

Alms for the Poor: Lenten Stewardship at Our Lady of Perpetual Help

Every Lent the Diocese of Calgary offers Catholics an opportunity to grow spiritually by helping the poor throughout Southern Alberta with donations to the Annual Bishop's Appeal. The Appeal is conducted at the parish-level with the support of parish staff and volunteers. As with all stewardship efforts in the diocese, it is up to each parish to know themselves and use their gifts of creativity in promoting this opportunity. During my time in the diocese, I noticed how Our Lady of Perpetual Help parish in the northeast of Calgary has consistently met their campaign goal and demonstrated excellent stewardship practices in doing so. Our Lady of Perpetual Help parish seizes not only the opportunity to give but also the opportunity to recognize and call forth the gifts of a diverse group of parishioners in support of the appeal. In return, the parish itself grows in community and stronger leadership. I invited representatives of Our Lady of Perpetual Help to tell you, the reader, about the mechanics of how they run the campaign and how it benefits the parish. I hope you will be as inspired as I am by their commitment, love for Christ's poor, and creativity. – Simone Brosig, Ph.D., Stewardship Office

by Edward Lam, for Our Lady of Perpetual Help parish, Calgary

At Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish, we have always supported the Annual Bishop's Appeal (ABA) and tried our best to reach the goal set for us. Even more importantly, we educate our parishioners about ABA as the stewardship response to all that God has given to us. ABA is a fantastic way for parishes and individual parishioners to live out their discipleship by funding ministries in support of parish life and many charitable agencies that meet local, national, and international needs.

At the parish level, we conduct the campaign in a creative, constructive and fun-filled manner! Every year, the Parish Pastoral Council invites a different parish group to lead the campaign. For instance, in previous years the Young Adult Group, the Youth Group and the Christian Fellowship Families have all served as the parish planning committee for ABA. This year the Knights of Columbus are taking charge of the promotion and overall operation of ABA in our parish.

For the parish group selected to plan and promote the campaign, the opportunity is an exciting project! There is some pressure on the group to ensure that the goal is met. This friendly competition with previous leaders motivates the group to pull together, unite, and strengthen themselves as a ministry all the while serving and leading the whole parish towards the same goal! The bonding that takes place while the group focuses on a common mission kindles a fire for stewardship that quickly spreads and influences other parishioners to participate and put their faith into action.

Campaign materials, including an information letter, ABA brochure, and envelope are mailed out to parishioners at the beginning of the campaign. The materials are also distributed to

parishioners before and after masses to ensure that parishioners are well-aware of the campaign, the theme and the target.

I remember one year when the youth even dressed as the poor, wearing sandwich boards with campaign information on the front and back of their bodies. They walked around before and after masses to bring to everybody's attention that ABA had begun again for the year! The Knights in our Parish have already planned to dress in uniform to distribute the ABA brochure and envelope in a couple of weeks after the campaign has kicked off.

Announcements are made in the church bulletin to kick-off the campaign. Later, members from the designated parish group will make presentations at masses. The youth I mentioned above gave their presentation in the form of skit, making the appeal especially lively and vivid. Representatives from agencies that receive funds from ABA are invited to speak to parishioners after mass about how their contributions make a difference. The organizing group also sets up notice boards, which introduce the different charitable agencies and programs that benefit from donations to ABA. By knowing and understanding how their contributions are used, our parishioners are eager to contribute. Lastly, we install mobile thermometers at all entrances of the church, which indicate the changing progress of the campaign in our parish. This visual tool proves to be an excellent stimulant for parishioners to donate towards the target for the year. All in all, ABA is a collective effort by all members of the parish, and all parishes in the Diocese as well as an opportunity to be united in our baptism and commitment to Christ.

May God bless all who give generously, in response to God's abundant giving!