

"There Is Still Work That Needs To Be Done"

The Early Days

I recall arriving at Assumption in 1995 and being handed a pole with a clipper on the end and told that the palm trees in the back yard needed trimming. I have fond memories of ripping out walls with some beloved parishioners who took great joy in making the Community Center into something that would better serve our needs. Year after year, the building evolved into what it is today - a home for many of us. I also recall standing up one Sunday and explaining that the Church needed money in order to pay the bills for that week. The humble altar took up the small space of the present day bookstore and 150 brown metal folding chairs filled the Church. Over time, the Church grew as it continued to do the work of God, reaching out to those in need, and even sponsoring a weekly radio outreach program. Today, in a way, I am coming to you and handing you a "pole" with a clipper on the end and letting you know, there is still work that needs to be done and your help is needed.

A New Chapter and a New Challenge to Increase Personal Levels of Stewardship

Since Assumption opened its doors October 28, 2001, we have experienced tremendous growth on many levels. Stewards have doubled from 150 to 300 and the budget has grown as well. Every year, at least 150 steward volunteers (add another 150 for the Festival) give of their time and talents in service to the Church. I will never forget experiencing the amazement when I saw our operating account balance climb to \$80,000! Over the last year and a half, things have slowly changed. Our budget continues to grow. And stewards have generously given to many special projects ("Icon Dome Campaign" and "Dream Campaign") in addition to their stewardship. However, our Stewardship has not grown as much as is needed. Presently, our operational checking account balance is \$26,000. To illustrate, in September we collected \$21,000 and spent \$42,000. The good news is that \$100,000 is pledged that is yet to be collected from Stewardship pledges.

The difficult economic times have affected everyone, but giving to the Church is not based upon what you have. It is based upon what one is willing to give. Many long time Assumption stewards who have always shared from their abundance have been some of the most affected by the down turn in the economy and they are still giving! What this means is that more than ever, EVERYONE'S participation in sharing and supporting the ministries of the Church is vital to our future development and progress.

Fear Not!

"Fear not!" said the Lord to His disciples while the ship was being tossed upon the sea by the life-threatening storm. "I am with you!" The assurance Christ offers is that His Father does provide us with all we need and more. We are taught not to worry about

the needs of this life, and instead to seek His kingdom and follow, doing good works. When something has been taken away that has long been a source of security, feelings of abandonment, doubt, and fear can develop. In turn, this causes troubling thoughts and concerns.

A boat is supposed to keep us out of the water and above the storm. When waves come, however, and crash over the sides, the boat fills with water-- we panic and become fearful. It is in this very condition and moment that Christ comes to us and offers His assurance that He has not abandoned us. It is when we feel abandoned that our eyes are taken off Him and all we see is the storm. In one storm recorded in the Bible, Jesus suddenly appeared walking on the water. In another storm, He was asleep in the boat with the disciples. In the first case Jesus was thought to have been away from them while in the other, He was with them yet asleep. This illustrates the two most common conditions of human life-- one the feeling of abandonment and the other, doubt which leads to fear. During difficult times, no matter what we might be feeling, Christ is with us in the storm.

Current Stewards

If you are a current steward of Assumption, your faith shines through making a pledge from your heart. Through cutting out some spending that is not essential, lowering household expense items, saving money by using coupons and shopping at stores with lower prices, many have found that they have more available now to do the things that are important to their families. "Fasting" from those things we can do without takes on a significant meaning when we are forced to stretch our dollars. An analogy is falling fuel prices. Prices have fallen largely because Americans have conserved by changing their driving habits. Consequently, there is more fuel available "driving" the prices down and we all have more to spend!

The faithfulness of our Stewards provides the backbone for the ministries at Assumption. We have 299 stewards who have pledged \$295,000! I hand to each of you a "pole" and point out that there is still more work that needs to be done at Assumption. As you consider your pledge for 2009, think and pray about how many ways giving to the Church is an investment in our spiritual life and growth. Especially for the children, their families and all. As the Church has doubled in size, so have the demands for ministry development and supervision.

New people come forward and offer their talents to direct new or existing ministries. Recently, this occurred in JOY and GOYA. Creating an environment that encourages new ideas, energy and talent inspires me to bring the ministries to another level. If you would like to get involved in a ministry or develop a new one, I will assist you in making it happen. Your involvement in the ministries and administration of the Church is more vital than ever as the Church grows. The parish needs Council members; web site maintenance; an accounting consultant; office volunteers; purchasing and delivering

various items to/from the church; and organizing work projects. These are just a few examples of how you can give of your time and talents to assist the church.

Pastoral Assistant & Your 2009 Stewardship Pledge

The parish Council is considering hiring a Pastoral Assistant next year, but has decided to wait until our Spring Assembly and to evaluate our response to the 2009 Stewardship Campaign. A Pastoral Assistant is a person with a theological education who is equipped to do everything a priest does, except the sacraments. I have realized that the spiritual needs of parishioners would be better served with the assistance of another staff member. It is not that your priest needs help, as much as it is that the needs of the community have grown. A theologically trained staff member is needed to take our ministries to another level and develop new ones.

For this to become a reality two things need to happen. First, the mortgage needs to be retired. We cannot afford to do both. Secondly, stewardship pledges need to be well above the current level. A half-year salary for a Pastoral Assistant, including benefits, is approximately \$32,000. What a blessing for us to be able to take our annual mortgage payments of \$50,000, and invest them in expanding the ministry staff at Assumption. I pray that you will take this into consideration as you make your pledge for 2009.

Non-Stewards

For whatever reasons, some come to Assumption and choose not make a pledge in support of the ministries. Our prayer is that you will join us this year and next, by making a pledge to do whatever you can. More importantly, hopefully the Church will become a place of greater importance in your life and you will find refreshment in God's grace as He pours His blessings upon your life. If you are struggling in your faith, we pray that Christ may strengthen and enliven it. Everyone is invited to share in the blessings that come from giving and sharing that which God has given us all. I hand this "pole" to you and say, "there is work that needs to be done, please join us!"

Some Good News - Debt Free - \$69,000 to go!

Perhaps the greatest blessing before us is the opportunity to retire the mortgage on December 15, 2008! To be able to enter 2009 debt free and to consider hiring a Pastoral Assistant is not an impossible dream. It can happen if EVERYONE participates and prays for guidance in making a decision to give above current levels. Many parishioners have given a great deal of money to the building of the Church and the retirement of the mortgage. Our Lord has the same expectation from those who have little and from those who have much...both are called to give sacrificially from their heart to Christ and His Church. So...this is the last "pole" I hand to you - for now.