

Parish of the Immaculate Church Renovation



DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

From the Spiritual Awareness Team of the Capital Campaign Committee...

This booklet was written for you and your family by members of our parish. As you prayerfully consider, therefore, your gift response and pledge to God through our capital campaign, the Spiritual Life Team invites you to allow the Holy Spirit to guide you in making that decision. This Devotional booklet was written to serve as a guide on your generosity journey.

No one will tell you what to give during this campaign. That decision is between you and God. If you listen, however, God will speak to your heart and He will guide you in knowing how to RESPOND. We believe this. Further, we believe that sometimes, God's guidance comes to us through the spiritual journey and experience of another. We are hopeful God speaks to you through the thoughtful and inspiring stories and experiences of others in our parish.

There are 7-days of devotional readings in this guide. Take a week...any week...between now and RESPOND weekend, October 23/24, when Fr. John will invite all parish households to respond by completing a pledge card, making an initial gift, and presenting both the pledge card and our first gifts of the pledge during the celebration of the Mass that weekend.

Use this Devotional Guide, therefore, to reflect on the spiritual experience of others. Maintain an open heart and the quiet but clear inner voice of God will guide you in making the response God is calling you to make. By following the impulse of the Holy Spirit, you will grow in your faith and your generosity will help our parish remain strong, vibrant, and healthy for decades to come.

By following the guidance of the Holy Spirit, your final decision will be in RESPONSE to God's call. Consequently, your gift will honor God. Your gift will be generous. Your gift will be a blessing to many through the ministries of Immaculate Parish.

“May God bless you and guide you” is our prayer.

The Spiritual Awareness Team
Capital Campaign

DAY 1 - FUTURE TREASURE

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasure in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19-21).

When I retired from the Financial Aid Office of a local college, I thought I had heard every story of financial need and misery. So, when a friend from Immaculate Parish asked me to help her with an indigent person who had no money but lots of troubles, I was somewhat reluctant, but thought I was prepared.

Jonni was older and lived alone in Section-8 housing. She had barely enough money coming from Social Security to buy groceries and pay her everyday living expenses. Because she had very little education and could not read, she did not understand what to do. My friend and I took her to the Help Office for food, to the county dentist for pain in her jaw, and a local clinic for chest pains. Wherever we took her, she was angry, belligerent, and downright nasty to anyone who tried to help her. After six months of her angry abuse, I asked my friend, "Why are we even doing this? She'll never thank us for anything."

In a true spirit of generosity, however, my friend replied, "We have an obligation to help her. We don't give because we expect anything in return...even someone's thanks. Besides, if we don't take care of her, who will? We need to make her life the best it can be and show her our love." I was aware of this obligation, but had thought of it in the abstract, not as a real-life condition that would affect ME! After two years of caring for Jonni, she mentioned one day that she had an estranged sister in Evansville that would take her in and care for her. Later, I learned she also had an emotional disorder which drove away her closest allies.

What I learned about generosity in that experience with Jonni and my dear friend changed my life and attitude for the better.

As Mother Teresa of Calcutta wrote:

People are often unreasonable, irrational and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.

If you are honest and sincere, people may deceive you. Be honest and sincere anyway.

What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. Create anyway.

The good you do today, will often be forgotten. Do good anyway.

Give the best you have and it will never be enough. Give your best anyway.

In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.

DAY 2 – THE DAY STRANGERS BECAME FRIENDS

“Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on” (Luke 21:1-4).

Try as we may, it would be difficult for many of us to relate to this widow must have felt after giving away her last few pennies.

What trust!

What a spirit of generosity!

What a sacrifice on her part!

Few of us would know what it is like to give away our last nickel only to then be totally at the mercy of God for your life and survival. Once, however, my family and I had an experience that brought us closer to understanding the level of trust and love of God one would need to develop to know and believe God will take care of you.

We had an old Ford station wagon, so we put an asking price on the automobile and sought to sell it. A stranger appeared at our door and was willing to give us the asking price. But, as we listened to his story, it quickly became obvious to us that his needs and his family's needs were great. He had recently taken on a new job and was struggling to get back on his feet.

He made an offer on the car but, in that moment, we felt God asking us to give him and his family the car and to pay for the transfer of the vehicle, too. We sought to do it to help him. Instead, we felt he had blessed us by giving us the opportunity to share with him. I suppose, therefore, there is a sense in which he met Jesus in us and we met Jesus in him.

