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The Vineyard

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Parish Stewardship Office

Standing on Holy Ground

As I was “channel surfing” a couple of weeks ago, I came upon the movie *The Ten Commandments*. The story had reached the part where Moses encounters the burning bush. God directs Moses to take off his sandals because he is standing on holy ground. This very dramatic scene dramatizes the miracle of God speaking directly to Moses, setting him on a path that would change his life, and the lives of countless others.

I had seen the movie, and this scene, many times. A new thought occurred to me, however, as I watched the very familiar plot unfold. I pondered the notion that the ground upon which Moses stood was holy not only because of the miracle. It was holy simply because God was there. If we truly believe that God is always with us, then each of us stands on holy ground every day.

It is easy to recognize the holy ground beneath our feet at certain times in our lives – weddings, funerals, the birth of a new baby. Our first challenge is to recognize this during the stress and strain of everyday life. Lent gives us the time, and the tools (fasting, prayer and almsgiving) to really feel the holy ground that supports us each and every day.

Accepting that we stand on holy ground each day leads us to a second challenge. Just as God called Moses to fulfill his destiny, He calls each of us to realize our distinctive and unique faith potential. Standing in place, merely marking time and taking up space, is not what God intended for any of us.

Another familiar story is that of a fig tree that has stood for years without bearing fruit. The orchard’s owner, measuring the tree by its lack of productivity, orders it to be cut down. The gardener measures the tree by its potential. He promises to fertilize it and cut away what is siphoning life from the healthy branches. He knows that fruit just doesn’t happen. Even when the potential exists, effort and dedication are required.

We stand on our holy ground this Lenten season full of potential. Praying for guidance, fasting from things that drain life and cultivating our sense of charity and justice will produce the fruit of a deeper relationship with God. This holy season offers us an opportunity to focus on the importance of faith in our lives. Let’s make the most of it!

Barbara Vite

Director of Parish Stewardship

- SEASONAL REFLECTIONS
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In this issue



“Because its members do collectively make up the Body of Christ, that body’s health and well-being are the responsibility of its members—the personal responsibility of each one of us. We are all stewards of the Church.”

Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response
U.S. Bishops’ Pastoral Letter on Stewardship



Reflection.....

The second Sunday of Lent, Peter, John and James are each gifted with a vision that altered their view of the world. By allowing each of them to glimpse His glory, God stirred them to move forward out of a familiar place into a closer relationship with Him.

Thousands of years later, a renewal of awareness and purpose is at the heart of our Lenten observance. We are challenged to find ways, some traditional and some innovative, in which we can renew our hearts, our spirits and our lives in the Lord.

One of the most serious challenges we face in our faith today is apathy. Year after year we hear about prayer, fasting and almsgiving during Lent. Year after year we give up something here and save a few extra coins there while counting the days to Easter vacation and spring break. Lent leaves us pretty much the way it found us. The life-giving power at the heart of our traditions is lost amid the clamor of 21st century life.

This year, why not delve into our Lenten disciplines from a new perspective? Why not answer the call to trust that each one of us is a precious child of God - a God who loves us and empowers us to become more than we are by doing with less?

Let us fast from the things that prevent us from deepening our relationship with God. Let us invite Him into our hearts through simple, direct, heartfelt prayer. Let our almsgiving expand to include acts of charity and kindness. Let our Lent be a time of exhilarating renewal!

Connection...

Statistics show that approximately 7 BILLION text messages are sent every month in America. Just the thought of being out of touch with friends and family is enough to make some people nervous. Staying connected is the way we relate, the way we survive.

How important is it, then, to tend to our connection to God? It is up to us to keep that relationship active and strong. Lent is the perfect time to spend some serious time reaching out to God in prayer and service.

Given attention and encouragement, our personal relationships with the Lord will blossom! It is then that we will be inspired to truly live as faithful stewards. The power of our faith in action, when we are truly connected to God and each other, can change the world!

Introspection...

We live in a culture that encourages assessment and planning. We have personal trainers and exercise programs to increase our physical fitness. We seek out financial planners to maximize our assets for the long term. We attend seminars and workshops to hone our job skills and increase our employment potential.

Hundreds of websites, countless books, magazines, TV and radio programs are devoted to making the most of what we have now, and making sure we have more in the future.

