

We are Bill and Cookie Zimmer and have been parishioners here at Good Shepherd since 1983. We love Good Shepherd and are certainly in awe of the many ministries and programs that our church supports. Our children, David and Alison, went through the RE program, we have been Involved In several ministries through the years, and now we serve on the Stewardship Committee.

This past fall, Good Shepherd focused on the Stewardship of Time and Talent beginning with the Ministry Fair and concluding with Commitment Sunday. In today's Homily, Fr. Mike/Craig spoke about the third area of Stewardship, Treasure. All three areas are Important and one does not substitute for the other. We were asked to share with you for a couple of minutes about the personal walk we are taking regarding the Stewardship of Treasure. As I said, we are still on our walk of becoming good stewards; we're not finished yet.

During our first several years here at Good Shepherd, we never really thought about or knew much about the term Stewardship. We knew what "tithing" was, but we really didn't connect it with Stewardship. In the beginning, donating money to the church was placing cash in the collection basket or if we were low on cash, hurrying and writing a check before the basket got to us. We always gave the kids a dollar or something to put in the basket also. Then we started using the church envelopes and increased our weekly offering, but it was still without much thought to our obligations to Good Shepherd or of being good stewards of our money.

The first sentence on the brochure you received this week really makes a great statement, "It's not the gift, but the intention to give that is the most important". I don't know if we really discussed our intentions or had any goals in regard to our giving, we just thought we were supporting our church. I'd like to read the following scripture passage that really hit home to me. This is Genesis 4: 2-5.

Abel became a shepherd, but Cain was a farmer. After some time Cain brought some of his harvest and gave it as an offering to the Lord. Then Abel brought the first lamb born to one of his sheep, killed it, and gave the best parts of it as an offering. The Lord was pleased with Abel and his offering, but he rejected Cain and his offering.

I wonder how the Lord felt about our offering, was it the best part of our life's work or was it just some of our harvest. I knew the answer to that question.

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The first time we received one of the Stewardship of Treasure brochures with a personal letter from Fr. Mike, it gave us a chance to really look and talk about what true Stewardship of Treasure was and it became a great guide to becoming good stewards of what God has given us. There certainly was fear and guilt to overcome as we prayed for guidance and the vision to become good stewards, to give from the first fruits of what God gives us. Challenges like...costs in raising our children,--piano lessons, car insurance, and then tuition as college rolled around, and now, what about saving for our retirement. Money management has never been simple. So when we reflected on what Stewardship of Treasure should mean to us, we decided to sit down and actually look at what we were giving to the church, to our community, and even the world at large. We were surprised to find that we were doing some things purposefully. We could account what we had been giving to Good Shepherd and The Catholic Sharing Appeal because we were supporting both of them. There were also several charities and organizations such as United Way, American Cancer Society as well as sponsoring a child in India, Food for the Poor, Maryknoll that we have been supporting for years. However, we had no idea what percentage of our income these causes were. So our discussions about our stewardship of treasure and our time in prayer helped us set up a plan to get where God wanted us to be, to put Him first. This made us so much more aware. We feel we have been very blessed and know that everything we have comes from God---everything we have is really His.

We decided that the automatic offering plan where funds are transferred from our checking account on the same day each month was the best way for us to give to both Good Shepherd and The Catholic Sharing Appeal. If we are out of town and miss a Sunday Mass, we don't have to worry about doubling up on checks and guess about being up to date in our obligation. It was a funny feeling not placing an envelope in the collection basket each week but now Good Shepherd provides us with electronic giving cards that take the place of the envelopes.

As we said, this is our personal journey of our Stewardship of Treasure. Maybe you can relate to some of the same difficulties we were having. We cannot express enough how much Fr. Mike's homilies, his personal letter and the Stewardship Brochure helps us with our personal reflection each year. We are still on this walk to become good stewards, to put God first and realize that everything we have comes from Him and belongs to Him.

We want to close with the same scripture reading that really speaks to us from the brochure, proverbs 3:9-10.

Honor the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will be bursting with wine.