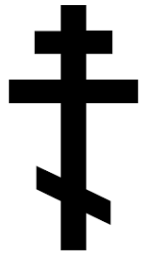

ST. ELIZABETH ORTHODOX CHURCH

Stewardship Letter 2019



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On Christmas Day love was given to the world: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” God gave to the world the most perfect gift we will ever receive. The gift our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Every day we are to be thankful for God’s love and for all the blessings He so generously and freely gives to us all, unworthy though we be. The question is will we receive this heavenly gift, or will we deny it and send it away?

Think of all the gifts God gives to each of us every day. The gift of His Son, the gift of salvation, the gift of our families and our loving Church family, the gift of our beautiful Church, the gift of food on our table, fresh air to breath, and so much more. God gives us everything, nothing is our own, and the only proper way to respond to this is with thanksgiving.

In the Liturgy, after the priest chants “*Let us give thanks to the Lord*”, while the faithful all sing: “*It is proper and just to adore the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit...*” the Priest is saying a silent prayer of thanksgiving. The prayer really lays out everything that we should be thankful to God for: “*You brought us out of non-existence and into being and, when we had fallen, You raised us up again, and left nothing undone to lead us to heaven and bestow upon us Your future kingdom. For all of this we give thanks to You and to Your only-begotten Son and Your Holy Spirit, for all the things of which we know and do not know, the manifest and hidden benefits bestowed upon us*”. After we fell from grace, our Lord *left nothing undone*, He held nothing back, He gave and sacrificed everything he could for us. Christ did all this so that we could receive a gift we in no way deserve, He did this so that we could become like Him. So that we could be saved. As Orthodox Christians we know that our salvation comes from becoming like Christ, and we do this by imitating Him, by pouring out every drop of ourselves for Him as he has poured out all of Himself for us. So how do we do this? How do we empty ourselves for Christ?

We do it by taking all that God has freely given to us and we return it Him. We freely give all of ourselves as an offering to our Creator Who freely offers all of Himself to us in return. In the Church there is much work to be done. There are services to be held, cleaning, singing, maintenance work, bills to be paid, teaching, praying, accounting, and so much more. For all of this work the Church does not ask for volunteers. We freely volunteer our time for many purposes, some good and some bad, but Christ is not asking us to be His volunteers, He is asking us to be His stewards. The Church asks for faithful servants to be caretakers of Christ’s Body; to be stewards of our Lords Ministry on this earth.

To be good stewards means that everything we do is for Christ’s glory and not our own. It means that when we offer out time, talents, and treasures to the Church we offer the very best that we have. In Genesis Chapter 4 we hear the famous story of Cain and Abel. Most of us probably remember how this story ends, but do you remember how it begins? Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve both prepare offerings to the Lord. Abel offers to the Lord the firstborn sheep from his flock. Cain offered not the first fruits harvest, but the leftovers, the last remnants of the harvest. Abel’s offering was accepted by God, whereas Cain’s was not. Abel held nothing back, he gave his best, and his offering was accepted by God because he poured out all of himself.

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Stewardship Letter Continued...

In the Third Century, St. Cyprian of Carthage wrote about how the gifts of Cain and Abel were offered saying, “*God looked not at their gifts, but at their hearts... Abel, peaceable and righteous in sacrificing in innocence to God, taught others also, when they bring their gift to the altar, to come with the fear of God, with a simple heart, with the law of righteousness, with the peace of concord. With reason did he... become subsequently himself a sacrifice to God; so that he who first set forth martyrdom, and initiated the Lord's passion by the glory of his blood, had both the Lord's righteousness and His peace. Finally, such are crowned by the Lord, such will be avenged with the Lord in the day of judgment...*” So, when we make the very best offering that we are able on the Altar in the fear of God, with peace, righteousness, and love, then our offering, just like that of Abel, is accepted by God. The other is true also, for if we hold back and don't give our very best, or make our offering with an expectation of return in our hearts, or just out of a sense of obligation, then that offering will not be accepted, just as our God did not accept Cain's offering. To be a good steward means that we joyfully take on the mantle that our Lord has given to us, so that as his disciples we may lovingly give ourselves as an offering to Christ; as He so lovingly gave Himself as an offering for each of us.

