When we began our parish building project three years ago we had a significant amount of money in our reserves. Now that our building project is complete, we have wonderful space for the diverse activities of the parish, the highlight being our beautiful new church. Of course these buildings mean we no longer have reserves which used to gain interest for us. They also mean more expenses for the parish with heating, electricity, maintenance, etc. Coupled with the fact that we did not meet our Bishop’s Appeal goal this year, our parish faced a $60,000 shortfall for the current fiscal year.

Our pastoral team met over the summer to determine how we would face this challenge. We considered the options—staff downsizing, cutting programs, doing creative fundraising. Gratefully, we unanimously decided not...
Church with a Mission to preach the Gospel in and out of season. The truth or “Veritas” we come to know through prayer and contemplation must be shared. Today Sisters collaborate in the Mission of the holy preaching. The church and world need the holy preaching. We strive to share that charism or gift so that the way of Dominic will continue in new and varied ways.”

In our Diocese, many Amityville Dominicans share their God-given gifts in education and formation, parish ministry, mental and physical health care, administration and many other ministries. The ministries they exercise are as varied as God’s gifts present in each of the Sisters!

I feel particularly blessed by this fine congregation of women religious and exemplary Christian stewards, having first been taught by them in Our Holy Redeemer School in Freeport and then St. Agnes High School in Rockville Centre. I was always impressed by their love for God, dedication, fine teaching skills, and compassion and concern for God’s people.

As an adult, I have had the pleasure of having wonderful collaborative relationships as well as friendships with many Amityville Dominicans. The Sisters I know are truly gifted and respond to God’s call to share their gifts in love and service. They bring a sense of joy to their varied ministries. The Sisters of St. Dominic are prophets for our times and great women of faith. They have played and continue to play a significant role in my faith journey, and for that and their friendship, I give thanks to God!

As part of their 150th Anniversary Celebration, the Sisters have produced a creative and informative CD presentation that includes musical selections, an interactive history of the community, and several computer screen savers. It is available at a nominal cost ($5.00) and is a “must have” for anyone who knew, knows, or wants to get to know our Amityville Dominicans! Contact Sr. Eileen Nolan, O.P. (Director of Development) at enolanop@amityop.org or 631-842-6000 x 238. You can also visit the Sisters at www.amityvilleop.org.

You, members of your parish community, or the parish itself may wish to consider including the Amityville Dominicans as part of your financial stewardship plan for this year. Give Sr. Eileen a call and explore the many ways your good stewardship can benefit the Sisters of St. Dominic of Amityville!

“And the Preaching Continues…”
Renewed and Refreshed!

This was the overwhelming feeling at the recent Stewardship Leadership Overnight Retreat. In mid-October, twenty stewardship leaders experienced the first annual overnight retreat at the Seminary in Huntington. Fr. Michael Sullivan, OSA, led us through an inspirational process of sharing, reflection and prayer.

Special thanks go to Chris Ferraro of Christ the King parish in Commack as he shared his passion for prayer and liturgy and his gifts of music and song for evening prayer and at Mass the following day (pictured top right).

We trusted, we carefully planned the renewal process and the People of God in Commack generously responded. 654 families returned commitment cards. This represents an increase of almost 45% from last year’s returns. The additional amount of money pledged adds up to $1,289 per week, enough to meet our shortfall with some left over.

Our renewal efforts included our usual components: one parish wide mailing with a personalized letter and a copy of the spiritual brochure provided by the Stewardship Office, stewardship homilies, witness talks, the presentation of the Annual Report of Parish Life, etc. We even sang “Christ, Be Our Light” during the entire renewal.

Our approach to commitment weekend this year was a little bit different. Our pastor, Fr. Joe Staudt, preached at each of the Masses and did a walk through of the commitment cards which had been placed in the pews before Mass. He asked people to consider sharing $1 a week more than they were currently giving to help the parish fulfill its mission and ministries. We designed our own commitment card to make it easier for the people to fill out. Amazingly, 401 families committed to increasing by $1. 50 families increased by $2 and 111 families increased by $5 or more. We were just amazed at people’s generosity.

One woman wrote on her card, “I don’t have much money but I have much faith.” She had been giving $1 per week and now she was going to give $2. It reminded me of the widow’s mite.

If I could summarize our renewal this year I would use three words: consistency, communication and trust. Consistency reminds us that Stewardship is a way of life in good times and in challenging times. Communication with parishioners and the parish staff is essential in getting the message out. And finally, trust in God is at the core of who we are as steward disciples. The fall stewardship renewal is part of parish life at Christ the King, not just because it helps us financially but more importantly because it helps us to fulfill our mission, to bring about the reign of God.
Just One Way To Build Trust

It cannot be stressed enough that people need to be acknowledged for the gifts they share. The most effective ways to develop and sustain trust in the relationship between church leaders and parishioners is to thank people often and be responsible and accountable for the ways the gifts of the community are being used. This demands effective communication.

