

## Stewardship Lay Witness by Carol Sargent

### Bishops Annual Appeal 2011

I have been asked to talk to you about the Bishops Annual Appeal. In prior years we showed a movie of the ministries done at the diocese level – I am a poor replacement for the movie.

Nothing can replace “seeing” the kinds of things the diocese does beyond parish centers. Let’s face it, most of the work that our diocese does is invisible to us. But we need your generosity to keep it going. Stewardship talks used to make me cringe. When the church talked about money, I would get turned-off.

I wanted to hear about Christ’s love, mercy, and sacrifice. I wanted to hear about how to grow in grace, and how to improve my relationship with Christ and with others. Somehow talking about money seemed unholy ... earthly...undignified. And now I am up here talking about money. Unbelievable. Please don’t cringe.

I have out-grown my former immature and defensive response to stewardship campaigns, through the grace of Christ. I have grown in love and generosity in all areas of my life, not just church collections. When I thought that separating love and money made sense, I was fooling myself. They grow together. I had to unclench my fist before I could grow.

Giving is a free response to God’s love. It is a natural result of knowing His deep and unending love. We do this naturally in our earthly relationships. When someone does something wonderful for us, we want to give back. What would you think about a spouse that pledged unending love for you but withheld on money? Not very convincing, eh?

God has blessed me in so many that I am afraid to number them in fear that they will be withdrawn. Everything I have is His. I am *entrusted* with resources. Health. Time. Talent. Money. And I will all account at the end of time for my choices with these gifts. I no longer think of it as a guilt trip. It is just the truth.

There’s more than just a need to be generous with a generous God. Giving changes the giver. I started with the token \$5 in the collection basket. No envelope. I didn’t want to be tracked. Stay under the radar. Right? Then, I moved to envelopes. Then I started giving God a raise. A little more each year. Then I finally when to percents! That was scary.

Twice in my career I have left a job for another job that paid half of my salary. But I kept giving the same level. I made stewardship a habit. Each year I increase my percent, thinking that this might be the year I’d finally hit my limit. But somehow I don’t! I’m hoping to reach the “big ten.” With God’s help I will!

Here’s the crazy part. I stress less about money than I ever did before I set stewardship goals. Stewardship put money into perspective. It isn’t good or evil. It is neutral. It becomes good when it is used for good. Giving away funds is a form of trusting God. So, I had to step out in faith. My life has blossomed: my work life, my family life and my parish life. I can’t think of an area that isn’t richer and better. Being generous is like fertilizer: allowing everything to grow. It makes no sense that giving more money would make you fret less about money, does it? Jesus’ treasures have satisfied me many times over what Caesar’s coins could ever offer.

Today is the BAA Sunday. We need to give to the diocese. Why? Because parishes can’t do everything. The diocese needs funds to do important behind-the-scenes work. We need seminarians. We need deacons. We need catholic education. We need to reach out to rural areas and fallen away Catholics. We need to partner with our protestant family on common causes. We need to help families with small children learn to nurture their children with limited resources. We need campus ministries. The list goes on and on.

If you have never given to the BAA, I want to especially talk to you right now. Whatever is holding you back on this might well be holding you back in other areas of your faith life. God can do a lot with your “yes.” But He will never force it. Are you embarrassed to give just a token? Heck, that’s where I started! Jump in!

Are you hurting, indifferent, defensive, stuck, turned off? My friends, Jesus plus one is an army! Jesus can fix *anything* but he needs a “yes” or two to work with! Open up. Let the BAA envelope be a “yes” for today. Follow it by another yes tomorrow. Let the spirit hold your hand and walk with Him.

Father wants 550 households. Why? Why not a dollar amount? Because we want each household to show support. It says you care. It shows that we believe these activities are important. It admits that you know fellow Catholics are working hard to send the message of salvation around the diocese.

I went to New England last weekend. The parish where I attended mass was SHARING a priest with a neighboring parish. We have seminarians who want to be our priests. Please be part of that! Not filling out the card is a rejection and not just "no money this year." Everyone has a coin to toss in. Some of you have piles of coins. We can blow away the 550 goal. How about 100%?

Thank you for your time and for making this a loving, faith-filled parish. God Bless You.