

Rev. Randall Hubbard, Presider
Chuck Sgro, Witness
Exodus 22:20-26
1 Thessalonians 1:5c-10
Matthew 22:34-40

THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
October 22-23, 2011

I would like to begin by first thanking you. A couple of weeks ago when Fr. Tom Clark was here, he thoroughly enjoyed his time here for mass. He said to me that some of you had commented to him that you so appreciated his preaching from the ambo because you could see him. (laughter) So I'm going to stay up here today.

Nonetheless, in our gospel this weekend, Jesus teaches about the two greatest commandments. And he teaches that the greatest of all the commandments is actually the shema prayer. It's the prayer that Jewish people pray in the morning, first thing, to remind themselves of who they are in relationship with God. But that prayer being to love God with our whole being. To love God with our body, our mind, our spirit – our whole being – to love God.

And then he goes on and says that the second commandment is much like the first commandment. And that is to love our neighbor. To love others as we love ourselves.

In these two great commandments, Jesus shows the relationship between love of God and love of others. He basically makes such an intimate connection between the two that we realistically cannot have one without the other. To say that we love God says that we love neighbor. Now this is the truth! If we say we love God and show little regard or little love for neighbor, we don't love God. The two go hand in hand. The evidence of our love of God is in our love of neighbor.

And with Jesus making this point to us, he points out that it is for us then, in love of God – love of neighbor, that we fulfill who we are as God's people. Recognizing that it is God's great love that brings us into being. It is God's love that creates us in God's image thereby making the connection of the importance of love of others. The image of God present in one another.

And so as we hear Jesus teach that this is how we are to understand relationship with God, relationship with others, we in turn then are to be open to not only God's love for us, knowing that it is God who first loves us, but that we extend that love and are open to extending that love to others.

Now this weekend we heard in the opening announcement that we doing stewardship weekend this weekend. And stewardship *is* that response to God's love. It is a way that we acknowledge that God has blessed us with God's love, God's forgiveness, the many ways that God shows us goodness. And our response to that love is to be intentional about giving back a portion, giving back a portion of time – precious time, of giving back talent – precious talent, of giving back treasure – precious treasure. All of it for the praise and glory of our God, thanking God for all that God does for us. But mostly, for God's great love for us, and our willingness then to take that love and to extend it, to send it out to others, helping others to know God's love as we know God's love.

This weekend we do begin our stewardship pledging. The Chairperson of our Parish Pastoral Council, Chuck Sgro, is here with us to share with us some information on the importance of our participation in the stewardship of our community in responding to God's great love shown us. So I welcome Chuck.

Chuck Sgro

Thank you Fr. Randy. I'd rather be standing up here this morning telling some jokes. But that's not possible. So bear with me please. As Fr. Randy said, I am currently serving **you** as Chairman of the PPC, and it's been an honor and a pleasure most of the time. But I need to talk to you about a situation that will have an effect on all of us, long term.

The Community of Epiphany is facing a \$69,377.00 shortfall in our current fiscal year budget, and we need your help. This past May, after weeks of evaluation and preparation, the Parish Council passed a deficit budget. This means we are expecting our expenses to operate from July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012 to be higher than our anticipated income.

Passing a deficit budget is unusual, and in fact has only happened one other time in our 40 year history. After many meetings, deliberations and discernment, it was the consensus of all of your Leadership, including Staff, Members of the Finance and Administration Committee and the PPC Members that we should pass the budget with its shortfall and then address this with the Community of Epiphany and ask you to take the appropriate corrective action.

To put it mildly, we have had a very busy summer. Beginning with the news of a transition of Pastors, celebrations of our 40th year as a parish, celebrating two of our dear, former Pastors' 50th Jubilee's as Priests, Fr. Jeff's going away party and Fr. Randy's formal installation as our Pastor. We had a full summer. Now that everyone is back in school, attending weekly Liturgies, and as this is the beginning of the annual Stewardship Appeal, we chose this weekend to address this important issue.

Many of us will remember the situation we faced 2.5 years ago when we had an \$85,000 deficit budget. Of the many things we learned from that experience was that even though we published detailed numbers in the weekly bulletin about actual Contribution Revenues to Planned Revenues, and provided the exact same information on the Epiphany website, not everyone sees or reads that information. Another lesson was that even with our mentioning the fact that there was a budget shortfall, the potential impact of it was never made clear.