The question we must all ask ourselves is “*What do I have to offer and am I offering it freely and fully.*” If we go back to the early twentieth century, when most of the first Orthodox Churches in America were founded, and we look at how the poor immigrant founders of these great Temples built and maintained the Churches that are still the bedrock of American Orthodoxy we can learn a great deal. Think of these people, who left everything they ever knew and most of what they ever owned behind in the hopes to build a better life for themselves and for their families. One thing that these early Orthodox immigrants refused to leave behind was their faith, their love for God, and their Church. These beautiful Churches could not have been built without the devotion, faith and great individual sacrifices of so many people who had so little to offer financially. Every night when the men got off of work and on the weekends many of these pious people went to assist in the building of their new parish Churches in America. What these pioneers lacked in finances, they more than made up for in faith, truth, heart, and spirit. Many of these immigrants would skip their lunch and donate the few cents it would have cost them to their local Church building fund. Over time, thousands of nickels turned into thousands of dollars and beacons of Orthodoxy that nurtured millions of Christians were planted to bloom and grow for the generations to come. The offerings of these founders of Orthodoxy in America was accepted by God because they gave everything they could give, they completely emptied themselves, and they did it lovingly for Christ, with the proper heart.

Although our Church building is young, we are all the inheritors of the sacrificial offering of these pious men and women; along with the men and women who sacrificed in the building of St. Elizabeth's not that long ago. The time for us to take up the mantle that has been passed to us and be the best caretakers we can be of Christ's body is now. In what ways can we make sacrifices like our forbearers before us? In what ways can we “skip lunch” for the Church? All of us have gifts that we must be thankful for and return to our Creator who has blessed us with them.

We can never repay the gifts our Lord gives to us. However, we can and must “Give thanks to the Lord for He is good” (Psalm 136). We can follow Christ and His commandments; we can love one another as He loves us. We can make our best offerings to God with our whole hearts, just like Abel did so long ago. We can give back to the Lord what He has given to us. St. John Chrysostom reminds us that “our money is the Lord's, however we may have gathered it.” When we give to the Church we are truly and simply giving back that which has only been loaned to us by our God.

As we prepare to greet our newborn King of the Universe in a humble manger, in a Cave, in the small town of Bethlehem, remember who takes that journey with us. The Angels, the shepherds, and the Three Magi. The Three Magi brought the newborn Christ child gifts of a great worldly value: Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh. Legend tells us that although the shepherds didn't have much that the world would consider valuable, but they gave what they could. Some shepherds gave the food for their next meal, some gave their cloaks, and some even sang lullabies for the infant Christ child.

Although the gifts of the kings and the gifts of the shepherds were different, they were all accepted by the Lord. In the eyes of the Prince of Peace they were all the same; because both the gold of the king and the song of the shepherd were the best these men could offer and were given freely in peace, faith, love, and with their whole hearts.

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Stewardship Letter Continued...

At the end of this letter you will find a *Stewardship Card*. On this card you will have the opportunity to present your gifts as an offering to Christ and His Church. There is space allocated for you to share what talents you have that you think could be beneficial to the Church. Things like singing, teaching, art-work, woodworking, maintenance/cleaning, technical skills, and anything else you think can be used for Christ's glory in His Church should be written out so that we can promise to God that we will give back to Him what He has freely given to us. There is also a section on the *Stewardship Card* where you can write in your yearly financial offering to the Church. As you prepare for the birth of Christ, remember to truly search the depths of your souls and think about the offering you wish to make to God and your Church. Prayerfully consider in your hearts, minds, and souls what you and your family can give the Church this year and give it freely with all your heart as an acceptable offering to the Lord. If you haven't committed in this way in the past it is important to start, even if you are worried about making a financial commitment, remember that God is not asking you to put yourself in a bad position, he is asking that you do your best with your whole heart. Remember that it was the nickels of the those first Orthodox immigrants, who skipped their lunches that led to the building of the great Orthodox Cathedrals in our country.

Filling out the *Stewardship Card* and promising to give back to God our time, treasures, and talents is a small way in which we show that we are committed to Christ. Christ tells us "He who *is* faithful in *what is* least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in *what is* least is unjust also in much." If we can be faithful in filling out the *Stewardship Card* and giving these small offerings to God then we can be *faithful in what is least*. If we can be faithful in what is least, then we can be *faithful in much*; we can be faithful offering our whole self to our Lord, just as He offered His whole self for us and emptied Himself on the Cross.

