

Many fitness experts today suggest that one of the best ways to not only begin a diet and exercise program, but to stick with it, is to afford yourself an accountability partner. An accountability partner is someone who will do the work with you, who will encourage you not to eat what you are not supposed to, who will motivate you to move when you feel like sitting on the couch, and who will push you to be better and better every step of the way. Oftentimes this is a reciprocal relationship, whereby accountability partners hold each other accountable for these things.

In many ways, there is something we could take away from this model in our Christian life as well. Having someone that we can count on to encourage us in our faith walk is also a good thing to have. It would be someone who would be faithful in studying God's word, with whom you could offer prayers of thanksgiving and need, and someone with whom you could talk when times were tough and you are looking for hope. It is far too easy at times to think that we can simply do all of this on our own, that we do not need someone else to ask us if we did our morning devotion, or we deny that the devil often leads us into thinking that skipping over prayers or church attendance is no big deal. Christians need one another along the way, which is why Paul calls the Church the body of Christ – all of us are needed.

In the area of stewardship, we often think that this is an internal matter. It is easy to fall into the habit of thinking that so long as we are giving something every so often, then we are faithful in our stewardship. But stewardship is something that needs to be intentional...it is part of our life of faith, and in much the same way we are called to be in the Word and to grow in it, we are also called to think deliberately about stewardship and prayerfully consider how we may ever increase in our thanksgiving to God.

To assist with this, we are once again returning to a pledge program in the area of stewardship. By now you have hopefully received in the mail a letter from me, along with a pledge card and an envelope. On Saturday, November 15th and Sunday, November 16th, I am asking that you bring those items with you to church for Stewardship Sunday. This tool is a sort of "accountability partner" for you. Take some time in the next couple of weeks to think about your stewardship of God's gifts. Do you even know what you are giving to God, or do you simply put what you have in your wallet in the plate? Are you giving a tithe to God? If not, what is preventing you? If you are, are there areas where you might be able to give more? If you are not able, is there a way that you can begin the process of working towards a tithe by increasing a percentage or two of what you do give? Prayerfully consider your response to these questions, and then fill out the pledge card and place it in the envelope. Then, fill out the front of the envelope too. Is there a service you might be able to provide to the church, thereby saving the church money on maintenance and upkeep that would normally have to be spent? That too is stewardship of what God has given. And then, during the services on the 15th and 16th, there will be an opportunity to bring your pledge envelope and place it in a basket before the Lord. No one but you will know what you wrote inside, for this is a matter between you and God. The "accountability" comes in when, at the beginning of 2016, we will mail back your pledge envelope with your year-end statement of contributions, and then you can see if you were able to live up to your pledge for the year.

In addition, after each service on the weekend of November 15th and 16th, as a way to say thank you for your faithful support of the work of Christ in his Church, there will be light refreshments served so that we can mingle with one another and rejoice in the blessings God has granted to us.

This is a small way for us to see that our individual efforts in faith are truly a blessing to all of the members of St. John's, and of the Church throughout the world.

So, please take the time to fill out your pledge card and envelope. Look at it together, as a family, and talk about how you might be able to increase your gift. Teach your children why we give money to the Church, which is really a thank offering to the Lord himself. Show them how we, as God's children's, benefit from God's generosity toward us. Make use of the bible study inserts that were given out in the bulletins, and read the Good News articles related to stewardship (they are available on our website), so that you may grow in your understanding of how God teaches us to make use of money and treasures. And then, come and present your pledge to the Lord, and then pray that by God's grace you may be able to do all that you intend, and more, knowing that his love will carry you and that his mercy will cover you if you fall. I would love to see 100% participation in this, for this is an important matter which concerns us all as a family of faith, but most importantly, it concerns you and your life of faith as it is lived out before God.

Thank you for your ongoing support of St. John's, both fiscally and prayerfully. May God bless us all as we seek to walk together in the love of God, and reach out with the Gospel to all those in need.

Lord of all good, our gifts we bring you now;
Use them Your holy purpose to fulfill.
Tokens of love and pledges they shall be
That our whole life is offered to Your will.

~ Pastor Noack