

## On Stewardship

One of my favorite quotes comes from the Judaic tradition.

*If I am not for myself, who will be for me?*

*If I am not for others, what am I?*

*And if not now, when?*

**Rabbi Hillel**

*Jewish scholar & theologian (30 BC - 9 AD)*

It might be helpful to consider these questions as we prayerfully make decisions about our pledges to St. Stephen's for the upcoming year.

***If I am not for myself, who will be for me?*** Clearly, we first must take care of our own needs and those of our dependents. The operative word here is **needs**, not **wants**.

For many of us, as we live through this time of economic turmoil, decisions about our giving may be more difficult than they were in the recent past. If it is fear that holds us back from giving with all our heart, let us keep in mind that fear is the opposite of love. *1 John 4:18* says, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear." We need to trust that the Lord will provide. (I know, that's really hard sometimes.) We also need to know that what we give comes back to us many times over, in material goods and spiritual blessings. "Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back." *Luke 6:38*

***If I am not for others, what am I?*** The imperative of the Christian faith, indeed of almost all religious traditions, is clear: give generously to those in need. "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise." *Luke 3:10-11* I don't know about you, but when I look in my closets, I see an awful lot of coats, and when I look at our downstairs pantry, it looks as if we are preparing for the next famine. God has given to us abundantly; let us show our gratitude by being generous in our own giving.

Your giving enables St. Stephen's to help the poor and the needy with food, shelter, health care, and other necessities. Among the organizations that we have helped to support are: Episcopal Relief and Development (ERD), Interfaith Nutrition Network, The Bowery Mission, Our Lady of Fatima Food Pantry, Doctors Without Borders, Church of the Holy Apostle Soup Kitchen, the Long Island Council of Churches, and the Port Washington Community Chest. In addition we were able to give, from a special fund, a large donation to ERD earmarked for its work in Haiti. Speaking as your Outreach Chair, I want to see our church family's ability to give to others continue and, hopefully, expand, while maintaining our own facilities and programs. If, as a church, we are not for others, what are we?

***If not now, when?*** Yes, NOW is the time to think, pray, and talk with other household members about your pledge to St. Stephen's. Consider raising your pledge if you can, and if you do not now pledge, please consider doing so. As little as a ten percent increase churchwide will enable us to continue carrying out our mission; more will enable us to take on more programs inside and outside our church family.

Dolores Kazanjian O'Brien