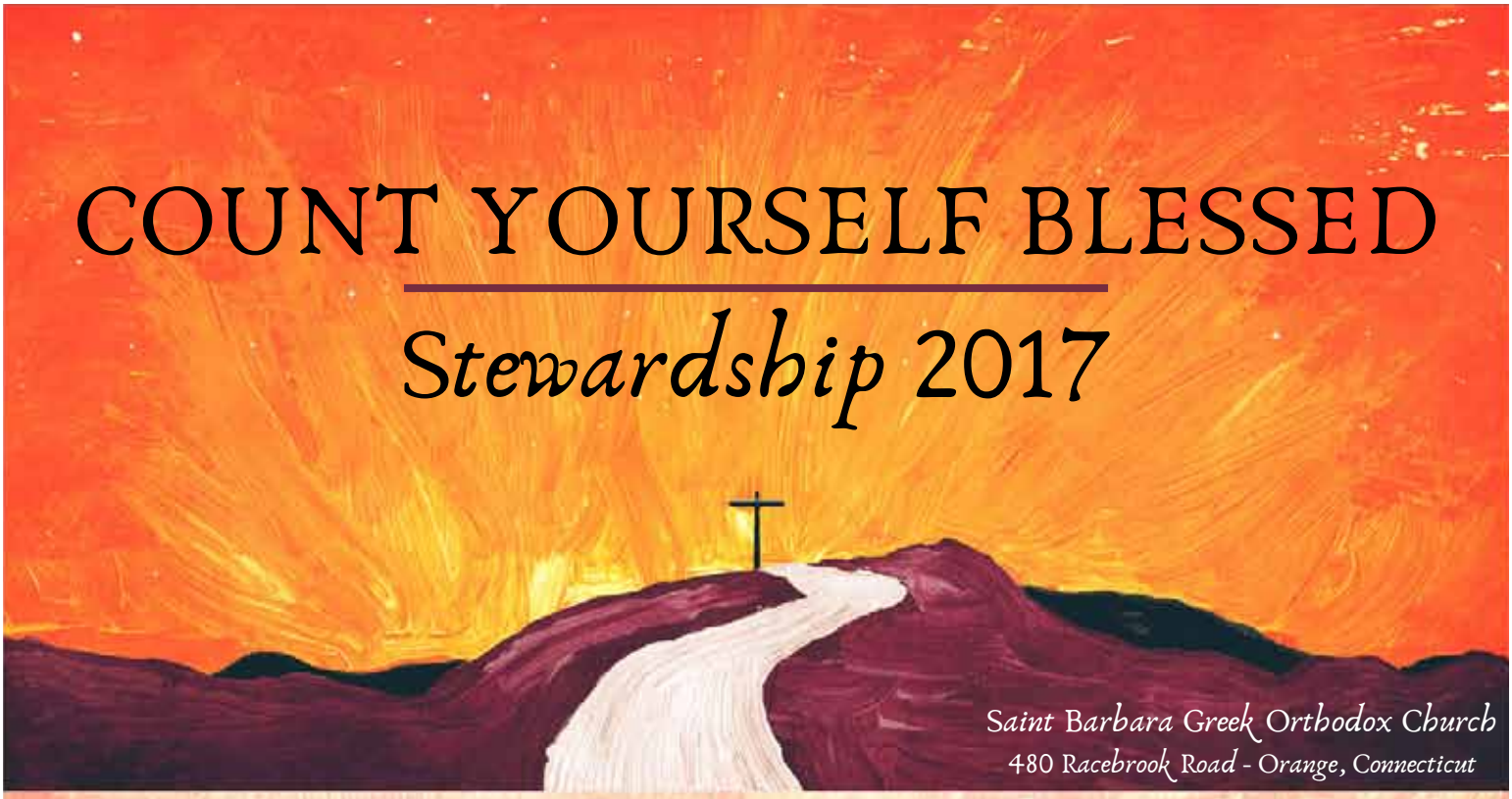
COUNT YOURSELF BLESSED

Stewardship 2017



Saint Barbara Greek Orthodox Church
480 Racebrook Road - Orange, Connecticut

Why do you give to your church?

