

Today you can pick up a letter from me with a report of your contributions to St. Anthony's last year, as well as a pledge card for next year. Those reports represent the sacrifices you have made for your parish. Thank you. You are helping us do God's work at worship, religious education, social events, and evangelization.

Please fill out the card and bring it back next week. Let us know how much you think you'll contribute to the basket this year. This helps us make plans, and it helps you set a goal. Our diocese recommends that all Catholics give 5% of their income to their parish. You'll see a chart on the back of the pledge card to help you with the math. Just to take an extreme example, if you give \$1 a week, that implies that you are making \$20 a week. If you make more than that, your goal should be 5% of that total. Some people give every week; some give once a month. You may give in the frequency suits you best.

Some people do not set a goal and just give what they happen to have on hand that day. We are grateful for every gift. But if you plan your gift ahead of time and prepare it at home, it becomes a more deliberate sign of the sacrifice you are making to God.

I especially thank those who use envelopes. We have about 700 households registered at St. Anthony's. We receive at least one envelope a year from 300 of you. In general, envelopes express a commitment to a parish, and parishes fare better when members support it regularly. Some of you have told me you come to church sometimes here, sometimes at Holy Cross or some other parish. If the membership of a parish is unstable, the finances remain unstable. Going to one parish and using its envelopes will help form a better community of friends and help that parish last long into the future. Those 300 households all have a report today showing our record of your gifts. If your envelope has no report, that means we don't have a record of your giving. In either case, only you know how close you got to 5%. Thank you for whatever you give.

Your contributions pay for our staff, who work hard and often put in extra hours volunteering. You also pay for heat in the winter and air conditioning in the summer. We do not receive enough from our own members to cover these expenses, but we do receive gifts from other parishes and individuals. With 700 households, we should be able to finance more of our own efforts. You will help all of us if you can offer 5% of your income. But we are grateful for every gift.

In today's first reading, Samuel is sleeping in the Temple when he hears God calling him. Samuel is there because his mother had made a pledge. Hannah and her husband had no children, so she prayed. She promised that if God gave her a child, she would give the child to God. God gave her Samuel, so she brought Samuel to the Temple. Now God was calling Samuel. My brothers and sisters, God is calling you. God is inviting you to make some pledge to him. Imitate Hannah, who gave her gift back to God. Make the same bold prayer that Samuel made: "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." If you listen, you will hear what God asks of you. Please open your ears and your heart and make a good pledge to St. Anthony's when you bring your cards next weekend.