

September 25, 2000

Dear Ones,

Well, it is that time of year again. You have, by now, received your pledge card and a note from Stewardship Chair, Sam Loudenslager. I want to commend him and his committee on the great work they have done. This is always an interesting time of the year. We tend to want to tip-toe around this issue of money in the Church, but here, at St. Peter's, I have always encountered less resistance. We know some things about money. We know that it takes money to keep the doors of the church open, to pay salaries, to pay bills, fund mission, fund outreach, everything. We know that without it we will not be able to do certain things in the years to come. We know that the largest percentage of the money spent at St. Peter's will come from its members and no one else. We know that each of us has the same commitments in our daily lives as the church does.

Even knowing these things, our world tells us that money is not something to be talked about. In fact, it tells us that money is bad, something to be separated from the rest of our lives, especially our spiritual ones, and that it is a necessary evil. I think you know me well enough to know that I don't think these things. I don't think we are even called to these thoughts by our tradition or faith. It is not money that causes the problems, in fact, the idea of money is actually a pretty handy way to deal with our transactions in this world. No, the money itself, how much we have, how much we want, how much we give away, is not so much the issue. The issue is how we see it in our lives and how we use it in our lives. That is just as true of our time. How we use our money and our time says so much about what we think is truly important in this life of ours. And because of that, money, our possessions, are a significant part of our spiritual lives. It is a spiritual issue.

The practical issues are simple—we need money. We need more staff here. We need to get to a point where we can become a parish and not a mission. We still receive about \$25,000 a year from the diocese. They are telling us that might not be there this year. We may have to learn to live without it. In addition, there are some exciting new ministries proposed this year, Women's Prison Ministry to the Faulkner County Jail, the Christ Child Guild, the Community of Hope, and the list goes on and on. These things do not just happen. They require funds and energy and staffing to make them come to fruition.

Now, it would be easier to not talk about it and so we use sayings like, "we shouldn't talk about money in the church." Or "all they talk about is money." In reality, that is far from true. Not talking about it leaves us in control. To that, trying to control, and to money, Jesus had a lot to say. In fact, for all the things we try to put in Jesus' mouth,

money is one thing we don't have to make up. Jesus was even more radical about it than the Old Testament!!

I guess I should clarify that the church only needs the money mentioned above, if we want the church to work as it does now, or in any way we might dream of it running. But, the church does not need money to survive and even more importantly, God does not need our money. The Church, though it may look very different, will go right along without it, and, of course, God has no need of it. However, in God's economy, it seems that all of our ancient scripture, tradition, and reason says that it is our need to give that should be the driving force.

That all said, please don't think that the next line is the guilt line about you giving more. No, in fact I do believe that statement about it being between you and God. However, what I see most people do with that statement is absolutely nothing. I would instead, encourage you, to take that to the place where you and God meet and really consider it. Because the reason to give is NOT because the church or God needs it. The reason to give is because you need it. I know I do. I need to give something back to a community that has given so much to me.

So, Marti and I have looked again at our financial lives and realized how very rich we are. We are going to raise our pledge about \$1200 this year to \$6800 for the year. Our Raise the Roof pledge is above that which brings our total gifts to St. Peter's for 2001 to \$9212.00 of our income. It is a little over 10% and it is the best money we spend and the first checks we write because we believe in this community, its power to transform, but most importantly, we know how much this place, all of you, have meant, and do mean, to us. It is our gratitude and thankfulness for the gifts God has given us that we give back to the community God so empowers.

Please join us in thanksgiving and the joy of being together, here, in this place.

Faithfully,

Greg Rickel
Vicar