

STORIES FROM THE GOOD AND FAITHFUL STEWARD CHALLENGE

HOW OUR CHURCH FAMILY IS GLORIFYING GOD

The Worcester Telegram and Gazette wrote about our Church, **“When it comes to the adage ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive,’ Saints Constantine and Helen Church practices what it preaches.”** We put into practice the **JOY OF GIVING!** We have learned the understanding that **WE ARE BLESSED SO THAT WE BLESS OTHERS, so that we share our blessings with others less fortunate!** This is the spirit of our Church and we want to cultivate this in all our members.

We kicked off the **“GOOD AND FAITHFUL STEWARD CHALLENGE”** at the end of November and have completed its first phase. We gave monetary gifts to 55 families in our community and asked them to *glorify God by reaching out to people or organizations in need, and to share God’s love in a concrete way with these people.* We’ve gotten back a number of responses and are getting an idea of how we have glorified God! We also have seen how families have seriously discussed how they can help others and even shared with friends about this great Challenge. **It’s generating a lot of thoughtful discussion, reflection, prayer, and action!**

PEOPLE AND PLACES TOUCHED BY OUR GOOD AND FAITHFUL STEWARD CHALLENGE

What we have done so far:

- Helped at least 150 specific families or individuals in need and entered into their lives by sharing God’s love and presence in a concrete manner
- Supported two months of the Living Bread Luncheon, which is a luncheon our Church offers on the first Saturday of every month and which touches around 100 people, mostly elderly who are looking for fellowship and love.
- Helped provide 20 food baskets and gift cards during the coronavirus crisis to families in need from Park Ave Elementary School and in Webster
- St Luke’s Homeless Shelter in Southbridge
- Toys Drive for Children
- Winter Warm Drive
- Bedouin women in Egypt
- Farms Hand Preschool
- NASCAR Family Foundation
- Hospice and Palliative Care
- Pajamas for Children’s Hospital
- Pine Street Inn Homeless Shelter
- Boys and Girls Club of Webster/Dudley
- Christian Appalachian Project
- OpporTUNEity
- CT Food Bank
- St Jude’s Hospital
- Webster/Dudley Food Share
- Worcester Food Bank
- Webster Library
- Dunkin Donuts to random people

- Helped someone buy new tires
- Blessed Backpack Brigade, which helps the homeless in needy in Webster
- The Webster/Dudley Veteran's Council
- Helped two homeless individuals in Worcester
- A family whose father has Stage 4 cancer
- Fisher House of Boston
- Masonic Angel Fund
- TEEG (Thompson Ecumenical Empowerment Group)

Here are a few of the responses the Parish received from the Good and Faithful Steward Challenge:

1. Since the start of the Good and Faithful Steward Challenge, my family and I have talked a lot about the monetary gift we received from the Church. We truly feel that it is important to take time and reflect on the wonderful opportunity we've been given and to determine how best we can use our gift to glorify God. **Although we have yet to determine where we will donate the money we received, we have been inspired to become charitable on our own. We feel God has blessed us in our lives and hope that in some small way we can help others. We decided to match and go beyond what the Church gave us by donating our own money in a variety of ways. Our goal is to donate to a charity or individual every month for an entire year.** We gave Fr Luke \$250 in gift cards to hand out for Thanksgiving, \$200 in gift cards for Christmas, and \$200 in January for the Church AGAPE Fund to help families in need. **I can honestly say that every donation has made our hearts full and we feel tremendously blessed. We are so thankful for what the church's gift has done for our family. The Church HAS GIVEN US THE GIFT OF INSPIRATION, which is a tremendous and priceless gift indeed!**
2. We sat down as a family and brainstormed how to use this gift. We decided to help two families who've faced tough time. One family has had car troubles all year, the wife is disabled, and the husband works many jobs to keep the family afloat. They have children with lots of needs. The other family was unable to have children so they adopted three siblings, all who are survivors from drug withdrawal as infants. They also foster the fourth sibling. They have been having a hard time keeping up with mortgage payments. **We decided to give each family \$125 to their favorite store, and then took \$50, bought food and invited both families over for dinner, surprised them with the gift cards and gave them an ornament to remember our get-together. We built gingerbread houses and so enjoyed our Christmas time together. Thank you so much for giving us this opportunity to help others.**
3. **This Good and Faithful Steward Challenge is brilliant! I'm not even from your church, but two of my close friends told me all about it. This idea is quite a lesson for me personally.** I was enamored with thoughts of how one would share the talent and make it "bigger" for the Master verses burying it to "protect" it? Would I try to double the talent and give it back? I thought of the parable about "giving a man a fish" versus "teaching a man to fish." I thought of a local waitress where I go for lunch. She takes care of her mother and has a son and daughter-in-law who live with their two small children in NC. She can only get down to see them every year and a half. I decided to help them. I talked with my two friends about what they will do with their gift. They took this idea so seriously and wanted to do something that would truly glorify God. **In the end, this**

