



The Good Steward

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Published to help stimulate a better understanding of our need to give

Living the generous life – By Fr. Tony Meadows, pen name for an overworked Catholic pastor who loves ministry, writing & life. Reprinted with permission from Today's Parish Minister, www.todaysparishminister.com. Published by Twenty-Third Publications, New London, CT. (800) 321-0411. All rights reserved.

I try to honor people's generosity here. Part of that is respecting their time. Meetings are an hour and a half, never a minute longer. Sometimes the conversation wants to press beyond that limit and so tonight I stood out in the damp and drizzle for the finance committee's equivalent of tailgating. Stewardship was the topic tonight, and the seemingly intractable problem in generosity. People love this parish. It is a busy and bustling place, the liturgy is alive, but we are just limping along financially.

Counting the cost - The meeting slid down the slippery slope of frustration and judgment. A typical rant: "Movie tickets are \$9.50 at the mall, medium popcorn is \$4.50, and a soda is \$3.75. It costs \$71.00 for a family of four to see a flick, and they just write out a check for three bucks for Mass. Who writes a check for \$3.00?" About half the parish it seems. And then there is the reckoning of who has cottages at the beach, a Caribbean tan, a gas guzzler in the driveway. In my naiveté', I had thought that the Katrina and tsunami crises would have taught us that there is joy in giving. It *feels* good to give. That sentiment eroded away quickly. So I asked people to consider how they learned the value of giving, and for about an hour we shared our stories.

Making allowances - It was the late 1950's and I was heading off to Mass in the back seat of my dad's Crown Victoria. My mom and dad, my brother and I were a Catholic version of Ward and June Cleaver and the boys. The night before, I had overheard a testy conversation between my parents on the topic of my allowance. Dad, a child of the Depression, believed in ingenuity and self-reliance, and was opposed. My side, the pro-allowance league, was represented by Mom, an artist, a bohemian free-spirit. The "let's throw these seeds in the garden and see what sprouts" type. The victor was revealed at a stop light that morning. My dad's hand came over the back seat and, using the Solemn High Form of address – my first and middle names – he said: "Here is your allowance." Lady Liberty and two buffalo head nickels were dropped into my open palm. A king's ransom in the days of three-cent candy bars and dime comic books. But before the light changed, his hand came over the seat again, this time with a pink envelope. "My Children's Sunday Offering," it said. Dad said that now I had to decide what would go back to God. I was on my way to a place where you could show God how grateful you were for the gifts he gives. You get to give something back. Of course, in my perverse little mind, the questions were spinning. "I wonder if they will hold it up to the light. I wonder if Sister Ursula helps count the collection." But at the distance of nearly 50 years, it seems to me that my dad was teaching me how to live a generous life. We weren't the richest people in town by any stretch, but I remember overhearing a wealthy, but tragically sad, relative say to my mother, "Everyone who comes to my house comes with empty hands, but not you, you always have something wonderful to give."

Take it from the top – I remember this so well-my parents teaching me how to live a generous life, revealing to me how their hearts were calibrated, never giving of the leftovers, but from the top. They probably were unencumbered by a vocabulary of tithing or tax advantages, but they knew how to give. And they knew how to form my life and commitments. How can I pass that on to my parishioners, except by telling the story?

Sharing Our Time

“How are you? I am fine.” Do you remember learning how to write a letter in grade school? Didn't we always begin our letters like that and then wonder what else to say? How about hand-written thank you notes? It seems that letter-writing is a lost art. When is the last time you received one? I have a sister who is very conscientious about writing letters and notes, so it isn't that long since I've received one.

Writing takes time...it also takes paper and the cost of postage has gone up. But think about the last time you received a letter or a note from a friend or loved one. Or think about the last time you received an email from a loved one that was personal and not just a story or joke being passed on. Don't get me wrong...a lot of us enjoy receiving those. But getting a personal note means even more.

So share your time with a loved one...it is good stewardship, whether it be in person or through a letter or an email. God bless you and your families as you enjoy the warmth of the summer. Jean LaJesse, Stewardship Manager (jlajesse@crookston.org)

Show Him Your Tooth

Two small boys went into the dentist's office one day and waited for the dentist to get through with his appointment. When he came into the waiting room, the older of the two boys spoke up. “Doctor, I want a tooth taken out, and I don't want any gas, and I don't want it deadened because we're in a hurry.” The doctor smiled and said, “Well, you're quite a brave young man. You want a tooth pulled and you don't want any gas, and you don't want it deadened.” And the little boy said, “That's right, 'cause we're in a hurry.” “Well, okay,” said the dentist, “but tell me, which tooth is it?” And the little boy turned to his small friend and said, “Show him your tooth, Albert!”

The world is full of people like that, isn't it? People who want to see things happen and get things done, but who let someone else pay the price and to deal with the consequences. That's not the way it works. We have to get into the dentist's chair ourselves.

We have to recognize that giving of our time, talent and treasure to our church is not something someone else does. It is an effort we all need to support. It is everyone's responsibility. Used with permission by Parish Publishing, LLC, New Canaan, CT 06840

Did you know: if you run your dishwasher only with a full load, use the energy-saving setting to dry dishes and don't use heat when drying, you will reduce carbon dioxide (or CO₂) by 200 pounds a year?

Did you know: if you clean or replace air filters as recommended, you could reduce CO₂ by 175 pounds a year? Cleaning a dirty air conditioner filter can save 5% of the energy used. Iowa Interfaith Climate & Energy Campaign – compliments of Office of Christian Service, Diocese of Crookston