

CALLED TO BE A BLESSING



Stewardship 2024

October 5, 2023

Dear Ascension Family,

Our understanding of the word "stewardship" often gets reduced to encompass only matters of money, particularly in the church. In reality, everything we do is stewardship. We are stewards not only of the money we possess but of all the gifts God has given us. How we use our time and our talents matters a great deal. Our stewardship, then, is how we manage everything we do with all that we have.

Earlier this year, I highlighted the concept of original blessing in a few back-to-back sermons. The concept struck a chord for many, and we've continued to touch on the blessing of God in various ways, including this year's stewardship campaign, *Called to Be a Blessing*. The scriptures are filled with examples of blessings. Some blessings we see clearly and attribute directly to God. Other blessings may come to us through others or seemingly by our efforts; these blessings also come from God. At their simplest, blessings represent all the good of creation.

Many of you have read our Reflections each Sunday. As part of our stewardship campaign, we launched these on August 7th, and you'll continue to see them each week through November 6th. They accompany our Sunday bulletins and are available to read on our website's Stewardship page. Each week, an Ascension member considers the scriptures for that week and writes about how they speak to them. Questions relating to stewardship are available at the end of each entry for us to ponder. I hope that as we read and reflect, our sense of how best to be stewards of our lives at home, church, and community is brought into focus. I also believe these weekly pieces can help us lean into this broader understanding of stewardship.

In a world where personal possessions and time autonomy matter greatly, the notion that everything belongs to God can be challenging. Theologian Henery Nouwen wrote, "The Spirit reveals that we belong not to a world of success, fame, or power but to God." Our actions convey our true beliefs; are we living as though our very lives belong to God?

Ideally, the church helps us fulfill this high calling. A faith community develops spiritual disciplines that keep God central in our lives. It is also a place where we serve our neighbors together, thus increasing our collective good works and exemplifying the blessing we experience in God. Gathering for prayer and service also allows us to serve out of the gifts God has given us, for together we are whole. It is as if each of us is a puzzle: together, the picture of God's kingdom is more transparent and more complete.

The same is true as we pool our monetary resources. Our budget supports our common life in worship and formation. It also allows us to offer outbound ministries to those in need and support a variety of other ministries and partnerships. I often wish to capture the gratitude I hear from those we serve. When I am thanked on our collective behalf, I do my best to impart that it comes from our entire parish community. Our generosity can inspire others to be generous as well, which exemplifies the principles of stewardship and sharing the blessing of God.

Please join me in embracing our *Called to Be a Blessing* campaign. Read the reflections each week, discuss the questions with one another, and pray for our church and our community. Discern how you will steward the gifts you've been granted in the year ahead and how Ascension can amplify them.

Blessings -

Fr. Paul

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Fr. Paul". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

CALLED TO BE A BLESSING



2022-2023 by the numbers



12,000

of pounds of produce for our Food Pantry from our Community Garden and N. Texas Food Bank



460,800

of ounces of water donated to Sandbranch community in South Dallas (our water team)



1,728

of pounds of produce harvested through our Harvest of Hope Community Garden



150 & 50

150 books donated to KidsU and gave out 50 backpacks to our Food Pantry clients



110

of Formation classes for all ages



53

of bikes donated and fixed to distribute to our refugee community



1,440

of families served through our Elaine Kadane Food Pantry



216

of lasagnas made and delivered to Austin Street Center



300

Blessing Bags prepared by our youth and distributed to the homeless community



150

of kids in our Ascension Day School Summer Camps



88

Average number children registered in our Ascension Day School

A REFLECTION ON STEWARDSHIP

IF WE HEAL THEM, THEY WILL GIVE

Following is an excerpt from an article written by Jane Burruss for
The Episcopal Network of Stewardship (TENS).
Jane is our 2024 Stewardship Chair