Challenge made us all think a lot and pray a lot about the best way to glorify God with the talents He has given us. IT REALLY CHANGED THE WAY I THINK GOING FORWARD. That may be the greatest lesson from this exercise!

4. **“Now this Challenge is absolutely amazing! Imagine a church having money and giving it back to their parishioners to help others? I’m floored. This to me shows the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Your Church is “walking the walk.”** Maybe some of your people need this gift desperately and I hope they keep it. **Yet, all of your parishioners have been challenged to pay it forward! This spreads God’s light, His kindness and joy right in your hometown.** Your Church is looking at the people right under your noses and helping them in a tangible way. This is not some abstract ‘hope’ in Christ, but it is very concrete. **Your people are experiencing the joy of giving, which maybe some thought they couldn’t afford to do otherwise.** I am just blown away by this. I’ve never seen it before and I’m very impressed.” *(from an observer not from our church)*
5. Our family discussed what we would do and decided to split up the gift between the four of us, allowing each one to use it wherever they felt best. I donated my portion to St. Luke’s Guesthouse, a homeless shelter in Southbridge. They told me that residents supply their own food, so I donated \$50 along with a bag of food and a bag of clothes. My husband knows of a special-needs man who walks to and from work every day. On his way home every day he stops at 21 West and buys a couple beers with a handful of loose change. My husband decided to give his \$50 to pay for the man’s drinks for a few days, without him knowing. My daughter gave a \$50 food card to a friend whose relative is struggling.
6. My family and I really wrestled with trying to agree upon a charity that would honor Emmanuel Pappas’ memory as well as benefit the community he loved. We discussed many charities that benefit women in developing nations, the American Red Cross with whom I have personal experience, St Jude’s Hospital, and the Worcester County Food Bank. Ultimately, our family already supports each of these charities. So, **we decided the best way to use this money was to help our local community. We are returning the \$300 and adding another \$100 so that we can sponsor one meal at our church’s monthly Living Bread Luncheon in memory of Emmanuel Pappas. We have witnessed the appreciation of the 100 guests who attend these luncheons and feel this would best honor his memory.** (A second person also wrote, “I think our Church’s Living Bread Luncheon is such a special event, and it offers loving fellowship and a delicious meal to so many people. I’m returning the \$100 gift the Church gave me and adding an additional \$50 to be put forward to partially sponsoring one of our Luncheons.)
7. I am so thankful for God’s providence. I received this gift from God and used the money to help someone buy four new tires for their car. Without this help, they could never have been able to buy new tires.
8. I prayed a long time before giving away this gift. I prayed God would show me the right person or organization to give it to. **God showed me a need in a person’s life one Sunday morning. He touched my heart and I knew who to give it to. I did it anonymously and felt so blessed glorifying God by sharing this gift. Praise God!** He is faithful in all circumstances and will lead us in the right direction when we ask Him.