We each have different motivations and capacities for giving, and every gift and pledge is gratefully received. Your stewardship committee's one hope is that your support for our ministries comes from a profound sense of gratitude and joy for all you receive through your relationship with God and the members of our church.

That's why we've chosen "Count yourself blessed" as our stewardship theme this year. We are blessed. We share a strong faith with each other. We celebrate the joyful events in each other's lives and comfort each other in times of trial and sorrow. We welcome everyone and anyone to join us, and we change the lives of people in our community – people who may never set foot in our church – simply because they have no one else to turn to, and we are here, and we count ourselves blessed.

Our church has ministered faithfully for more than 98 years – not because members have given year after year out of duty, obligation, guilt or fear. Such motivations can't sustain a parish for nearly a century. No, our parish is still here, still strong and vibrant, because generations and generations of members have counted themselves blessed and have therefore supported its mission with generous gifts of gratitude and joy. Now it's up to us.

In worship, fellowship, study and faith-sharing groups, service opportunities and more, we're growing as an extended family of faith. Your generous gift will continue to build the web of caring and community for all. As you "count yourself blessed," please consider increasing your pledge for 2017 and beyond.

Please take a moment to reflect on the many ways you can count yourself blessed and then give gratefully, generously, and joyfully in support of our ministries in 2017.

Thank you.

"A steward is one who manages another's property or resources; the Christian, therefore, is a steward of everything he is and has, including his own body and soul, for according to the mystery of salvation, we possess nothing from ourselves, not even our own life and being; all belongs to God and is given to us by the Father through His Son because of the richness of His love and mercy."

from The Theology of Stewardship in Light of Orthodox Tradition

What is a stewardship program?
Stewardship is a system of proportional giving to the Church in which the members examine their conscience and offer their support in accordance with their individual means and circumstances. This often confuses people because a specific amount is never solicited. This system is fair because it acknowledges the reality that the pensioned widow and the prosperous business owner do not have the same resources at their disposal. One has less, the other has more; to ask them both to support the Church equally as we did under the antiquated "dues" system is terribly unfair. It burdens the pensioner unbearably, and discounts the generosity of those who are more prosperous. With Stewardship, therefore, we do not give in accordance with an artificially set amount, but rather in accordance with our true ability to share.

For those who insist in having some guidelines: The average Stewardship pledge in the United States is $1,200 per married household. As a suggested guide, families should work towards initially pledging 1%-2% of their gross income and eventually working up to 5% over a three to five year period. Some families find it easier to start by pledging $25/week. Give in proportion to what you have been given.

