of every member visitation every three years to connect with those not attending regularly."

Rural parishes can benefit from the program as well. John Lawson, Deputy Rector's Warden at St. John, Craighurst north of Barrie explains that "for years we had been relying on our annual parish yard sale to help cover operating expenses but the demands on people's time was becoming too onerous."

With an average Sunday attendance of about sixty, St. John's was too dependent on special events to cover expenses. Mr. Lawson continues: "We hadn't done a giving campaign in years and little had been done to actually teach people about the need to give. Over the course of six weeks in the fall of 2005, we had guest speakers and sermons and finally a pledging Sunday. The results speak for themselves. Not only were we able to cover off on all our operating expenses but now we can support outreach in ways we had never thought possible."

The Joyful Giving program – conducted over a six-week period – can be implemented in a way that best suits the parish. It involves:

- Teaching from the pulpit from the parish priest
- Regular communication in the bulletin, on the website and in email
- Lay witness presentations
- Reflection material on proportionate giving
- An invitation to give from parish leadership
- A giving covenant between the parishioner and God

“I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the other contributors to the temple treasury. For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood.”
(Mark 12:43-44)

There will always be detractors when it comes to speaking about money in church. Some even think we talk about money too much. The truth is that we probably do not talk about money in the church enough. Or to be more precise, we do not speak about it in its proper context, so it appears that we talk about it too much. And yet Jesus spoke about what we turn into false gods more than any other topic in scripture. Part of the problem is that stewardship is sometimes equated with begging. And we often do not make the connection between the gifts that we give and the free gift of life that we have already received from God.

The program to encourage generous giving in your parish is self-contained and user-friendly. All outlines, templates, letters and worksheets are included. We also provide bulletin announcements and quotes straight out of scripture. There are even sample sermons to give clergy ideas on what to include when they introduce stewardship to their parish. The program can be downloaded from the diocesan website or can be ordered from the stewardship office at no charge.

As always, may God bless our clergy and church members in their ministry of service!

Peter Misiaszek, CFRE
Director of Stewardship Development

The Difference between Joyful Giving and Stewardship

It is important to develop a mutual understanding of what we mean by the terms stewardship and Joyful Giving. Sometimes these terms are used interchangeably and without precision, so we need to be clear about exactly what they mean. While the terms are inter-related – springing from our understanding of stewardship as a way of life – they generally involve various levels of obligation on the part of the committed Christian.

The classic definition of **Stewardship** is the following: “Stewardship is receiving God’s gifts gratefully, cherishing and tending them in a responsible and accountable manner, sharing them in justice and love with others, and returning them with increase to the Lord.” It is a complete lifestyle of accountability and responsibility, acknowledging God as the Creator and Owner of all. Stewards, as disciples of Jesus Christ, see themselves as caretakers of all God’s gifts. Gratitude for these gifts is expressed in prayer, worship, action and offering by eagerly sharing these gifts out of love for God and for one another. In talking about stewardship, the phrase “time, talent and treasure” is frequently used.

“Render to God not a tenth, not a third, not a half, but all that is God’s, be it more or less, by employing all on yourself, your household, the household of faith, and all people, in such a manner that you may give a good account for your stewardship when ye can be no longer stewards.” (John Wesley, “On the Use of Money,” 1760)

Joyful Giving requires that we put God’s priorities before our own, that we put the support of God’s Church and its mission before our own pleasure and comfort. Joyful giving involves four principles: it must be a gift, it is planned, it is proportionate, and it is a sacrifice. It comes from our substance, not our excess. This act can lead us into a closer relationship with God because if we are giving an amount that is truly a sacrifice we are expressing the belief that our security lies not in our material wealth but in God.

Proportionate Giving is related to Joyful Giving. We encourage congregants to give a proportion of their income to the ministry of the church. In the Old Testament, the tithe – or ten percent of one’s income – is the obligatory proportionate gift. In the New Testament Jesus never advocates tithing. Instead, Jesus challenges us to be generous in all that we do. In Luke’s Gospel we learn that “much is required of the person to whom much is given; much more is required from the person to whom more is given” (12:48).

We can see therefore that a hierarchy of sorts exists when we talk about stewardship and Joyful Giving. Joyful Giving is a component of stewardship, yet for stewardship to be complete it requires additional emphasis on our gifts of time and talent. Generally speaking, no stewardship initiative gets off the ground by highlighting one element over the other, let alone speaking about treasure before the other two. We have an obligation, at the same time, to teach our congregations about the merits of giving thanks, and sharing our treasure is often the easiest way to demonstrate that our thankfulness. Parishes should be able to expand on their experience with Joyful Giving to include year-round stewardship as a means of involving all the gifts that the community has to offer.

Guidelines for Giving

Many Christians support their churches and clergy with monetary contributions of one kind or another. Frequently this is called tithing whether it follows the ten percent rule of the Old Testament. However, as tithing was an ingrained Jewish custom by the time of Jesus, no specific command to tithe per se is found in the New Testament.

The absence of a command for tithing does not relieve Christians of the responsibility to give. Rather, Christians are held to the higher law of stewardship - acknowledging that everything we have is a gift from God (Matthew 19:21). The Bible specifies two main reasons for Christian giving.

First, Christians should provide for the needs of fellow Christians who are experiencing financial hardships. For example, while Barnabas and Saul were ministering in Antioch, there was a severe famine in Judea. Members of the community decided that each of them would send whatever they could to help their fellow believers in Judea. They collected the offerings and sent the money to the church elders by Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:27-30).

Later in Paul's ministry, he gave instruction to other churches that they also should give to the poor in Jerusalem. He wrote: "Now, concerning what you wrote about the money to be raised to help God's people in Judea. You must do what I told the churches in Galatia to do. Every Sunday each of you must put aside some money, in proportion to what you have earned, and save it up, so that there will be no need to collect money when I come (1 Corinthians 16:1-2)."

In his letter to the Romans, Paul tells of another example of generosity among believers, "Macedonia and Achaia have freely decided to give an offering to help the poor among God's people in Jerusalem (Romans 15:26)." Today's Christians are called to follow these examples and provide for the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ who are in financial distress.

A second reason for Christian giving is to support Christian leaders. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that "those who preach the gospel should receive their living from it (1 Corinthians 9:14)." To the Galatians, he wrote: "Anyone who is being taught the Christian message should share all the good things they have with their teacher (Galatians 6:6)." Note that these Christians encouraged supporting those who lead them both in their local community and beyond.

The final question remains; how much should Christians give? Each Christian "should give, then, as they have decided, not with regret or out of a sense of duty; for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7)." No set amount or percentage of income is dictated, rather, "if you are eager to give, God will accept your gift on the basis of what you have to give, not on what you don't have (2 Corinthians 8:12)."

In summary, Christians are not restricted in their giving to the Old Testament understanding of tithing. Instead they are to be challenged by New Testament guidelines which describe giving as:

- Proportional to one's income (1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 8:12)
- Consistent (1 Corinthians 16:2)
- Sacrificial (Mark 12:43-44; 2 Corinthians 8:2-3)

- Cheerful/Joyful (2 Corinthians 9:7)

Christians should live open-handed and generously, acknowledging that they are merely stewards of God's creation and that all things come from God.

It is helpful to have some sort of clarity about a standard of giving. Those who are being introduced to Joyful Giving for the first time might consider donating one hour's pay per week to church and a similar amount to charity. Those who are retired can be encouraged to consider an hour's pay (2.5%) from their retirement income. This approach can have two very positive outcomes: First, it makes the work week and the work of our hands holy because our act of giving is intimately tied to how we earn a living. A blessing of sorts is given to our creative efforts made during the week. Secondly an hour's pay is simple and profound, and it may increase with time to reflect our progress in life.

