

## **"Bring All You Have"**

### **By Bishop Victor Galeone**

This edition of our diocesan magazine contains the financial report for the year just ended. Now is a good time to discuss the question of our diocesan finances, especially since the diocese might be moving in a somewhat different direction for the future. I hope we can move to a new way of thinking about diocesan finances.

Almost all diocesan programs are supported through the Bishop's Stewardship Appeal. That's really a tax on the parish income of 22 percent of the offertory collection and two percent of the building fund. Each parish assessment is calculated by the parish income of the previous year.

For the present fiscal year - 2003 - the appeal has been renamed the "Diocesan" rather than the "Bishop's Stewardship Appeal." After all, the funds aren't meant for the bishop but for the diocese. The educational video has been prepared and everything is set for the drive in February. I hope you will be as generous as you can in response to the presentation I will make in this year's video.

In the near future, perhaps as early as 2004, I would like to attempt a different approach. I would like the campaign to be called simply the Stewardship Appeal, with no reference to the diocese or the bishop. It will be the parish stewardship drive. It will take place in the fall of the year, challenging every parish towards total tithing.

Total Tithing is a spiritual approach to finances. It has many benefits, among which are:

We could have only one Sunday collection instead of two or three.

We would support special collections by sharing once a month 10 percent of the parish offertory.

We could lower or eliminate tuition for parish families with students in the school.

All monies would stay in the parish with the exception of the monthly special collections and the diocesan assessment. We would have a simple way of supporting the diocese: parishes would be assessed with a tiered flat tax that would be easy to understand and to administer.

On hearing of this proposal, a respected financier in the diocese cautioned me, "Bishop, be careful. You have to lay a spiritual foundation before you can attempt to change the way people contribute to the church." He's right, of course. The spiritual and the financial go hand in hand. Recall that Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, that's where your heart will be also." You cannot serve both God and money. And challenged by the rich young man, who had been obeying the commandments his entire life without being assured of his salvation, Jesus told him, "Go sell what you have, give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven."

We want our financial actions to reflect our spiritual faith. We want to act generously because

we know how generous God has been to us.

In the Old Testament we find an identical message. Through his prophet Malachi, God asks the chosen people, "Why are you robbing me?" Questioned on how they were robbing him, God replied, "In tithes and offerings...Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse." Namely, everything we have comes from God. Our offerings are not our gift to God as much as they are returning the first portion back to him of what is his already. St. Paul asks the Corinthians, "What do you have that you did not receive?" Ultimately, everything comes from God. So he has a right to the best - the first fruits - not just the leftovers.

I realize that I'm getting ahead of myself. I want to plant a seed for your consideration. I want to challenge all of us to think generously when we think of God. He will never be outdone in generosity. We want to be a generous diocese built on generous parishes and generous Catholics.

I close by quoting St. Paul, "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Everyone should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."  
(2 Corinthians 9:6-7)