9. **The responsibility of sharing in this mission of faithful giving turned out to be more of a challenge than expected. It was a true endeavor of love and commitment. We were led to realize the need of a family who had a dire hardship.** This husband is a handyman and the wife works in a distribution center. They have four children and struggle to make ends meet. The husband's work was terminated for the winter months and he scrambled to find means to support his family. **When my husband offered this man our gift, he looked at us in disbelief. Many tears flowed from these men together in a garage sharing a gift that was so needed for his family. He expressed such gratitude and awe that a Christian church would give this money to the parishioners to make a difference to others in need. The concept of this challenge created a wonderous joy within us.**
10. We decided to divide up our gift and give it to the following places: 1) St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, which offers free treatment, as well as room and board, to children with the most severe conditions; 2) Worcester County Food Bank, which increased our gift fourfold. We learned that 1 in 9 children from the Worcester County do not have enough food to eat; 3) Children's books for the Webster Public Library, 4) Dunkin Donut gift cards given out in the name of our church. I even saw one *"Thank you for making my start of the day better"* because of our gift on the Webster/Dudley/Oxford Facebook page. **I have to say that donating this money made us feel as if we wanted to help those in need even more.**
11. I donated the gift to the CT Food Bank, where I have volunteered at the Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen in New Haven from 8th grade until I graduated from high school. I knew that I wanted to use my donation in a way that would help the greatest number of people most efficiently. Given that none of the work I did at the Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen would have been possible without the CT Food Bank, I knew this was a good choice. Second, the problem of poverty in Connecticut, with a proliferation of drugs and mental illness are a big factor in urban poverty: they are spurs and aggravators for people who are on a downward trajectory toward poverty. Because of this, I felt it was important to entrust the Good and Faithful Steward donation with someone who could use it responsibly. As a side note, **I have been attending your church for the past six months and my experience with your community was more enriching, encouraging, and heartening than I think I can express with words. The care you took to speak with me, to guide me in the parish customs and encourage me in worship has greatly impacted me. I was able to take my rightful place in the broader work of the community as a prayerful participant in the liturgy and as a servant to Christ in the poor through the Good and Faithful Steward Challenge. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to occupy my place in doing the good work of prayer and charity.**
12. Our family thought very hard about what to do with the church's gift. There are so many wonderful organizations and people in need. We thought of the homeless, foster children, underprivileged children. It is overwhelming when you stop and think how many people need support. We wanted to do something that has an impact on people and can help in a positive way. Our children have been blessed with music the last few years, and we've seen how it has helped them grow and give them confidence. Our son's music teacher started a non-profit organization called **OpporTUNEity**. **The organization brings kids from Worcester who may not otherwise be able to participate in music classes to Anna Maria for a music program. A music therapist**

teaches many kids with disabilities. One of her newer programs brings Anna Maria students and herself to teach songwriting to inmates at the Worcester County House of Corrections. This program is where we've decided to use our gift. I know Melissa received some flak for running a program for those who have "done wrong" and we struggled at first with our choice, but in the end, helping those who have been led astray is central to Christianity. Watching one of her concerts with these people is so powerful because we can see the joy on their faces, and we hope that this experience helps them to heal and perhaps want to strive to do good things with their lives when they are released.

13. After receiving the gift from the Challenge, I thought and prayed about what I should do. I first thought about giving it away in \$20 amounts to anyone I meet on the street asking for money. But I don't really go walking on the streets much, so this was a romantic idea. After more reflection, I looked to see where homeless shelters are in the area. I drove to St Luke's Guesthouse in Southbridge and was impressed by the neatness and general feel of welcome. It is run by a doctor and his wife, and they take in homeless men, women and children. The place supports people looking for housing and work. It keeps 75% of any earnings and puts this money into the individual's savings account, which is held until the person is ready to leave. Help and counseling are provided. There is room for up to 12 people and they can stay for three months. I want to keep supporting this beautiful ministry.
14. I prayed and asked God for help in finding the proper place to offer this gift. I divided the money and gave it to several charities – the **Christian Appalachian Project** for poor families, the **Boys and Girls Club, Pine Street Inn** who helps the homeless in Boston, and then gave part of it **to a lonely 85 year old neighbor** who doesn't have any relatives, and struggles to keep her house warm. She cuts firewood herself to warm her house. Despite her living conditions she is so positive and was very grateful for the help from our Church.
15. As a family, this was much more difficult to decide how to use this gift. We came up with many different ideas, but in the end we did the following: 1) Supported a **Toy Drive** for Christmas at our children's after school program, 2) Bought blankets for a "**Winter Warmth Drive**" at the hospital, 3) Donated for pajamas at **Children's Hospital**, and 4) used a modest amount to buy supplies and run a hot chocolate stand to raise money for our school (and so far we have doubled the money we will give to the school). **It feels great to give and people are so appreciative. It was also an educational process to get the kids to think about all the different ways good could be done!**
16. I prayed and asked God to help me discern among the many needs. I decided to give part of the donation to the NASCAR Family Foundation for children in need with terminal illnesses. I also gave part of the money to the Hospice and Palliative Care. **My eyes filled with tears and my heart was gladdened by being able to help others**
17. I gave the money to the **St. Catherine's Embroidery Project 2020**, which pays widowed Bedouin women of the Jebelinja tribe a fair wage to sew bags that will be sold at St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai.

