



## **Stewardship of Vocation and the Annual Bishop's Appeal**

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### **The Bottom Line**

What is the bottom line? Is it whether your parish reaches its financial target?

Does it matter if there are two large donations or thousands of small ones?

If the donations come in, does it matter if you talk about it?

Yes, it does matter because the bottom line isn't only about the target. The bottom line is about discipleship: the stewardship of our personal and communal vocations.

Parish ABA campaigns have two responsibilities apart from meeting the financial target: Responsibility and Vocation.

### **Responsibility**

First, it is important to speak about the Appeal even if a couple large donations cover the target from the beginning. There are many agencies that benefit from the Appeal and it is important for the community to be aware of the needs that exist among us and the people who are in need, as well as to hear about the good work the church is doing in the name of ABA supporters.

The community is also called to do more than just offer money or material support.

The needy in our community are made in the image of a loving God just like you and I are. They are people who need to give and receive love to feel whole.

As Pope Benedict said in his first encyclical, one year ago, in addition to meeting people's material needs, we must give them the "look of love which they crave" (*DCE* 18). However uncomfortable it may be, we must have the poor before us so that as individuals, and as a community, we can offer them our prayers, our recognition, and our love. The first responsibility, then, is about "living each day in an intimate, personal relationship with the Lord" (*DR*, 14) so that Christ uses us, our eyes and ears and hands and feet to see the poor, listen to the needy, to reach out to the suffering, and to walk in solidarity with the oppressed.

Second, even though the target may be easily met, it is important to speak about ABA lest parish leaders deprive the community of an opportunity to give. This second responsibility is another way of stating the adage: stewards don't give to needs, stewards have a need to give. Providing people with an opportunity to give to the ABA invites them to contribute to the community and to have a role and a stake in the work of the diocese. It is our job as disciples not only to serve others but to enable others to become servant leaders themselves.

## **Vocation**

The bottom line of the ABA campaign is to help each of our communities discern and live out God's call. The Christian vocation is the call to be a disciple of Jesus. Stewardship is how we manage or live out our particular call to discipleship.

Each of us is on a unique journey to holiness and has particular gifts. On account of our diversity, our responsibilities are different. It is often hard to know what it is we should be doing with our lives. From one perspective we can be assured that we are good people, we abide by the law, go to church, pay our taxes, and look after our own. Maybe we do some volunteer work. At the same time, there are so many choices to be made: how should we use our leisure time; share our money; or engage in self-improvement? How should we gain our living? These decisions account for our stewardship of the personal vocation or calling we have received from God. The church document on stewardship says, "Each of us must discern, accept, and live out joyfully and generously the commitments, responsibilities, and roles to which God calls him or her." (*DR*, 13)

Whether you are the Bishop, a priest, deacon, consecrated to religious life, married, or single, you have a vocation and are called to be a steward of your personal vocation. This stewardship of your vocation also includes the vocation of your community and of individuals within your community.

When we pray for vocations to the priesthood and religious life or pray that we may learn to be more generous or to care for the poor, do we really hope it will happen? Is it not often our greatest fear that God would actually hear our prayers? It makes sense to be afraid because often, when God answers our prayers, it means that we must change. The point is that the stewardship of vocation applies to us personally, to our loved ones, and to the community because we are all united as the body of Christ in prayer and sacrament. The prayer for vocations is not a prayer for somebody somewhere unrelated to us to decide to become a sister, a nun, a brother, or a priest. It is a challenge for all of us to consider our role in the promotion and maintenance of religious vocations, as we all take up our vocations as Christian stewards.

In closing, I invite you to reflect on some words from the Second Vatican Council.

"In the various types and duties of life, one and the same holiness is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God, and who obey the voice of the Father, worshiping God and Father in spirit and truth. These souls follow the poor Christ, the humble and cross-bearing Christ, in order to be made worthy of being partakers in His glory. Every person should walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of a living faith which arouses hope and works through charity." (*LG* 41, quoted in *DR* 17)

The purpose of the Annual Bishop's Appeal in your parish is not to ensure the mundane measure of the target being met, but to dispose the people in your community to be moved by the Spirit, to obey the Father, to follow Christ, and partake in His glory. Jesus doesn't just call, he calls, forms, and sends.