Those who may be unemployed or facing serious financial burdens could consider how they might give of their time and talent to the church on a weekly basis and pray for the ministry of the Church. Everyone, regardless of income level, should be encouraged to give something. Even in our hardship we experience blessing.

Why Practice Stewardship?

Our understanding of stewardship as a way of life is based in scripture. The first chapter of Genesis tells us that God created all things and created us to be the stewards of all creation. Being good stewards involves protecting our environment, as well as being concerned about the welfare of our fellow human beings. As stewards, we recognise that everything we have is a gift from God. We are responsible to tend our gifts, to nurture them and then to share their abundance with all.

“We need to get our priorities straight and be faithful to what has been entrusted to us. We are to make sure that wealth and material possessions always remain a means of serving God and never become ends in themselves.” (The Rev. Dr. John H. Westerhoof, “Grateful and Generous Hearts,” 1997)

The Reverend Dr. John H. Westerhoff, a noted scholar and priest from Atlanta, writes: “Stewardship is the way to spiritual health and maturity, but for stewardship to have a chance we must begin with a serious spiritual question: What do we owe to God for the gift of life and its accompanying benefits? The answer, of course, is everything.”

To be true stewards we must gladly share with others our time, our talent and our treasure. The lesson of scripture is not to be viewed in isolation from our daily lives. Scripture provides a real and complete guideline to living our daily lives as followers of Jesus Christ, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength and you shall love your neighbour as yourself (Mark 12:30-31).”

Christ’s teachings and life are our model for stewardship. “It was for this that God called you, for Christ himself suffered for you and left you an example, so that you would follow in his steps (1Peter 2:21).” Embracing a life of Christian stewardship is the way we offer thanks to God for what God is already doing for us.

Our Baptismal Covenant

The practice of stewardship manifests itself in our daily lives through the Baptismal Covenant. In the Rite of Baptism, we profess our faith and reply affirmatively to the following statements:

- Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?
- Will you persevere in resisting evil and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?
- Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ?
- Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbour as yourself?
- Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

(Book of Alternative Services, p. 159)

The commitment we make at Baptism is not merely a statement of belief but is also a call to action. It recalls the teaching: “suppose there are brothers or sisters who need clothes and don’t have enough to eat. What good is there in your saying to them, ‘God bless you! Keep warm and eat well!’ – if you don’t give them the necessities of life? So, it is with faith: if it is alone and includes no actions, then it is dead (James 2:15-17).”

In the breaking of bread and sharing of fellowship with one another, we recognise the temporal needs of our faith community. Our response is to ensure that our parish has the human and financial resources necessary to support vibrant ministry – ensuring a sound physical structure, strong and capable volunteer leadership, outreach programs, Christian education, hospitality, youth ministry and music – in addition to providing all parish staff, including clergy, with equitable and fair compensation for their work. The practice and teaching of stewardship education becomes vital to help us understand why we give joyfully.

We resist evil by inclining our hearts to follow God’s commandments and to be examples of Christ in our world today. In thought, word and action we seek justice, practice tolerance and celebrate the diversity that is found within our church and society. It means reaching out to those who are different to us and making them feel welcome at the table of Christ.

The good news as found in Holy Scripture guides and nourishes us on our faith journey. The way we live gives testimony to our belief that our God is a God of salvation and mercy. We are mindful of the need to feed the hungry, give drink to those who thirst, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick and visit those imprisoned (Matthew 26: 35-36). As stewards, we live to give hope to others.

Loving our neighbour as ourselves acknowledges that we have a responsibility beyond our own interests. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus challenges his followers to become “other” centred. We are a Christian community endowed with many wonderful blessings. In gratitude, our faith obliges us to share what we have received with those less fortunate and those on the margins of society.

As we strive for justice and peace among all peoples we seek to create the world as Christ himself envisioned it: a world where people freely give without expecting in return and give in abundance because of the joy that is experienced in giving. In living the life of a joyful steward, we can then proclaim that “there is more happiness in giving than in receiving (Acts 20:35).”

Stewardship as an Expression of Faith

Practicing stewardship intimately ties us to who we are as a Christian people. Stewardship is an expression of faith. It is not simply the church’s way of raising money; rather, it is a spiritual discipline that encompasses our very being as Christians. It is a radical departure from our secular understanding of charity where we give to an external need. Instead, as stewards, we are motivated to give because it is something we internally need to do; it is intrinsic to our very understanding of what it means to be fully human. Giving is not predicated on a certain act, nor is it something we do just because it is convenient. Our vocation as a Christian is that we give freely and in great generosity “for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7).” Recognizing that God gave us everything we have in trust, we, in turn, share the gifts that we have been given.

Introducing Joyful Giving to Your Parish

Our material goods are often the greatest barrier to our trust in God. Therefore, it is important to take the time to teach how and why we must change our attitude to wealth. It will require persistence and careful teaching to wean people away from the materialism of modern life to a true understanding of Christian generosity. We owe it to ourselves and our churches, however, to impart a correct understanding of the theology of giving. An intentional and committed program focused on the merits of Joyful Giving is a first step to transforming our congregations to ones where giving truly becomes a way of life.

Guidelines for Success: The Six-Week Covenant Sunday Program

The six-week program is sufficiently intensive to focus a congregation's attention on the merits of Joyful Giving. Not limiting ourselves to the usual pledging campaign of one or two weeks that takes place in many parishes, we afford the opportunity to genuinely and thoughtfully discuss the theology behind why giving is a necessary and reasonable practice of Christian life. In addition, we have the chance to reach out to those parishioners who do not attend services on a regular basis and are usually missed in the annual pledging drive.

Week 1 – Sunday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bulletin Announcement (p. 10) ● Sermon by Incumbent (p. 22)
Week 2 – Sunday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bulletin Announcement (p. 10) ● Lay Witness Talk in place of Sermon (p. 16) ● Prayers of the People (p. 30)
Week 3 – Sunday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bulletin Announcement (p. 10) ● Prayers of the People (p. 30) ● Mailing #1 (Letter with Proportional Giving Worksheet and Covenant/PAG enrollment form) (pp. 11-13)
Week 4 – Sunday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bulletin Announcement (p. 10) ● Prayers for the People (p. 30) ● Lay Witness Talk in place of Sermon (p. 16)
Week 5 – Sunday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bulletin Announcement (p. 10) ● Sermon by Incumbent (p. 22) ● Prayers of the People (p. 30)
Week 6 – Covenant Sunday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pulpit Announcement of Result ● Mailing #2 (to those not responding) (p. 14) ● Mailing #3 (thank you to those who have already responded) (p. 15)

Sample Materials

Bulletin Announcements

A Joyful Giving program will soon be introduced at our parish. No gift is truly a gift unless it is feely given. God's gifts to us are given in such a manner. Joyful Giving is really an attitude of gratitude for God's generosity.

We are called to model our giving after God's unconditional generosity to us. Our gifts become sacrificial when we give from what we feel we need; when we give something that we thought we needed for ourselves. Then we realize our security lies not in material goods but in God.

Is your gift to the work of God's Church a sacrifice or do you give what is left over after taking care of yourself? Each of us must search our own hearts to find whether we give to God first, trusting that God will care for us, or do we put God at the back of the line to wait for the leftovers?

A rich man died and went to heaven. St. Peter escorted him to his new home, a hut in a very poor area. Seeing the shock on this man's face, Peter explained "We only build your home up here with the material you send ahead while you are still on earth."

