

A Festival of Thanksgiving

Dear friends,

Charles R. Lane once said “The goal of our stewardship ministry is to help God’s people grow in their relationship with Jesus through the use of the time, talents and finances God has entrusted to them.” Stewardship ministry also seeks to strengthen our work as coworkers with God in God’s mission. I cannot imagine a higher calling and joy than the strengthening of our relationship with Christ while partnering with God in the building of God’s Kingdom of justice, beauty and love. Even though it has almost become a cliché I agree with the statement that stewardship is all that we do after we say we believe, after we receive the gift of God’s grace in Christ Jesus. Stewardship is integral to being a church in mission, a church that lives the Marks of Mission.

With these foundational principles in mind we have developed a stewardship program that focuses on spiritual formation by helping people and parishes to grow in their faith. We call it “A Festival of Thanksgiving.”

To succeed in these objectives we have attempted to ground the program in Holy Scripture, worship and prayer. We have identified the theological motifs of grace, gratitude and generosity as our overall theme. Obviously there are other motifs you could use but we thought these three set a solid framework for people in considering what it means to be a good steward. Even if you do not use the material for an actual stewardship campaign, we encourage you to find ways to use these themes in teaching and discussing stewardship throughout the year. In the end, we all need to make stewardship a part of who we are. Something we just do without thinking.

If you do choose to use this framework for a stewardship initiative, we have also provided practical resources to assist you in asking people to give generously. We are confident that this effort will be a financial blessing to your parish. The literature on stewardship commitment programs notes that when all things are equal and the program is done properly parishes can expect a 15% -30% increase in annual giving. This is obviously encouraging for parishes, as increased revenue will aid you in your ministry. However, it is our desire that the festival’s focus will be on the givers’ need to give more than the parishes’ need to receive. We also pray that the focus of the festival will be on giving to God’s mission and not to the parish budget.

On a pastoral note, as the title implies, there is a lot of opportunity to give thanks throughout the festival. This time of celebration can be very encouraging for both the parish and the parishioners. It is fun and delightful to give thanks. However, for people struggling with grief, poverty, depression, doubts of faith and other issues, giving thanks and celebrating may be difficult. Obviously such an event does not take away the mandate to cry with those who cry and to comfort those in need (Romans 12:9-15).

Included in this package is a brief listing of resources that you might find helpful. In this list are three other examples of stewardship pledge programs that you can use. Regardless of how you choose to do stewardship ministry in your parish, I am delighted to assist you in any way that I can, including joining your stewardship committee as a helping hand.

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