We don't want that to happen again.

At this point you may be sitting there asking yourself some hard questions.

What happened back in 2009?

We went to each Staff and Committee Chair and asked them to go through their planned programs and budgets, line by line, and to "tighten their belts" wherever possible. Even with this, we were we were still showing that \$85,000 loss for the year.

What happened next?

After some long meetings and deliberations, we contacted the parishioners and asked if they would be willing to consider increasing their donations to make up the shortfall. The response was overwhelmingly positive. Some people increased their monthly contribution while others wrote out a one time check! I will never forget a husband and wife coming up to me before Liturgy one Sunday morning and giving me a check for \$2,100.00! Incredible!

What happened this year?

This past spring the Finance and Administration Committee began preparing the 2011-2012 budget. Leadership again asked that the Epiphany Staff and the Committee Chairs look very closely at all of their planned expenses and see if and where any reductions could be made. Some Committees reduced their budgets significantly while others added modestly. We ended the process being short \$69,377.00.

What were the contributing FACTORS?

We have looked at this several ways and much of the detail will be available to view and discuss with our Finance & Administration & Stewardship representatives after Liturgy, if you choose.

The “bottom line” is: we need additional funds to continue providing all of the wonderful Staff and programs that we have all grown to count on and love here at Epiphany.

What is the worst case scenario?

Epiphany leadership decided many years ago to set aside a cash reserve of two months of operating funds. What this means is we are committed to cover any shortfall with our cash reserves. That means that the Staff and all of the Committees - Finance and Administration, Community Care, Community Spirit, Children’s and Adult Formation, Parish Council, Parish Life, Social Responsibility, Stewardship and Worship - have all of their expenses covered through June of 2012.

What happens if the budget shortfall continues or grows?

This is the hard part. If the monies are not pledged and received to make up the short fall, we will be forced to reevaluate all of our Committees’ activities and programs, as well as the Staff in place to support them, next year.

What do we need you to do?

Let me answer that first by sharing that approximately 74% of all registered members are currently making contributions.

This percentage is not likely to increase even in the best of times. Also, experience tells us that “life happens” and a percentage of the pledges will never be received.

We also know that many of you have been struggling in this very difficult economy. Some of our parishioners are unemployed or underemployed, many haven't gotten a needed raise or any cost of living increases since 2009. Perhaps you are paying college tuitions, your savings and

investment portfolios have been devalued or you are living on a fixed or limited income. No one knows for sure how soon things will improve so you will have to give what you can. This means that those of us, who can afford more, might want to pledge more.

What can you do!

We need for each registered family to take home their Stewardship Packet and evaluate, pray and discern what you can afford to pledge. If all of the registered members gave \$5.00 more per month we could get this budget in the black. If you are able, please consider giving more.

\$5.00 more per month might mean perhaps giving up one of those fancy Starbucks Latte drinks, (I can say that because my wife, Nancy is not here) or the Sunday New York Times or as my Son, CJ, said, a McDonald's Happy Meal.

What is the one thing about Epiphany that you love the most?

We posted a board during our 40th year celebration and asked you to write the one thing you liked most about the Community of Epiphany.

Among the many great answers were the Liturgies, beautiful music, vibrant meaning filled homilies, the other Members, the welcoming atmosphere, dare I say excellent Lectors, the Formation programs from Baptism through RCIA, our Youth Groups and the caring Staff and Community just to name a few.

As a Stewardship Parish we all want to see all of those and several other things grow and flourish here this year and every year.

Final Question: What is a stewardship parish?

See if you don't agree that this describes the Community of Epiphany.

It is a parish that:

- Demonstrates a commitment to a Stewardship way of life through the leadership of its pastor, pastoral council and other parish leaders
- Warmly welcomes individual participation in parish life
- Exhibits vibrant spiritual, social, and outreach activities
- Reaches out to the broader community as sisters and brothers in Christ

And a parish whose members:

- Are motivated by the belief that we are the Body of Christ
- Recognize and understand God's call to be good stewards of all God's gifts
- Prayerfully and honestly assess the value of these gifts
- Responsibly share a proportionate amount of their time, talent, and treasure.

Please consider joining me in insuring we get the needed funds!

Thank you for listening and may God bless you!