

## **Stewardship Sermon**

### **Dick Hammond – October 24, 2004**

Good morning – my name is Dick Hammond. I'm here this morning to talk to you about that dreaded topic– Stewardship. Last February when John Funston called and asked if I would give the stewardship sermon in October, he softened me up by telling me what a great speaker I am –I'm not! He called when I'm most vulnerable– during Happy Hour. Besides October was a long way off so I said yes. I'm glad I did because Grace Church has been a very important part of my life for over 50 years. God has bestowed many gifts on me during my life. By my speaking to you today I am thanking God in some small way for my many blessings.

Being right here in Grace Church has always given me a great feeling of comfort - a closeness to God that I get no where else. I have experienced great joy here such as when I walked my daughter Carrie down this aisle 7 years ago at her wedding. I have also felt profound sadness here as when my beloved wife Joan died 14 months ago. But I was greatly comforted as I sat here knowing that she is with God and without pain or sorrow.

During Joan's illness Father Pat was immensely supportive of her and me. His many visits and kind words were of great comfort to Joan. She was quite serene through the whole ordeal and I think that was largely due to Father Pat's reassurance that God loved her as he does us all.

I'm speaking to you this morning because Grace Church is such an integral part of my life . I can't image what it would be like without the closeness to God that I feel here.

It troubles me greatly that although Grace is located in one of the most affluent communities in NJ it is not being adequately supported by it's parishioners.

For several years now the vestry has had to withdraw money from our reserve fund to pay some of our operating expenses such as heat, light, insurance, and salaries etc. because of the shortfall in stewardship giving. We have cut expenses to the bone to make ends meet. For example, Mother Renee', has not been replaced, but, Deacon Colleen has stepped into the breech and has been a huge help to Fr. Pat. This great lady does her wonderful work for us

## **Stewardship Sermon** **Dick Hammond – October 24, 2004**

and the Lord out of the goodness of her heart.

We have had to cut our Diocesan pledge in half this year and give virtually nothing toward outreach. The wonderful work done by the St. Paul's Food Program is accomplished through individual contributions and much of that comes from folks outside our parish.

Our fundraisers like the Oktoberfest and the rental of space in our Parish House have certainly helped, but the bottom line is that many of our parishioners are not paying their fair share of Grace Church's operating expenses. We are operating in the red and this can not continue.

In our Stewardship drive last year only 206 families out of 440 families in our parish made a pledge. That is less than 47%. The average pledge was \$1,150. The total amount pledged was \$237,000. Our budgeted expenses for the year are \$379,000. After taking into consideration actual and projected income from loose offering, Easter, Christmas, fundraisers and space rental, our expenses will exceed income by approximately \$50,000. This will have to come out of our reserve which is fast disappearing.

Back in the early 90s when I was stewardship chairman we introduced the Pony Express theme to get more people involved in stewardship and to increase giving. It worked! The number of families making a pledge that year increased from 50% to 65%. The total amount pledged increased from \$195,000 to \$230,000, an increase \$35,000. It is interesting to note that the pledged amount in 1993 was \$230,000 and is \$237,000 now --11 years later.

The pony express rides again this year! We hope that with God's help we can achieve a similar increase in pledging for 2005. As I said, our average pledge this year was \$1,150 and 206 families made a pledge. If we could just encourage 50 more families to make a pledge and could increase the average pledge by 10% to \$1,265, we would be in the black for the first time in several years.

I'm retired. I know times are tough. We all have heavy demands on us financially. It is often easier to put our church at the bottom of our list of

## **Stewardship Sermon**

### **Dick Hammond – October 24, 2004**

priorities . I'm not any different than anyone else. However, last year when I lost my wife, I realized that my time on this earth is short, and that to take any moment of it for granted, or to squander any moment of it on negative thoughts or actions is a slap in the face of our wonderful Creator. I now understand the words that had eluded me in the past. " All things come of thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee". I realize that I am called by God to share my blessings, not hoard them. I need to return to God a part of what He has given to me. And, in order for it to be meaningful, I know that share has to entail a sacrifice on my part. God is certainly familiar with sacrifice. There was no doubt this would mean making some trade-offs in my life. But, I knew that I would find that my faith was deepened, not simply by giving money to the church, but by reordering what was important in my life.

In order for me to best understand what it would take to change from a comfortable pledge to a sacrificial pledge, my focus had to shift from pledging a specific dollar amount to pledging a specific percentage of my income. I realized that the actual dollar amount of my pledge is irrelevant. What seems like a small pledge in terms of actual dollars, might, for example, be a significant pledge if made by someone with low fixed income. And conversely, what might seem like a generously large pledge in terms of actual dollars might be merely a drop in the bucket for a wealthy donor. What matters is how our gift measures in relation to what we have. A gift of treasure is not only about what the church will do with that money, but what we will do without it.

My prayer today is that each of you believes that you are loved by God, that you feel it in your heart and soul. My challenge to you is to take a look at your life. Are you making the most of your time on this earth? Are you sharing your blessings in a significant way? You may be surprised at what you find. How do your gifts to Grace Church relate to the gifts God has bestowed on you? I pray that you will live life to the fullest and share your gifts accordingly. Amen.