

Thank you, everyone, for the financial support you give St. Anthony Catholic Church. I have mailed a letter to each of our registered households this week showing you our record of your gifts and asking you to make a pledge for next year. Please watch for the letter, receive its message of thanks, fill out the pledge card and return it next week so we can plan for the coming year.

The new year marks a good time to assess how much we give to charity. We have all received many blessings from God. One reason we gather here on Sundays is to thank God for those blessings and put them to use for the sake of the gospel. Sometimes we think that we have earned everything that we have, but all that we have is a gift. God gave us life; God gave us parents; God gave us a country; God gave us faith. God created all the possessions we have. We are not owners of what we've earned; we are stewards of what we've received. When we give to charities, we return to God a portion of what God has given to us.

The bible praises people who give one tenth of their possessions to works of charity. That is called a tithe. In our diocese we encourage Catholics to fulfill this ideal in three ways: Give 5% of your income to your parish church. Give 1% to the diocese in the Annual Catholic Appeal. Give 4% to any other charities you choose. Some people can give more than 10%. They should provide for those who have less. Others cannot give 10%. They should still give something, even if it is not the ideal. On the back of your pledge card, you'll see a chart helping you compare your annual income with the size of your gift to St. Anthony parish. As we begin this year, please check out where you stand in fulfilling a tithe, and challenge yourself to do a little better. The more generous you become, the happier you will feel.

At St. Anthony's, your gifts are making a difference. We pay our bills each month. We employ several people to run the office, supervise religious education and the liturgy, and maintain our facilities. Our employees have talents, and they put their gifts at the service of the church. We owe them a just salary. The diocesan finance office shows each pastor a scale so he can judge a proper salary based on an employee's type of work and years of service. Workers deserve a fair wage. In addition to paying our bills, we have increased our savings. Savings ensure that this parish will be here for our children and our children's children, they protect us in the event of catastrophe, and they prepare us for expensive improvements to our facilities in the near future.

In today's first reading, Isaiah says, "The LORD said to me: You are my servant, Israel, through whom I show my glory. Now the LORD has spoken who formed me as his servant from the womb." By the very fact of our creation, we are servants of the God who made us, stewards of the gifts placed into our care. When we use them wisely, we show the glory of God.

Please fill out your pledge card and bring it back next week to express your gratitude to God for the gifts you have received, especially for the gift of light that shines from St. Anthony Catholic Church in Jesus Christ our Lord.