Joyful Giving is sharing, in a planned, proportionate way, the wealth with which God has blessed us. It is a sign of our gratitude to God. It is an expression of our faith, of what we say we believe. We direct a portion of our giving through our parish because it is the body which most clearly bears witness to the meaning and values we find at the centre of our lives.

How much should I give?

Give in proportion to the goodness God has shown to you. Consider a weekly gift to your parish starting at one hour's pay. Then, with prayer and sacrifice over a period you may be able to increase your gift.

A king invited all his subjects to a feast and asked each one to bring a small flask of wine to be put into a large vat and served to the guests. Each one thought, "What will my small flask mean? I will bring a flask of water and no one will notice the difference." When the wine was served, each guest received only water. Remember, God sees all sacrifices made, and whether large or small, they make a difference.

Do not store up riches for yourselves here on earth, where moths and rust destroy, and robbers break in and steal. Instead, store up riches for yourselves in heaven, where moth and rust cannot destroy, and robbers cannot break in and steal (Matthew 6:19-20).

Command those who are rich in the things of this life not to be proud, but to place their hope, not in such an uncertain thing as riches, but in God, who generously gives us everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share with others (1 Timothy 6:17-18).

Honour the Lord with your wealth, with first fruits of all you produce; then will your barns be filled with grain, with new wine your vats will overflow (Proverbs 3:9-10).

Proportionate Giving Worksheet

From the Old Testament we learn that the people were to give of their “first fruits.” The same principle applies to us today: to give the first fruits of our labours to God through the Church. We should also give in proportion to what God has given us. Some people use the “modern-day” tithe (5% of all income) as a guide for their giving (2.5% to church and 2.5% to charity). Others use an hour’s earnings as their contribution. Each person must determine what is appropriate for them.

This worksheet offers a means of determining one’s present percentage level of pledged financial support for the local church and establishing a commitment for the coming year. It is not to be returned to the church. It is intended for personal use with prayerful consideration in the privacy of your home.

- To find your current level of local church support, divide your pledge by your net income for the same period.

	<u>Example:</u>	<u>Your figures:</u>
A. Current Net Income	\$ 60,000	\$ _____
B. Current Pledge	\$ 600	\$ _____
C. Current Percentage Level (Divide line B by line A)	<u>1.0%</u>	_____ %

- A financial commitment for the coming year might be based on one of the following options:

Modern Day Tithe

A. Expected Net Income	\$ 60,000	\$ _____
B. Tithe (2.5% church/2.5% charity)	<u>5%</u>	<u>5%</u>
C. New Commitment (Multiply line A by line B)	\$ 3,000	\$ _____

An Hour’s Wage

A. Net Weekly Income	\$ 1,200	\$ _____
B. Hours in Work Week	<u>40</u>	<u>40</u>
C. New Weekly Commitment (Divide line A by line B)	\$ 30	\$ _____

Joyful Giving Covenant

This is a guide to returning the first portion of your treasure to God

Annual First Portion Guide

Net Family Income	1%	2%	3%	4%	5%	10%
\$10,000	\$100	\$200	\$300	\$400	\$500	\$1,000
\$20,000	\$200	\$400	\$600	\$800	\$1,000	\$2,000
\$30,000	\$300	\$600	\$900	\$1,200	\$1,500	\$3,000
\$35,000	\$350	\$700	\$1,050	\$1,400	\$1,750	\$3,500
\$40,000	\$400	\$800	\$1,200	\$1,600	\$2,000	\$4,000
\$45,000	\$450	\$900	\$1,350	\$1,800	\$2,250	\$4,500
\$50,000	\$500	\$1,000	\$1,500	\$2,000	\$2,500	\$5,000
\$55,000	\$550	\$1,100	\$1,650	\$2,200	\$2,750	\$5,500
\$60,000	\$600	\$1,200	\$1,800	\$2,400	\$3,000	\$6,000
\$70,000	\$700	\$1,400	\$2,100	\$2,800	\$3,500	\$7,000
\$80,000	\$800	\$1,600	\$2,400	\$3,200	\$4,000	\$8,000
\$90,000	\$900	\$1,800	\$2,700	\$3,600	\$4,500	\$9,000
\$100,000	\$1,000	\$2,000	\$3,000	\$4,000	\$5,000	\$10,000

As I/We have received generously from God, I/we intend to covenant \$ _____ in the Sunday Offertory each week in gratitude to God and in support of our parish.

-or-

As I/We have received generously from God, I/we intend to covenant \$ _____ monthly through Pre-Authorized Giving in gratitude to God and in support of our parish.

(Name)

(Address)

(Phone)

No signature is required because your decision is a covenant with God and not a contract with your parish.

Sample Mailing #1

Date

X
X
X
X

“Much is required of the person to whom much is given; much more is required from the person to whom much more is given” (Luke 12:48)

Dear X,

As followers of Jesus, these words apply as much today as they did nearly two thousand years ago. We are reminded to look at all God has placed in our care. It is easy to get caught up in the materialism of today’s society, confusing our own wants as needs. It is easy to forget that Jesus calls us by our Baptism to continue the work He began on earth. It is our responsibility to ensure that we pass on the faith to up-coming generations and to support the work of the Church here in our own community and throughout the world.

Over the last few weeks you have heard us talk in church about Joyful Giving. In considering a joyful gift we recognize that all our gifts, abilities and possessions come from God. We acknowledge that we live, love and work because God gave us the ability and opportunity to do so.

All the material possessions we have derive from God’s continued will to allow us to keep them. The gift of free will means that God allows us to decide what we will do with our lives and our wealth. To give joyfully is our choice. God is inviting us into a complete loving relationship. Our gift will also strengthen our loving relationship with God’s people because it will help support our parish and our diocese.

I am asking you to prayerfully consider your contribution to the work of the Church, here in our own parish, in our diocese and beyond. When you have done so, use the enclosed worksheet to decide what planned proportion of the family income you wish to give to the Lord’s use and place the completed Joyful Giving Covenant in the enclosed envelope. Then place it in the collection plate next Sunday.

Thank you for your past generous support of the Church and the needs of your brothers and sisters. May God bless you and your family abundantly.

In Christ,

XXXXXXXXXXXX

Sample Mailing #2

Date

X
X
X
X

“I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the other contributors to the temple treasury. For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood.” (Mark 12:43-44)

Dear X,

I would like to renew my invitation to you to support the caring community of _____ Parish. As you know, the Parish Joyful Giving Covenant Program has been launched during the past six weeks and has been a remarkable success.

Many people are now committing their financial support to the work of the Church in our parish. We would like to ensure that you also can become involved in this inspiring work. Please be assured that any sacrifice you care to make will help to continue God’s work in our caring community.

It was not for nothing that our Lord singled out the widow giving her mite. More than anyone, Jesus understood the very private nature of each person’s approach to support His work. Whatever decision you make will be appreciated and will remain confidential.

Thank you for your consideration. Remember that the story of the widow’s mite is an inspiration to all who aspire to do good works but feel their contribution will make little difference. Please prayerfully consider your support for the parish. When you have done so, use the enclosed worksheet to decide what planned proportion of the family income you wish to give to the Lord’s use and place the completed intention card in the enclosed envelope. Then place it in the collection plate next Sunday.

In Christ,

XXXXXXXXXXXX

Sample Mailing #3

Date

X
X
X
X

“Everyone must give according to what they have inwardly decided; not sadly, not grudgingly, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Corinthians 9:7)

Dear X,

I would like to thank you and the members of your family most sincerely for your generous covenanted gift of \$____ per week (or \$____ per month if using PAG) to the Parish Joyful Giving campaign. Your contribution will help all the many people who depend on _____ Parish for pastoral care and support and will ensure the maintenance of the parish buildings.

