

The Vineyard

A bi-monthly publication from
the Archdiocese of Milwaukee
Parish Stewardship Office

Be a Good Steward of Thanksgiving Day

Almost everyone has one or more Thanksgiving day traditions that they hold dear. Everything from grandma's heirloom tablecloth to mom's famous stuffing to the family touch football game comes to mind.

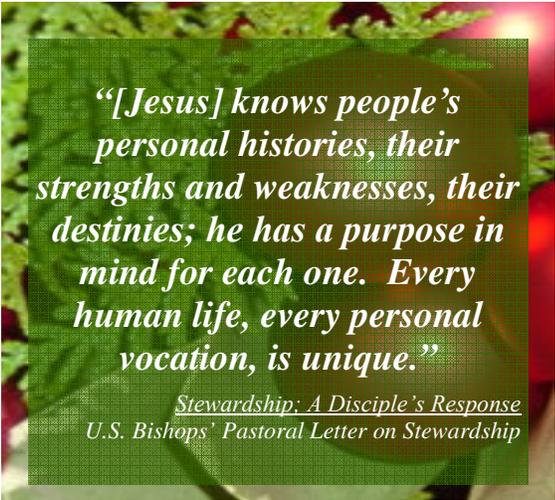
Thanksgiving is also a wonderful time to start new traditions that reflect our gratitude for the bounty God has entrusted to us.

Here are some suggestions for making Thanksgiving day even more special by living out the call to live as good and faithful stewards:

- **Go to Mass and count your blessings.** In your prayer, reflect on the five things you are most grateful for in your life. Then, reflect on how you can be an even better steward of these gifts.
- **Write "I'm thankful for you" cards** and give them out on Thanksgiving day. E-mail works too!
- **Share your Thanksgiving meal** with someone who is alone this year. Look for someone, such as a neighbor, co-worker, fellow parishioner, college student or armed services personnel who may be separated from family and ask them to join you.
- **Help someone if you can.** Extend your generosity and blessings beyond your own family. Be part of an adopt-a-family effort, help distribute food baskets or serve dinner at a shelter.
- **Take a walk.** Find a place to enjoy God's gift of creation. Invite family, friends or others to share the experience - and the wonders of nature.
- **Most importantly,** take advantage of the Thanksgiving holiday to focus on what you are grateful for and the things you appreciate about yourself and others. Remember the Source of these gifts.

Have a wonderful Thanksgiving!

- REFLECTING ON THE READINGS
- SEASONAL STEWARDSHIP PRAYERS
 - SLOWING DOWN FOR ADVENT
- MUSKEGO PARISH WINS AWARD
- THANKSGIVING NEVER ENDS
 - GETTING AHEAD ?
- ICSC 2012 CONFERENCE



"[Jesus] knows people's personal histories, their strengths and weaknesses, their destinies; he has a purpose in mind for each one. Every human life, every personal vocation, is unique."

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

In this issue



Reflecting on the Readings

November 20th Solemnity of Our Lord Christ the King

In today's gospel St. Matthew offers a compelling vision of the end-time, when the people of all nations are brought before the Lord to give an account of their lives and actions. The righteous are rewarded for having acted with love and compassion even though they did not recognize the face of Christ in others. Good stewards recognize that those in need of their care are gifts from God; instruments of Christ's active, loving presence in the world. How will we treat others - family members, friends, customers, co-workers, strangers - this week? What accounting will we make to the Lord for their care?

November 27th 1st Sunday of Advent

In today's gospel we hear a simple message through the pen of St. Mark; "Be watchful! Be alert!" Good stewards understand what Jesus meant when he said, "It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task." Faithful stewards realize that to each one a unique task is assigned by God. They have been set in a particular place and time, and have been gifted with unique relationships. How do we respond to our tasks and honor our relationships in a way that keeps us alert for the return of Christ?



December 4th 2nd Sunday of Advent

Our readings today focus on preparing the way for the Lord. The prophet Isaiah encourages us to cry out the glad tidings that the day of the Lord is at hand. Yet St. Peter reminds us that, "...the day of the Lord will come like a thief." None of us knows when we will be called to account, but good stewards prepare to meet the Lord daily, in their life of prayer, worship and acts of compassion and generosity. A stewardship reflection for the week; Are we open to the work of the Holy Spirit in us? The Lord is coming. Are we ready?

December 8th Immaculate Conception

In today's gospel we are given perhaps the strongest example of trust in God. Even though what Mary hears from the angel seems impossible, she asks not if, but rather how, this will come to pass. Mary's response, "May it be done ..." reminds us of the posture to which every disciple is called. In surrendering to God's will, Mary makes possible the Incarnation. Our own "yes" also makes God present in the world.

