

The Vineyard

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

In this issue

Don't Forget this New Year's Resolution...

The time for making New Year's resolutions is here. As we begin 2012, we may resolve to lose weight, to exercise, to eat right. We may resolve to read more, to spend more time with family and friends, to take up a hobby or finish a project.

One definition of the word resolution is, "A firmness of mind or purpose". This is how many of us approach a new year – with a firm commitment to make changes, to do something differently than we have in the past. We make resolutions we think will improve our physical, emotional and social lives. It's easy to forget the most important "life" of all – our spiritual life.

This time of resolution and new beginnings is the perfect moment to renew a "firmness of purpose" as faithful stewards. This year, why not include a resolution to spend 5 minutes in prayer each day or to attend Mass every week? If we have not already done so, we can make a resolution – a firm commitment – to share our time, talent and treasure in proportion to what we have received.

Resolutions are traditionally made to make us healthier and happier. What resolution can we make that will make our relationship with God healthier and happier? A strong bond with God doesn't just happen; we need to work at it – one step at a time.

As we begin this new calendar year, I invite you to include a spiritual resolution (or two) on your "to do" list for 2012. I wish you all a very healthy and happy New Year!

Sincerely,

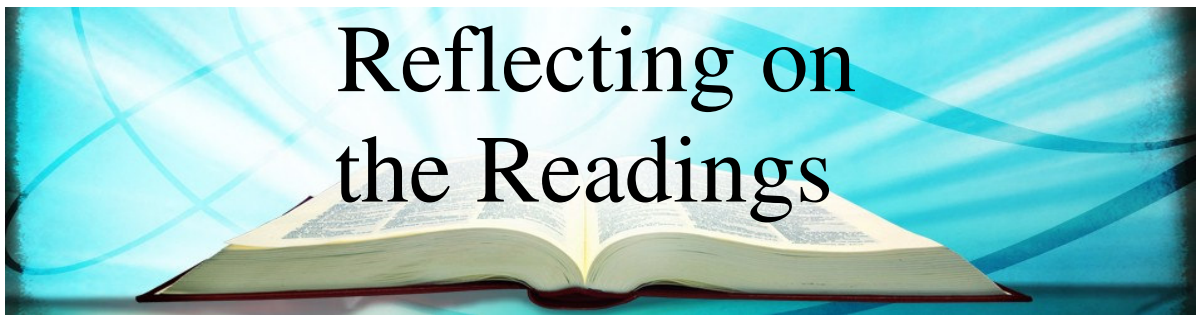
Barbara Vite

Director of Parish Stewardship

- REFLECTING ON THE READINGS
 - TRANQUILITY PRAYER
- SENDING A VALENTINE TO GOD
- ONLY SIX MORE FEET TO GO...
- ARE OUR CHILDREN LISTENING?
- SHARING STORIES ; SS. PETER & PAUL

"Jesus' call is urgent. He does not tell people to follow Him at some time in the future but here and now—at this moment, in these circumstances."

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



Reflecting on the Readings

January 1st

Mary, The Mother of God

The gospel reading today talks about people being *amazed* by the story told by the shepherds. Amazement is a mix of surprise, awe and joy - emotions that lie at the heart of good stewardship. At this time of year when we traditionally pause to reflect on the past and the future, let's take some time to be *amazed*; to feel the immensity of God's goodness to us, His faithful stewards.

January 8th

Epiphany of the Lord

Today's feast day celebrates the manifestation of God in Christ and the extension of God's saving love to all people. This revelation of God's saving action is not just a past event we gather to remember, but a present and on-going reality the Church is charged to announce. As faithful stewards in the year 2012, we are called to proclaim the wonder of God's ultimate gift, a message that remains relevant today, tomorrow and for all time.

January 15th

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

In today's first reading we hear that it took some time for Samuel to recognize that it was God calling him by name. God has a unique purpose for each of us. An important part of living as faithful stewards, is taking the time from our non-stop lives to listen for God's call.

January 22nd

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

In our second reading today, we hear St. Paul's words to a community expecting the end of the world to happen at any moment. St. Paul's words seem very specific and directed to the people of his time, but are they relevant today? St. Paul's message to us is that the things of this world are fleeting, their value transitory, and that we should hold only lightly onto worldly things lest they distract us from what really matters; our relationship with Christ. Every good steward knows that a strong relationship with God is the one thing that we *can* take with us.

January 29th

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

In today's second reading, St. Paul is giving very specific advice to the Corinthians that might appear off-putting to Catholics today. At the heart of St. Paul's message is the suggestion to live more simply - to keep in mind that which is most important for our eternal life. Faithful stewards know that focusing on our relationship with God first helps the other relationships in our lives thrive.