In deciding to put God’s priorities before your own, you are following in the footsteps of the apostles. In a world filled with materialism and self-interest, it has been the sacrifices of Jesus’ followers that have illuminated His teaching and spread a faith founded in love. Thank you for continuing that tradition.

May the blessing of God Almighty be amongst you and remain with you always.

In Christ,

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Lay Witness Talk

One of the most important parts of Joyful Giving is the stories and testimonials delivered to the entire congregation by individuals whose lives have changed as a result. These lay witnesses are necessary to the success of the parish effort. There are many reasons for this. Learning to be a generous giver is a part of the internal change of heart, or conversion process, we know so well from the Scriptures. The Old and New Testament are full of stories of real people who became aware of the need to put their faith into action.

Lay witnesses send a strong message to the faithful about giving of one's self for what God has given them. Christians throughout history have been raised to a new level of awareness by hearing how a deeper sense of spirituality has taken over the lives of people just like them.

The lay witnesses should be individuals from the parish who believe and practice the concept of Joyful Giving, for example, those who give of their time, talent and treasure in an intentional, planned and proportionate way. They should be individuals who can relate well to other parishioners, feel comfortable speaking to a group about their personal experiences, and who will be enthusiastic about their mission. A potential lay witness may say, "Yes, I believe in giving back to God in gratitude, but I don't want to stand up and tell everyone what I am doing because it sounds like I'm bragging about myself."

The response to that person could be, "You are not bragging because you are unselfish in your giving. By sharing with us how you arrive at your decision to become a more generous giver, you will be inspiring others to rise to the same level of generosity."

Sample Outline

1. **Introduce Yourself.** While many of your fellow parishioners will know you, some may not. Give a description of your family, the number of years in the parish, etc.
2. **Properly Define Christian Stewardship.** It is a response we make in gratitude to God for what God has given to us. It is intentional, planned, proportionate and sacrificial.
3. **Discuss How You Began Practicing Joyful Giving.** When did you first become aware of the concept? Did you have reservations? Be honest about your first reactions. People will relate to any feeling of "discomfort."
4. **When Did You Begin to Experience the Benefits?** Speak of the effect that Joyful Giving has had on your faith life. Use anecdotes from your own family life if possible. Were you able to give a full tithe (10%) right away? If not, how are you working toward that goal?
5. **Urge Your Fellow Parishioners to Get Involved.** Invite the congregation to become a stewardship parish, initially through Joyful Giving. Ask them to look at all that God has given to them and make a generous response to God's many gifts.

Tips for Presenting a Lay Witness Talk

An important part of people's acceptance of the concept of Joyful Giving is the personal witness of individual testimony you provide with your presence and the way you give your talk. The following are tips you should consider in preparing your comments:

- When planning your talk, use language you are comfortable with. Use your own style, wording and delivery.
- Explain that Joyful Giving means giving our first fruits, not the leftovers, when making a gift to the Church.
- Show how when we give in this way, we experience deepened faith and joy. Also give a personal testimony of how you have found this to be true in your own life.
- Challenge people to reflect on their values and the importance of the Christian faith in their lives as evidenced by how they use their gifts from God. Question whether we really use these gifts to do the work of the Lord.
- Challenge them with practical questions. As they receive increases in pay for example, do they, in turn, increase their gift to the Lord? This increase enables ministry to grow.
- Explain that stewardship involves not only church, but also includes the time and financial support we give to other charitable organisations.
- Do not talk in dollar amounts: "if everyone could just give an extra \$2.00 per week." Joyful Giving is about giving proportionately. Two dollars may mean nothing to someone who is well off, but undue hardship to someone who is poor.
- Stress the role of the pledge card and emphasise that its return is a sign of participation and commitment.
- Include the following explanation to mention the completion of the covenant card in your talk:

"You will receive a covenant card this week by mail along with a work-sheet on proportional giving. Please prayerfully reflect with your family on the many blessings you have received from God. In that context consider a gift that is appropriate for your situation. If you are new to Joyful Giving, consider a gift of an hour's pay – it is fair, equitable and just. Remember that everyone is important and has something to give back to our parish. Once you have completed the covenant card, return it in the collection on commitment Sunday. The card is confidential and not legally binding, but helps our parish community plan for the future."

Sample Lay Witness Talk

Presented by Mary Pember, St. Timothy, North Toronto, October 20, 2013 (Reprinted with permission)

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer.

St. Luke's Gospel, chapter 12, verse 34, tells us, "For your heart will always be where your riches are."

I am pleased to be speaking to you today about Stewardship.

Stewardship is what we do, with what we have, all the time.

Stewardship is putting our faith into action.

Stewardship is what we do, after we say, I believe.

The first chapter of Genesis tells us that God created all things and created us to be Stewards of all His creation. Being good Stewards involves protecting our environment, as well as being concerned about the welfare of our fellow human beings. As good Stewards we recognize that everything we have is a gift from God.

My name is Mary Pember. I am a lifelong Anglican and my husband Fred, and I have been members of St. Timothy's for almost 3 years. I have a 31-year-old son, Shaun, with whom I am very close. I have had many blessings in my life, along with some challenging times, but I do very much hope to one day be blessed again with the gift of a grandchild. I have recently retired after a 37-year career with a Canadian bank and in addition to sitting on the Board of Directors for United Way of York Region, and several of its Committees, I am now chairing the Stewardship Committee here at St. Timothy's.

My husband and I are residents of Thornhill, but we chose St. Timothy's as our parish approximately 3 years ago. We had a very good experience the first day we walked through the doors. Alan Flint was a Greeter that day, and his welcome was warm and sincere. We were obviously struck by the beauty of this church building, which was lovingly built by faith and patience over many decades and which now has been so generously endowed by Reg and Ruth Soward.

The Holy Eucharist service was and continues to be familiar, comforting and meaningful.

The music at St. Timothy's is excellent, and to be honest, we would not have chosen this parish unless the music was inspiring and uplifting. As the daughter of an Anglican Church organist and a very musical Anglican priest, music has always been an important part of my life and to me is integral to the worship service. My perspective is simple – God, in His infinite wisdom created such

very talented composers, musicians and choristers to create beautiful music, with which to praise Him.

In fact, the anthem that very first Sunday was Stanford's beautiful *Beati Quorum Via* – one of my very favourites.

I have been so very impressed with the vast number of Outreach activities here at St. Timothy's, very capably led by Linda Gilpin. As identified in our recent Visioning session led by Alan and Frances Flint, the parish values fellowship and community – in reach and outreach. It has been a pleasure for me to become involved in the monthly Community Lunch program – working both with the many volunteers and visiting with our guests.

But my husband and I were especially struck by the warmth and sincerity of Greg's welcome to the parish. He promptly visited us in our home and made us feel very comfortable. Greg epitomizes my ideal of a parish priest – intelligent, hard-working, compassionate, a leader and tender of his flock – a humble man. A parishioner said it best one day at coffee hour – “St. Timothy's hit the jackpot when Greg and Ardith arrived”.

I was pleased to serve on the Our Faith - Our Hope Campaign Committee, chaired by Bruce Cameron, and our success in meeting and surpassing our goal of \$365K in funds pledged over five years, was certainly reason to celebrate.

A natural progression from that work has been the formation of a Stewardship Committee this past spring. St. Timothy's is privileged to be one of seven parishes in the Diocese of Toronto invited to participate in a year-long and continuous pilot program in Stewardship. To assist us we have been provided with a trained, volunteer coach from a nearby parish who has been successful in leading stewardship programs. The pilot program includes an evaluation of needs, recommendations of best practices, objective setting and a suitable action plan using diocesan programs and resources. The program focuses on various aspects of Stewardship such as time and talent, proportionate giving, volunteer development, legacy giving and social outreach.