Isn't that what generosity is all about? Responding to the inner impulse of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God? As my wife and I and our five small children sat around the supper table that night, we re-lived all over again this transformational encounter of meeting Jesus in a stranger and being prompted by God's Spirit within to help this stranger as if he were a long-time friend.

It was Jesus who said, "Whatever you have done for the least of these my brothers and sisters, you have done unto Me" (Matthew 25:40).

Prayer of St. Ignatius of Loyola:

Eternal Word, only begotten Son of God,

Teach me true generosity. Teach me to serve you as you deserve. To give without counting the cost, to fight heedless of wounds, to labor without seeking rest, to sacrifice myself without thought of any reward, save the knowledge that I have done your will. Amen.

DAY 3 – PRAYER AS A GIFT OF GENEROSITY AND HEALING

"Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you" (Luke 6:38).

In 1976 our family moved to a home near the Parish of the Immaculate. Our oldest child was planning to start first grade in the parish grade school. My husband and I were also expecting our third child in early March of that year and arrangements for a six-week maternity leave from my teaching position were already in place.

Our baby boy arrived on March 1, 1977. He was born with a cleft palate (discovered at birth). Of course, feeding issues were our most immediate concern. But looming in the unknown future were preparations for a surgical repair when our son reached 14 months of age. By December of that year, I "retired" from teaching to be home with our three young children . . . and to be ready for the completed arrangements for surgery in St. Louis.

About a month before it, however, I began taking our baby with me when attending early morning Mass at Immaculate Parish. Some parishioners, who regularly attended Mass, approached me (and my sweet baby boy), to get to know us better. They listened, too, as I shared my worries and my prayers that all would go well with the scheduled surgery. They promised to keep him and our family in their prayers. Each morning at Immaculate, they checked on us.

The day before we left town, they asked if they could pray with us. A married couple and two other parishioners gently touched my baby's head and prayed so beautifully, asking God's grace and peace be upon us to trust in God's presence and goodness through the days ahead. Following the operation, a surprise card arrived in the mail and was delivered to me at the hospital. My new friends at Immaculate were once again reassuring me of their continued prayers.

Our pediatrician saw the surgical-repair later and said it was "AMAZING!"

Yes! Those parishioners inspired me and taught me that generosity is about more than money. It's also about the management of our lives and how we reach out to others to try to really listen to them and their needs, to get to know, and know better, our brothers and sisters in Christ. We really are a family here at Immaculate Parish. And we learn to grow more and more generous as we love one another and show compassion and friendship toward one another.

"By this we know love," wrote the writer of 1 John 3:16-18, "that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers... Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."

Holy Father, there is nothing we have that is not yours. There is no need we may ever see but what it is ours to meet. Help me to be to others what I may someday need from others. Amen.

DAY FOUR - WHY THE 'RESPOND' CAMPAIGN?

"For God So Loved the World..."

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" John 3:16.

This IS the Gospel message. And it is one of generosity. Here's a lengthier expression of this immortal scripture text taken from John's Gospel: "For God so cherished, delighted in, loved us, His beloved people, that He responded to our need for a Way to be with Him forever."

Jesus is the Way. He is the Gift. He is Life.

- His life gives us a way to God.
- His example gives us a way to love ourselves, others, and the world.
- His compassion gives us a way to forgive those who wrong us.
- And His generosity gives us a way to RESPOND, knowing "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

God so loved the world He gave His Son...

It's not so different with any of us, is it? My husband and I so love our family so much that we provide a way to stay close to each other and connected to one another. We provide a home for our family, shelter for protection, food for sustenance, love and affection, and we take care of their daily needs. We do this without even thinking about it. We do it because we love that much.

Again, love is the key. Love is always the key. As we are filled with Christ's love, we are filled with Christ's spirit of generosity. How could we not be? The Gospel is about giving... what God has given for us and what we give in response.

That's what our campaign is all about – a RESPONSE to this Eternal Love that is God, our God of love. So, when our parish – the very place where we meet with Love and are transformed by it -

we can't help but respond to the needs of our beloved Immaculate Parish. We ask, not "Why should I give?" but "Why should I not give?" especially in response to God's greatest gift to me? Our RESPOND campaign is therefore a way for each of us to meet Christ and a way for us to share this Christ whom "God so loved the world that He gave."

Our family invites you to RESPOND to this great endeavor at Immaculate Parish to renovate and improve our church for all of us to enjoy now . . . and for generations to come to enjoy.