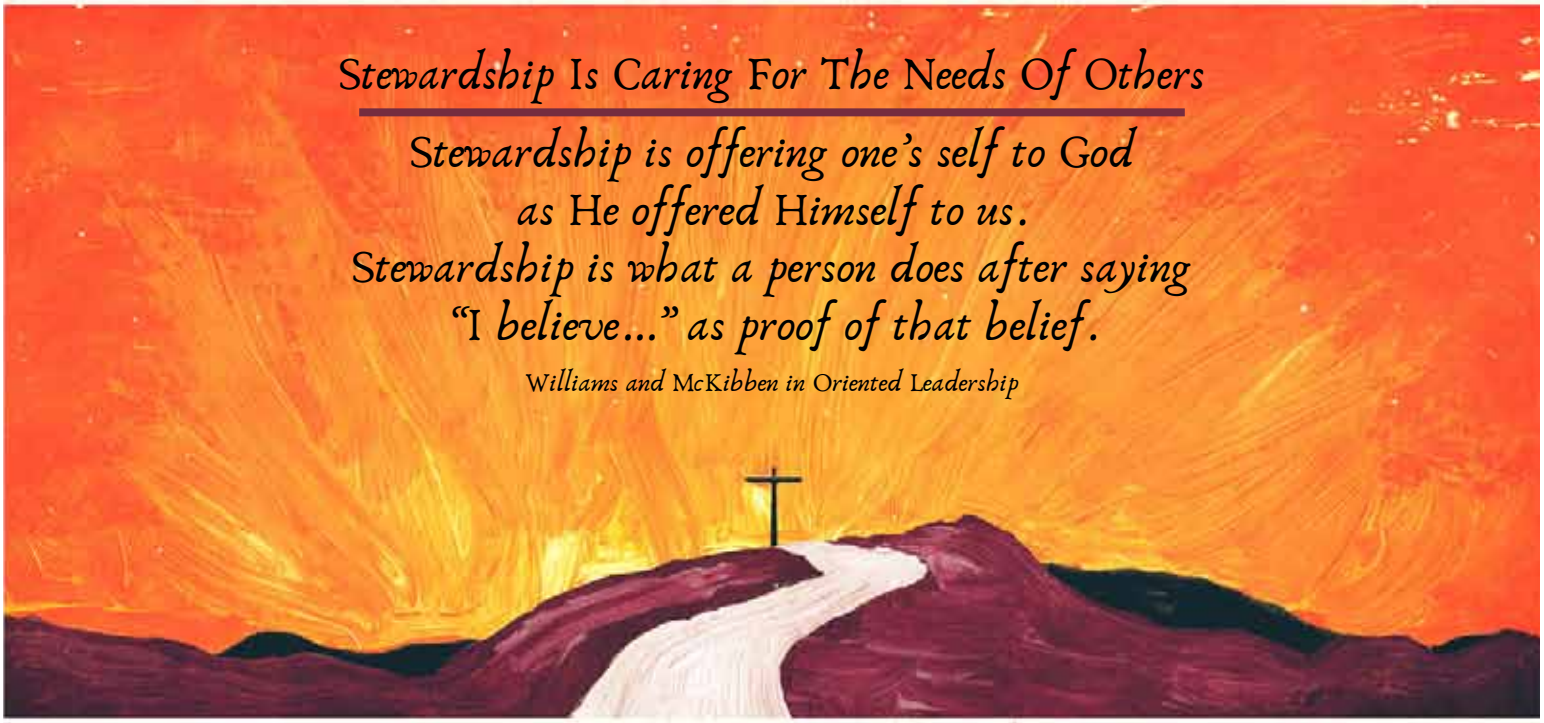
Is stewardship just about money?
Of course not. We do not support our Church simply by mailing a check. That has never been our message at Saint Barbara Church. That is not who we are as a community. In addition to our material resources, we also have been given time and talents. The Church prospers with people who also donate their time and skills to the service of the parish. We can serve on boards and committees; we can volunteer to help with the bulletin mailings; we can paint and do carpentry; we can sing in the choir; we can work at the festival and various parish functions; we can keep the parking lots spotlessly clean and tidy. The opportunities are as endless as the talents of our people and their willingness to be involved and engaged in the life and ministries of our Church. Remember: building our parish's volunteerism in time and talent and enhancing our parish ministries has been the explicit and publicly stated strategic goal of our community for many years.

What about my children?
We need to teach our children to be good stewards of the Church, so that they understand that our offerings of time, talent and treasure help the Church with her mission in this world. We need to begin encouraging our children to become stewards at a young age so that they understand the Christian concept of giving. We need to encourage our children to give a portion of their allowance or a percentage of their birthday or Christmas gifts to the Church so that they can develop the understanding that it is 'not all about us.' Paying a child's stewardship for them doesn't help them to understand the basic Christian concept of giving; of offering a portion of what we have freely received from God back to Him and His ministry through the Church.

At what age should we become stewards of the church?
We should strive to become stewards of the Church on the day of our 18th Birthday.

I am one person. Can I make a difference?
Yes, you can. History is full of individuals who acting alone made all the difference in the world. Your good example, multiplied by hundreds of others acting together, will be the catalyst that will revitalize the parish.

Become a donor, but more important, become a disciple and apostle of God's truth by encouraging others, friends,



children, brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, and godchildren to also become stewards. A positive word of encouragement, together with your own personal example of generosity, can perform miracles of change.

