

Stewardship

“Now after the wise men had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.’ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod...” (Matthew 2:13-15)

Joseph was in all likelihood trying to figure out exactly what was going on. He had a new wife. She had a baby that wasn't his. And now, on top of this, he had to deal with a dream in which God sent him a message to bug out with his young family, leaving everything, including his carpentry business, behind and heading to Egypt. I expect that by now, Joseph's mind is a jumble of confusion.

Incidentally, at that point in history, a trip to Egypt would not have been a long, extensive journey, as Egypt's border was much closer to Palestine than it is today.

At any rate, he closes up the carpentry shop and heads to the safety of Egypt with Mary and the infant Jesus Christ.

The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines stewardship as

1: the office, duties, and obligations of a steward

2: the conducting, supervising, or managing of something; especially: the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care...

Another bit of trivia to file away is that, according to the Merriam-Webster site, the noun stewardship dates from the 15th Century.

So, following the second definition given, Joseph was practicing good stewardship. The Holy Family was his responsibility as Mary and the Infant had been entrusted to his care, and he had accepted that responsibility. He dropped everything to exercise that care when they fled to Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod, the Roman governor.

This concept of stewardship is reinforced very early in Holy Scripture. In Genesis II, we read, “Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.’ So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field...” According to the ancients' way of thinking, this naming process gave the namer authority and power over the namee.

Along with this authority and power, God also gave mankind the responsibility of taking care of His creation. This is stewardship, plain and simple.

There is another dimension to stewardship described extremely well on the Web site Wikipedia. It says, “Stewardship is also a major part of teaching in Christianity and Islam. For example, Green Christianity emphasizes stewardship as a Bible-based environmental outlook. Financial stewardship is based on the belief that God is the true and ultimate owner of each person's possessions, and that one is accountable to God for the acceptable care and use of those possessions. Stewardship can also refer to Jesus Christ's accountability to God the Father for the Christians that have been entrusted to Him or how to use your resources for God.”

Every household will receive in the near future a letter from a fellow member of the Episcopal Church of the Holy Family. Some of the letter-writers are members of the vestry while others are not. I don't know the exact wording of all the letters, but I do know about the content. They focus on the financial aspect of stewardship.

It is very difficult for some members of the Episcopal persuasion to discuss stewardship, particularly the monetary variety, especially during these uncertain financial times. Will the stock market continue to slowly improve? Will our family's income remain at the same level this year as last year or will it improve? Will one or the other of us even have a job? These are legitimate concerns which all of us face. Unfortunately, I can't answer these questions.

There is another underlying concern here at Holy Family, which has to be faced.

Anne and I spent Christmas with two of our children and four of our grandchildren in Texas. The four cousins got along very well for the most part. There were those moments when more than a little dissension erupted. This is a normal part of a family's life. Human beings just don't always see things the same way or agree on every issue. That's the way we are. We get mad with one another and start calling each other names, the behavior Talbot, Cheney, Liza and Jimmy exhibited at times. That's part of our sinfulness, but it isn't something we can ignore.

With all due respect to The Rt. Rev. Neil Alexander, The Episcopal Church of the Holy Family in Jasper, Ga., does not belong to the Diocese of Atlanta or its bishop. The same holds true for the rector. Holy Family does not belong to its rector. It doesn't belong to the vestry, either. No group of its members can claim ownership of Holy Family.

Quite simply, The Episcopal Church of the Holy Family belongs to Jesus Christ and no one else. It is not a joint ownership. Put in the language of an attorney, it is a sole proprietorship.

Yes, the Bishop of Atlanta, the rector, and the vestry have certain responsibilities concerning any particular parish or mission. This is true for all members of Holy Family, as well. These responsibilities fall right into the realm of stewardship.

A generally accepted working definition says stewardship involves three areas: time, talent and treasure. This means that belonging to Holy Family involves more than just spending an hour or so every once in a while at one of the worship services.

The first thing that comes to my mind when thinking about the stewardship of talent is our choir. There are a lot of gifts used by the choir members to enhance and assist us in the worship of the source of all that is. They certainly give of their time with the rehearsals, too.

Do you enjoy working with children or teenagers? I can guarantee you Joyce Faircloth would be delighted to talk with you about the Sunday school program at Holy Family.

Take your bulletin/Touchstone home with you. Look at the back page. There are many areas listed where members can assist Holy Family and her mission, both inward and outward, which also happens to be Christ's mission too. Contact the person listed by the ministry area for more information.

Additionally, we pray weekly for The Family Diner, CARES, Inc., Good Samaritan Health & Wellness Center, Appalachian Children's Emergency Shelter, Goshen Valley Boys Ranch, The Joy House, Women of Hope Ministries, St. Marc School in Haiti and The Lamb Institute in Honduras. One of your vestry members or clergy can steer you in the proper direction in order for you to help with a particular ministry.

Don't forget about our members' trips to Honduras. The Trio Coffee House provides financial support for Hearts for Honduras. There's nothing anywhere that says supporting a ministry can't be fun, too.

Jerry Tyson's Rembrandt Society is another area in which Holy Family members give of their time and talent to help others. Members of Holy Family support the therapeutic programs of Angels on Horseback.

At this point, I apologize if I have left some particular ministry out. You should get the picture by now: There are plenty of opportunities to practice the stewardship of time and talent throughout the year. Maybe God has some more plans for us, which He has not yet revealed. And someone sitting in the congregation right now just might be the vehicle through which He points us into a new direction.

And now, yep, you're right. Here it comes, a few words about money.

Holy Family does need money to continue our mission and ministry, if we are to continue being a church. There is no way around it.

After you read the letter your family receives, put it aside for a day or two before you make any decision and sign the pledge card.

Consider to whom Holy Family belongs.

Understand that everything you have, including your income, is a gift from God.

Remember that your pledge to Holy Family is not a donation. It is returning to God a portion of that which he has entrusted to you and your family for your use. It is giving back to God, in thankfulness, part of what He gave you for His use in the mission of Holy Family, the Diocese of Atlanta and The Episcopal Church.

Remember and pray about your decision and pray for Holy Family and the Diocese of Atlanta and TEC. And then pray some more.