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## **Stewardship Stew** December 2009

### **TIME**

#### *Invitations to Pray*

I was surprised yesterday when I read in my parish bulletin that our parish was hosting an organ concert that afternoon. I checked the previous week's bulletin and the parish Web site and did not find it listed in either place. The event was planned by an outside organization that was drawing on its membership to attend, but I know that many parish members would also have attended if they had known about it in advance.

How many times are we surprised by low attendance at parish events? Offering programs of limited interest is one thing, but not properly promoting the event is quite another. Our parish worked with a capital campaign consultant who told us that people need to hear a message seventeen times before it takes root and prompts action. That might be true in the capital campaign arena, where folks are being asked to make significant financial gifts. For most parish events, we can count on good results when we include event information in the weekly bulletin, but certainly more than one notice is needed. For major parish-wide events, we should allow at least three weeks of bulletin articles. An insert in the bulletin might also be appropriate, as is information on the parish Web site. Posters displayed in parish gathering spaces are yet another medium to consider. Many parishes also use services such as Constant Contact<sup>®</sup> or another e-mailing system to spread the message.

This past weekend my parishes launched its Facebook<sup>®</sup> page. If you don't know what this free social networking service is, check in with a teen, a 20-something, or a 49-year-old J. S. Paluch employee. Facebook<sup>®</sup> allows us to post information about upcoming events at the parish. Without going into too much detail, Facebook<sup>®</sup> allows our "fans" easy access to information about all parish activities. Fans can also post comments about our posts on their own Facebook<sup>®</sup> pages, or you can allow fans to post on the parish's page. But after reviewing a few parishes' Facebook<sup>®</sup> pages, I would caution against allowing your fans to add a post to your parish page; some were offensive. Be sure to check out WLP Music on Facebook<sup>®</sup> as an example on how you, too, can promote your parish's events.

Does seventeen different exposures to your message not seem doable? If we add up the three to four bulletin listings, the Web site notice, the weekly viewing of the poster, several Facebook<sup>®</sup> posts, and an announcement at Mass, we're just about there. Of course, you'll have to promote the fact that your parish has a Facebook<sup>®</sup> page. Now about your Advent reconciliation service—what are your plans to draw people to attend?

## TALENT

### *Invitations to Participate*

The scripture readings in November focused on the “end times.” Two of the homilists I heard on the Thirty-third Sunday made reference to the new Hollywood offering *2012*. They pointed out that the movie lacked our belief in salvation and God’s promise to us of eternal life. Fr. Larry suggested that we need to treat today as if tomorrow will be the last day. What would we do to make a difference? The Gospel for the First Sunday of Advent returns to a similar theme, but Jesus tells us to “stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand” (Luke 21:28).

In Matthew’s Gospel for the Christmas Vigil Mass, we hear the genealogy of Jesus. Consider your own genealogy. What do we learn about ourselves from our ancestors? This Christmas there will be many family gatherings and opportunities to hear the old family stories. Maybe some new ones will be revealed. Pay attention to these stories; as you learn about your ancestors you will learn about yourself. Some of their characteristics formed you. My mother claims that I inherited her brother’s singing voice. His name, Francis, is my middle name, and I think of him often when I am the cantor or sing in the choir. Reminisce about those relatives you admire. Perhaps your inventory

of talent can be bolstered by recalling and adopting those gifts, talents, and activities that dear old Auntie shared with her parish community. Imagine our “end days” if everyone recognized and shared their talents during the time we live on earth.

Speaking of Christmas, every few years I compose a family quiz for our Christmas Eve gathering. The questions range from “What color dress did Mom wear to each of my five sisters’ weddings?” to “Who were our godparents?” My brothers-in-law receive a different quiz to make sure they have been paying attention to our stories over the years. They have to match the names of our aunts and uncles together correctly based on our stories. As a way of educating your parish members about the ministry needs of your parish, your parish quiz might include such questions as “How many lectors are needed each Sunday?” “How many people hours does it take to set the Christmas environment?” “When do the sacristans meet to clean the church?” This fun and informal way of informing the parish of the ministry roles, skills needed, time commitment, etc. is an great way to draw more people into the ministries. In your answer key, be sure to include a description and contact information for each ministry.

## Parish Quiz

1. How many lectors are needed each Sunday to proclaim the Word of God?
2. How many Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are needed each Sunday?
3. How many people hours does it take to decorate the church for Christmas?
4. Which day, time, and for how long do the sacristans meet to clean the church?
5. What time is Midnight Mass?

Answers:

1. 10, 2. 35, 3. 40, 4. Fridays after morning Mass for one hour, 5. Midnight

Looking to share your time and talent in these ministries? Call the Parish Office today!

## TREASURE

### *Invitations to Give Thanks*

Retailers—or maybe it's the media—have labeled the day after Thanksgiving as Black Friday, the day when the stores begin earning enough money to be profitable. In early November some retailers began discounting prices, trying to draw consumers in to create an earlier Black Friday. At many parishes, December offers a similar opportunity as more people attend Mass, especially for Christmas. Parish staff members and finance councils charged with encouraging generosity also see this as a time when members' and visitors' extra donations support the long-term financial health of the parish. For many parishes, the financial gifts at Christmas can be equal to those of four, six, or even eight Sundays. At the same time, it can be disconcerting to the returning Catholic if too much mention is made of the need for a generous collection. Marketers, though, will not want to miss that opportunity with such a captive audience . . . er, I mean attentive congregation. Although the economy crashed in the third quarter of 2008, many parishes fared well through the end of that year. As the economy begins its recovery, I wonder what will happen at the close of this year.

Certainly the economy has led most of the news stories this year. A big part of our economy is the health care industry. Like many of you, I have been following the health care debate. On one particular newscast, a segment aired that included a protester saying that everyone should just be on their own. So much for caring for each other! At a dinner party last weekend, one

guest asked if we were living a life of scarcity or a life of abundance. Are we so afraid of living without something that we have become hoarders and are unwilling to share the abundance God has given us? I once saw a magnet that read "The things I have keep from enjoying the things I have." Sometimes refrigerator-magnet or bumper-sticker philosophy hits home. Anyway, I did a little online searching and came across an article by Old Testament professor Walter Brueggemann. He urges us to imagine living knowing that the abundance from God is so great that we have to give it away and we'll still have enough. It is worth noting that the article was written in 1999, shortly before the New York stock market hit a new high of just over 11,000 points. American's new wealth was viewed as a scarcity to be hoarded, not shared. Here we are ten years later, having to learn to live as if it were ten years ago and we're having problems doing so. Now I'll be the first to admit that maybe I need better training as an economist, but I know that the gospel still calls us to share what we have, no matter how little it is that we think we have. This Christmas, maybe we need to be reminded that God's gifts are abundant and that we in turn should live a life of sharing that abundance with others.

You can read the entire article, *The Liturgy of Abundance, The Myth of Scarcity*, at <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=533>.

Next month in *Stewardship Stew*, I'll take a brief look at how we acknowledge our donors. Later in January, I'll conduct a Webinar on that same topic. You might want to begin thinking about creating a parish newsletter.