"You often say, 'I would give, but only to the deserving.' The trees in your orchard say not so, nor the flocks in your pasture. They give that they may live, for to withhold is to perish." ~Kahlil Gibran:

DAY FIVE - BEING RICH IN GOOD WORKS AND GENEROSITY

"Instruct those who are rich in this world's goods that they should not be proud, nor should they trust in the uncertainty of riches but rather in God who richly provides us with everything we need for our enjoyment. ¹⁸ Tell them to do good and to be rich in good works, to be generous in giving and ready to share" (1 Timothy 6: 17-19).

It was about 4:45 in the morning when my daughter called the day before New Year's Eve. The voice was weak and shaken. I had difficulty hearing what she was saying.

"Mom, we've had a home invasion! Two armed men held us hostage for over three hours! They ransacked our house. They made our three little ones lay on the floor and tied them up with the Christmas tree cords. Can you and Dad come?"

As we were packing to leave, my daughter quickly called back and told us the police advised them to leave the house and come to us. Their home was considered a crime scene. Upon observing the damage done to our home, a police investigator noted, "The rage and damage shown to this home usually ends in a homicide! Someone from above must have been watching over your family!"

Our children stayed with us until the police called and said the intruders had been caught and it was safe to return home. Before they left for their ransacked home, however, one of our Immaculate parishioners showed up at our door. They handed my son-in-law an envelope with what turned out to be a large sum of money. Parishioners heard of their misfortune and just wanted to help. My son-in-law wept as did we, to receive such an unanticipated gift of kindness.

We reluctantly said good-bye and our children returned home not knowing what they would find. When they arrived, however, my daughter called us almost immediately. She could barely speak.

When they opened the door to their home, surprise overwhelmed them. Not only had Immaculate Parish responded to their need, but it seems God, our Father, had been at work in the hearts of parishioners in their home church.

A group of young couples had completely cleaned their home, repaired the broken furniture, bought-in a new Christmas tree fully decorated, and had placed new toys under the tree for the children. The hand painted Nativity set was glued back together, too, and they left a large,

beautifully-framed picture of a Guardian Angel sitting upright on their fireplace with a note attached. It read, "Unto His angels, He's given a command to guard you in all of your days!"

Never had we experienced such generosity, kindness, good works and the protection of God. Do you need more reasons to know why the church is important? Why the church deserves our support?

Thank you, Holy Father, for the generosity we experience from others. Make each of us generous, too, by the inner working of your Spirit. Amen.

DAY 6 – GOD LOVES A CHEERFUL GIVER

The point is this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. (2 Corinthians 9:6-8)

We can recall one of the earliest witness talks about tithing that we heard as a young couple. At the time we were writing a check just before church and contributing, but giving was not a priority for us. The speaker had talked about how they struggled early in their lives as well while facing a medical crisis. They made it through the medical crisis, however, and knew they were blessed. Consequently, they started to make their contributions to church the very first check they wrote, making their giving to God top priority in their lives.

Their example inspired us to do the same. When pay-day came, the first check we wrote was to our church. We made giving a priority. It wasn't always easy either. But making the decision to put God first and tithe every week turned our lives around.

We often learn some of life's best lessons by following the example of others. Because we followed their example, we have been blessed richly by God, who continuously places people in our lives, many of whom turn out to be good examples to us in our growth. Furthermore, we hope our witness here will be an example to others, too.

Both of our parents celebrated Golden Wedding Anniversaries and the example of their lives, living out their vocation, has taught us so much. Other families and friends over the years have encouraged us and shown us how to be generous givers.

Long before we became members of Immaculate, for example, we were privileged to work in ministry with long time members of this parish. During a medical crisis with our six-month-old baby, a very special member of Immaculate, who we call our guardian angel, arrived at our door and helped us get her to the doctor. We have been blessed with many new friendships since we became members of Immaculate. Our lives have been blessed by the generous giving of those around us; and we hope to do the same for those we encounter

What's been your experience. Reflect on it now. Who has been an example of generosity in your life? Could our witness that you're reading today be influencing you to go higher in your relationship to God and in your giving?

DAY 7 – RENOVATION PRAYER

Loving Creator

You have made the whole world the temple of your glory.

You have given it to us for our delight and have entrusted us with its care.

Send forth your Holy Spirit to enlighten our hearts and minds so that with the help of your grace and the work of our hands we may renew this house of worship.

We are this house of Living Stones.

Bonded by charity and impelled by the fire of your wisdom and love, may our gathering in this hold and beautiful place be a source of inspiration for us and for future generations to carry the Good News into the world.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

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