

## **Stewardship Comes from God's Love, and the Love We Choose to Give in Return**

**Luis Ricardo Fraga  
St. Benedict Parish  
Seattle, WA  
November 6, 2011**

I am Luis Fraga, Chair of the St. Benedict Pastoral Council. My wife, Charlene Aguilar, Chair of the School Commission, and our son Tomás, a fifth grader at St. Benedict, are blessed to be members of the Parish for just over four years. I am also blessed to have the chance today to talk to you about stewardship, and especially about the stewardship of treasure.

A steward is one who guides and sees to the needs of others. Stewardship is the ethic, the body of moral principles, that exemplifies responsible planning and management of resources.

Our Catholic faith teaches us that all we have, all that we are, all that we aspire to be that is good and just, are gifts of God's endless love for us. As Catholics, in accepting these gifts, we also accept the responsibilities of stewardship. The stewardship of our gifts of treasure, our material resources, gives us the chance to renew our commitment to share these gifts with our Church, our parish, and our brothers and sisters in Christ. In the Gospel according to Luke, Christ said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Luke 12.34). Let us all pray to renew our commitment beyond what we would ever expect.

I am blessed to have been raised in a family where the stewardship of treasure was a central part of our Catholic worship. My family did not have a great deal of

money. We never wanted for anything critical, we always had a roof over our heads and plenty of food to eat. My father was our principle breadwinner but although he had a high school education and some college, although he had served our country proudly in the U.S. Navy during WWII, and although he was a committed civil servant working at the local Naval Air Station as a clerk for over forty years, he was never promoted in his job. There were many months where my mother and father worried about how they would pay all of the family's bills.

But there was never a Sunday that our church envelope was left unfilled. Their giving was planned, proportionate, and sacrificial. That payment was made each and every week. I learned from my mother and father about the stewardship of treasure. They also gave every year to the Maryknoll fathers and sisters and to other Catholic missionary organizations. I have such loving memories of reading the Maryknoll bulletins and learning of the incredible work that these missionaries did all over the world. I learned through these bulletins of just how lucky, despite our money challenges, our family was. My Dad was always employed. My mother always prepared our meals and washed our clothes. We lived in a home that my parents bought through the GI Bill. We had so much more than so many others. I understood why my parents always gave of their resources. They were good stewards of the richness of God's treasure that he gave to our family.

My Dad passed in 1997. I miss him and pray to him for guidance every day. My mother, at 87, on the limited pension she receives from my father's employment, still gives to Holy Family Parish, the parish where I made my first communion, the parish where Charlene, Tomás, and our older children Bernard and Isabel go to mass when we visit my dear Mom Rosa. Every week that envelope is filled with all that my mother can give. She still receives the Maryknoll bulletin and many

others. She is still my model of the stewardship of treasure. In fact, she is now the steward of that treasure at her home parish. She is one of two women who count the Sunday collection on the following Monday. I guess we could say she is a steward's steward.

Charlene, Tomás, and I give to St. Benedict, to St. Benedict School, to the Archdiocese, and to other charitable organizations because we are so blessed. We do this in a planned (except perhaps at the School Auction after a few glasses of wine), proportionate, and sacrificial way. I asked Tomás why he contributes to St. Benedict and he said because he knows that when he gives to St. Ben's he "does not have to worry about where the money goes. I know it will go to do good." Charlene said that we give because we "know that we are building a community. By giving we build relationships, serve needs, and grow in our faith far beyond what we could do ever do alone."

The evening after Fr. Steve asked me to speak with you we had a meeting of the Pastoral Council. I asked the members of our Council how they would respond to the question "Why do you give of your treasure to the Church?" Mary Brown said, "I think of it as giving to our family." I was moved by what she said. I think that she is right.

When we give of our treasure to the Church we have to see it as we do when we give to our family. We all know how we feel when we give of our treasure to our family. Now, I am not naïve. If we are honest we know that we don't always give to everything we are asked to "all" of the members of our family....or to our children....for those of us who have had children in college. But when we give to our families to help at times of need, at times of crisis, at times of celebration and

joy....we know why we give....we give out of LOVE...unconditional love, ever-growing love. This is what must motivate the renewal of our stewardship of treasure today.

I would like to return, one final time, to my parents. My father suffered for nine years before he passed, as our tradition and faith teach us, to be greeted by St. Peter and welcomed in Heaven by God, our Lord Jesus Christ, our Mother Mary, and all the saints. It was a very difficult nine years for my Daddy and my Mom. I was not close by. Charlene and I lived in California. They were still in Corpus Christi. So that my father could live the last years of his life in dignity, Charlene and I paid, as did one of my sisters, to have a neighbor, who needed work, to come and care for him eight hours a day, seven days a week. My mother had, with my two sisters, been his care providers for the first two years after his stroke and his initial battles with cancer, but it was just too much for these giving women of our family to do it alone. Charlene and I helped my mother and father every month, for all of those years, out of love. We did it because of the love that my parents, as her parents, had always shown for their children. We did it because of all of the sacrifices, all of the gifts, that they had given to me and my brother and sisters. We were not returning their love....it was their example of love for each other and for their children...grounded deeply and unquestionably in their Catholic faith, demonstrated day after day after day by their sacrifices for each other and for us...without question, without doubt...that we were simply replicating.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, my fellow parishioners, our call to renew our commitment to the stewardship of treasure must be made out of this same understanding of faith-filled, ever-growing, ever-deepening, example of love that, as our faith teaches us, God gives to us every day. Our stewardship of treasure

must be guided by the light of love that led to God sending his only son to us, led to our Lord Jesus Christ giving his life for us, and leads our Catholic Church today to instill in each of us an unlimited capacity to give, sacrifice, and grow in our faith and work. Charlene, Tomás, and I will pray for this light to enter our hearts as we renew our commitment to our stewardship of treasure. We will discern. We will continue to receive the greatest gift that our Lord can give us, a capacity to deepen our faith more and more.

May all of God's blessings and the grace of the Holy Spirit be with you and your families in this time of renewal of stewardship. May the Lord be in our hearts always.