

ADVANCING MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP

BY BISHOP STEPHEN BERG



Holy Week 2021 is upon us! We carry memories of a difficult year, and prayers for those who have suffered and died, and for those still under threat from the coronavirus. As we enter into the Paschal Mystery, we give thanks for the Faith which unites us. It is time to reflect on and turn more fervently to the joy of the passage of Jesus through suffering, death and into resurrection.

Three years ago our diocese embarked on a strategic plan to strengthen its mission. We considered how we could become more alive in addressing the call to discipleship by taking careful steps in many little ways. We have since been addressing such concerns as family faith formation, parish leadership, and diocesan communications. Now we approach one crucial step, the major realignment of our financial structure around the spirituality of stewardship.

In all our endeavors to strengthen our mission, we find one constant question: ***How do we develop among ourselves, our clergy and lay people, a spirituality of giving?*** There is much more to this than financial restructuring. Much has been accomplished with stewardship as a way of life in Catholic communities across the world. From these experiences it is clear that stewardship always starts with the personal experience of Jesus. The following of Christ as a disciple entails a personal response. The examples of work, services and ministries of the church as promoting good stewardship include evangelization and witness to the Gospel, catechesis, and the faith formation central to our mission.

This is what we envision, and where we are going. ***On April 1, our diocese is changing its stewardship model from the DMF assessment to a completely parish-based stewardship model.*** The DMF is going away, and you will reroute your DMF donations to your parish. The bookkeeping will be worked out for supporting the diocesan missions, and practically speaking, the amount of giving is the same. However, in the long run this is a good move for all concerned. Stewardship is an expression of discipleship, with the power to change how we understand and live out our lives. ***Your gifts formerly offered to the DMF will now be given directly to your parish. It is important that all givers understand this change, that your DMF giving be redirected to your parish --*** Because that is where discipleship takes place.

The vision and invitation to each one of us is to grasp the fact that we are no less than “God’s co-workers”, each of us with a share in His creative, redemptive, and sanctifying work. We bring to the Eucharist all that we are and all we have shared as stewards of what we have been given. As we bring our gifts together – time, talent, and treasure – we become more deeply transformed as disciples. Where the response of stewardship joyfully reflects the personal response to Jesus in the parish, that response will only grow.

Our year ahead is to be a year of return to mission, and a return to gratitude.

As parishioners, it is now most important that you focus your stewardship on your local parish mission.

Sincerely in Christ,

Bishop Stephen Berg

