

Letter from Bishop William Skylstad to Priests, Pastoral Ministers and the Faithful of the Diocese of Spokane

January 24, 1999

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

"Everyone must give according to what he has inwardly decided; not sadly, not grudgingly, for God loves a cheerful giver." (II Corinthians 9:7) This text from St. Paul's collection request to the Church at Corinth has been repeated often in the Gospel efforts to call forth good stewardship from believers. I would again affirm this teaching, but there is another side of good stewardship.

God loves a cheerful giver, but he also loves a prudent giver, a wise giver, and a discerning giver. Good stewardship demands that those who ask for Gospel support do so faithfully and wisely. We are called to use the gifts we receive for the common good and the spread of the Gospel. We must ask for good causes in a reasonable way.

In recent years, one issue has caused me concern about the Church's good stewardship: the multiplication of collections. There are great needs, but every need cannot be met. There is a terrible temptation to ask over and over again because the people of God are so very generous. In the face of this generosity I feel a very strong responsibility to frame our appeal for funds in a reasonable and meaningful way.

After significant consultation with the Presbyteral Council, The Bishop's Finance Council, the Catholic Charities Board, and the Diocesan Pastoral Council, I have determined that in 1999 we will restructure the appeals which the Diocese makes for support. In some ways these changes are not great, but I hope that they will be understandable and appeal to your generosity. In the past a number of national collections have been a part of the Annual Catholic Appeal. I have been concerned about two issues involved in this: 1) the amount dedicated to these collections has not kept pace with the inflation over the passage of years, and 2) we have not catechized the people of the Diocese about these special needs and their relationship to the Gospel mission of the Church.

As a result the new restructuring will remove these national collections from the ACA. The Catholic School collection and the support of our retired priests will return to the ACA. I will establish two new diocesan collections for the support the missions of the Church, one on the national level which will include the Catholic Campaign for Human Development and The Collection for Retired Religious; and the other on the international level will include the Collection for Eastern Europe and Support for the Guatemala Mission. There will now be only four collections:

1. The Annual Catholic Appeal - a request for pledges for support of the Diocese and its ministries, eg. Seminarians, Catholic School Support, Catholic Pastoral Center Offices, the Retired Priests of the Diocese, and the Ministry of the Bishop. It will occur just before Lent.
2. The Catholic Charities Christmas Collection will take place between Thanksgiving and Christmas. For 59 years, this collection has supported the social service programs administered by our diocese throughout Eastern Washington: Family Services, House of Charity, Partners for Community Living, St. Anne's Children's Home, St. Margaret's Shelter, Senior and Family Housing, Parish Social Ministry, Regional Offices in Colville, Tri-Cities and Walla Walla and the Regional Emergency Networks in rural areas.
3. We will take up a collection for the missions of the National Church. It will be called The U.S. Catholic Mission Collection. It will support the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, the National Religious Retirement Collection, the Home Mission Collection, the Black and Indian Mission Collection, the National Communications collection, and the Catholic University.

4. We will take up a collection for World Missions. This will include the Propagation of the Faith, the Near East Missions, the Church in Eastern Europe, Our Guatemala Mission, Catholic Relief Services, and the Collection for the Holy Father and the Holy Land Collection.

The ACA will continue to be a diocesan wide campaign for support of the ministries of the Diocese. You will be asked to make a pledge. The other three collections will be taken on Christmas and the designated Sundays. We will supply promotional materials for each collection to facilitate catechesis on these vital concerns of our faith. You will receive a request for your donation with an envelope from my office. You may send your offering by mail or place it in the collection at Mass. The precise way of taking up these special offerings will be determined locally.

As we inaugurate this new effort, I ask for your support and your patience. I ask that pastoral leaders unite behind this common effort. "Everyone must give according to what he was inwardly decided; not sadly, not grudgingly, for God loves a cheerful giver." Paul is very correct. We can and we must give with generosity and careful discernment. God is primary giver of all the gifts we have received, and he challenges us to be his faithful instruments in doing his work, his mission and his ministry.

I am confident that I can count on your support of this restructured effort. May God bless us for faithfully responding as good stewards of his gifts.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

William S. Skylstad
Bishop of Spokane