Each of us offering ourselves to Christ in our parish is what makes us a community; it's what makes us a family. Each of us giving to God what He has given to us for the good of all. This is why filling out the *Stewardship Card* is what officially makes us "*members in good standing*". There is much more that goes into being a "*member in good standing*", but again, if we can be faithful in little, we can be faithful in much; we have to start somewhere. That means that if you choose to not fill out a *Stewardship Card* you are also choosing to not have a voice in any parish meetings. Absolutely everyone is invited and encouraged to fill out a *Stewardship Card*.

We want to make giving your offering to the Church as easy as we can for everyone. This year we are considering providing weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly offering envelopes to everyone. We are also considering adopting a system that would accept debit/credit cards. None of these ideas are definite and they both come at a cost, so we are also asking on your *Stewardship Card* if you would take advantage of either of these opportunities to make your offerings to the Church more convenient.

I am so proud of all of your hard work, love, and devotion to Christ and His Church this past year. You gave back to the Church so beautifully the gifts which God has given to you. We must continue to build on this and always give the very best we have to offer to Christ and His Church. It is your love, prayers, generosity, and of course the grace of God that have allowed and will continue to allow our parish to flourish and grow. It is by the grace of God and because of your love, prayers, and generosity that St. Elizabeth Orthodox Church is able to serve all of you, to serve the community, and to spread Christ's Gospel of love to those who need it most and to the world around us. All of us must continue to give our sweat, our dedication, our time, our treasures, and most importantly our prayers and our love to Christ and to St. Elizabeth Orthodox Church; freely for our Lord, with our whole heart.

Thank you all for your continued support of St. Elizabeth Orthodox Church, without it and without each other we can do nothing. But together, faithfully, and by the Grace of our Lord...all things are possible. Remember to cheerfully give all that you can this year and by doing so, show your love for Christ and His Church. This year my prayer is that we give our very best offering, the offering of our whole self with love and peace, just like Abel, and just like the shepherds and wise men did so long ago in Bethlehem.

My prayers and blessings are with all of you as we journey together once again to the little town of Bethlehem, were we will greet our New Born King saying "Glory to God in the Highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

May God always bless you all with health, happiness, and salvation in His Kingdom!

With love in Christ,

Fr. Matthew Dutko

ST. ELIZABETH ORTHODOX CHURCH

Stewardship Offering Card 2019

Everyone in our community is invited and encouraged to fill out a Stewardship Offering Card.

