

**Lay Witness Talk, Bishop's Annual Appeal  
(March 13, 2011)**

When Fr. McDonald asked me to speak with you today, my first thought was, "Oh great, the Director of Parish Administration gets to talk about the benefits of contributing to the Bishop's Annual Appeal! Will anyone really listen to what I have to say?" I mean, let's be honest, without your generous contributions, I simply wouldn't have a job here, would I. So, what does that do to my credibility?

Well, I'm here to say I'm speaking today as a St. Joseph parishioner; one who wants very much for all of you to understand the importance of what I am about to say over the next few minutes.

Many of us here are on different spiritual paths and I am fairly certain earlier in my life I've been where some of you are right now. For the better part of 30 years, I am ashamed to say I didn't see much of the inside of a church, let alone think about giving anything to the church. All that changed when I met my wife, Ramona, in 1993. There's something about loving another which changed my perspective on giving. Knowing what I know now, I wish I could somehow immerse you in it so that you too will know how, by simply opening your hearts and minds to God, your life can be transformed.

So, here's my brief attempt to immerse you:

First of all, what I have learned is everything starts with Prayer—

- To learn how to become more like Jesus, start with Prayer
- To prepare your hearts and minds to be receptive to the Word of God, start with Prayer
- Before reading the Word of God, start with Prayer. As I prepare to read the Bible, what works for me is a simple prayer asking the Holy Spirit to give me the Wisdom to Understand what I am about to read

It was during one of these times (again, after I had met my wife) I wanted to learn more about what Scripture had to say about giving to others and about generosity. The Holy Spirit worked His miracle.

About giving to others, it was in the words of St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 12, verse 12 and 14: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For the body does not consist of one member but of many.” Also, in Romans, chapter 12: “We, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually parts of one another.” If the hand is hurting, does it not affect the whole body? So, you see, no one is to be excluded from the Body of Christ, no matter how different or untalented; we all have gifts. It is the sharing of these gifts among each other which builds the church community. **Our gifts are completely worthless if not shared among each other.**

About generosity, Paul writes in his second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 9, verses 6 through 8: “look it up”. This did it for me and I know it is impossible here to immerse you with this: That I am living proof of the truth in these words—I attribute the blessings and joy in my life directly to this Scripture verse. It would be human nature for you to fear “lack” resulting from your giving. This is when it is imperative that you fervently pray these five words, “Jesus, I trust in You.” It is there I was set free from the bondage of materialism. Let me give you a quick example of what I mean: right after my wife and her sister returned from a pilgrimage in Mexico in 1996, we decided (well, Ramona decided) to pledge \$50 a month to benefit 3 orphans there. I thought, even though we were struggling at the time, we could do this for a year. Here we are 15 years later and there’s not one month in 180 months we have missed; and, you know what, even though we’ve been increasing our contributions each year, we are not lacking for anything. It is my prayer that you all witness this for yourselves in your life.

So, why do I appeal for the Bishop’s Annual Appeal? Quite simply, the diocesan ministries reach many that St. Joseph’s ministries do not. For instance, the Catholics Come Home program was made possible from last year’s contributions. Through the Office of Faith Formation, there are programs promoting Spanish Mass attendance with over 6,000 in the diocese attending each week; Youth ministries get together for the DYC and various youth rallies throughout the year; presently, there are 14 Seminarians whose tuitions are being funded through your contributions to the BAA. Talk about building up the Body of Christ.

Again, I encourage you to pray about how you can help build the Church of Christ especially if you haven’t done so already. When you come face-to-face with

Jesus, how will you respond when he asks, “What did you do for the least of my brothers?” God bless you for making St. Joseph the wonderful parish that it is.