

## Parish Stewardship: Let Your Light Shine!

By Bishop Victor Galeone

This month most pastors are conducting their annual Parish Stewardship Sunday. I'd like to support their efforts. In my pastoral letter of two months ago, I compared three major world systems striving to shape economic reality according to their beliefs. The ideal for us Christians should be to share our resources with those in need: "What's mine is yours, I share it generously." But due to human weakness, we often fall short of the ideal. I want to share one such failure of my own while I was serving in Peru by quoting an entry from my journal:

Feb. 5, 1974 - Today a poor beggar came to the door. As I looked down from my window, he asked, "A pair of old trousers for me, Papito?" I study him carefully - his miserable rags patched all over, and his sandals held together with twine. "Where are you from?" - "From Pacucha, Papito." (A two-hour walk away.) A mental debate follows: "I do have an old pair, but they'd never fit him. Besides, he might sell them in the marketplace and get drunk. No, I'd better not." So I call down, "Lo siento, no hay," and close the window on him.

At my desk I open a small volume with excerpts from the Church Fathers and read: "Who's the miser? The one who's not content with the necessities of life. And who's the thief? The one who takes from others what is theirs. Aren't you a miser and aren't you a thief, when you keep for yourself what you've been given only to administer? Shouldn't that person be called a thief...who doesn't clothe a naked man, if he has the means to do so? That coat that you're saving in your chests belongs to the naked... In short, you commit as many injustices as you fail to help the needy that are within your means." - St. Basil the Great, Sermon on the text, I will tear down my barns.

I jump to my feet, bolt out the door and rush through the drizzling rain to the market. After canvassing the stalls, I search the side streets. There's not a trace of him. Dejected, I return to my room, musing as I go, "And I'm the one who came to mission lands in order to give what I had to the poor so that I could follow Jesus more closely!"

Yes, we all fail at times. This month, however, we have the opportunity to make amends. We can take to heart the theme of this year's Parish Stewardship Sunday, Let Your Light Shine! I'm well aware that many of you are facing severe hardships due to the financial downturn, which continues to linger. Still, for those blessed with employment or a steady pension, I want to challenge us all to give the Lord 10% of our net income. If that's not possible, try giving at least one hour of income each week. Discuss this with your spouse and pray for guidance. Then complete the intention card in this year's stewardship brochure and drop it in the offertory basket.

I want to conclude this message with an explanation about the annual collection for the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD). This collection traditionally takes place in November. However, after consulting with our three diocesan advisory bodies - the Presbyteral, Diocesan Pastoral, and the Finance Councils - I made the decision in May that our diocese will no longer participate in this national collection of the Bishops' Conference. The reasons for doing so are:

1. Over the years some CCHD funds were disbursed to certain organizations hostile to key Catholic positions. In November 2008, CCHD announced it would no longer fund ACORN, due to their misuse of funds.
2. Catholic organizations or groups cannot receive CCHD funds since their guidelines exclude all "organizations controlled by governmental, *educational*, or *ecclesiastical* bodies." Our Catholic inner-city schools are struggling to make ends meet, yet they cannot receive a single dollar of our own CCHD donations for that purpose!
3. If CCHD's mission is to address the root causes of poverty in America, why are no funds earmarked to address the greatest cause of poverty in our country today - single motherhood? Moreover, 80% of the

male inmates incarcerated in America come from fatherless homes. Yet no CCHD funds go to groups striving to strengthen family values.

Accordingly, the former CCHD collection will be replaced with the “Diocesan Schools and Social Action Appeal.” The proceeds of this collection - to be taken in parishes this month - will be disbursed equally among: 1) local pregnancy centers, 2) tuition assistance for needy students in our Catholic schools, 3) self-help community groups like ICARE in Jacksonville and ACTION in Gainesville.

In closing, I want to publicly thank Father Ed Rooney for his dedicated service in the past, serving as our Diocesan CCHD Director. Due to his leadership, proper oversight was always exercised in disbursing local funding.