Name: _____

Family Members: _____

Birthdates: _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

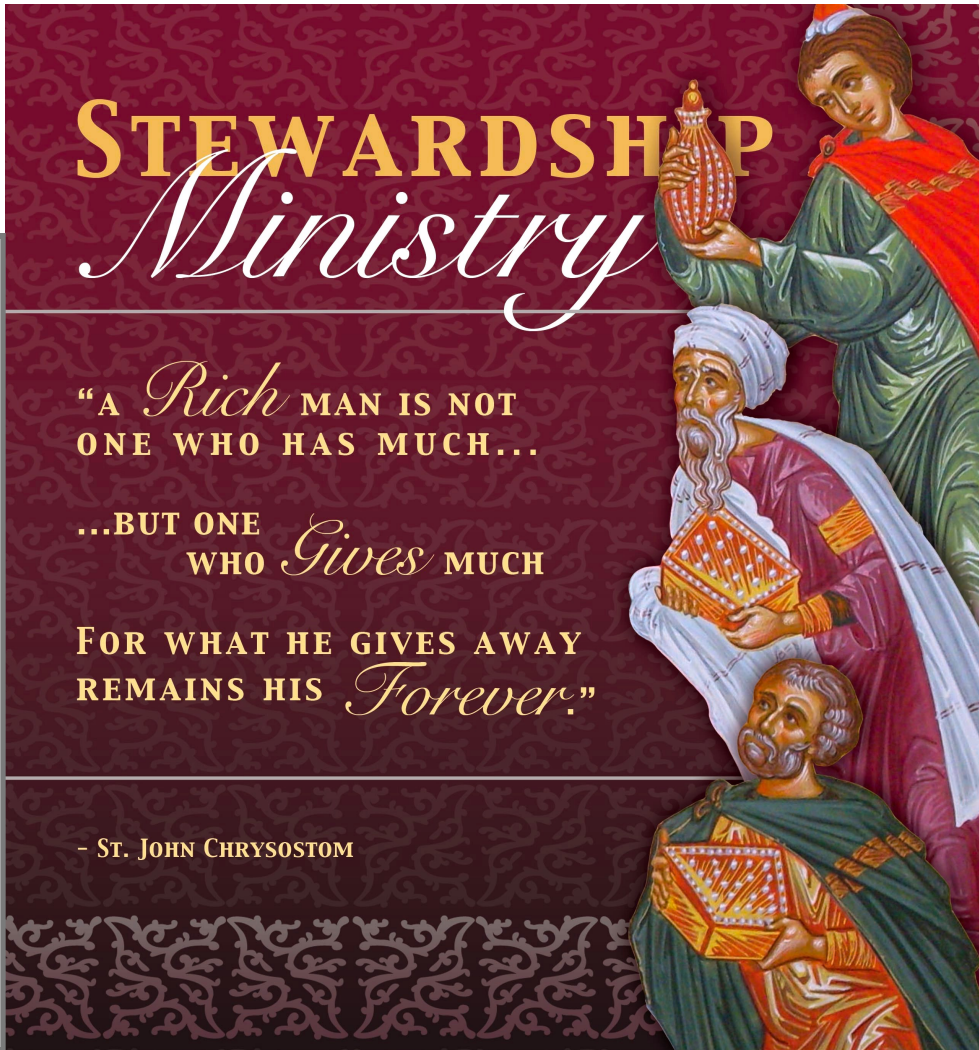
In gratitude for God's blessings, I/we are offering to God, through St. Elizabeth's, the following amount:

\$ _____ weekly \$ _____ monthly \$ _____ quarterly \$ _____ annually \$ _____ one-time

Would you use weekly envelopes provided for you?: _____

Would you use a debit/credit card system to give your offering?: _____

Please use this space to write how you/members of your family would like to offer your time and talent to serve Christ and His Church:



Signature: _____

Please Turn in Your Stewardship Offering Card in a Envelope Directly to Fr. Matthew, or you may Mail it to Rectory at 2263 East Cherokee Drive

Thank You So Much For Your Offering to Saint Elizabeth Orthodox Church! May God Bless you and Your Family Always!

MORE ON STEWARDSHIP

Some Questions You May Have

How do I become a member of the parish?

Membership in the Orthodox Church begins at baptism (Chrismation for some) and continues throughout our life. We are united with Christ through the sacraments, or mysteries, of the Church and through our faithful offering of our entire selves to Jesus Christ. If you are interested in becoming an Orthodox Christian Fr. Matthew is here to assist you in whatever way you may need. Public and private sessions are available to you along with whatever else you may need to assist you and your family on your spiritual journey.

Our diocese distinguishes between voting members and non-voting members. In our parish a voting member is over 18 years of age and turns in a signed stewardship offering card, committing a portion of time, talent and treasure to the Church. The diocese also requires the voting member to receive the Sacraments of Holy Confession and Communion at least once in calendar year. Keep in mind that true membership in the Body of Christ involves living according to His word and within His Church. If we only do the minimum, we may be a “*member in good standing*” but we may also be suffering spiritually.

Why must I commit to give a specific amount?

Please keep in mind that your stewardship of money is kept in the strictest of confidence. However, we do compile the amounts anticipated to better plan our budget.

What if I cannot fulfill my stewardship commitment?

During the course of a year, circumstances change. Your stewardship is valued because it is made out of your love for God and His Church. Please do not be concerned if you are unable to meet your stewardship commitment – we are thankful and appreciative that you are a part of this parish family.

Christian Stewardship is...

...learning how to be a responsible and concerned caretaker of Christ’s Church; it is learning how to enjoy Church life and be happy in Church work., for in Her dwells the fullness of the Spirit of God.

...our active commitment to use all our time, talent and treasure for the benefit of humankind in grateful acknowledgment of Christ’s redeeming love.

...caring for the needs of others.

...offering one’s self to God as He offered Himself to us.

...what a person does after saying “I believe...”, as proof of that belief.

...devotion and service to God and His Church as persons, as families, as diocese, and as the Church universal.

