

What return shall I
make to the Lord

for all the good He
has done for me?

- Psalm 116

Stewardship at St. Walter Parish

Stewardship versus Tithing

Last Sunday's (December 11) *Daily Herald* front page carried a *Wall Street Journal* article on tithing. Writer Suzanne Sataline asked "Is the tithe too much in tight times?" as she discussed the practice of giving 10% of one's pay to the Church. The article mainly focused on challenges some Christians are making to the tithing practice that is encouraged by their local congregations. Resistance to tithing has increased as (1) more churchgoers question the way some churches spend money, (2) people react negatively to guilt motivated tithing messages, and (3) self-centered attitudes leave people less inclined to want to give. Unfortunately Ms. Sataline's article did not distinguish between *stewardship*, which we have been focusing on at St. Walter, and *tithing*. It did not even mention the concept of stewardship.

In light of this article, it is appropriate to consider the differences and relationship between tithing and stewardship. Tithing is a way of financial giving, while stewardship stresses a way of life that recognizes that all we have belongs to God. Tithing encourages a one-tenth offering of one's income to God based on Old Testament biblical concepts. Stewardship recognizes that Jesus calls for a deeper participation in life in the Kingdom that involves our entire selves. As stewards of creation we are reminded that we are not owners, only caretakers, of our life and belongings.

Tithing makes little sense for one who is not first a steward. There was a telling quote of a Catholic lawyer in the mentioned article. He said he donated weekly to his church, but tithing was a different story, because "It's my money to do with what I want." If that is a person's attitude, he need's a stewardship, not a tithing, message. He needs first to work on a spirituality of gratitude, to have eyes that look for blessings each day, to have the capacity to say "thank-you." Then he needs a heart and mind that are open to God in asking for guidance in how best to use what has been entrusted to him. In time he will hopefully recognize that his giving to the church and other worthy causes is really a response to God's goodness and

generosity to him. The steward is motivated not by fear or guilt, but by love and a desire to see God's work accomplished through the Church. The steward may come to see his own need to tithe as his personal response to God's goodness.

"The excellence of a gift lies in its appropriateness rather than in its value."

— Charles Dudley Warner (1829-1900)

Charles Dudley Warner, an American essayist and novelist once wrote, "The excellence of a gift lies in its appropriateness rather than in its value." In this season of Christmas, we celebrate God's gift to us that was not monetarily valuable but was nonetheless perfect in its appropriateness. The world most needed a Savior, and that is what God gave. The steward knows the meaning of this quote and asks, "Will my gifts this Christmas to others and to God be appropriate?" Even in economically tight times, the steward gives back to God some portion, because they never give up on God, because God never gives up on them.

by Father John Regan

Lessons in Stewardship: A Love that Sacrifices

During the Great Depression, Sue's family was seriously poor. Meals often consisted of a bowl of oatmeal. Her mother saved the coupons inside the boxes to get needed things, like the cups shown on the box. But, what attracted Sue, was the doll shown on the box.



Just before Christmas she and her mother saw the doll as a display model in a store. Sue talked about it all the way home. Imagine Sue's joy on Christmas morning, when she saw the doll under the tree.

Shortly after Christmas her mother died. Years later Sue learned that her mother had begged the store manager to work at the store in exchange for the display model.

Can you recall a similar memory of your father or mother? Often our parents teach us the most important stewardship lessons.