Our committee's first task was to complete a Parish Stewardship Best Practices Evaluation in 14 categories. Let me give you some examples of these questions: 1. Does the parish have an active Stewardship Committee? 2. Does the parish produce an annual Narrative Budget? 3. Are 40% of identifiable givers on Pre-Authorized Giving? The answer to these three questions last spring was not favourable. We have now made great strides with the Stewardship Committee and the Narrative Budget and we will be talking more about pre-authorized giving.

Our parish was chosen to be part of this program as we have a solid track record in Outreach and FaithWorks and we are supported by Greg's committed leadership. I would like to thank my Committee members – Greg Symmes, Bruce Cameron, Janet Gordon, Don McKibbin and Sydney Liburd for their dedication, enthusiasm and friendship. We have accomplished a lot in a brief period, together.

We've worked hard over the summer and today we are pleased to provide you with our inaugural Narrative Budget which is available in hard copy after the service and will also be forwarded this week to our email distribution list. The 2013 Narrative Budget tells the story of our ministry here at St. Timothy's not only in numbers but also in words. You will read about the journey that we as believers are sharing together, and how all our expenses support the ministries that we value –

Worship, Christian Education & Development, Outreach, Fellowship & Community, Pastoral Care & Growth. You will also be struck by the many, many volunteer hours we have captured. Today is the start of a Joyful Giving Program at St. Timothy's. We are invited as a parish to become a stewardship parish. We are asked to look at all that God has given to us and to make a generous response to God's many gifts. We are asked to give of our first fruits, not the leftovers, when making a gift to the church and this parish. When we give in this way, we can experience a deepening of faith and the joy of giving.

In early November you will receive a package from the Wardens – a letter outlining the Joyful Giving Program, and a pledge card supported by a proportional giving chart. The Wardens' letter reminds us that budgeting for the 2013 Vestry meeting was a difficult process for them and that it was necessary to make painful cuts due to a lack of funds. In fact, unless we increase our annual donations, further cuts may be necessary. When you receive the Wardens' package, please prayerfully reflect with your family on the many blessings you have received in your life. In that context consider a gift that is appropriate for your situation. Remember that everyone is important and has something to give back to our parish. Once you have completed the intention card, please return it on the collection plate. The card is confidential and not legally binding but helps our parish community plan.

We would like everyone to consider using pre-authorized giving instead of parish envelopes or open offering. This convenient, efficient and confidential way of giving will assist the Wardens in the financial management of the parish. Setting up a regular monthly withdrawal from your chequing account ensures that the parish receives your funds even when you might be absent from church. Pre-authorized giving is also a GREEN initiative. There are no weekly envelopes required, no cash to collect and no cheques to write by donors. There is no money to be counted and deposited by the parish. Pre-authorized giving automates all of this.

Please return the pledge card as a sign of your participation and commitment to the parish.

We will continue our work with other aspects of Stewardship education over the coming months. Our efforts are meant to ensure that this wonderful parish is vibrant, attractational and missional. We are a community of believers and we want to show our appreciation for our many blessings by sharing the good news of Jesus Christ and caring for each other and those around us.

I began by quoting from St. Luke's Gospel – "For your heart will always be where your riches are."

This is a verse from one of my favourite Carols, "In the Bleak Mid-Winter:"

What can I give Him, poor as I am?
 If I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb
 If I were a wise man I would do my part
 Yet what can I give Him
 Give my heart

When my father died very suddenly at age 67, just a year and a half after he retired, I helped my mother settle his estate. While there had never been any question of where his heart was, I was struck by the fact that 8 out of every 10 cheques recorded in his chequebook were to charitable causes. He didn't have a lot of money to give, but it was clear to me that he was always willing.

For many years in my career I have had to focus on using my head to do my demanding job. My head still works quite well, in fact. It is not necessarily difficult to chair a Committee and complete several tasks. I can do these types of things and I am happy to step up.

But what about my heart? Am I giving my heart to Him? Does my giving reflect a profound sense of gratitude for my many blessings – the gift of life, the gift of loving family relationships, the gift of my Christian upbringing, the gift of belonging to this wonderful parish?

To give joyfully is my choice – my gifts can strengthen my relationship with God and His people.

I know I can do better.

Amen.

Stewardship Sermons

Clergy play a key role in supporting the stewardship process. Each incumbent should strive to give a stewardship sermon at least once every three months. This will help orient the parish into thinking about sacrificial giving as a year-round effort and will mitigate criticism that stewardship is only equated with money. Incumbents need not speak directly about money either. Practically every Gospel message speaks about sharing and generous living.

I have included four sample sermons from clergy in our diocese that represent diversity in approaches to dealing with the theme of stewardship.

Sample #1 – The Parable of the Talents

Sermon by the Rev. Canon David Harrison, Incumbent, St. Mary Magdalene, Toronto, November 14, 2014. (Reprinted with permission)

If I were a dyed-in-the-wool, hard core, unrepentant capitalist (which I'm not) ...

And if, as a dyed-in-the-wool, hard core, unrepentant capitalist (which, did I mention I'm not) I were wanting to point to a biblical proof text to prove my case...

I wouldn't have to look another further than the Parable of the Talents.

A parable which seems, at first glance, like a good solid story about the wisdom of wise investment.

A wealthy man is going away on a journey and he entrusts his property into the hands of his slaves. Eight talents in all. Originally a talent was a certain weight of a precious metal. By the time of the New Testament, it was a unit of money, and just one talent was a substantial amount of money. Some think that one talent might have been as much as twenty years wages for a worker; others think it less. But whatever was the case, eight talents was a lot of money.

And so, the man divvies up his eight talents among three of his slaves, each according to his ability. One is entrusted with five talents; another with two talents; and the third with just one. After a long absence, the man returns and asks for a report. The slave entrusted with five talents has, it turns out, traded with them and reaped a 100 percent return - he now has ten talents. The second slave has, just the same, turned his two talents into four. But the third slave, the one entrusted with just one talent, took a different tack and decided to bury the talent in the ground. And so, after all this time, the return on his money is nil - there is still just one more talent.

So, invest your money wisely. Make a good return. Hiding it just won't cut it.

But, of course, this is not really a parable about hedge funds, mutual funds and the Toronto Stock Exchange. This is a parable about the kingdom of God. We might be forgiven for missing that fact, because today's parable opens only with the words 'For it is as...'. But it comes right after last week's

gospel parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids, both of which are part of Jesus's teaching of what the kingdom of heaven is like. So, the kingdom of heaven is like ... when a master goes on his journey and leaves his fortune in the hands of his slaves, and two of his slaves double their share, but one of his slaves hides his share and gets no return...

We hear, of course, the word talent and we think something quite different, and we aren't wrong. For, indeed, our English word talent came into our language in the Middle Ages from this ancient use of the word talent, meaning something precious - metal or money. And, indeed, a classic (perhaps *the* classic) interpretation of this parable is one about how *we* use *our* talents.

Let's notice a couple of things about this parable. First, each of the three slaves is given talents, although not each slave is given the same number of talents. Indeed, they are given according to ability. We might focus on the fact of the uneven distribution of talents. I get that. I wish I could do even with great effort what others seems to do effortlessly. Whether it is to speak another language, or to run a marathon, or to be able to figure out how to fix a dripping faucet. I have some talents, but they are not *those* talents. But let's also notice that each of those slaves *is* given at least one talent. Not one of them is without a talent. Just so, each of us. There is not a single person here who does not have a number of talents. I can think of people here with a talent for words, for music, for hospitality, for prayer, for service, for fixing dripping faucets and for building a stronger community. None of us is bereft of talents.

