

The finance council will soon be setting the budget for next fiscal year. I'd like to thank you all for your support. We will probably end this year a little bit ahead at St. Aloysius and with a shortfall of about \$8000 at St. Munchin. It sounds bad, but a year ago we thought our deficit would be about three times that size. In addition, you have contributed to special appeals from the rectory back porch to the Easter candle. The altar society had their biggest St. Patrick's lunch ever. The Knights of Columbus received a record offering at breakfast last month. Both our churches went over the goal of the bishop's annual appeal. The debt at St. Munchin is under \$150,000. Our contributions inside the envelopes this year went up in both churches, about \$1500 at St. Aloysius and \$15,000 at St. Munchin.

Envelope contributions are one of the most significant ways to grow in the spiritual life. Once again this year I'll be asking you to fill out a pledge form telling us how much you challenge yourself to give each week or month. Only about 50 families do this, but I wish everybody would. Here's why. The envelope is only one indicator of the spiritual life, but it is a good one. It reflects our belief that God asks each of us to practice stewardship. Stewardship implies that we really don't own anything, not what's in our home, not what's in the bank, not even our own life. Everything comes from God and belongs to God. God has entrusted us with his own possessions and is asking us to take care of them for him. We are to manage the time we receive from God, our talents, as well as the treasure God gives us. None of it is ours. People are usually quite generous when they see a specific need that requires their support, but stewardship is not about giving to a need, it is about the need to give, to live a life that shares. A lot of people approach contributing to their church the way they approach shopping: if there's something they want to buy, they purchase it. If they don't like what they see or the way they get treated, they don't spend anything there. Stewardship is a whole different approach – it is about distributing funds in the way that God wants them shared, not in the way that brings us the most pleasure.

The pledge I ask you to make shows God your good intentions. It says you are willing to sacrifice, to think hard about where God wants his resources to go, and to distribute them accordingly. When you don't pledge, it's hard to know what that means. Do you not believe in giving? Are you afraid to plan ahead? Do you not know how to plan ahead? Do you want the flexibility to let other priorities come ahead of this one? If you don't pledge, you know why, and God knows why. My job is to remind you that pledging to your parish is a good way to practice faith in God, trust in his goodness, and charity toward others.

After the Ascension of Jesus into heaven, the apostles went into the streets of Jerusalem and preached the kingdom of God. Something else happened to them. They became a tighter community. They shared their resources. They saw the connection between what they did on the street and what they did at home. They practiced stewardship at home, and they lived it with everyone else they met. We can do the same.