

ParishSOFT Offerings

Newsletter for ParishSOFT Users and Friends

Volume 3: Issue 4

September, 2004

Founder's Letter

Stewardship: Helping Parishes Respond

God has given each person a gift.

That gift is something each can do.

Each one should use this gift to serve others.

As good stewards we can all make good use of the many blessings God has given.

1 Peter 4:10

This is your house.

This is my house.

This is Our House.

A gift opens the way for the giver and ushers him into the presence of the great.

Proverbs 18:16

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

1 Peter 4:10

Welcome to our September 2004 Newsletter! In this newsletter we will be focusing on practical ways to use technology in your parish to assist your stewardship process. Our corporate objectives include Stewardship as a cornerstone of our product philosophy. Why this strong focus? As a minister in my own parish, I am keenly aware of the challenge. This is true of our entire executive team as well. Each one, in some way or fashion, serves a ministry role in their parish. We see first hand the resources spent organizing and communicating with the parishioners. And we recognize practical innovations that can minimize these costs, while maximizing the effect. We know the actual costs in terms of money spent and hours invested. And we have seen the effect of the even greater cost when the message just is not delivered clearly. Our corporate goal is to continually expand our products and services to

assist our clients in making their stewardship processes as effective as possible.

To this end, we recognize the complex nature of successful stewardship plans. And I am sure you are aware of this, as well. It does seem a daunting task. But there is a successful formula, as there are many success stories and parish testimonials from around the country to inspire us and give us hope. In fact, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has a wonderful document called "Stewardship: A Disciples Response." This document can be downloaded at no charge from their web site. Here is the document URL: <http://www.usccb.org/publishing/WithPictures.pdf>

The common thread to many successful stewardship plans includes three foundational components. These are:

Liturgical catechesis for increased attendance and quality of participation in Church life,

Individual and group spiritual formation for an increased committed volunteer base, and, once these two initiatives are well underway,

Financial development initiatives that result in increased giving.

As I said earlier, all three of these components require close collaboration among the staff and volunteers, a tightly organized and planned

strategy, and a successful communication roll out plan designed to reach 100% of your membership. And this is exactly where our products and services can help. I hope you find the articles in this newsletter insightful and useful. And we will give practical examples of technology in action.

It is clear that the concept of stewardship is already alive in our parishes. The point of formalized directives is to help greater numbers of people to discover new ways of living the basic theme of discipleship. There is much to learn from others, who have systematically developed ways of engaging parishioners in active discipleship, thus sharing the burdens and making more effective the witness of the parish community.

Stewardship is an expression of discipleship that recognizes God as the source of all gifts. As one matures as a disciple through a formation process, it becomes natural to make conscious decisions to follow Christ and to be a good steward of the gifts of God's creation.

May God bless you for your good works!

David Rosenberg,

Founder and Chief Product Architect

Parish Highlight:

St. Brigid of Kildare, Dublin, Ohio

Visit
www.ParishSOFT.com
 to register for any of
 our TeleTraining
 Courses.

Fundamentals

October 5 & 6
 November 2 & 3
 December 7 & 8

Offering & Tuition

October 12 & 13
 November 9 & 10
 December 14 & 15

Religious Education

October 28 & 29
 December 9 & 10

In Depth Reports

November 12

Web Solutions

October 14 & 15
 November 18 & 19
 December 16 & 17

Time & Talent

October 26 & 27
 November 16 & 17

Touring the grounds of St. Brigid of Kildare in Dublin, Ohio, one is almost surprised not to hear an Irish brogue escape from the lips of the first person who smiles to greet you. Though the church itself is modeled only loosely after Kildare's thirteenth century Church of Ireland Cathedral, artifacts and furnishings throughout transport heart and spirit to early Gaelic times. Such a setting within Dublin, a city of rich Irish and agricultural heritage, connects the St. Brigid parish community to their patron saint and to her concerns for the poor and hungry. The parish staff and ministry leaders exemplify the same innovative spirit seen in St. Brigid when she founded and developed monasteries and schools in the late 400s A.D. Today, we call such well-managed programs *best practices*, and St. Brigid parish has much to teach us about making the most of technology to organize, manage, and propel their ministries to new heights.