Why does the Orthodox Church encourage annual stewardship commitments from its parishioners?
The philosophy of the Orthodox Church is to take as much of the daily focus off finances as possible. By making an annual commitment, you provide the security that operating expenses of the Church will be underwritten through stewardship. This will allow us to move forward with our real work of being disciples of Christ, which includes not only evangelization and community service, but also the education, nurturance, and support of our own parish community.

What is the best way to fulfill my stewardship pledge?
Stewardship is most appropriately understood as an obligation not unlike utilities and rent. So we encourage you to make regular, weekly or monthly payments at the same time you sit down to pay your other bills. The Saint Barbara Parish has made fulfilling your pledge easy with a variety of payment methods: online through our web site, automatic bank withdrawal, or credit card. Of course, you may always pay by check.

What if I my circumstances change?
God asks only that you enter into a good-faith commitment, not a legal contract. You can make changes to your stewardship pledge affected by new circumstances (positive or negative) simply by contacting the church office and speaking with Father Peter.

Is my commitment that important?
Absolutely. We all want the Church to be there for us. If our Orthodox community is to remain healthy, we each need to contribute our fair share, understanding that the expenses and work of the church go on whether or not we are in attendance. More importantly, demonstrating thanksgiving to God in a concrete way is the best way of going through life with an "attitude of gratitude" for all that He has given us.

A final reflection from Father Peter
My dear parishioners of Saint Barbara, my confidence is in each of you. In my many years of service to the Church I have learned first hand that we are a generous people. Our mutual support of our community is worthy and noble; and our need is truly and honestly great. I ask that you respond to the Church office as soon as possible. As you do so, I ask you to prayerfully consider what increased amount most honestly represents what you can offer.

Thank you for your continued support and your heartfelt effort to listen to the Lord's message to you, as you offer prayers of thanksgiving daily, for all of your gifts.

"If I do not feel a sense of joy in God's creation, if I forget to offer the world back to God with thankfulness, I have advanced very little upon the Way."

Metropolitan Kallistos Ware

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The Saint Barbara Parish Council continues to do a remarkable job monitoring the monthly expenses of our parish. Through its various committees they have been able to identify cost-saving measures which in the long run have allowed our community to save thousands of dollars in annual expenses. Our parish is also blessed to be supported by a battalion of parishioners who selflessly volunteer their time and talent to assist the Church in its mission to shine the Light of Christ in the world. Even so, just as in our homes - annual expenses continue to rise. As parishioners, we are all called to offer financial assistance to the Church to insure that our parish doors remain open and that the community of Saint Barbara can continue to minister to her parishioner families as well as to the surrounding community.

Including our General Fund (daily expenses) and Building Fund (mortgage expenses) it currently costs $73,833 per month or $2,461 per day to keep our parish operating. While we have begun our next Building Fund Campaign to complete the construction of the gymnasium and lower the existing mortgage on the education and community centers, the Stewardship Goal for 2017 is $373,000. The monies from your stewardship contribution go directly to the general fund and are necessary for our parish to meet our daily expenses.

"All Christians are called to be witnesses to the faith, to be Christian in giving, to tithe, and to know that giving is part of who we are, not just something that we do to meet a need."

