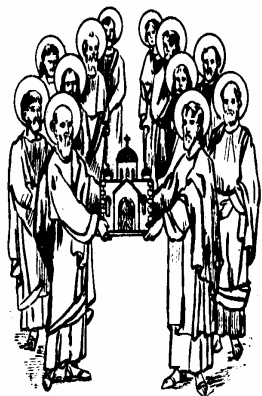


# Stewardship in an Orthodox Christian Parish ... It Is Very Logical

by Ron Nicola

Here, then, is its purpose: the perfecting of the saints, the work of ministry, the building up of the Body of Christ -- a triple task of the whole Church



and, consequently, the task also of every parish.

**If A equals B and B equals C, then A equals C.** This most basic of all logic formulas offers a clue about the role of

stewardship in the Orthodox Church. Stewardship, as a definable concept with **related principles, shall be represented by item A.** Parish life, with all its dimensions and complexities, shall be represented by **item B.** **Item C** will be labeled that special and important role parish life plays in the Orthodox Church.

## A = B:

The reason why **A equals B** in this logic formula is because stewardship is compatible with the characteristics of parish life. Parishioners who understand the concept, definition, and principles of stewardship harmonize together, producing a vibrant, energetic parish environment.

## B = C:

The concept of **parish life is relevant** to and important in all denominations, but it can probably be said that it carries special meaning in the Orthodox Church. It is correct, then, to say that **B equals C.** Orthodox congregations, especially in the "new world," are not neighborhood churches. The faithful tend to come from great distances to worship and to share fellowship with other Orthodox Christians. The parish is a place where a person receives enrichment in all dimensions of their existence. It is more than a physical structure in which to worship. In addition, there are often ethnic and cultural ties, which, along with spiritual ties, bond the members together in a tight web of interdependence and mutual support.

## A=C:

The cycle is now complete, and the formula is proven correct. **A equals C** because stewardship is vital to the health

of an Orthodox parish as well as to the well-being of any congregation, no matter what the denomination. It is useful then, to discuss the ways in which good stewardship practices can be brought into the life of every Orthodox parish.

**Stewardship on the parish level** must be founded on three essential principles. First, the assumption must be made that stewardship is an ongoing process. Year in and year out, virtually everything a church does must be founded in principles of good stewardship. Stewardship must not be viewed by the parishioners as a passing fad or a short term goal. Churches organize fund raising drives which last for a specific period of time because they are geared toward a certain, limited purpose.

**Congregations identify specific** areas of need and design programs to satisfy those concerns. These types of parish involvements are different than stewardship. A parish can recognize that a plan is needed to make stewardship more a part of their church life, but this plan must be designed to perpetuate itself once initial "**start-up**" goals are achieved.

**Second, every parish is unique.** This means that no two churches can use the exact same methods of incorporating stewardship into their parish life. Much of the published materials on stewardship describe parish plans which have proven successful. The natural tendency is to try and adopt a proven

model. While this may provide some positive results, the better approach is to become aware of the unique needs and special characteristics of a certain parish, and to select features from various models which fit the needs of that particular situation.



Third, all parishes have the talent, resources, and ability to develop their own unique, ongoing stewardship program. Nobody knows the parish better than its own committed priest and parishioners. When these people avail themselves of the existing resources; books, articles, workshops, and the experiences of neighboring churches, it becomes quite possible to design a workable stewardship model.

Once these three principles are accepted as valid, then developing a parish plan for stewardship can begin. Seven basic guidelines can direct this process. These basics are general in nature and can be applied to each and every parish situation. Within the three guidelines there is room for application of strategies designed and described by others. It is the combination of these guidelines and strategies which results in an effective and unique parish stewardship model.

**1. In every parish, there must be an awareness of stewardship.** This awareness includes the ability to define

stewardship and to understand its role in the parish. Initiating or upgrading this sense of awareness is a task which often falls to the priest and lay leaders of the congregation. The information they gather through study and research can be communicated to parishioners in a variety of ways, with sermons and bulletin articles being the most common methods. In whatever manner the message is sent, the goal should be to make stewardship part of the routine jargon of parish life.

**2. The second guideline is closely related to the first,** but important enough to warrant separate attention. In an earlier article, the topic of stewardship's definition was discussed. The idea was put forth that while the word-for-word definition of stewardship can legitimately vary, there should exist a consistent, underlying appreciation for the broader concept of stewardship. When parish leaders attempt to heighten the level of awareness of stewardship within the congregation, this point should be kept in mind. This second guideline, then suggests the need to communicate a clear, consistent understanding of stewardship among the congregations.

**3. Guideline number three is the implementation step** for the first two recommendations. The plan devised for accomplishing the heightened sense of awareness now must be put into practice. It is necessary for this message to eventually reach the entire parish, but

an important first place to begin is with the parish council.

A plan to educate parish council members about stewardship has the potential of producing a number of direct and indirect benefits. Typically, there is very little, if any, training conducted when a person joins the parish council. This often results in attitudes about the role of the parish council which are not very sound. Generally speaking, members of the parish council see themselves as caretakers of the church's money and material possessions. Others in the church take care of other parish needs. A special retreat or training session could begin the process of broadening this limited scope. **Parish council members must see themselves not as mere caretakers of church finances, but as stewards of God's Word.** Knowledge about stewardship would help develop this outlook on a most vital aspect of parish life, service on the parish council.

With the parish council now involved in the **"stewardship movement,"** they can assist in spreading the word throughout the congregation. Those who organized the parish council education program could enlist the aid of the whole council in brainstorming strategies for a church-wide awareness campaign. The collective talents of this group will produce an effective and creative way to make stewardship a common topic of conversation among the parishioners.

