

Reflections On Wealth

The month of September at St. Francis Parish traditionally means the start of another "Stewardship" campaign, a time in which we attempt to get greater numbers of our parishioners involved in committing their time, talents, and funds to help further spread the Gospel message both inside and outside of our parish. For those of us on the staff, it is an exciting time, as it always results in new people, many of whom we do not yet know, volunteering to work in our areas of ministry. Some of these folks become so involved in the ministry in which they are volunteering, that they continue to volunteer their time there, year after year after year. We are truly blessed to have such a vibrant parish, with so many different ministries, and to have so many parishioners who share our commitment to making those ministries the best that they can be.

While we seem to be quite good at communicating our needs for volunteers for our various ministries to you, our fellow parishioners, candidly we do not seem to be as good when it comes to communicating our need for funds. Including our school, the parish employs about 60 people, and although every one of them is paid significantly less than they would earn in the private or government sector, payroll and benefits are still the major cost in our annual budget. No one has told me that

these people are ineffective, or that we waste money; many, in fact, have told me that they think it is a shame that we cannot pay these people more of what they truly deserve. I certainly appreciate those sentiments, but until we have sufficient financial resources, we aren't going to be able to do that.

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That leads me to another point. I wish I had a dollar (which I'd donate to the parish!) for every time I've heard our parishioners say, "you know, the Catholic Church is very wealthy", or that "St. Francis is a wealthy parish". Sometimes I think this is a rationale for "letting the other guy do it"; that the Church and our fellow parishioners have so much money that I don't need to consider how well I support the message of Stewardship. You know, the Catholic Church is wealthy, but only if you look at the talents and commitment of its members, or at the value of its real estate holdings. And, as any one who owns real

estate (your own home, or investment property) could tell you, real estate is not a source (generator) of cash, it is a user of cash. The worldwide Church needs substantial gifts of cash in order to maintain its glorious buildings, and to provide heat, light, air conditioning, water and sewer, and all the other essentials that are required in today's modern world.

Our situation at St. Francis is similar. Yes, we are "wealthy" when measured in terms of the quality of our parishioners, of their commitment to the Church and to our parish. We are also "wealthy" when we look at the facilities that we have here for worship, for socializing, for the education of our children, and for the efforts that our ministries make in furthering the Word of God. But, do we have sufficient cash resources to maintain these facilities the way they should be, and to support our ministries and the people that dedicate their lives (often a lot more than 40 hours a week) to those ministries? Well, no, we don't. And that is what I would like everyone to reflect upon this September. Are we serious about our responsibilities to live the Gospel, and to spread its message inside and outside our parish? If so, remember that it takes money to accomplish those things, and don't be reluctant to do your part.

---- Dave Barera