The Quarterly Report letter is one vehicle that serves this purpose and they’re not as difficult as you may think. As this Fall’s renewal comes to a close it is a perfect time to set in motion (if you haven’t already) procedures for sending the Quarterly Reports. These letters have changed quite a bit over the years and can be customized to suit your particular parish. Quarterly reports are a great way to:

- Foster good accountability (both parish to people and people to parish).
- Thank people regularly for their generosity and develop a relationship that will foster future participation with the parish on many levels.
- Gently remind people of their commitment.
- Catch any data entry errors (for next year) that may occur that can be addressed before the end of the year “crunch.”
- Let people know how their financial gift has supported existing ministries as well as bringing new ministries and services to life.
- Continue to evangelize and inspire through stories of ministries in action.
- Communicate the parish vision and mission on a regular basis.

If you need help generating Quarterly Reports or for samples of the new recommended letters, please give us a call 516-379-4055 x3 or visit www.stewardshipli.org/lead.html and click on “Downloadables.”

A Big “ Tanks” to The Diocese of Brooklyn

With almost 250 people in attendance, the Diocese of Brooklyn celebrated its second Stewardship Training Day in 5 years! And, what a day it was! The Diocese’s new Bishop, Most Reverend Nicholas DiMarzio, spent the entire day praying and learning with participants. Nationally known speakers on a variety of topics were present. People from our Diocese were invited to attend and several did!

We thank the Diocese of Brooklyn (especially Tom Flood, Director of Stewardship and Development, Rita D’Amato, Senior Program Coordinator, and staff) for their wonderful hospitality and a great day!

Something to Look Forward to...

As the winds pick up and the temperature drops we will soon begin dreaming of the Spring thaw. Spring is the time when life bursts forth from the ground and we see a renewal of the earth.

Renew yourselves too by attending one of five Spiritual Mini-Retreats led by Sr. Margaret O’Brien, OSU. We know you’re busy, so here’s the info you need to plan ahead.

**Friday, March 12, 2004** (Morning)  
St. Ignatius Retreat House, Manhasset

**Thursday, March 18, 2004** (Morning)  
St. Ursula’s Retreat Center, Blue Point

**Tuesday, March 30, 2004** (Afternoon)  
The Cenacle, Ronkonkoma

**Thursday, April 1, 2004** (Evening)  
Kellenberg Retreat Center, Uniondale

**Saturday, April 3, 2004** (Morning)  
Immaculate Conception Seminary, Huntington

Look for more on Sr. Margaret O’Brien, OSU, in the next issue of “Connections.” Also, stay tuned for more information on the “Nuts and Bolts” workshops for this coming Spring!
When it comes to Annual Stewardship Renewals...

**Consistency is Critical!**

Avoid the temptation to leave these important (locally and nationally proven) pieces out!

- Lay Witness Talks
- Mailings
- In Pew Commitments
- Stewardship Homilies
- Accountability and Quarterly Reports

Light for the World...

God’s Greatest Gift to Creation!

**Merry Christmas to you and your family!**

From the Staff of

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Keeping with the Christmas Spirit...

A soon-to-be–announced sponsor has offered to purchase the new *“Taking Care of God’s Gifts”* children’s activity books from Our Sunday Visitor for every child in five of our parishes and schools! *“Taking Care of God’s Gifts”* - comes in two volumes - Grade K-2 and 3-5. These books are great for the following uses:

- In at-home activities for a particular season of the Church year or topic of family discussion.
- In parish religious education programs and Catholic schools.
- For distribution at family liturgies.
- As a gift from pastoral ministers who visit children in hospitals or other places.
- In Vacation Bible schools and camps.
- During child care programs or after-school day care.
- For use during children’s Liturgy of the Word.
- As a gift at parish ministry celebrations, special liturgical celebrations, or seasonal feasts, holidays and holy days.

We are now seeking more sponsors for this worthwhile effort. When we have secured them, we will let you know in our weekly fax. In the meantime, order your copies from Our Sunday Visitor at 1-800-348-2440.

Thanks Mystery Santa!

P.S. The nominal royalties from the sale of these activity books goes to the Diocese of Rockville Centre to help offset some of our Office and program costs.
The Feast of the Epiphany

In January we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany. The word epiphany means “to show.” This is the day that Jesus showed all people that he is the Son of God. The Three Wise Men (Magi) used the star of Bethlehem to guide them to the newborn King, our Savior and bring him gifts. The Magi represent all people and they knew Jesus was the Son of God.