This parable is about how we use our talents, whether those talents be (indeed) money, or whether they be (yes) our talents. And it is suggesting that, in the kingdom of God, we will, indeed, *use* our talents. You know that last slave had a convincing reason for not using his talents; he was afraid. He said it himself, his master was a harsh man reaping where he did not sow and gathering where he did not scatter seed. In other words, he was a thief. The third slave was afraid of trading with his talent and ending up with nothing. (And the fate to which he is condemned to by this violent and harsh thief, tragically backs him up - thrown into outer darkness.) The master even condemns him for not taking what would have been a safe investment with the bankers, to get even a little, if not a 100% return. But, out of fear, he hid his talent, and it did not grow.

Although the word is not used here, this is a parable about stewardship. Stewardship is how we go about looking after things. How do we *steward* our talents, and let's consider those talents to be (in stewardship language) our treasure, our talents, and our time? And the lesson is don't hide them, use them. Employ them. For growth. To create, yes, new talents.

Now I suppose one could argue somewhat convincingly that this means investing money wisely and being willing to take risks. But keeping the focus on this parable as a *kingdom* parable, what does it mean for us, individually and as a parish community, if we read it through the lens of what the kingdom of heaven is, and will be, like.

This focus in our readings is on the kingdom of God. The kingdom of heaven is not accidental, but entirely intentional. We are coming to the end of the Church's year, the last Sunday of which is a week today - the Feast of the Reign of Christ and of Christ the King. And then we begin again, with the season of Advent, which prepares us not only to celebrate once again the coming of the Christ in Bethlehem, but also (and in some ways more importantly) that time when the kingdom of God will come in its fullness, and all things will be gathered up into Christ. We live in the in-between time, the time when we look for and tease out and *eke* out those things which are of God, those things which point to, and even make real, the kingdom of God in our midst. And the use of talents,

the *risk-taking* use of talents - even when we have reason to fear - is one of those signs - one of those things.

Stewardship is a word which tends to pop up in parish life about this time of year, but usually (truth be told) because those who guard our finances are nervous, looking at a year-end deficit, and encouraging members of the community (that's you and me) to do what we can to increase our givings, or perhaps to begin to give, of our treasure, so that salaries and utility bills can be paid, and those in need supported. And we are now different here in this parish, as you know. The wardens and I have written to those on our parish list with precisely this predicament and precisely this request. Because we are facing a significant year-end deficit.

But stewardship should be much more than a year-end plea to balance the budget. Stewardship is a deeply important, year-round word, and it applies (yes) to our treasure, but equally to our talents and our times. No community - certainly no Christian community, no parish community - can or does exist without the generous use of talents - of talent, time or treasure. Everything we do in this place - everything, relies on stewardship. Our worship, our outreach, maintaining this glorious building, our advocacy for social justice, our mentoring of children and adults in Christian faith, our hospitality. Look around each day in this place and see how it relies, completely and utterly, on stewardship - on generous stewardship. It relies on us taking the risk to use our talents, to invest our talents, in hope and faith that by so doing, they multiply, even a hundred-fold, even a thousand-fold. It relies on money, and talent, and time. And none of us is bereft of those things.

One more thing to notice about this parable - the talents that these slaves are given are not their own. They are entrusted to them. And that, really, is what stewardship is about. It is about how we look after those things which are not, in the deep sense, our own. We believe that everything in the created order is, at its roots, not ours but God's. Creation - everything - is entrusted to our use while we are here on this earth, while we are able. But it is not ours.

In a few moments in this liturgy, we will offer our talents to God. You may in fact not realize it, but we will. At the offertory, we will offer our talents of treasure, for the life of this parish and the wider Church. But we also, symbolically, be offering our talents and our times along that treasure. They will be offered to God, in prayer that God will transform them into something more than we can ask or imagine.

And, they will be offered alongside bread and wine. Just bread and wine. Brought to that table. And we will pray that will transform that ordinary bread and that ordinary wine into something which infinitely more than we can ask or imagine - the very Body and Blood of Christ - the very being of God.

Talk about a huge return on a small investment.

Thanks be to God.

Sample #2 – Give unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and unto God what is God’s

Sermon by the Rev. Stephanie Douglas-Bowman, Incumbent, Christ Memorial Church, Oshawa, October 19, 2014. (Reprinted with permission)

They must have been patting themselves on the back that day, the Pharisees. They had been trying to trap Jesus pretty much from day one of his ministry, but each time, Jesus had managed to wiggle his way out. But not this time. This time, they have Jesus exactly where they want him. They’ll let Jesus hang himself on his own words. The Pharisees are so confident their plot will work they don’t even bother going themselves – they just send along their henchmen – a few of their disciples, and some Herodians, to witness Jesus speaking the words that will seal his doom.

“Teacher,” they say to Jesus, “you are so smart. You teach the truth of God, so we want to hear your opinion. Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?”

That is what you call a *loaded question*. If Jesus says, *yes, we ought to pay the imperial tax*, he will alienate the common folk who hate the Roman occupation and its pagan ruler. If Jesus says no, *we ought not pay the tax*, the Pharisees and the people will be pleased, but Jesus lands on the Romans’ watch list. That’s why the Herodians are there. The Herodians are Jewish leaders who are obliged to Rome for keeping the Jewish King Herod in power, and if Jesus even hints at resistance to Rome, they will rat on him. No matter what answer Jesus gives, he is doomed.

So, Jesus, brilliantly, *doesn’t answer*. Instead he asks for a coin, and comes with a question for his questioners: “Whose image is on this coin, and whose inscription?”

Well, it’s Caesar’s, they reply.

“Then give to Caesar what is Caesar’s,” Jesus replies, “and give to God what is God’s.”

It’s a brilliant play, a “checkmate” move. It’s a response, which on the one hand prevents him from preaching outright revolt to Rome and keeps him firmly on the side of faith. Of course, the coin is Caesar’s. So how can anyone object to returning to Caesar what is his? Yet Jesus simultaneously asserts God’s authority over that of Caesar, over all of Rome, even. For as every good Jew knows, all that is Caesar’s, is God’s. Many of them there that day would be able to quote by heart the opening lines of the psalm: “The earth is Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.” For the faithful Jews listening to Jesus that day, they knew that not only their wealth, but their very selves belonged to God. Or to stick with the analogy of the coin, each one of us is minted in the image of our creator; we are God’s treasure, and as such, we belong to him.

It’s a fabulous answer, but frankly, I don’t know what it means. I mean, in one sense the message is clear: *everything* belongs to God. All our blessings come from God above, whether we’re talking our financial resources, our God given talents or the very gift of our life and our time on this earth. This much is obvious, so obvious even a pre-schooler can understand it. It’s in the application that things get murky. How do we give back to God all that belongs to Him, in a day-to-day practical sense? Caesar demands a tax. But what does God ask of us, the one to whom we owe everything?

If everything comes from God, including your very being, does giving back to God what is his mean that we must all, by necessity, become monk, handing over all our earthly possessions and offering

all our time and talent in service to him? Well, clearly not. But how do you sort out what giving to God what is God's means when you are a retiree with grandchildren, or a teenager in high school, or a middle age professional caring for aging parents, or a single parent juggling multiple responsibilities?

