The notion of discipleship and service are synonymous, meaning that to be a follower of Jesus Christ is to be a servant as Jesus was a servant as well. Frequently we hear the phrase “The last shall be first and the first shall be last. **Service** is not **servitude**, but service is a response to the grace that God has already given us. That’s what it means to be a great disciple – to serve others because Jesus served others and to serve as we too have been served by others. Opportunities for Christian service abound of course, as they always do, but once a year we come to the parishes of the Archdiocese, all 110 of them, and ask for participation in the one free-will offering that is done each year for the Catholic Services Appeal.

The Appeal funds the agencies and programs of the Archdiocese that are much too big and much too comprehensive for individual parishes, including ours, to tackle. In other words, we benefit from this structure that gives us opportunities for service and sometimes serves our particular needs. It’s a service that really goes back and forth. Before I get there I want to address this idea that there’s something different between this parish and the Archdiocese of Louisville. They are both really one and the same. In fact, it’s impossible to think of this parish as somehow separate from the Archdiocese. You see in the Catholic way the two are one and the same. In the ancient Church the Bishops were the Presbyters, the ones who officiated the Eucharist, and the other Presbyters, the small number that there were concelebrated, the way we still do nowadays when the Bishop is present at a liturgy. There weren’t enough people to go around. So it was not a problem. Of course today there are a billion Catholics worldwide and there are not enough priests to go around. The world is divided up into dioceses and Archdioceses to make them manageable. Each bishop is part of something larger. We belong to one, holy, apostolic church. There’s always though among the parishes, typically some resistance between what we call “them” and “us”. You see it’s not an “us” and “them” thing. Us **ARE** them. Every one of us is part of the one, holy, and apostolic church. The Archdiocese is able to fund initiatives and programs that all of us participate in through three major sources of funding.

1. The first source of revenue is the parish assessment, also called the Cathedraticum. Six percent of parish income is assessed and therefore paid back to the Archdiocese to fund many of the different things that they do for us. This is sometimes controversial and people say “I want all my money to go to my parish.” As if your parish is an entity by itself. But the system is quite just in terms of how it is levied, how there is general consensus in what needs to be done, and that of necessity the Archdiocese is funded by a percentage of our income. Many of my priest friends from other dioceses have much larger assessments. We have one of the lowest ones in the country at six percent. One of my brother priests in another diocese has a 20% assessment!
2. The second source of income is return on investments. We’ve been blessed, particularly in the last decade, with a substantial return on investments in the stock market.
3. The third source of income is the once-per-year Appeal for a free will offering from the parishioners to support the work of the Archdiocese.

For the past few years when I have discussed the Appeal in my homily, I usually single out one or two of the programs that are funded by the Appeal. This year I wanted to give you a broader scope of the many ministries that are supported by your gift to the Catholic Services Appeal.

1. All the Archdiocesan faith formation programs are funded by the Appeal. Catechesis, conferences, workshops, training sessions and resources. These are things we use on a regular basis in our parish.
2. Youth and young adult ministry. Retreats, activities, ministry events and leadership opportunities for our youth.
3. Family Ministry. Our parish benefits from the marriage preparation classes for our engaged couples. The Archdiocese provides important resources for priests and deacons as we prepare couples for marriage. They also provide resources for young married couples, including counseling. They provide Safe Environment Training for our coaches, teachers, and all others in our parish who work with youth. This training is absolutely essential in order to keep our young people safe and it is fully funded by the Catholic Services Appeal.
4. The Appeal funds benefits and insurance for our employees and we have some of the best employees here at our parish!
5. The Archdiocese provides worship services, including liturgical direction, liturgical minister formation and other resources from which we benefit directly.
6. Seminary Formation. Every seminarian has room and board expenses and a substantial tuition cost. These costs are fully funded by the Catholic Services Appeal. The Appeal also funds training for all deacons.
7. Retired Priests have their pension supported by the Appeal.
8. The annual Priests Presbyteral Assembly – about the only time each year when our Archdiocesan priests have the opportunity to gather together.
9. The Tribunal is funded by the Appeal. This is the litigation for the ecclesiastical courts for the Archdiocese. These are primarily marriage cases, annulments, etc., but there are other things such as validations and dispensations. In years past, people had to pay for these services up front, but that is now fully funded for everyone who avails themselves of these services.
10. Facilities management is particularly helpful to parishes such as ours. Facility assessments, assistance on contractor bids, and architectural services are a few of the facility needs that the Archdiocese helps provide for parishes – things that would be very expensive to try to take care of on our own.
11. Parish Leadership Development – trains our parish leaders and provides resources for them when they have questions or need assistance.
12. *The Record* newspaper.
13. The *Catholic Connection* monthly email newsletter.
14. Funding for our “mission” parishes in southern Kentucky near the Tennessee border.
15. Funding for Catholic Charities and their services, including the Ombudsman program that has a presence and provides services for patients in nursing homes throughout the entire Archdiocese.

I’ve given you a broad range to let you see that there is so much that is done from the funds raised for this Appeal. These are things that we could never do on our own – we would never have the resources. To give you a metaphor though, I compare it to the Crusade for Children, which all of you have probably heard of through the years. Once a year in the same way a free will offering is made from fire departments and other service organizations for the Crusade. We know that by pooling that money the Crusade for Children is able to provide steady, ongoing, lifesaving assistance to families that provide care for persons that are developmentally challenged.

The Catholic Services Appeal works in that same way. It’s actually coming up with that large amount of money so that in order to have that constant presence in our parishes the Catholic Services Appeal is necessary.

I hope that I’ve done a good job of saying that the money won’t be squandered. Not one single cent of Catholic Services Appeal money goes to administrative costs. 100% of the donations to the Appeal are used to fund the ministries and services that help all of the parishes continue to thrive.

Once again the Catholic Services Appeal reminds us that we are one, holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. If we were just an individual parish there would be a limit on our reach, a limit on what we could do, a limit on our footprint. But as part of a larger Church, the only limit is to our imaginations.

It is that Diocesan structure (the very thing which some of you view as bureaucratic, which turns some of you off) that makes the Catholic faith possible.

If you are a registered parishioner, you should have or will soon receive a mailing with more information about the Appeal. It’s also easy to go online to the Archdiocesan website to make your gift as well. That’s what I did and it was very simple.

What I’m going to leave you with is a thought about WHY this needs to be done. Jesus gave us the mission to serve everyone, not just Catholics. In other words, we serve others because WE are Catholic, not because they are. It is the most valid and beautiful expression of our faith – this annual freewill offering in service of others.