Combining the St. Brigid Tapestry Program with ParishSOFT Tools

Another stellar example of St. Brigid's best practices shines brightly in the stewardship program that Msgr. Joseph Hendricks' designed and named *Tapestry*. Of the 2,600 families registered at St. Brigid, only twenty percent were financially supporting the parish. With more than 2,000 families either not involved or participating without lending their financial support, Monsignor Hendricks mobi-

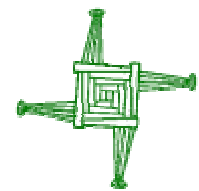
lized his troops. Ministries were restructured and expanded from a handful to more than 50. The staff designed a packet that includes a personalized ParishSOFT mail merge letter (with, of course, address labels) to each family, a ministry card for volunteer commitment opportunities, and an offertory card for planned, annual contributions. The response from the St. Brigid families was phenomenal. Volunteerism has soared to heights that would make St. Brigid herself smile. More than 1,500 families returned their annual pledge cards. While some families chose the option of contributing through weekly envelopes or pledge reminders, over 700 families opted to make electronic financial contributions via authorized, automatic payments from their bank or credit card accounts. St. Brigid now has a guaranteed monthly income of \$30,000 to \$50,000 in electronic fund transfers alone.

Implementing ParishSOFT's ACH Electronic Banking module will be a great enhancement to the Tapestry program management. Currently, those 700 payments need to be posted in the Offering & Tuition module to credit payments appropriately to the contributing families. Joseph Burger, St. Brigid business manager, is preparing to add the ACH module to their suite of ParishSOFT software applications. ACH will automatically post each transaction to the proper accounts, saving

hours of data entry per month. Cremeans adds, "We make it a point to thank our electronic funds contributors during Masses to spread the message that if someone isn't putting an envelope into the basket on Sunday, it probably means they're giving electronically. These parishioners give us not just a more stable budget, they save us the cost of envelopes, postage, and administration."

Parishioners receive thanks and a year-end giving summary but are spared continued requests for donations throughout the year. After the two to three week offertory pledge campaign ends in September, the subject of financial support for St. Brigid is considered a closed matter until the following year. Contributions are tracked and compared to the actual amount pledged only for internal budget projections. Parishioners are never asked to explain any differences between pledges and actual payments.

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The rush cross, crafted by St. Brigid at the bedside of an ill man in the late 400s A.D., serves as the parish emblem at St. Brigid of Kildare.

At the campaign's end, St. Brigid has two telephone soliciting weekends when volunteers call each family who did not return a card. The volunteers delicately ask each family about their parish membership situation and whether they have any other issues or concerns. This last question often reveals pastoral issues of which the parish had been previously unaware, such as illness, job loss, or separation. It is not uncommon for people to retreat during times of trouble, rather than reach out for support; but this personal contact delivers proactive pastoral care to parish families and reconnects the church to its members. For those who have withdrawn themselves from parish life intentionally, the telephone

follow-up determines and records the family's wishes and allows parish staff to designate the family as unregistered in their Family Directory database. Cremeans recommends adding notes to the family record to document when and why the registration status was changed and which member of the family gave the instructions—this information has come in handy when someone in a family later wants to arrange a marriage or baptism in the church or doesn't recall withdrawing membership. Using the unregistered status keeps the family information in the database but out of census reports; a family can become registered again with a single mouse click.



St. Brigid of Kildare Catholic Church is located at 7179 Avery Road, Dublin, Ohio, 43017. Msgr. Joseph M. Hendricks is pastor. Visit www.stbrigidofkildare.org for a virtual tour and Mass times. Click on *Calendar* to view the terrific online calendar and event details. To contact Karen Cremeans, email kcremeans@columbus.rr.com.

Stewardship and Electronic Giving

Ask two stewardship directors about the role of electronic giving in a parish stewardship program, and a fight is likely to break out. There are very passionate opinions on both sides of this topic. So what are the issues surrounding electronic giving and how do you determine what is best for your parish?

Definition: Throughout this article, electronic giving refers to two things. 1. Giving done through direct withdrawal from the parishioner's bank account, called ACH for short. 2. Giving done through credit cards such as VISA or MasterCard.

The "Bottom-Line" Perspective: Those who view this issue from a purely financial, bottom-line perspective are likely to be strongly in favor of electronic giving. Parishioners who do their regular offertory gifts electronically often give more, and almost totally avoid the problems of missed payments, a real problem for parishes during summer months. There is strong evidence that donors using credit cards tend to make larger gifts. Some parishes have seen astonishing results from heavy promotion of electronic giving methods in their parish.

