

Stewardship
Given at Grace Church in Haddonfield
November 03, 2002 by Al Schmidt

Lord, help my words to fully communicate your will.

Good morning.

Each day we all have opportunities to do Christ's work in the world and to follow God's will. At this time of year, during our stewardship campaign, we have an additional opportunity. That is to make a commitment to support God's work throughout the coming year.

By now you should have received the Personal Guide that was mailed to you last week. If you have not received it, there are a few in the back of the church and in the Parish Hall. Please pick one up as you leave.

In this guide is an invitation for you to join us on a beautiful journey. And it has some important information in it about how we can use our gifts from God to make our journey through life more beautiful. I hope you have had a chance to read it, if you haven't, please do. I think you will find the information useful in your private journey through life.

In addition to our private journeys through life, we as a congregation are also on a journey, a journey to bring people to Christ, to grow in our spiritual understanding and to enjoy the fellowship of this wonderful place we call, "Grace Church".

Through the commitments you made last year, we were able to maintain our physical facilities and the services of our staff. **And** we were able to increase to our staff with the inclusion of a priest associate. Programs were made available such as the Advent Series, the Lenten Series, the Confirmation Class and Retreat and our Vacation Bible School. We continued our Music Program and our Sunday School. The list could continue, but I think you get the idea.

I hope that next year we can do more. But that will depend on what you do in the next few weeks as you think about the commitments you will make in the form of a pledge of a portion

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of your financial resources to your church. If you can take a forward step or a step of faith, as described on the back of the Personal Guide, we will grow.

These small steps that we each take help each of us to grow in our grace of giving and make a big difference to the contents of our journey next year. It can be like this brochure. If we stay the same, this is all we see. When we open it, we get the complete picture!

But this takes hope on your part.

Ever wonder what hope is? I use the word hope in many types of ways. Sometimes I use the word hope express the desired outcome of a situation. For example, when I approach the church on Sunday morning I hope that the grounds and walkways will be cleared, the grass mowed and the shrubbery trimmed. When I approach the entrance, I hope that the lights will be lit, and if it's hot, that the air conditioning is also running so that the inside is comfortable. As I open the door, I hope that the altar has flowers and the appropriate linens. I also hope that the candles are lit, the acolytes and priest are available for the service and, if I am attending a choral service, that the organist and choir are present. I also hope that there is a bulletin available for me so that I know the details of the service.

This kind of hope is what I call an expectation (or anticipation). It has happened in the past and I anticipate that it will happen again. But for it to happen we all had to give some of our resources to the church. While our time and our skills are important, the church also needs us to provide a portion of our wealth.

What would it be like if we did not have enough hope to believe that God will fill our needs and we are free to provide a portion of our wealth to our church. Just imagine our future if we did not do this:

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- there would be no priests,
- there would be no flowers or linens on the altar,
- there are would be staff in our offices, or for Christian Education, or for our music programs, or for visitations, etc..
- there would also be no utilities to provide our heat (and cooling) and our lighting
- and there would be no maintenance of the grounds and buildings.

I do not want this kind of a future. I hope (anticipate) that you do not want this either. So I ask you to consider these things when you are deciding the content of your financial commitment to our church for next year.

Other times I use the word hope is a very different way. In this case I use hope in a more goal oriented way. By this I mean that my hope is not something that is particularly visible or tangible. For example, as I travel through this beautiful journey we call life, I hope that I become a better person and grow to act more according to God's will. My wife, Bobbie, and I also try to give a fair portion of our wealth (plus our time and skills) to our Church hoping that through these contributions more of God's Will can be done in the future. We do not really know or understand what this might be. We just do it because our goal is the hope for a better world in the future and we are trusting God's will to prevail. It may not be a future that we will see in our lifetime, but that is OK.

There is a quote from St. Paul's letter to the Romans (Chapter 9, verses 24 and 25) that says, to me, what this type of hope is all about. The verses are:

For by hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

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Today I am also asking you to use the content of your pledge express your hope for the future of our Church. You will have some help with this. Each of you will receive a pledge packet with a personal note from a fellow parishioner. This note will give you some of their feelings about Grace Church and why they think you should raise your contribution to our church for 2003. After reading the personal note and the materials in your pledge packet, let your heart be your guide as you set your goal for giving to Grace Church.

Pledge packets are on a table in the Parish Hall. They are arranged alphabetically in trays. If you can pick yours up today, it will save us the postage when we mail the remaining packets tomorrow. (If yours is not there, not to worry, a few are being completed today and will be in the mailing tomorrow.)

I ask you to please return your pledge card by next Sunday or, at the latest, by “Thank You” Sunday, November 17th.

I want to publicly thank all those note writers who worked so hard to produce the personal notes for your pledge packets. It was a tremendous effort by a great set of people. Next year I hope more of you will join us in this effort. It is fun and very rewarding.

I would like to leave you with the following prayer from Teresa of Avila.

Christ has no body now on earth but ours

Ours are the only hands with which He can do His work

Ours are the only feet with which He can go about the world

Ours are the only eyes through which His compassion can shine forth upon a troubled world

Christ has no body now on earth but ours

AMEN