



ASCENSION PLEDGE 2012

The annual stewardship campaign began Sunday, October 30, with a parishioner, Scott Knitter, sharing with us why Church of the Ascension is important in his life to the end that his remarks, and those of the three parishioners who will address us in the coming weeks, will prompt us to ponder why this Church is important in our own lives. By the Feast of Christ the King, November 20th, the Treasurer hopes to receive your pledge card which expresses your commitment to make a tangible offering of support for the work of this Church in 2012. Scott Knitter's remarks follow.



The *History of the Church of the Ascension*, published in 1984 and written by former parishioner George Giles, offers this anecdote, prefaced by the phrase “perhaps apocryphal.”

On his way to communicate a sick parishioner, Fr. Stoskopf [longtime rector and parish benefactor] was seated in the back of an automobile driven by a sister of the Order of St. Anne. Committing an inadvertent but egregious traffic violation, the sister was directed to the side of the street by a police officer. As the officer began to comment sternly on the violation, he was interrupted by Fr. Stoskopf, who reminded him that he was a priest and had in his possession the Blessed Sacrament. The officer immediately genuflected and motioned the automobile to proceed.

I love that story because, apocryphal or not, it's about reverence for Our Lord present among us in the Blessed Sacrament and a zeal for having people receive the Sacrament, whether here in church or where they are out in the world. And that's at the center of what the church is for.

When I think of our parish, of course the first point that comes to mind is the liturgy and music, but this points to a broader characteristic of the parish, and that is that we *have our priorities in order*. As I serve as an acolyte, one of the principles I've learned is “God first.” In a rehearsal for the Great Vigil of Easter, I once found myself in the middle of the sanctuary wondering whether I should bow to the celebrant or genuflect to the Blessed Sacrament. As I started turning toward Fr. Fertig, he quietly reminded me, “God first.” That was a succinct lesson that applies to more than that one situation, of course.

All of the work that we do for each other and for the community as members of this parish flows from what comes first: the worship of God according to the liturgy of God's Church. And this is not a mere concept: our clergy and musicians demonstrate this Sunday by Sunday as they offer their best efforts, which inspire the best efforts of all of us, primarily to glorify God, and secondarily to edify and equip God's people. And from that center, we go forth to take Christ to the world through our words, relationships, and works of mercy.

The second aspect of our parish that I love is summed up in a favorite phrase I heard in a sermon somewhere: “Our church is not a showcase for saints, but a hospital for sinners.” Where would we get more efficacious healing for our daily sins, public and private, large and small, than the place where we find the healing balm of God's Word and Sacraments? I often think of Church of the Ascension as a full-service hospital for sinners. I'm encouraged by that, especially when I see someone who is deeply in need of healing and has found our door open, like the woman who joined us for Evening Prayer and Mass one Wednesday and later said she was so glad to find a place to pray for her sister, who was scheduled for a dangerous surgery the next day. Or another woman, worried about her own health, who found prayer and anointing here. Our parish register of services bears witness to the many visits our clergy make to the sick and shut-in, bringing the Blessed Sacrament, the richest medicine for our souls.

And personally, I cannot reflect on my appreciation of our parish without thinking of the Daily Office of Morning and Evening Prayer prayed daily, aloud, in our church, every day of the week. It's one of the things that first attracted me to the parish, and I am constantly thankful to be part of a parish that prays the Office, in which we unite our prayer with the prayer of the whole Church around the world, and indeed the voice of prayer is never silent.

I appreciate all that we do in this parish, and I'm constantly inspired by and learning from the example of those who work with the poor of our neighborhood through the St. Anthony's Soup Kitchen and the Thanksgiving Dinner...from those who share their knowledge by leading discussions and classes...from those who do the considerable and constant work of preparing this sanctuary and its furnishings for Mass...from those who work hard to welcome newcomers and make sure we have joyful social gatherings...and from those who simply and faithfully kneel here in Church to pray.

Being a parishioner here has not only encouraged me as I strive to live a Christian rule of prayer and service but also gives me a sense that when we fail in this, which is very often, I'm carried along by the prayer and service of so many fellow parishioners until their example inspires me again to do likewise.

English priest Martin Thornton wrote, “Let us by all means keep that proper perspective which puts the adoration of God before all other values, and which gives our heavenly citizenship prior civic rights.” As we contemplate our annual pledge for Church of the Ascension in support of its Catholic faith, worship, and witness here at La Salle and Elm, let us remember to put God first, praying in thanksgiving and responding sacrificially with our time, talent, and treasure, to God's greater glory.

¹ George C. Giles, *History of the Church of the Ascension, Chicago, Illinois (1857–1982)* (Aberdeen, SD: North Plains Press, 1984), pp. 54–55.

² Martin Thornton, *Christian Proficiency* (New York: Morehouse-Gorham Co., 1959), p. 152.
