

Stewardship Testimony
Sunday, November 2, 2014
Speaker: Bob Dennis

“This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” This scripture passage is from 1 Corinthians 4:1. As servants of Christ, we must be good stewards! My talk to you today is about being a good steward and a servant of our Lord.

Let me begin by telling you a short story, yes a short story, about a church named St. Philip's. A beautiful building on park-like grounds which was built 115 years ago, and a little smaller in size than presently. This “little church on a hill” grew in time and officially became a parish in 1900. The original twelve members and Fr. Satig their priest, who also became the first rector of St. Philip's for quite a few years, had a vision. Our location on 11th avenue was much different back then, and to ensure we could build a church on these grounds, a local real estate developer donated the land for our church to be built on. Yes, the land was donated, thank God!

Their vision I believe was to have a church in a section of Brooklyn, known as Dyker Heights to serve the growing community. This area of Brooklyn was being developed primarily for residential use. The new church reached out to the local community and became a vibrant parish. In the 1960's the Verrazano Bridge was built and the Expressway, U.S. Route 278, leading to and from the Gowanus Expressway was finished as well. The Right of Eminent Domain was put into effect and many homes were torn down to allow for the construction of the highway. Because of this St. Philip's lost many parishioners who had to move so this construction could begin. I recently saw an old copy of the Parish Directory back then that Phyllis Anderson has, and it looked like a small local telephone book with far more names than we have in our newest Directory today.

Since the Bridge was built and opened 50 years ago our presence remains here on these hallowed grounds. We have a beautiful church with a priest, and determined parishioners who want to have our descendants celebrate our bi-centennial in the turn of the next century. Make your reservations now for this gala event, as we only have 86 years to go! Who would like to be on the bi-centennial committee? See me during the coffee hour. Let's go back again in time, and imagine being a member of this small group of visionary people who wanted to build a church on 80th street and 11th avenue. Suppose the land was not donated to us to build a church on? Do you think that would have deterred these founding members of our parish? I don't believe so, and they would have found another way to perhaps buy the land!

Here we are today, faced with our newest challenge, specifically the need to upgrade our electric service, to bring our buildings up to code to meet the standards set by Con Ed and N.Y.C. We have had to install a new centralized HVAC unit to heat and air condition the Parish Hall, which was in violation of N.Y.C. Fire Department safety codes. If we didn't replace the existing A/C unit previously located on the Parish Hall roof, which was

the source of the violation, we would have been levied a large fine. I have vivid memories of 9 or 10 years ago having to pay the City a fine of \$1,500.00 for not filing a permit for one of our units, which we did not know we had to do, or that the contractor didn't perform on our behalf.

You may be wondering right now what this has to do with stewardship, but as your Treasurer I want to inform you about these challenges that we have had to overcome, and thank God we have! As your Treasurer, I also must let you know that to "keep the doors open" we have no choice but to comply with all N.Y.C. fire and building codes that must be adhered to, or again be assessed a fine that we have to pay. If we ignored the fine and didn't pay it, then more penalties would be added on. We have learned the hard way that ignorance of the law doesn't exempt us from not obeying it. However, on a positive note, I want to share good news with you and that thanks to a generous parishioner we now have the right fire extinguishers where they are supposed to be placed, for our safety, and the buildings protection in case of any kind of fire. Further, we have received special donations to the Refurbishing Fund on a number of occasions and the donors have requested as well, to remain anonymous. A lot has had to be done since Fr. Kevin joined us a year ago as you have seen, and he has been very involved in the refurbishing work since his arrival. We don't want to discourage him from continuing in this capacity! As most of you know, the Rectory was not occupied for many years and was only used for storage for card parties and flea markets. It has been renovated and it is now in a comfortable living condition, thank God!

I must tell you that we are doing our best to avoid having any more deferred maintenance! However, this has been the decision vestry's in some other parishes have had to make for lack of funds. Sadly, this ultimately leads to a parish being closed because the buildings have been declared unsafe to occupy due to neglect. This has happened with three parishes in Brooklyn that unfortunately have been closed by the Bishop, as he had no choice. A loss to the parishioners and to the communities they once served!

Again, I thank God for the special donations to our Refurbishing Fund that were made by parishioners and friends of parishioners. The money has been used to pay part of the ongoing upgrade to our electric, and repairs elsewhere to our buildings and grounds. I like to refer to us as "the little church on the hill with proper lighting". Let's take a step in another direction and focus for a moment on what it takes to "keep the doors open".

To keep you informed, we have building usage income, and we also have the occasional hall rental. Further, we have investment income that we receive monthly which is used towards meeting our operating needs. Please remember that the remaining money in our two investment accounts, formerly called an endowment, was left as a legacy to us, and the principal was built up over many years guaranteeing this income to us. If we had to withdraw principal from the investment accounts to pay our bills that would slowly and surely in time be the end for us. Let's now focus on what we give! We have your pledges and special offerings which go as you know towards our income to cover the checks I write out to pay the bills, both routine and otherwise. I am proud to say that we are not and have not been delinquent with any obligation we have been responsible for

including our employee's salaries, to our utility companies, to our diocese, to the insurance companies and to the landscaper.

We would not survive very long without the sources of income I have mentioned that have covered our bills each year which have ensured that we are able to "keep the beautiful red doors open on days of worship", welcoming both people and pets. This is my gentle reminder about what it takes to keep our mailing address located at 1072 80th street.

Stewardship talks have typically been characterized as a pledge of "time, talent and treasure". Let's address your treasure and mine. Without your treasure and mine we would not meet our monthly obligations to remain a vibrant parish. My appeal to you today is to renew your pledge, or to join the St. Philip's family and pledge for the first time. Better yet, if you can, increase your pledge. Yes, it is necessary for me to ask this of you. For nearly ten years now I have been intimately involved in the financial management of our Parish, and it is time we got out of the "survival mode" only thinking. I hope that you will continue to be part of and committed to the future of St. Philip's as we become more of a vital, missional parish. Prayerfully consider what you feel called to do as a parishioner, and yes being here on Sundays for worship is part of this renewed commitment. Think about what you want to have us do for you by working together, and conversely how giving of your time and talent would benefit St. Philip's.

Our Parish will provide an opportunity for you to grow spiritually, and enjoy meaningful worship. We have a gifted Priest-in-Charge who has years of experience to share with us. We have a dedicated Vestry. We also have a ministry to men and to women, and yes we can by working together, reach out to more people to join our Parish family. Please know that this annual stewardship drive has a purpose, and that purpose is for you to renew, reflect and refresh, not just give of your time, talent and treasure! I am asking you today to join with me and promise to faithfully support the mission and ministry of St. Philip's, to pray for each other, to participate in worship and to invite your friends and family, and those who are seeking a new place of worship, to become part of the St. Philip's greater parish community. Only through your efforts will we be a vibrant, Christ-centered parish that will offer hope to those who need us. Only with your involvement can we with God's help, be assured of our continued presence in Dyker Heights. Now it's time for you to pause, renew, reflect, refresh, and act. If you need to talk with Fr. Kevin, with me or a Vestry member, please do so. Thank you for this opportunity to talk with you today. God bless St. Philip's and the work God has called us to do in His Name today, and in our promising future.