

A while back I preached about volunteering to be a “Welcomer” at Holy Family. You really responded. We had 88 new people sign up. It’s been a real pleasure to see brand new volunteers at the doors each week – people I hadn’t seen active at the parish before. I have tried to thank you newbies personally, although I really only get to those at the south and southeast doors. That ministry reminds me a little of volunteering at the Café. The Café is also staffed by lots of people, and I’m edified by the turnout. If you were at the 9:00 or 11:00 masses last week you heard me preach about the results of the parish survey. In the past two and a half years the percentage of those actively engaged in the parish rose 8% and those actively disengaged fell 3%. I think those ministries of welcoming and the Café are part of the reason.

On this Commitment Sunday for our Annual Catholic Appeal I want to relate that growth in parishioner engagement to the Appeal. Every year we have about a third of the parishioners participate in the Annual Appeal to help fund the work of the Archdiocese. Now,

realistically, some of those people on our books we never see except perhaps at Christmas, Easter, and for funerals. And others come sporadically. So, a third participating in the Appeal isn't as bad as it sounds. But we could do a lot better.

When I preached this year about the Welcoming Ministry, I challenged you to see it as an entrance opportunity to becoming a new kind of parishioner. There is a huge difference between those parishioners who volunteer in any way at all – and those who volunteer for nothing. Just to take that first step is huge revolution – and I thank you for it. But I asked you to do so because giving from your time will help YOU in your relationship with Jesus.

It's the same when giving from your treasure. It's a huge step to go from someone who never gives anything to the Appeal – to giving anything, no matter how small the gift. Our Discipleship takes on a new form when we become givers. This year for the Catholic Annual Appeal I want to speak to those of you who have never given to the Appeal.

This year we're concentrating on increasing the percentage of those who are giving – anything. We always say we want 100% participation, and we do. But, honestly, if we could go from 33% of you giving, to 50%, it would be incredible.

And we'll need that this year. Our assessment is over \$340,000. That's a \$30,000 jump from last year. The reason is that according to the formula by which parishes are assessed, when a parish's debt falls below a certain percentage of its income it loses a big "tax-break". For better and worse, last year our debt for the Parish Center fell below that number, so we got this big hit.

So, I ask those of you who always give, please continue to be generous. To those of you who have never thought of giving to the Appeal – I would ask you to think in a new way about what your discipleship looks like, as you did when trying out the Welcoming Ministry. For some of you giving money is more difficult than giving your time at the doors of the church or at the Café. For some of you it's

the opposite: time and commitment are hard – writing a check, not so much. But both are forms of stewardship we need from you.

And it's a good cause. The Appeal pays for the education of seminarians. It supports the infrastructure of the Catholic Church in western Washington. I know that doesn't sound exciting, but it provides services we would otherwise have to provide ourselves. We're in the middle of a search for a school principal. The Archdiocesan Schools Office helps us with that process. The Appeal pays for our human resource and payroll capabilities – I know, not sexy, but necessary – and most efficiently done on a large scale. The Archdiocese also allows us to have the services and help of such organizations as Catholic Community Services as we dream of new ways to serve Jesus.

In our Gospel today, Jesus taught His Disciples on the night before He died for them – and us: “I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples.” When we think of the

New Bethlehem Center, which just broke ground on a \$9 million building, it wouldn't be happening without you, the parishioners of Holy Family, generously giving over a million dollars to the cause. All the other players in this game, the city, county, state, other churches, are indispensable. But without YOU it would not have even entered their minds! Thank you. But while it would have been impossible to build that homeless shelter without this parish of Holy Family, it couldn't be run without the Archdiocese's CCS.

We Catholics work best as a team of parish communities praying and ministering together. That is really what the Catholic Annual Appeal is all about. So, again, I'll end by asking for your support – the continued support from those who have always seen the need – but also for the new support of those who haven't given anything in the past. Please pray about becoming this new kind of Disciple.