December 11th 3rd Sunday of Advent

In his letter, read today, St. Paul encourages us to "Rejoice *always*. Pray *without ceasing*. In *all circumstances*, give thanks..." He tells us to be hopeful in all circumstances - in good times and bad. St. Paul's life was marked by trials that could test anyone, yet he clung to his faith and asks us to do the same. Good stewards remain hopeful, trusting in God's promise to provide for His people.

December 18th 4th Sunday of Advent

In past weeks we have heard readings focused on Christ's return in glory. This Sunday's gospel focuses on Christ's first coming; His birth as a human being. In the story a humble woman from a tiny village becomes the Mother of God through the will of God and the working of the Holy Spirit. Like Mary, we are called to embrace the unique plan God has for each of us, His faithful stewards. Can we put aside our fear and/or questions and answer, like Mary, with a heart-felt "yes"?

December 25th Nativity of the Lord

"Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all people..."

Humble shepherds were chosen as the first to be told of the messiah's birth. These ordinary men not only hear, but understand the angels' announcement that this is the Christ. They prove themselves to be exemplary disciples who do not hesitate or doubt, but rush to share what they had heard and seen. Faithful stewards today follow in the footsteps of these first witnesses, answering the call to continue to spread the good news to all.



A Stewardship Prayer for



Heavenly Father,

We give you thanks
for the inspiration of your
Holy Spirit
as we reflect on the gospel call
to exercise Christ's stewardship
on our journey of faith.

We ask you to guide us
in our discernment
and show us how to be faithful
in the plans we make,
the actions we take,
and the love we share
on our pilgrim way.

Give us the courage to find
wisdom in our sacrifices,
joy in our generosity,
and hope in the compassion we show,
especially to those most in need of
your comfort and care.

Create in us a more open heart
and a greater awareness of our need
to grow,
to change,
to be transformed,
so that we may be better stewards of your gifts
for the good of all.

Thanksgiving Never Ends

Life is a gift. Every Day. Every Minute. Every Breath. Offering thanks for our many gifts not only honors God, but also reminds us of the source of our temporal and spiritual goods.

For the Christian steward, thanksgiving occurs more than once a year in November. Gratitude is a state, a response, a grace. We are, however, often creatures of habit. So many of our abundant blessings we take for granted. Yet *we* all like to be thanked.

A Christian steward fosters a thankful heart year round.

Prayer for a Thankful Heart

Almighty God, in gratitude we praise you for your boundless glory and thank you for your abundant gifts and graces.

Grant us hearts buoyant with thanksgiving.
This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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A Stewardship Prayer for Advent



Dear God,

Help us to be good stewards of these Advent days.

In this precious time of hope-filled waiting, help us to seek you more intentionally and more often.

Teach us to look for you in the faces of the needy we will be invited to help and the lonely ones we may be called to accompany in new and unexpected ways.

Help us to be still now and then, even in the midst of our busyness, and see you in the beauty of Your creation - in the shimmer of sunlight on snow or the crystal blue of the desert sky.

Each morning, may we wake, knowing you love us and rejoice that you have given us another day in which to share our lives and our blessings.

Each night, before we close our eyes, may we remember to thank you for the gifts and graces of the day.

Make us mindful of your presence, Lord, as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of your Son.

In his Holy Name, we pray. Amen.

Going Up on to a High Mountain...

On the second Sunday of Advent, the prophet Isaiah proclaims "*Go up on to a high mountain, Zion, herald of glad tidings; cry out at the top of your voice, Jerusalem, herald of good news!*" Isaiah's words inspire us to look up, to set our eyes and efforts on that which is above our ordinary, every day experience.

The image of "going up the mountain" can serve as a framework for a spiritual purpose statement for our walk on this earth that can be renewed every year. Next year I will:

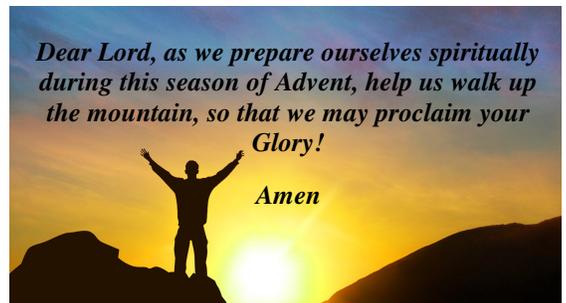
- * Lift my eyes in prayer to God
- * Attend Mass regularly
- * Seek a deeper understanding of the Lord's teachings
- * Invite others to walk with me
- * Open my heart to peace
- * Grow in love for God and my neighbor

Each item we address in our spiritual purpose statement is like a step we take on our climb up the mountain. They are specific steps that will keep us focused on being good stewards of our faith.

And so we pray:

Dear Lord, as we prepare ourselves spiritually during this season of Advent, help us walk up the mountain, so that we may proclaim your Glory!