The "Too Commercial" Perspective: One objection that is commonly heard to the use of electronic giving for a church is that it makes us look "too commercial," too much like the mall. This seems to be particularly directed at the use of credit cards and is heard less often as electronic bill payment has become more common.

The Sacrificial Giving Perspective: A more substantive objection to the use of electronic giving for the offertory comes from those parishes that have adopted the "sacrificial giving" approach to stewardship of treasure. Sacrificial Giving refers specifically to a program promoted most effectively by Msgr. Joseph Champlin and used successfully by thousands of parishes as a framework for giving. A key element of this program is the promotion of the use of giving envelopes to "gift-wrap your gift to God." This approach helps Catholics to see the symbolism in the Offertory procession at Mass. Our gift of self to God, represented by our envelope, is carried forward in the procession and the basket is often laid at the base of the altar. Parishioners are encouraged to use their envelopes every week and be attentive to this symbolism. Those who have adopted and taught this well are under-

standably wary of removing giving from the context of the Mass.

Some other objections: Some stewardship directors have worried that, if done without proper education, electronic giving may reduce giving as parishioners unaware of its use simply note that fewer and fewer envelopes are being used. This could inadvertently send the message that giving in the collection is "not really that common here." Others express the deep concern with credit card giving in particular that it will add to the already heavy debt load faced by too many families.

Is electronic giving appropriate for a stewardship parish? One man's opinion...

I must admit that, having worked teaching stewardship at both the parish and diocesan level, I was initially unfriendly to the idea of electronic giving. Over recent years, I have heard enough from both sides that my opinions have changed a bit. To wit, I believe: **The financial benefits of electronic giving, especially through ACH are hard to deny.** Financially, I believe that :

(Continued on Back Page)

24 Frank Lloyd Wright Drive - Lobby M
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-0482

Phone: 866-930-4774

Fax: 734-205-1011

E-mail: info@parishsoft.com

Stewardship and Electronic Giving

Continued from Page 3

1. parishes will see the greatest benefit from the reduction in missed payments and the "summer swoon."
2. **Electronic giving is consistent with our efforts to encourage grateful, planned and proportionate giving.** The motivations behind our giving are more important than the method we use.
3. **Parishioners should understand the comparative costs.** Many Americans love paying through their credit cards because they get airline miles. While the cost of ACH payments are minimal, the roughly 2.5% taken off the top of credit card gifts should be clearly communicated. Those airline miles are not really free. Both due to the cost, and because of the potential of family debt issues, I'm much more comfortable promoting ACH gifts than gifts through credit cards.
4. **The Offertory collection should not be marginalized.** I promote the idea of families placing an envelope in the collection basket each week and feel the

symbolism involved is important. I also worry, especially in the short run, about the message sent by fewer and fewer individuals placing gifts in the basket. Therefore, I recommend strongly that parishes that promote electronic giving also educate their parishioners to participate in the offertory. Some envelope companies, such as Our Sunday Visitor, offer a checkbox on their envelopes saying "I give electronically." Encouraging our "e-givers" to use this or some similar device would not only avoid marginalizing the collection, it might also encourage others to consider giving electronically.

5. **Electronic giving is a "no-brainer" for capital campaigns.** Regardless of how strongly it is promoted for the regular offertory, electronic giving is perfectly suited for multi-year pledge drives. I think a parish would be silly not to offer it as an option for efforts of this sort.
6. **Electronic giving can be implemented gradually.** Some families will jump onto

it immediately, others may never choose to. Initially offering it as one option among many should minimize any negative backlash.

To summarize, I believe electronic giving, especially through ACH, can be successfully integrated into a parish stewardship program without sacrificing our principles. To be successful, it is important that families taking advantage of it be carefully educated and encouraged to use it as an aid to living stewardship as a way of life.

John Howard worked from 1989-1996 as development director for St. Malachy Parish in Geneseo, IL. In 1996 he was invited to serve the Diocese of Peoria, Illinois as director of planned giving, and in 1999 became the Director of Development & Stewardship for the diocese. He currently works as an independent consultant for non-profits. John assists ParishSOFT in software development and marketing and is a popular speaker on stewardship issues.