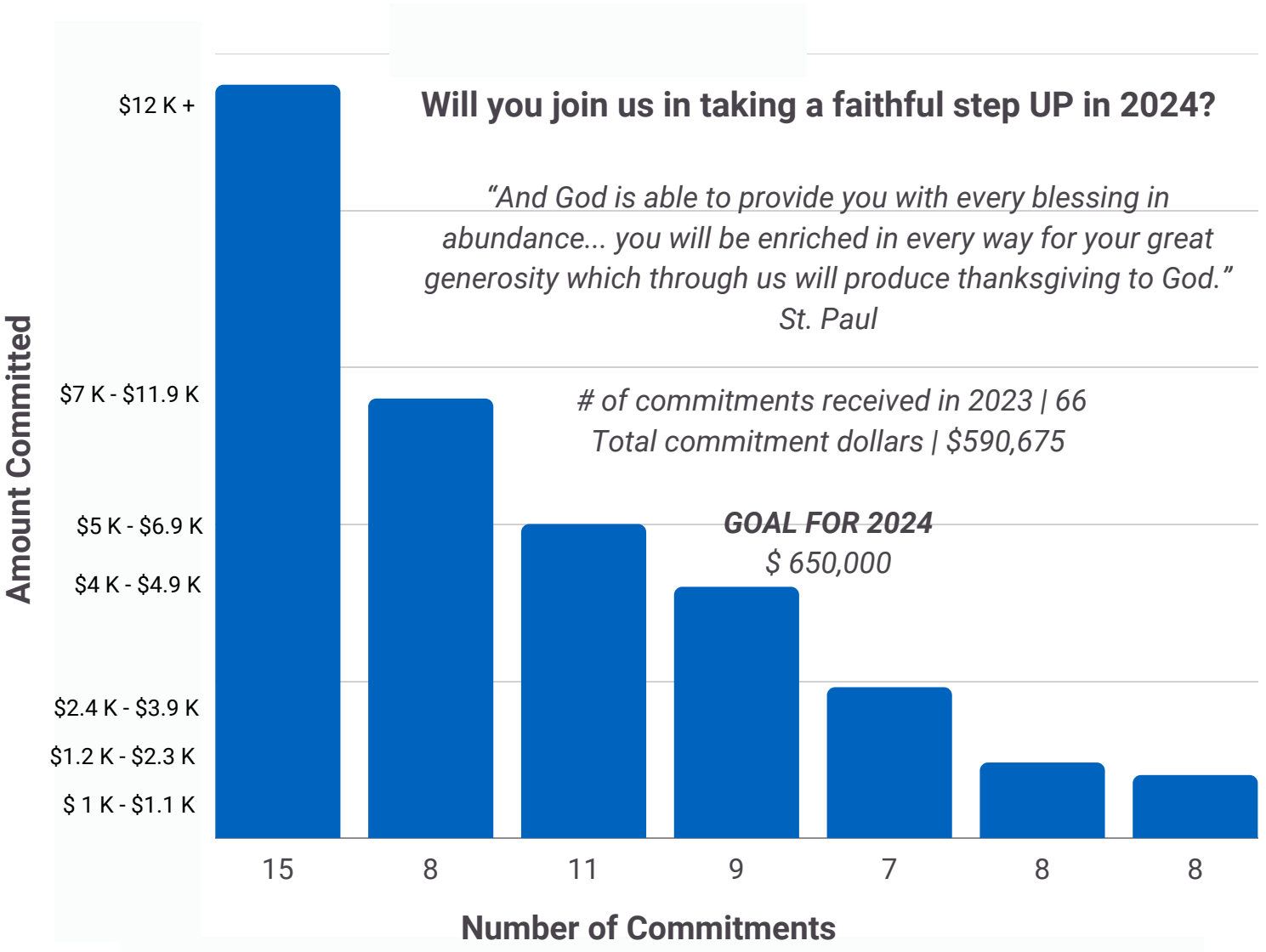
The most important question is not "How can we get parishioners to increase their pledges?" but "What keeps someone from living up to their full potential?" We must work on ways to show people their belovedness and the grace of our Lord. We must help them to understand that through faith, belief, and love, our fears dissolve and our best is allowed to shine through and be seen. Converted hearts are needed more than increased money to do additional good works, for on some level we know that converted lives are spent in much greater alignment with God's vision. Converted lives help the church through gifts that are shared doing God's work-which should also be the Church's work.

While fundraising can change attitudes and bring to light the stories that engage and encourage, it cannot teach the individual to act with integrity concerning what he/she believes. Fund-raising cannot help someone say "With all that I am and all that I have, I honor you." The Church must continue to work to be a catalyst for healing, providing a safe environment for self-reflection that challenges but never shames.

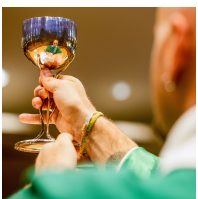
Why we give and why we do not give more, why we pledge, and how we decide how much to pledge: these are subjects that need to be discussed openly so that people have the opportunity to reflect on what limits their generosity. Money and time are very difficult topics for most of us. Who does not feel the daily pressure of daily choices about how to allocate his time or her money? And the framework for making these decisions, the discussion of first things first and setting priorities should be where we learn how to define our priorities - in the Church - rather than be determined in a secular world where we are bombarded with incentives to simply do more and spend more.

If we want our day-timers and our checkbooks to reflect what we truly believe in, then where better to begin the discussion than in our church? For if we are simply trying to encourage or guilt those in the pews to do more, we may raise the bar for giving, but we will miss the opportunity to transform lives and bring hearts to Our Lord.

We invite you to learn to love as God loves, to Be a Blessing, and to share your time, talent, and treasure with Church of the Ascension in its work in our community.



A GUIDE TO GIVING



First Time Commitments

If you're new to Ascension we hope you've found us to be faithful, welcoming, and authentic. Each year our parishioners support our ministry, staffing, and programming through financial commitments. The "Estimate of Giving" (EOG) cards help us plan effectively for the year ahead. We welcome all gifts whether or not a card is completed. You can also commit your time and talents to our shared life and ministry at Ascension.

Continuing Commitments and Consistent Givers

We are so grateful to those who've continued to say "yes" to God and Ascension. Your financial support makes a direct impact on what we can accomplish as a community. We need your support more than ever and invite you to consider how God may be calling you to step up in 2023.