Amen





This wonderful Advent reflection was shared in December 2009 by Stephanie Daily, then a parishioner at St. Mary Parish in Menomonee Falls.

This Advent season I once again had high hopes of slowing down the pace of life in our family and taking time to reflect on what it is we are all truly waiting for during Advent -- the coming of our Lord Jesus. I had wanted to do so much to prepare -- attend the Advent Prayer Service, have an evening routine of reflecting on a bible passage telling the story of the Lord's birth, making a homemade advent wreath with my children, to name a few ideas. I wanted to be sure my children did not see me stressed out about holiday shopping, cooking and the like, but rather a mother focused on the "reason for the season". As I sat in Mass last weekend and realized that the second candle had already been lit I wondered how I was living up to the plan I had made, for in fact, I had barely had a moment to sit in quiet since the start of Advent.

As is the case for many of us with busy families, Advent has been filled with multiple trips to the doctor, days upon days spent at home with one sick child or the next, and at times a feeling that the winter ahead will simply be unbearable -- closed in doors with four boys who physically can not be too close to one another for any length of time, too much stuff (treats and gifts) arriving in the home, and a to-do list that never ends. As I reflected, I was disappointed at myself that I was sidetracked with my everyday responsibilities that seemed to fill my days. I was in survival mode and not Advent mode!

Then, last weekend our pastor related the Gospel story from Luke that stated, "*the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert*". He reflected on the fact that God comes to us when we are in the desert of life - the desert for each of us has a different face to it -- some more challenging than others. For the first two weeks of Advent I felt a little like I was in the middle of the desert. Looking back, God was with me all along in the desert. In fact, there were so many opportunities that I minimized where God was with me and where He was simply waiting for me to slow down and see Him more clearly -- from the spontaneous discussion with my children about who St. Nicholas really was, to teaching my son about the grace one receives from the sacrament of Reconciliation, to talking about and praying for the family we will adopt this Christmas. These conversations were taking place amongst organized chaos most times, and this was all part of my Advent journey, even though it did not look the way I thought it should.

For the last weeks of Advent I would love to participate in the gift basket program for our seniors, attend the parish Christmas concert and the Advent Reconciliation service as a way to continue my faith formation. But, I know life will continue to move at fast past and there will be many things that come up out of my control. As a family we are going to try and remove some of the societal pressures and let the valleys and gorges in life be filled by God instead of all the extra stuff life brings. As the end of last week's Gospel reads, "*Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.*" **Luke 3:5.**

- Stephanie Dailey and family



St. Leonard Parish Wins Stewardship Award

St. Leonard Parish in Muskego was recognized at the 2011 International Catholic Stewardship Council (ICSC) conference for exceptional efforts in fostering stewardship as a way of life within the parish community. St. Leonard Pastor, Fr. Bill Kohler, Director of Stewardship, Nancy Kerns and Stewardship Committee Chairperson, Joe Roubik participated in the conference and accepted the award.

ICSC certification is awarded to parishes that demonstrate a commitment to living stewardship, identifying a true stewardship parish as one that, *“recognizes the living presence of Christ in their midst, and sets out to steward this gift of God to all humanity”*.

St. Leonard demonstrated exceptional effort in multiple areas including stewardship outreach, spirituality, communications, leadership formation, hospitality and stewardship catechesis.

In addition, St. Leonard has agreed to serve as an ICSC “mentor” parish, available to provide advice via e-mail or telephone to other ICSC parishes nation-wide about promoting and advancing stewardship as a way of life.

Congratulations St. Leonard on being named an ICSC 2011 Stewardship parish!



Left to right; Rick Jeric, Chairman ICSC Board of Directors, Fr. Bill Kohler, Nancy Kerns, The Most Reverend Paul Gregory Bootkoski, Bishop, Diocese of Metuchen, New Jersey / ICSC Episcopal Moderator, Joe Roubik

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.

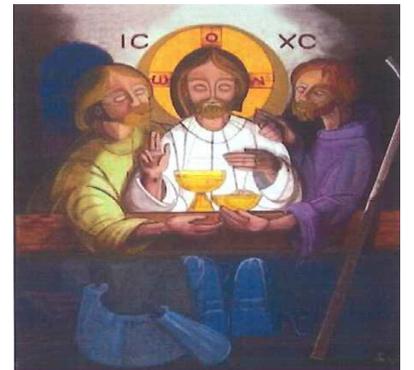
Job-wise he was doing fine – an office job with a large company. He wasn't at the executive level, but it was enough to make his family “middle-income”, and he liked what he was doing.

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 causes 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



With Hearts on Fire

Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?

~ Luke 24:32



of Teaching Stewardship

**ICSC 2012
Annual Conference**

Chicago, Illinois
September 16-19, 2012