18. I gave the money to my niece who will use it for the **Farm Hands Preschool**, a small community that works for social justice by raising children in a multi-ethnic climate of love, generosity, vulnerability and connection with one another.
19. **An anonymous donor read what we are doing in the local newspaper, and was so inspired by it, that they sent in the mail \$150 worth of gift cards to give away during Christmas.** This is similar to how one of our Church Family members was telling her neighbor about what our Church is doing. The next day, this neighbor came back to our parishioner's home with \$600 in gift cards and told her to give it to the priest and have him pass them out to needy families.

The joy of giving! Jesus said, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."* Realizing that we are blessed by God SO THAT we can share those blessings with others less fortunate. This is what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. This is what it means to be the Church of Christ. This Good and Faithful Steward Challenge is meant to only inspire and motivate all of us to continue glorifying God in all that we do and to act as good and faithful stewards with all of the blessings He gives us every day!

Here are more of the responses the Parish received from the Good and Faithful Steward:

"It was impossible for me to read through all these stories without crying. I've tried twice and haven't gotten past story #7 (from the February issue of "The Light")," confessed Dan Pappas, the nephew of Emmanuel Pappas and the executor of his will. "Manny would be twice as touched. It's just amazing. The Webster community is getting a huge dose of God's love. Sharing these stories is as potent as sharing the money."

20. **One parishioner used the money to buy the ingredients for a Pancake Breakfast. With the \$850 she collected from this fundraiser, she split the money with the Blessed Backpack Brigade, which tries to help the homeless in needy in Webster, and with the Webster/Dudley Veteran's Council.** Members of each of these communities came to help with the pancake breakfast, along with a number of other parishioners. It was great to get everyone involved!
21. This was a great challenge as it made me give a lot of thought as to how I could help out in ways I normally don't. In the end, I helped in ways I normally do but with a bit of a difference. A friend of my son has had a rough childhood and is presently homeless, living in shelters but working and trying to move forward with little support. He called one night to say he wanted to say hello. He was staying at the Worcester shelter but it had been an unruly night and he walked to Oxford. We ended up finding him on his walk and brought him back to our home where he spent a couple nights. My son encouraged him to reach out to some family members to try again for help. I was able to have a nice talk with him and I truly felt God placed him in my hands at that time to help him. I gave him the money and we spoke about where it came from and why I felt at this point in his life it may help him move forward. He was eternally grateful and amazed. I am now praying he does well with it. I did give a little portion of the money to another homeless man I met outside of Price Chopper in Worcester. He was cold and wasn't asking for anything – just huddled out of the wind. So, I approached him and asked if he was hungry. He asked for some warm soup. So, I got him some warm soup and other supplies I thought he could use, as well as gave him some money. His

name is Steve and we talked a bit about life. He told me he knew God was watching out for him because he had already survived so much trauma. WE shook hands and parted. **Putting a name to a homeless face and having some physical contact made me realize that all of these people on the streets are someone's son or daughter or wife or husband. It's a cruel world sometimes and it felt good to make a little difference and spread some love and humanity and compassion.** Thank you for inspiring me with this challenge.