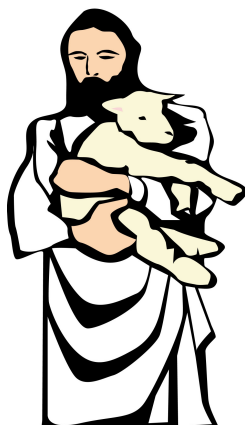
Lent is also a time for assessment and planning; perhaps the most important personal development we will ever do. This holy season is our faith workshop, our devotional seminar; helping us to make the most of our current relationship with God and preparing us to grow in faith in the future. Let's give it our all!

Transformation...

Our Lenten season can be a time of cultivation, a time of growth, a time of transformation.

As we move toward the glory of Easter, are we ready to fully embrace the newness of the resurrection? Will we take this opportunity to start fresh in our relationship with the Lord?

Responding to our call to live as faithful stewards, opening our hearts to the work of God in our lives, we can do nothing less!



"I am the Good Shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep." John 10:14-15

Getting Ahead

He and his wife were in their late forties, raising a large family – and raising them well. Theirs was a family that spent a lot of time together, and anyone who ever visited their home couldn't help but notice that they had a good time together.

Job-wise he was doing fine – an office job with a large company. He wasn't at the executive level, but it was enough to make his family "middle-income", and he liked what he was doing.

The whole family was involved in their parish in lots of different ways. Faithful to Sunday Mass, of course, but also ready to lend a hand in whatever needed to be done.

One day while having lunch at work, some of the fellows said to him, "You know, you've got a lot of talent and the bosses like you. But you don't work much overtime and you just don't seem to have the drive. You're still young enough to have a shot at bettering yourself. You ought to go for it! You'll have to give up some of the time you spend with your family and some of the other things you're involved in for a while, but it will be worth it. You've got to make some changes. Otherwise you'll never get ahead."

He replied, "Ahead of what?"

from The Little Burgundy Book, published by the Archdiocese of Saginaw

Priorities are a very personal subject for every family. Some priorities change as time goes on, but some do not. As Catholics, members of the Body of Christ and members of our archdiocese and parish communities, one priority that should remain constant is our commitment to actively live our faith.

We are faithful stewards when we help a co-worker solve a problem, when we hug our children after a long day away, when we send a card to cheer a senior living alone, when we make decisions based on justice and the greater good.

When we live each day as the gift from God that it is, our priorities will take care of themselves.



A Prayer for Focus

As we move through the Lenten season, we are encouraged to step back, slow down and focus on the extraordinary sacrifice Jesus made for us.

Throughout this holy season, we are asked, in a very special way, to transform from people with closed hearts focused inward, to people reaching out with open arms to embrace God and each other. Thinking gives way to feeling as we leave behind that which separates us from God.

Lent can be a time of cultivation, growth and transformation. As we move toward the glory of Easter, are we ready to embrace the newness of the resurrection? Will we take this opportunity to start fresh in our relationship with the Lord?

Responding to the call to live as faithful stewards, opening our hearts to the working of God in our lives, we can do nothing less - and so we pray:

*Where should I begin, Jesus, to unclutter my life?
I have yielded to temptation and filled my days
with more commitments than I can
comfortably manage.*

Help me to make myself a little less busy.

Free my time.

*I have crowded my space with too much baggage:
with gadgets and conveniences and possessions.*

Help me to let go of whatever I cling to.

Free my hands.

*I have filled my head with trivial distractions:
news and weather, gossip and prejudices.*

Help me to focus on more important concerns.

Free my mind.

*Jesus, my life is cluttered with more idols
than I realized. I have given them a reverence
they do not deserve. Teach me to renounce their
claim on me, and end my divided allegiance.*

*Guide me to a simpler life
and more generous service. Amen.*

- Bishop Kenneth E. Untener
(1937-2004)

And God Said...No

I asked God to take away my pride...and God said, "No".
He said it was not for Him to take away, but for me to give up.

I asked God to grant me patience...and God said, "No".
He said patience is a byproduct of tribulations. It isn't granted; it is earned.

I asked God to give me happiness...and God said, "No".
He said He gives me blessings, and happiness is up to me.

I asked God to make my spirit grow...and God said, "No".
He said I must grow on my own, but He will prune me to make me fruitful.

I asked God for all things the things I might enjoy in life...and God said, "No".
He said, "I will give you life, that you may enjoy all things."

I asked God to help me love others as much as He loves me...
And God said, "Ah, finally you have the idea!"

*Be still...and know
that I am God.*





Enjoy the following family reflections.

The Blessing of “Mrs. Jane”

My husband, and I were looking for a way for our four children to be more involved in some kind of ministry. We are on our parish Greeter list, but that only offers the chance to serve once every couple months or so and we were hoping for something more for them; something that they would really remember when they were older; something that made an impact on them and helped them see that they were God’s servants just as much as we adults were.

