
First Fruits

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A FUTURE VISION

Part 2
by Ron Nicola

AN AWARENESS OF STEWARDSHIP INCLUDES THE REMINDER THAT the whole world is God's creation. Each Christian believer is responsible for being a steward of all which God created through the use of time, talents, and resources; which are also gifts from God. For this reason, vision cannot be limited to self, family, or local parish. It must include the community where a parish is located, the archdiocese to which the parish belongs, and, in a real sense, the whole world. Visions must include specific involvements with every one of these levels of association with the family of man.

Christianity does not preach the limited scope of parochialism. The work of the Diocese, for example, should be seen in the same light as the projects of the local parish. It is a natural extension of our lives as Orthodox Christians to respond, for example, to a plea from the Diocese for aid to people in some far off land suffering

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the hardships of war or natural disaster. The financial support for Diocesan endeavors is minute in comparison to what it should be, yet the fact that this small amount of it is often given reluctantly indicates a lack of vision. Too many Orthodox Christians are parochial in their thinking. Their vision extends only as far as the local church. God is the Father of the whole world, not just of St John, St Nicholas, or St George's parish.

A goal of stewardship education is to develop this sense of vision within the minds of Orthodox Christians. Vision is a concept which suggests happenings in the future, so in a sense stewardship involves a future vision. This reality about the word “vision” must not lead to an attitude of procrastination. Learning about stewardship and allowing it to reflect changes in the life of every believer must begin immediately. Everything cannot happen at once,

but there must be definite, steady, and identifiable growth. Thinking of stewardship as a future vision must be accompanied by the realization that the future is now. Consider the immediacy of the need to make stewardship a part of everyday life. Ideas contained in the paragraphs which follow might offer some ways to begin or to continue this process. Remember, stewardship must be reflected in action and behavior as well as by belief and acknowledgment.

Churches which have ongoing stewardship programs are providing their members great assistance in developing a sense of vision. These programs can take a variety of forms, but there are essential elements which all should contain. When these parts are present, the chances of clear vision evolving are greatly enhanced. In his book, *A New Climate for Stewardship*, Wallace E. Fisher offers an excellent description of where the focus should be in a parish stewardship program. Whoever takes up Christ's cross, denies himself daily, and follows his Lord into the world is a Christian steward. Christian lifestyles differ from culture to culture, from denomination to denomination, from congregation to congregation in the same community, and from person to person in the same congregation; but obedience to Christ is the common factor in biblical stewardship.

The church's responsibility, therefore, is to uncover the biblical description of stewardship, get it before its members, enable them to dig into it, and encourage them to act on it in church and society. The search for biblical descriptions of stewardship produces many readings and passages. They become the basis for discussion sessions and Bible study groups. The understanding these produce can form the basis of a parish stewardship program. While such programs can take various forms, they most probably will revolve around the three purposes for a stewardship program explained by W. David Crockett in a sermon called, “Grace, Freedom and Stewardship.” (reprinted in *Jesus, Dollars and Sense*, Oscar C. Carr, Jr., Editor) [*Continued on next page.*]

Navigating the Transition To Proportional Giving

BY ARCHPRIEST GARY JOSEPH BRETON

HIS EMINENCE, ARCHBISHOP MICHAEL, HAS ESTABLISHED THE PRACTICE of regularly offering opportunities to the faithful of our Diocese to deepen their faith and to learn ways to live out their faith more fully and effectively. These opportunities are manifested especially in the Parish Council Conferences and Church School Workshops that are held annually throughout the Diocese.

This year, the Parish Council Conferences will take place on consecutive Saturdays in June, in each of the three deaneries of our Diocese of New York and New Jersey. The conferences will focus particularly on a new way for our parishes to financially support the Diocese and the central Church. The emphasis of the conferences will be placed on the transition from the current per capita assessment method to a model based on proportional (or, percentage) giving. Our diocesan treasurer, Matushka Mary Buletza Breton, will present this concept along with the Diocesan Council's proposals as to how Diocesan parishes may respond to the change in methodology.

This is a vital topic for our parishes, our dioceses, and for the entire Orthodox Church in America. It is important that the faithful of our Diocesan parishes understand and embrace the concept and practice of proportional giving as the future path of support for the ministries and the administrative structure of our Church. The Parish Council Conferences will provide the opportunity for parish leaders to become familiar with the transition and to offer their input to the fine-tuning process. It is hoped that a significant number of parish council members from all Diocesan parishes will attend and then transmit the acquired information back to their parish faithful.

It is especially important that the Diocesan faithful be informed of this transition from per capita to proportionate giving as soon as possible. This is so because later this year, on November 1st and 2nd, parish delegates will gather together at the annual Diocesan Assembly at Holy Trinity Church in Yonkers, and they will be asked to formally vote to accept a unified vision and methodology of parish support for the Diocese and the central Church administration. It is hoped that these Parish Council Conferences will provide the information that will create the basis for an informed vote. The conference schedule is as follows:

NEW YORK STATE DEANERY

Saturday, June 11th, at St Basil's Church,
6 Lansing Avenue, Watervliet, New York 12189

NEW JERSEY DEANERY

Saturday, June 18th, at Christ the Saviour Church,
365 Paramus Road, Paramus, New Jersey 07652

NEW YORK CITY DEANERY

Saturday, June 25th, at the Cathedral of the Holy Virgin Protection,
59 East 2nd Street, New York, New York 10003

Check with your parish priest, or on the Diocesan website, nynjoca.org, for specific times.



A Future Vision, *continued*

1. TO TEACH THAT EVERYTHING COMES FROM GOD. God is truly a sovereign and everything, our time, our abilities, and all of our possessions, are derived from His gracious gifts. 2. TO TEACH CHRISTIANS HOW TO PROPERLY USE GOD'S GRACIOUS GIFTS. "We are but stewards of these for a time...we will have to give an accounting. This means one hundred percent of our treasure! Our accountability is not for one, two, five, or ten percent of God's gifts, but for the full measure." 3. TO INSURE THE DEVELOPMENT OF EACH AND EVERY ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN. Toward this third purpose, a stewardship program teaches and encourages the giving of the time, talents, and resources given to us by God to use as stewards of the world He created.

Canon Crockett, a leading expert on stewardship in the Episcopal Church, tied his thoughts together about the purposes of a stewardship program by referring to the Latin word, "*gratia*." *Gratia* was the Latin word for "free." Free will is a central theme in Christianity. In English, *gratia* became the word, "grace." Through the grace of God, all Christians have free will. In Spanish and Italian, *gratia* is the basis for the word, "thanks." Giving thanks to God for His grace is the essence of stewardship. In Canon Crockett's words: "God has made us free. He has freely given us His creation, and this personal favor of God, which we call grace, also calls upon us to respond in thanks-giving. Jesus Christ commanded us to go teach all nations and to baptize them 'in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.' This is our missionary imperative! Had we even begun to meet this challenge, our world might be a different place today. With the thankful giving of our time, our abilities and our treasure we must redeem the mistakes and failures of the past and move forward. We must do God's work. Practice Christian stewardship and you will enter into a new appreciation of the sovereignty of Almighty God. Practice Christian stewardship and you will learn to use all of his gifts in thankfulness. Practice Christian stewardship and assure your own development in the sight of both God and man. Practice Christian stewardship and hasten his kingdom of love. It is a way of life. It falls within the realm of grace." ■ Ron Nicola is the chairman of the Department of Stewardship for the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America. Part Three will be released next month.