

Frequently Asked Stewardship Questions

Article 3: Stewardship and Pledging

This is the third installment of the parish “Stewardship FAQ Document”. This installment deals with topics associated with stewardship and pledging.

This installment offers answers to the following questions:

- “What is ‘stewardship’ – I really don’t understand the term? Isn’t it just a way of asking for money?”
- “What is pledging? How does it work?”
- “I don’t want to pledge because I don’t want to let the parish down.”



The fourth and last article will continue with these same topics. Previous articles covered “Parish Finances” (article 1) and “Support of the Diocese and the Orthodox Church in America” (article 2).

Q1: “What is stewardship – I really don’t understand the term? Isn’t it just a way of asking for money?”

Overview

The term stewardship basically means the careful, responsible management of something entrusted to one’s care... *for greatest output/return... for a purpose*. It refers to delegated authority to be practiced on behalf of the interests of another.

Three “T’s”

Though in church circles many discussions labeled “stewardship” tend to focus solely on money, stewardship is not just about money. There are really three dimensions of stewardship: time, talent and treasure.

As Christians we believe that none of what we have --our words, actions, powers, properties, resources -- are our own, to do with as we please. They have been given to us by God. So, stewardship in the church means responsibly working *with God* to manage all of our God-given resources for the purpose of turning our life toward God – and not ourselves.

God is the creator and owner of all. When we give to the church and others, we are only gratefully, joyfully giving to God what already belongs to Him. We’re not the owners — we’re the borrowers. We will be called to account for the use of the gifts, resources and talents given to us by God. Unlike the “one talent steward” who, having been given a talent by the Lord buried it in the ground and did nothing with it, we need to willingly make a return to God for His investment in each of us.



We Are Accountable for Our Parish

One of the most important gifts entrusted to our care is our parish itself --not only parish facilities and resources --but care of clergy and also care of the parish mission and purpose. Our parish has been entrusted to us—not to keep—but to care for, to minister from, to strengthen, and to preserve for future generations. We are responsible.

Responsibility

It should be the *joyful* responsibility of all parishioners to become *invested in* the work of the parish. Responsibly supporting the parish means that we each give a meaningful portion of the resources- time, talent and treasure- given to us by God back to God through the parish to support the costs associated with doing God's work through the parish.

Concern for Future

When each of us is gone, our future generations will be what remain of us and our parish. Let us leave for them a parish prepared to do Christ's work in the world and one which in every aspect can be found to be in better condition than we received it. In a parish with as many children as we have, preparing for a future would seem to an important and pleasant task.

Q2: "What is a pledge? How does it work? I never heard of this before."

Estimate of Giving

On one level a pledge is really nothing more than a prayerfully considered estimate of annual giving. On another level it is much more. It is a spiritual and practical *tool* to help us:

- *Regularly review* our relationship between: ourselves as persons; God as Master of our life; and our worldly possessions given to us by God to be managed on His behalf.
- *Express gratitude* for all that God has given to us.
- *Joyfully offer* a meaningful investment in the work of our parish -- sharing in the work of God through this church.
- *Reveal* what we value.

The pledge is used by you, privately, thoughtfully, and prayerfully to answer one key question - '*What of God's am I going to give back this year?*'

It is NOT...

- A "ploy" to generate more income...
- Or... to create a sense of guilt...
- Or even an obligation.

A Common, Good Practice

Pledging is the method used for decades by most OCA churches and -- in particular most OCA churches that are growing. It is not new. It is not a gimmick or the "next big thing". It is the method used in our parish since its beginning. Like any practice that has been "around for awhile" there can be a tendency to take it for granted. Our current parish stewardship education effort is attempting to strengthen this very good parish practice.

Other Qualities of Pledging: Planning, Stretching, Teaching

Pledging is also:

- A planning tool for parishioners and the parish. It provides an annual review for both.
- A "stretching" tool. Annual pledge discussions, when done well, energize a parish and its parishioners toward reiterating the parish mission and its priorities for ministry -- what we are called to do here, in this time, in this place.

- A rite of entrance for youth and new members – providing a platform for emphasizing the responsibilities of membership.

It is a private, nonbinding, estimate of what portion of God's financial gifts to us we intend to give back during the coming period.

Q3: "I don't want to pledge because I don't want to let the parish down if something changes."

This is also an oft expressed concern.

First of all let's remember the pledge is an estimate-- not a mortgage. If your personal circumstances change the pledge can and should be updated. Just let the treasurer know your new plans. No questions or need for justification.

Now let's dig deeper on this one.

Guessing is Not Planning

Those who offer this reaction seem to be expressing a belief that the parish is better off if they (the potential donors) are very conservative -- under commit and over deliver.

Yet, is this approach truly helpful to the parish? Are we really being responsible by not providing an estimate of giving? In reality the opposite is actually true. Asking parish leaders to guess about your intentions is not responsible --and not good stewardship. It avoids the review and commitment that makes the pledging process practically and spiritually valuable.

Unraveling this concern starts with an understanding that a good parish has a *job* to do. We have responsibilities to parishioners and to others to "make saints" and to bring the light of Christ to our region. When people hold back on their pledge decision, parish leaders may be forced to adopt an overly conservative income forecast and a spending plan that eliminates or reduces items in the budget. Then, when, unplanned donations materialize at year end the parish has paid an opportunity cost. Something that could have been afforded was pared back. Important improvements will be delayed or the cost will be laid off onto others. New ministries --hopefully with important impact -- may not be considered. ("*We can't afford that!*") Though the money may eventually arrive by year end, the opportunity to create an impact has been delayed or an opportunity completely missed.

Putting God Last in Line

Pardon what might seem like a harsh comment, but being unwilling to think through the idea of giving back the first fruits of the financial gifts bestowed on us and indicating our best estimate intentions, essentially puts God and His Church last in line. If everyone used the "wait and see then donate" approach little or nothing could be planned and much less would be done. Perhaps more realistically without the soul searching involved in making an honest, serious, meaningful pledge often the money does not ever find its way to the church.

Our next and final article will deal a few other miscellaneous questions about stewardship.