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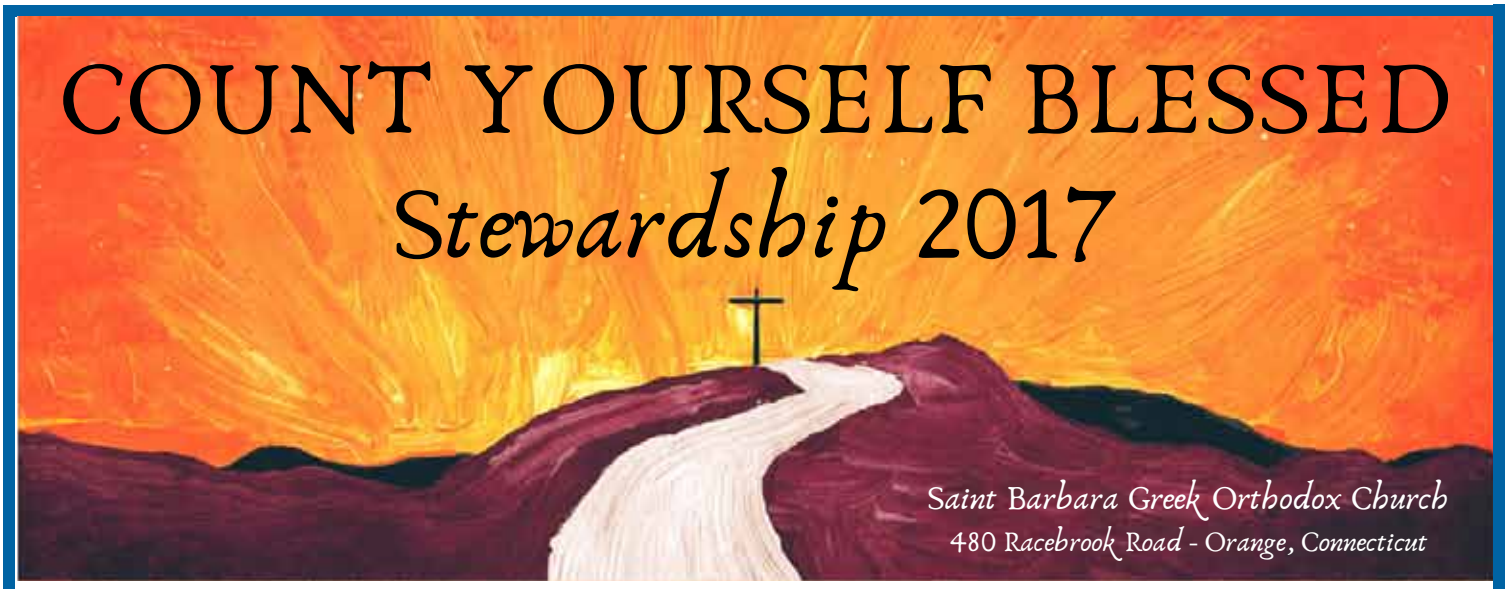

My Commitment of Treasures - For Christ and the Ministries of His Church

Yes! I want to support God's work through my Church of Saint Barbara. Here is my Commitment of Faith for 2017 representing my best efforts to return to God a portion of that which belongs to Him.

Name: (please print) _____

This represents my individual stewardship commitment for 2017

I pledge to give: ____$250/month ____$200/month ____$150/month ____$100/month

____$75/month ____$50/month ____$25/week ____$20/week

____$1,200/year (The National Average per couple) ____$more/other

I will make my donations:

____ weekly ____ monthly ____ quarterly ____ yearly

Υπόσχομαι να προσφέρω:

____$250/μήνα ____$200/μήνα ____$150/μήνα ____$100/μήνα

____$75/μήνα ____$50/μήνα ____$25/βδομάδα ____$20/βδομάδα

____$1,200/χρόνο (Ο Μέσος Όρος) $____περισσότερο/άλλο

Θα εκπληρώσω τη δωρεά μου:

____εβδομαδιαίως ____μηνιαία ____τριμηνιαία ____ετήσια

Name: (please print) _____

Home Phone: ( ) _____

Cell Phone: ( ) _____

Address: _____

City:_____ State: _____ Zip:_____

E-Mail Address: _____

Work Phone: ( ) _____

Payment Options:

☐ I will mail or bring my monthly stewardship contribution directly to the Church Office.

☐ I will pay my stewardship contribution by credit card online through the Church's web site at **http://www.saintbarbara.org/stewardship**.

Note: This is a promise of intentions. It can be changed at any time by contacting the Priest or Stewardship Chairperson.

Please complete this form and return it in the enclosed confidential envelope within 30 days.

Saint Barbara Greek Orthodox Church
480 Racebrook Road
Orange, Connecticut 06477