22. "I gave the money to four people she saw on the street. I saw a mother pushing her baby carriage through the snow, and I thought how they must not have a car, and just wanted to give them a little gift. They were so surprised and happy. Then, I saw someone rummaging through the trash can outside Dunkin Donuts. I went over to him and gave him a little gift. He couldn't believe it. **I helped two other people as well. Then when I shared this experience with my son-in-law, he gave me \$50 and told me to give it to someone else in need. This giving is contagious and makes us feel so good! Each time I felt such a joy in giving to others. It made me feel so blessed.** Thank you so much for this opportunity."
23. "Thank you so very much for this gift. **My friend's husband has Stage 4 cancer.** They have made many trips to the hospital for radiation and other treatment. **I gave them the \$100 to help pay for their gas. This inspired me to give another \$100 as a donation to our Project Mexico team.**"
24. I gave my gift to a young woman who works two jobs to put herself through nursing school. **She was so grateful to God and to us for sharing His gift.** She was surprised because God came through for her. And we shared that God is always faithful!
25. I sent \$100 to St Jude Children's Hospital and the other \$100 to Fisher House of Boston which offers housing to families whose loved ones are getting treatment at the VA Hospital.
26. I reached out to the Webster Food Share and gave the money there. They help the needy every Tuesday and Thursday.
27. **I combined with one other parishioner and we used our money to buy Christmas presents for a family whose father just got out of prison for dealing drugs.** He wife and three children were homeless at one time but were now living with the father's dad. We bought them gifts and gave them a Ham Christmas basket. **It felt so good to do something around Christmas for another family.** It doesn't take much to put a smile on someone else's face. Thank you for giving all of us in our church community the opportunity to think about someone else's needs instead of our own. What a great idea! (Both of these parishioners ended up using their own money for the gifts, and returned back to the church the gift they received)
28. Thanks for much for such a creative and worthy project. It was an inspiring idea and I believe its results will continue to benefit the local community and our beloved parish. I used the money to support the Masonic Angel Fund, which helps families in need in different ways, with food, clothing, furniture, even with laptop computers.
29. **First, we decided to add \$150 each to the two gifts we received from the church, so we had a total of \$500 to use.** We wanted to focus on people in our area who are in need. This led us to meet the director of TEEG, a community service agency that addresses the unmet needs of people in Northeast Connecticut. The director of TEEG had already read in the newspapers about our Good and Faithful Steward Challenge, and was excited that they would be recipients from this gift. The

money was used to help a single mother of four children who was in danger of having her power shut off and even losing her housing. The lead case manager who presented the mother with this gift said that “the joy of being able to help this family was so overwhelming” that she could not contain her tears. The mother’s response was one of deep gratitude because it relieved some of the terrible stress she faced. We tried to glorify God through this act, but we also benefited from this experience. We now have a personal connection with the TEEG Director and manager and both of us are now eager to find new and creative ways to support TEEG and the needy in our community beyond the once a year donations we each have made in the past.

30. I am giving our gift back to the Church, and adding to it so that we can sponsor one month of the Living Bread Luncheon. We will come and serve the lunch as well. It’s a wonderful feeling to be able to supply a large group with a delicious meal and fellowship. This will also give us a chance to meet some folks in the community as well.
31. **We bought the following supplies that are useful for homeless individuals through the Mustard Seed Soup Kitchen in Worcester: 60 pairs of hand warmers, 50 pairs of winter socks, 47 pairs of women’s underwear, 12 pairs of sweat pants, 6 hoodie sweat shirts, 5 pairs of boots, 3 backpacks.**
32. One parishioner used her gift from the Church and multiplied it in a special way. She organized volunteers from our Church, together with people from the Blessed Backpack Brigade and the Veterans Council of Webster and Dudley and put on a pancake breakfast fundraiser at our church. **She used the \$300 her family got and multiplied it to \$900 through this fundraiser. She ended up giving \$450 to each of the two nonprofit organizations as a way of supporting their efforts in reaching out to the homeless and needy of our community.** It was a great way to get many people from our church and in these organizations involved. Even the Girl Scouts joined this event by selling their cookies.