The truth is, I can't tell you what this means for you in your life right now. Nor can any biblical scholar, for that matter. The truth is, I think the living out of this command will look different in different seasons of our lives. For example, there have been times in our marriage when we were double income, no kids, when tithing for us meant tithing on our gross, and gifts to organizations other than the church were on top of that. And there have been times in our married life when we were both underemployed with not enough to make ends meet, where choosing to give sacrificially meant less than 10%, yes, although what we gave cost us more, if you know what I mean. Different circumstances, and in each we had to prayerfully consider anew what challenge God was asking of us.

Or again, when it comes to giving of our time and talents, at one stage of our lives, giving of our time looked like Mike leading bible studies and me taking on extra responsibilities creating an inter-church worship service. But a few years down the line, I remember us having a conversation during those days when there was no money for babysitters, where we realized that giving of our time had to happen when one parent was available to watch the kids, or finding ministries that could be done mostly from home or with kids, which I did, taking on play group and writing ministry during my maternity leaves. Different circumstances, with different obligations and opportunities and different call from God.

Or again, when it comes to offering God our talents, I have a very clear memory of a conversation with my mother, then newly retired. She talked to me about her talents and said that she wanted to use her newfound time to give back to God in a joyful way, but she wasn't sure how, exactly. Would my mother, a retired school teacher, teach Sunday school again? There was a need, certainly. Or maybe she would try something new, and join an ESL ministry to Chinese immigrants? Or maybe she would explore an entirely different ministry with a talent of hers, hospitality, and help newcomers in the church find friendships in the community? Where was God leading? For my mother, it was a matter for discernment through prayer and conversations and testing the water.

My point in sharing these stories, is simple. There *is* no unchanging list outlining what it means to give to God what is God's. Each of our realities are very different, and this call to honour God by offering back to him what is His must be worked out in our own unique context, while we prayerfully listen for God's guidance. And since our lives are constantly changing, with new demands and new opportunities unfolding, and with God asking of us different things in each season of our lives, it's not a question that we can sort through once in our lives and be done with it. Instead, Jesus' challenge to give to God what is God's is one that we need to consider repeatedly.

I was both pleased and surprised when I saw the gospel reading for today, because it coincides so nicely with the launch of our parish's Joyful Giving campaign. Over the past few weeks, you will have heard Gord Thow and members of the committee talk about this Joyful Giving. The campaign is quite simply an opportunity for us, as individual households, to prayerfully consider what it means for us to give to God what is God's in this season of our lives, in the context of our life at Christ Church. And, because everything we have belongs to God, we're being asked to think about our blessings in three categories: Time, Talents and Treasure. We're going to take a few moments to

look at those categories, to give you a sense of what they might mean.

When I think about my time, while all our time belongs to God, is there time I am purposefully offering back to him? Perhaps, as you prayerfully think about this category, you might feel God challenging you to set aside time for prayer, which you have neglected. Or perhaps you have sensed God challenging you to be more deliberate in carving out time for a Sabbath, a time that is dedicated to worship and rest. Or perhaps as you look over how you are spending this resource of time, you may feel God's Spirit prompting you to spend some of that time serving others. If all our time is God's time, what does it mean to purposefully offer your time to God in this season of your life?

With regards to talents, this has to do with your God given talents and your spiritual gifts. Maybe God has given you the spiritual gift of encouragement, but as you prayerfully think about offering to God your talents, you suddenly realize you haven't been very purposeful in blessing others with it. Perhaps you feel God challenging you to commit to exercising that spiritual gift to the building up of your family and your church community. You decide that as a homebound senior, the best way to start doing that is by writing notes of blessings to people, and to verbally encourage people as opportunity arises. Or maybe you are someone whom God has blessed with a talent with computers and a creative mind, and as you discern what it means right now to offer your talents to God, you feel like the Holy Spirit is nudging you to bring those two talents together and to offer them to God in service to him. You don't know what on earth that means yet, but you realize your job is to figure that out. Or maybe there is a specific ministry opportunity that you've been asked to consider, and you think – I may have the talents needed – and the opportunity is one that has come up enough that you find yourself wondering: is this something God is asking me to do? You don't know yet, but you put this down as an item to pray about and put on your to-do list the name of a friend to email, to find out more about the ministry to help in your discernment. If all our talents are God's, what does it mean for you to offer God your talents in this season of your life?

And lastly, with regards to treasure, this has to do with our material blessings, both in terms of what we give back to God from our finances, as well as how we use the material blessings we have – our cars, our homes, and so on. What does it mean to give purposefully, joyfully and sacrificially of your financial resources this year? We are asking households to include, in this process, their giving intentions to the ministry of the Church, to help us be faithful stewards as we plan next year's budget. And I hope that you will also think about other material blessings, and what it means to offer them back to God. I know one family, for example, who decided this meant they would loan their spare car to visiting missionaries during furloughs. I know another family who decided this meant they would open their home to feed a university student in their church at least one Sunday a month, both as a practical gift of food and as a spiritual gift of welcome and hospitality. If all our treasure is God's, what does it mean for you to offer God this treasure in this season of your life?

Our hope and prayer are that the Joyful Giving Campaign will be a blessing for you and your household, offering you an opportunity to engage, more deeply, with Jesus' challenge in this season of your life: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and give to God what is God's."

Sample #3 – Giving Our Giftedness – Our Gifts to God

Sermon by the Rev. Mary Lewis, Associate Rector, St. John's York Mills Parish, Toronto, January 1, 2006. (Reprinted with permission)

Today here at St. John's we are keeping the Feast of the Epiphany. Today we have heard the story of the three wise men, who were led by a star, and who brought their gifts to give to the Christ Child – their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Taking example from these wise men, I would like to focus in my sermon on us giving our giftedness – our gifts, to God, because each of us has a set of gifts that we can give to God.

What are the gifts which God has given to you? They are your talents, your aptitudes, your abilities, events that have happened to you. These have shaped you, your family, your health, your everything. Your gifts are the sum of all the resources that God has given to you. Your gifts are not just genetic abilities and natural aptitudes, although these are part of your gifts. Many of your most precious gifts are qualities and resources that have been developed in you over time.

It is true that God has given everyone here today an abundance of gifts. So, I ask you to think right now – what are the gifts and resources that God has given you?

Mary Schramm has written a book titled "Gifts of Grace". In her book, she suggests that there are five steps in ascertaining and using your gifts.

The first step is to discover your gifts – and you nearly always discover your gifts in relationship; you rarely discover your gifts in isolation. For example, we discover our giftedness while at work: gifts for organization, leadership, cooperation. In a good marriage, a spouse is forever helping you to discover your talents and how to use those talents more effectively, from the time you are first married until you die. You are forever growing and changing, and a good partner is one who helps you to discover yourself and what you want to do next with your life. Friends also help you to discover yourself. They know your interests and resources and the changing circumstances of your life, and they help you to discover and expand your giftedness. I believe that it is very important to keep learning about, and using, your gifts at each stage of your life.

The second step is to accept the gifts which God has given you. This is the art of maturity – learning to accept the gifts that God has given to you and not given to you. A key indicator is how jealous and envious you are of other people and their gifts. If you are jealous and envious of other people's giftedness, or if you feel inferior, chances are you have not really accepted your own blend of gifts that God has given to you.

The third step is to enjoy your God-given gifts: to take pleasure in them – to appreciate what God can do through your life. For example, if you are an artistic person – a painter, a sculptor, a photographer – you get a great deal of pleasure from creating a piece of your very own artwork.

The fourth step is to develop your gifts. Like all gifts, your gifts need to be put to work, to be exercised, to be matured. Nothing in this world becomes stronger without hard work and the

investment of your time and energy. Just to rely on native talent and to avoid the hard work of developing that gift will lead you nowhere.