Our CONSISTENT GIVERS are important as well. These are members or regular visitors who consistently give but do not fill out a commitment card. If you are a CONSISTENT GIVER we are grateful for you and hope you consider making a commitment in 2023 so we can plan for more ministry impact.



What happens if I make a commitment and can't meet it?

While we believe this is a serious commitment, it is principally between you and God. God's grace abounds. An estimate of giving card is not a legal document or contract of any kind! It is purely voluntary. We understand emergencies or changes in financial situations can happen during the year. Changes to your giving do NOT affect your standing at the church at all - we are here to walk with you through good times and bad, so don't let money troubles keep you from participating in the life of the church. It is, however, helpful if you are able to let us know if you can't commit to the estimate on your card. We can update your commitments in such cases with no negative consequences for you.

HOW TO GIVE | 3 EASY STEPS

Step 1: Reflect

Ascension is growing along with our needs. As you reflect, pray about how God may be calling you to be generous with your gifts to extend the reach of our community.



Step 2: Respond

Complete the enclosed Stewardship Commitment Card and the Time and Talent Card, or make a secure online pledge at www.ascensiondallas.org/give

Step 3: Rejoice

Come to church on November 12, 2023 for our Annual Ingathering and bring your cards! We will collect, bless, and thank God for the gifts given and received.



WHAT YOU'RE SAYING



For our family, Ascension is not only a place to worship in a loving environment, but it is also church that operates outside of the four walls. One of our values is contributing to the community, and Ascension gives us a great opportunity to do this.
Katie and Gene Dickinson



As we examine our whys and wants, let's give thought to why we pledge to support the ministries of Ascension. As we give to the work of this parish, God gives to those within and touched by this family of the faithful. The heart and soul of Ascension is the continued love of its people and the true desire to enable Christ's work in this corner of the world. Let's continue to show this in every way that we can, giving of that with which God has gifted us...in time, talent, and pledges.
Laura Warner Gilmer



We love Ascension because it is inclusive, accepting and loving. It gives of itself. Service, humility, unconditional love.
Words = Action
Kabir Masters & Steven Lee



When I walk into the doors of Ascension, I know that I have found a place where I can worship God. Every face is welcoming; people in the pews know that God is there! There is joy, peace, and comfort in the worship.
Nancy B. Callaway



Ascension has been my spiritual home for 40 years! Mike and I were married here, and my children and grandchildren have been baptized here. Why do I stay? The love of God and each other is transparent at Ascension. From bonds built in Bible Study to serving in the community in so many ways to teaching and learning from the children and youth of the church, Ascension fulfills my spiritual needs and Baptismal vows joyfully!

Kathy and Mike Wendling



We love the welcoming faces, the strong faith community, and the spirit of love that permeates Ascension.

The Rectors

After years of not attending church, I found a beautiful, spiritual home at the Episcopal Church of the Ascension. There, I found what I had been looking for: a community of Christian love, acceptance, and faith. The outreach to the parishioners and the surrounding community is welcoming and authentic. I look forward to being uplifted and inspired each week through the teachings of Christ and the fellowship of his followers at Ascension.

Christine Miller



When searching for a new church home after I retired and returned to Texas, diversity, inclusion, and outreach were all at the top of my list. After my first visit to Ascension, I knew I didn't need to look further. Six years later, I appreciate all the opportunities provided to me to grow as a Christian. Being part of this church community has been a blessing.

La Bau Bryan

Ascension has always been a warm and welcoming place. From our first Sunday in 1987 when Perry Lyons heartily greeted us, the people at our church have shown their love of God by supporting both members and the greater community. I've heard from outsiders and returning parishioners that Ascension is like no other church, and we believe it!

Bill and Beth Dunham



I recently joined our church with some intentionality: I was wanting to be part of a diverse faith community, especially within the Anglo-Catholic spiritual tradition, that took on the hard work of being the hands of Christ to those that we pray for together in our liturgies on Sunday mornings and individually throughout the week. Through Ascension's work on issues of food insecurity like our community garden and food banks, aiding refugees and asylum seekers, and literally bringing living water to our fellow citizens in Sand Branch in South Dallas County, I found the Church as I think Jesus intended us to be for our time and place. Are we perfect as a church? No. Are we all striving together in community to better reflect the love of Christ for our part of Dallas and the wider world? Yes. Through our prayer and study together, we are all growing in different ways—not just to wring our hands and clutch our pearls—but to get our hands dirty in God's good creation to help bring God's dream of justice, love, and grace for all.

Chris Reed

Ascension is a place where we feel at home. We have found many opportunities to contribute to the life of the parish and the larger community. We enjoy the abundant fellowship, the remarkable people, and the grace extended to us. From serving in the AV booth, singing in the choir, tending campus trees and plants, to other ministries within and outside of Ascension, our talents and gifts find expression here in service to the Lord.

Winifred and Todd Rutenbar





LOVE

LIVES

HERE