So I marked a couple boxes on our Time and Talent forms, one being “Bringing Communion to the Homebound.” We turned the form in and kind of forgot about it. A couple months later, we received a phone call from our parish Deacon, asking if we would be willing to bring communion to a local woman who was homebound. I definitely hesitated at first – I have to admit that part of me wanted time to hear more about the ministry, sort of “feel it out.” But I found myself saying “sure” and the next thing I knew, we had the name, number and address of “Mrs. Jane”, as we came to affectionately call her. I nervously made a phone call to her later that week and that Sunday morning, after 8:00 mass, all six of us walked up to “Mrs. Jane’s” door with Jesus in our pocket!

We now visit “Mrs. Jane” every Sunday when she is feeling up to having us, and it is one of the greatest blessings in our lives. The kids often bring pictures for her and love the cookies she shares with them. She showers us with thanks for bringing Christ to her, and she loves our family like a Grandma. She is an angel here on earth and we are so grateful to be friends with her.

This experience taught us that trying something new can bring such joy, especially when it involves doing something for someone else. We stepped out of our comfort zone and ended up getting so much in return. I made sure to thank our Deacon the next time I saw him for gently nudging us closer to God!

The Best Gift of All

We always knew an important part of parenting for us would be finding opportunities to celebrate each child’s gifts within our family, the community, even the world. While we all know that children LOVE to receive gifts, the real challenge is to convey that the most important gifts, the ones given by God, are not meant to be kept but rather to be shared with others. Whew! This is a big job—thank goodness we have found our [faith] home at our parish.

Service opportunities are plentiful here! When we first came to the parish, we marveled at all the ministries. We had never seen anything like it. We are finding ways to get involved, individually and as a family. And, if “sharing our gifts” was truly going to be an important lesson for our children, we couldn’t just participate once or twice a year. So, we crafted a saying in our family, “If you don’t have a real good reason to say no, then don’t - say yes!”

We find the more we answer the call to share our gifts, the more we want to continue doing it. So, whether we’ve donated a few hours of our time, some handmade items, a few groceries or supplies, or even just a heartfelt prayer, it all feels good.

Our dream is for our children to continue throughout their lives to say “yes” to sharing their wonderful gifts with others. As a parent, that would truly be the best gift of all.

The Stroh Family



Hope starts here.

CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP APPEAL
Many Hands. One Vision.

Building the Kingdom...Everywhere

As Catholics, we are called to build the kingdom not just in our own parishes, but throughout the greater Church. Our bishops addressed this aspect of financial stewardship in their pastoral letter:

*“At the same time, stewardship in and for the parish should not be narrowly parochial. **For the diocese is not merely an administrative structure but instead joins communities called parishes into a “local church” and unites its people in faith, worship and service.***

The same spirit of personal responsibility in which a Catholic approaches his or her parish should extend to the diocese and be expressed essentially in the same ways: generous material support and self-giving. ...Indeed, the spirit and practice of stewardship should extend...to the Christian community and to one’s sisters and brothers in Christ everywhere...”

Stewardship, A Disciple’s Response
U.S. Bishop’s Pastoral Letter on Stewardship

Stewardship education is only one of the Appeal-funded ministries that strengthens parishes. Other ministries funded by the Appeal serve families, support schools and form our priests and lay leaders.

Our gifts to the Catholic Stewardship Appeal translate into tangible ministry serving our brothers and sisters in Christ throughout southeastern Wisconsin. As faithful stewards giving to the Catholic Stewardship Appeal, we answer His call to build the kingdom beyond our parish borders.

Thank you for supporting the
Catholic Stewardship Appeal.

Priest who is deaf
brings empathy and joy.



Fr. Christopher Klusman is the first profoundly deaf priest to graduate from Saint Francis de Sales Seminary and one of only a handful in the U.S. Like our other newly ordained priests, he’s eager to help us celebrate the sacraments and live the gospel. Your gift to the Catholic Stewardship Appeal provides vital support for the Seminary, now preparing 32 men to serve in parishes. Please give generously!

Go to catholicappeal.org for details.

Catholic Stewardship Appeal
Archdiocese of Milwaukee

Please give generously.

www.catholicappeal.org

All contributions will be used solely for the restricted purposes of the 2012 Catholic Stewardship Appeal and for no other purposes. The Appeal funds ministries that serve families, strengthen parishes, support schools, and form priests and parish leaders within the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. The restricted purposes are identified specifically on the Appeal Web page www.catholicappeal.org.