

People support St. Anthony's Church in a beautiful spirit of love. I see it in the way that you contribute to the collection, volunteer for our many activities, greet newcomers to the church, and sustain old friendships. A vibrant and selfless community makes an impact on other people. It spreads the gospel. Here, many cultures share one faith. We are part of something greater than our individual lives.

God created this multicultural world and has given each of us a share in it. It is God's world. We are each responsible for part of it. We are like stewards to whom God has said, "Here, take care of this for me. It's mine. But you take care of it on my behalf." We sometimes feel as though the possessions we have and the money we make are our own. Whether we earned it or inherited it, like children, we think, "It's mine." But it's not. All that we own belongs to God, even our income. When we give to the church and to other charities, we are stewards returning to God the things that are already God's.

Giving to others is greatly satisfying. We sometimes do it just because it makes us feel so good. In the United States, people who itemize their tax deductions get another benefit from giving: lower taxes. But the best incentive is stewardship: we give because what we have isn't really ours. It's God's, and God wants us to put these resources where they will do the most good.

At St. Anthony's today, you may pick up a record of your contributions from last year, along with a letter from me and a pledge card for next year. Please return the pledge card today. I'm challenging everyone to consider giving 5% of their income to the collection basket throughout this new year. In the United States the government does not subsidize churches, and priests do not keep the collection for themselves. Our contributions support a wide range of services including mass, confessions, education and evangelization.

If you are a registered member of St. Anthony's, you should be receiving envelopes in the mail. If you don't have envelopes, please let us know on your pledge card today. Please use your envelopes. Prepare them at home with the amount you've pledged and bring them to church. Normally, the people who use envelopes are the people we get to know the best. When you need the parish for an important event in your life, whether beautiful or tragic, you can count on our help. Your support will ensure that St. Anthony's will be here for all the upcoming events in your family. Our future needs include improvements to our building, relying less on outside givers, and saving for major expenses. We take up extra collections for events such as All Souls Day, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and the St. Joseph Table. But if our giving is strong each week, we won't need to panic when it comes time to party. We'll have the resources, and we can share God's bounty.

Jonah is known primarily for his visit to the belly of the whale. He ended up there because he was trying to run away from God. When the whale spit him up on the shores of Nineveh, Jonah finally said what God asked, and the people repented of their sin. God is inviting us to preach his message to a world in need. People will experience it in the words we say and the deeds we do when we participate at mass and offer back to God the bounty we have received.