

'We are stewards of God's bounty'

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My dear Friends,

Together with Bishop Austin Murphy, Bishop Frank Murphy and Bishop Frank Stafford, I have met recently with hundreds of our clergy and laity in 12 area meetings over a period of two weeks.

The purpose of our meetings was to begin the Archdiocese of Baltimore Christian Stewardship Appeal. To be more precise, we met to begin your parish Christian Stewardship Appeal. I say this to emphasize the fact that, while sponsored by the archdiocese, our appeal is a parish one, formulated to assist the individual parish and thus the total work of the archdiocese.

May I also emphasize, that our appeal was undertaken only after lengthy and fruitful deliberation and full collegial process. Many of you no doubt have read about this continuing process in *The Catholic Review*.

A successful Christian Stewardship Appeal in your parish will improve the financial position of your parish and, thus, that of the archdiocese. Other equally important benefits will result as the stewardship concept is explained and developed these next few weeks. Basically, stewardship is what we do with what we have when we believe in God. We are stewards of God's bounty and as such will be asked to give generously of our time, our talents and our treasures.

These past few years, the archdiocese has operated at considerable annual deficits to be able to provide essential services which no parish or group of parishes could hope to undertake and which only can be rendered on the archdiocesan level. To have these programs work successfully requires inter-parish cooperation, in other words, archdiocesan support. It became apparent that the situation could not be allowed to continue since archdiocesan resources would be completely drained in a very short period of time. Thus, increased financial pressures would be placed on parish financing. Various solutions to the problem were considered and evaluated. These ranged from a major multi-million dollar archdiocesan fund raising program with funds raised coming to the archdiocese to a simple increase in cathedraticum, from the present 10 per cent level to 15 per cent.

Obviously, neither of these plans would be of direct assistance to parishes. It was also very apparent that individual parishes had financial problems for which a solution had to be found. This fact was paramount in all deliberations

and considerations. Actually, it was a determining factor in the final decision to select, formulate and undertake the Christian Stewardship Appeal. As I have stated, this really is a parish-oriented program which, although sponsored by the archdiocese will function and be conducted at the parish level. Its purpose is to raise parish incomes to a more realistic level to meet increasing cost of operation, maintenance, debt service and the like. At the same time, the Archdiocese will benefit because of the increased parish incomes. The cathedraticum, as a part of the plan, has been increased by 2 ½ per cent. With this modest increase on higher parish revenues, the archdiocese also will be in a more solvent position as will your individual parish.

Raising funds primarily for the expansion of administration or undertaking unnecessary programs has never been our aim. Nor is it now. In this regard, a comprehensive, in-depth study of Archdiocesan Central Services is presently being conducted. It will be thorough and of great value to all of us as we chart our course for the future well-being of all members of our Christian community.

I ask you to keep one thing in mind. Through the archdiocese, like your parishes, we serve individuals. The archdiocese, like your parishes, exists to serve, not to be served. In this framework, the more effective we can make our service to parishes — and people, the better we can do the work of God.

I close this letter on a personal note.

I am certain that all pastors and parish councils and Christian Stewardship Appeal Committees will do their very best showing true concern for the welfare of our brothers and sisters. They will seek your cooperation and support and understanding as your parish prepares for its appeal. So I come to ask you to render whatever assistance you can. I come to ask you to give generously of your time, your talents and your treasures.

We live by faith. We know that God gave us our life, our health, our talents, our strength. We believe that everything comes from God. Without Him, we would not be here.

Gratefully yours in Christ,

William D. Borders

Archbishop of Baltimore