The fifth step involves all the steps....and it is to surrender all your gifts to God. This means to give all your gifts to Jesus Christ. That is what was wise about the wise men in our Bible story today. Their wisdom wasn't merely giving their material gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, but it was the gift of their total selves to their journey to find the Christ Child. Their trip took a long time, and they were totally devoted to the mission of finding Jesus, making use of all their resources to do so.

I believe that wisdom for you and for me is giving all our gifts to Jesus Christ. If we don't, we will use our gifts for our own benefit...just to glorify ourselves. But you and I are called instead to glorify God, and to praise God each day for all of God's wonderful works done in and through us.

Do you realize that, when you discover your gifts, use your gifts, and surrender your gifts to Jesus, you are doing the will of God for our life? Perhaps you have asked yourself: What is God's will for my life? Very simply, to do the will of God is to discover and use and surrender your God-given resources to make the world a better place, to be the kingdom of God in your own time and space.

Today is Epiphany Sunday. It is that Sunday in which we celebrate the gifts that the wise men brought to Jesus. And, indeed, this is when each one of us becomes wise: when we discover the unique blend of gifts that God has given to us; when we have accepted those gifts; when we enjoy those gifts, develop those gifts, and surrender those gifts to Christ.

I pray that you will find fresh joy in this New Year through the gifts you offer this Epiphany Sunday to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Episcopal Network for Stewardship has developed the following Litany of Thanksgiving for Stewardship Campaigns:

The Prayers of the People for the Fall Focus on Stewardship A Litany for Stewardship

Leader: Let us pray for the mission of the Church, our baptismal ministries, and the Christian Stewardship by which we use all the resources God gives us to fulfill God's will and purpose for the world.

God the Father, who created us, affirm our faith in you that we may fulfill our Baptismal Vows.

The People: *With all that we are and all that we have, we honour God.*

L: God the Son, who redeemed us, keep us in the apostle's teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers, that we may fulfill our Baptismal Vows.

P: *With all that we are and all that we have, we honour God.*

L: God the Holy Spirit who empowers us, preserve us in resisting evil and whenever we fall into sin, help us to repent and return to the Lord, that we may fulfill our Baptismal Vows.

P: *With all that we are and all that we have, we honour God.*

L: Lord Jesus Christ, be known to us as Risen Lord as we proclaim by word and example the Good News of God made manifest in You, that we may fulfill our Baptismal Vows.

P: *With all that we are and all that we have, we honour God.*

L: Lord Jesus Christ, reveal Your presence in those persons we seek and serve in Your name, loving our unknown neighbors as we love our families and ourselves, that we may fulfill our Baptismal Vows.

P: *With all that we are and all that we have, we honour God.*

L: Lord Jesus Christ, be with us as we strive for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity God places in every human being, that we may fulfill our Baptismal Vows.

P: *With all that we are and all that we have, we honour God.*

L: God the Holy Spirit, deliver us from sin and death, open our hearts to grace and truth, and fill us with Your holy and life-giving grace, that we may fulfill our Baptismal Vows.

P: With all that we are and all that we have, we honour God.

L: God the Holy Spirit, keep us in the faith and communion of Your Holy Church and teach us to love others in Your power, that we may fulfill our Baptismal Vows.

P: With all that we are and all that we have, we honour God.

L: God the Holy Spirit, send us into the world to witness to Your love and bring us to the fullness of Your peace and glory, that we may fulfill our Baptismal Vows.

P: With all that we are and all that we have, we honour God.

The Book of Alternative Services (1985) identifies several litanies that might be useful during the six weeks of your Joyful Giving campaign. These include (with page # in parentheses):

Teach us to use your creation for your greater praise, that all may share the good things you provide.
Lord, hear our prayer. (112)

We pray for one another: may we always be united in service and love.
Lord, hear and have mercy. (114)

Let us ask the Lord to teach us to love others as he has loved us.
Lord, have mercy. (117)

For the mission of the Church, that in faithful witness it may preach the gospel to the ends of the earth, we pray to you, Lord.
Lord, have mercy. (121)

That he may provide for those who lack food, work, or shelter, let us pray to the Lord.
Hear us, Lord of glory! (122)

Scripture References

Old Testament

- Deuteronomy 15:11 Always be open-handed with your brother, and with anyone in your country who is in need and poor.
- Deuteronomy 16:17 Each of you, with as much as you can, give in proportion to the blessings which the Lord God has bestowed on you.
- Proverbs 3:9-10 Honour the Lord with your wealth, with first fruits of all you produce; then will your barns be filled with grain, with new wine your vats will overflow.
- Proverbs 11:25 Those who confer benefits will be amply enriched, and those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed.
- Sirach 35:9 Give to the Most High as has been given to you, generously, according to your means.

New Testament

- Matthew 5:1-12 Blessed are the poor..... (the Beatitudes)
- Matthew 6:19-20 Do not store up riches for yourselves here on earth, where moths and rust destroy, and robbers break in and steal. Instead, store up riches for yourselves in heaven, where moth and rust destroy, and robbers cannot break in and steal.
- Matthew 10:42 You can be sure that whoever gives even a drink of cold water to one of the least of my followers, will certainly receive a reward.
- Matthew 16:27 He will repay each man according to his deeds.
- Matthew 22:37 You shall love the Lord your God.... You shall love your neighbour as yourself.
- Matthew 25:40 I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of my followers, you did it for me.
- Mark 10:21 Sell all you have and give the money to the poor and you will have riches in heaven.
- Mark 12:44 For the others put in what they had to spare of their riches, but she, poor as she is, put in all she had.
- Luke 3:11 Whoever has two shirts must give one to those who had none, and whoever has food must share it.

- Luke 6:38 Give to others, and God will give to you.....The measure you use for others is the one that God will use for you.
- Luke 12:34 For your heart will always be where your riches are.
- Luke 12:48 Much is required of the person to whom much is given; much more is required from the person to whom more is given.
- Luke 14:33 None of you can be my disciple unless you give up everything you have.
- Luke 16:13 You cannot serve both God and money.
- Luke 18:25 It is much harder for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle.
- John 9:4 As long as it is day, we must keep on doing the work of Him who sent me.
- John 12:26 My Father will honour anyone who serves me.
- John 15:12 Love one another, just as I have loved you.
- John 21:15-16 Jesus said, “take care of my lambs.....take care of my sheep.”
- Acts 2:44 Those who believed shared all things in common.
- Acts 20:35 There is more happiness in giving than in receiving.
- 2 Corinthians 8:2 They have been severely tested by the troubles they went through; but their joy was so great that they were extremely generous in their giving, even though they are very poor.
- 2 Corinthians 9:7 Everyone must give according to what they have inwardly decided; not sadly, not grudgingly, for God loves a cheerful giver.
- 2 Corinthians 9:8 God can give you more than you need, so that you will always have all you need for yourselves and more than enough for every good cause.
- 1 Timothy 6:18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share with others.
- Hebrews 13:16 Do not forget to do good and to help one another, because these are the sacrifices that please God.
- James 2:15 Suppose a brother or sister who need clothes and doesn't have enough to eat...what good is there... if you don't give them the necessities of life?

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the many parish volunteers and clergy who have used this resource and through their experience have offered their own suggestions on how to improve it. I am delighted to hear from time to time that others, from across the church in Canada, have found this resource to be helpful in their stewardship efforts.

Specifically, I would like to thank the volunteers and clergy from the following parishes for their input in this revised edition:

Christ Memorial Church, Oshawa
St. Andrew, Scarborough
St Dunstan of Canterbury
St. John, York Mills
St. Peter, Cobourg
St. Margaret, New Toronto
St. Mary Magdalene, Toronto
St. Thomas, Brooklin
St. Timothy, North Toronto