Jesus shows himself to us to this day when we see or experience people living the way he teaches us. When someone does something nice, it is a sign of Jesus. In the same way, we show others Jesus when we are good stewards of our many God-given gifts. When we use and share our gifts for good, not only do we show Jesus to others, but we ourselves grow closer to him too!

The stars have been used for many years to guide people to where they need to go, like the Magi. The stars below can help guide you to be a good steward. Sharing the three gifts below is a great start to making Stewardship a way of life! Fill in how you can show Jesus to others by sharing your time, talents, money and other things. Then color the stars with light colors (so you can read them), cut them out and hang them where you can see them often to guide you to show Jesus to others every day. You could even attach them to string and craft sticks to make a mobile!

**TIME**
I can show others Jesus by sharing my gift of **Time** by

**TALENTS**
I can show others Jesus by sharing my gift of **Talent** by

**MONEY & THINGS**
I can show others Jesus by sharing my gift of **Money & Things** by
WERE YOU THERE????

Our office recently hosted a presentation by ParishSOFT on their software solutions for parishes. We learned a lot! For those of you, who couldn't make it that day but are interested in the topic, we present this review of the program. It should be noted that most of the features described below are offered by other major vendors of parish management software as well. We just want you to get an idea of what’s out there!

In addition to the traditional modules like Family Directory, Religious Education, and Offering & Tuition, ParishSOFT offers a range of innovative solutions. Here is a really quick overview:

WEB SOLUTIONS
Web Solutions is a host of online services that connect your office with your students, parents, teachers and catechists, parish, diocese...and to the world. Retrieve sacramental registry information online. Keep your students and parents up-to-date with bulletins and announcements you can post on the web in just minutes. Access an online search engine that connects you with over 20,000 Catholic parishes across the United States. Collect tuition payments by credit card or electronic funds transfer. Instantly send reminders by e-mail or letter for payments due.

ACH ELECTRONIC BANKING
Fully integrated with the Offering & Tuition module. Allows you to automate your parish and school processes for collecting funds and posting transactions. Eliminates the time-intensive task of manually posting income to account ledgers and parishioner records, and permits electronic transfer of funds directly to your parish account for regular contributions, pledge campaigns, school tuition, and fees.

TIME & TALENT
The Time & Talent module stores key information on the availability and personal preferences of your parish members along with the details of your parish liturgy schedule. Together with the eMerge add-on, you can send merged letter or email to ministry groups. You can also send reminders of upcoming assignments to ministers and post ministry schedules to your ParishCalendar.com web calendar.

eMERGE
Allows you to send an e-mail message or personalized letter to an individual, the entire parish, or use the unlimited group building features in other modules to communicate with any parish group.

You can learn more about ParishSOFT by visiting their website at www.parishsoft.net or calling them at (734) 205-1000. And get the big picture by pulling up some comparative/contact info charts on other vendors from our website at www.stewardshipli.org/lead/software.html.

Are you Paying Attention?

Just for fun, we thought it was time for another contest! All you have to do is count how many times the Stewardship Christmas ball appears in this issue of "Connections!" Then, e-mail us the answer and (if you’re right) we’ll send you a fun new Stewardship gift! It’s that simple! (Note: the ball doesn’t have to appear in full.) stewardship@prodigy.net

GOOD LUCK!

PS—If you had Electronic Delivery, you would see the Stewardship Christmas balls in bright blue! Sign-up today!!! www.stewardshipli.org
If not us, who? If not here, where? If not now, when? If not for the Kingdom, why?

If creatures—as something special, for in and through creation, God chooses to become present. And, as we are made in the image and likeness of God, so too our relationship with God’s creatures and our earth changes because we are created to mirror God.

Christian stewards, then, show a “...profound reverence for the great gift of life, their own lives, and the lives of others, along with readiness to spend themselves in serving all that preserves and enhances life.” Also, “...stewardship of the world is expressed by the jubilant appreciation of nature, whose God-given beauty not even exploitation and abuse have destroyed.”

Drawing from a rich tradition of incarnational spirituality, Catholic stewards can look for ways to better our relationships with God, each other, and the rest of creation in specific ways.

Some questions for reflection and discussion:
• What is your image of God as creator?
• How do your relationships with other people mirror the God of all creation?
• What are some ways your parish community fosters and encourages the faithful to reverence and honor the many gifts found in God’s creation—human life, creatures, the land, water, sea and sky—all of creation?
• Do all of your parish ministries embrace an incarnational spirituality?
• How can you move to further embrace an incarnational spirituality in your everyday life?