February 5th

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

In today's first reading Job has lost hope. We all know people, perhaps ourselves, who have suffered depression and despair. One of the greatest gifts our God has given us is His promise to be with us, in good times and bad. As grateful stewards let us remember to thank God when all is well, and call on His strength in troubled times.

February 12th

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today St. Mark recounts one story of Christ performing a miracle by healing a leper. When we hear this and other stories of miracles from scripture we picture dramatic wonders occurring long, long ago. Faithful stewards recognize that miracles happen in and around us every day. Perhaps the most under-appreciated miracle is the gift of time. The average adult heart beats 103,680 times each day. Let's make the most of our "beats" by embracing the gospel call to live as God intended.

February 19th

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

In all of human history, no one like Jesus ever walked the earth. What the crowds shouted 2,000 years ago after the healing recounted in today's gospel still holds true; "*We have never seen anything like this.*" Good stewards never lose their sense of wonder at the greatness of our God.

February 22nd

Ash Wednesday

In the gospel reading today, Jesus reminds us to be humble as we practice our Lenten disciplines of almsgiving, prayer and fasting. Doing special or extra good works during Lent is important, but *why* we do them is even more so. Spiritual growth results less from external changes we might affect and more from internal changes that happen as we live as faithful stewards.

February 26th

1st Sunday of Lent

In today's brief gospel reading, Jesus says the words that every faithful steward lives by, "...believe in the gospel." If we believe, and act accordingly, we are truly living a stewardship way of life.



The hustle and bustle of the holidays now give way to the long weeks of winter. The next few weeks offer us an opportunity to take a breath, calm our spirits and focus on what we hope to accomplish in the new year. Before we make our "to do" lists for the coming weeks and months, we should remember to be thankful for the gift of time. This prayer is a good one to keep handy if we start to feel harried and overwhelmed with the tasks at hand.

**The Lord is my pace-setter,
I shall not rush.**

**He makes me stop and rest
for quiet intervals.**

**He provides me with images of
stillness which restore my serenity.**

**He leads me in the ways of efficiency through calmness of mind,
and His guidance is peace.**

**Even though I have a great many things to accomplish each day,
I will not fret, for His presence is there.**

**His timelessness, His all-importance
will keep me in balance.**

**He prepares refreshment and renewal
in the midst of my activity
by anointing my mind
with His oils of tranquility.**

**My cup of joyous energy overflows.
Surely harmony and effectiveness shall be
the fruits of my hours,**

**for I shall walk in the pace of my Lord,
and dwell in His house forever.**

Japanese Version
by Toki Miyashina



Care Enough to Send the Very Best

Much like the Tin Man in "The Wizard of OZ", we're all in search of our heart. Have you ever been overcome with emotion while watching a baptism, or a wedding, or while standing with your hand over your heart during the Pledge of Allegiance or the national anthem?

The word "love" is probably heard, seen and spoken more in the month of February than in any other month. Greeting card, candy and jewelry sellers all remind us how important it is to focus on the one we love. "Show her you care"... "Sweets for the sweet"... "A diamond is forever"... "Care enough to send the very best". While we are bombarded with slogan after slogan it is important that we remember the ultimate Valentine's Day sentiment, "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." **Corinthians 13:13**

Love is the governing force driving the life of a true steward. Love for God, demonstrated by the way we care for and share the gifts He has entrusted to us. Love for each other, demonstrated by our care of family and friends. Love for the greater community, demonstrated in our commitment to justice. Love for the earth, demonstrated by our acts of conservation and respect for nature.



Only six more feet to go...

There once was a man terrified of close spaces. Too ashamed to admit his claustrophobia, he accepted an invitation to go spelunking, even though the idea of dark, dank, subterranean caves spooked him.

His adventure began as he shimmied through a small entrance to the cave. The light on his helmet penetrated the velvety darkness 95 feet below. Following the guide, he squiggled through a tight tunnel. He pushed himself along with his toes and pulled himself along with his elbows. Then his helmet caught on a rock, and he found himself wedged in the passage's tightest space. He raised his head and the light on his helmet shined directly ahead. The passage seemed to go on endlessly into the bowels of the earth. He felt trapped. Panicky. Alone. Afraid. All he wanted at that moment was to see light, feel warm, and breathe fresh air.

He then heard the voice of the guide, like an underground angel. "You only have about six more feet to go." But the man didn't believe him. From his vantage point, the passage appeared without end. "Trust me", the guide said. The guide grasped the man's wrists and helped him worm his way to an unseen break in the passage that dropped into a spacious cavern. The man made his way from the cave on a wide pathway. The experience left the man humbled and emboldened by his daring. Above all, he realized that in a time of dire need, his worldly needs had been reduced to simple essentials.

Christian stewardship requires us to step out of our comfort zones. Sometimes we feel stuck, shouldering the weight of the world. The view is daunting. Blessed are they who remember to trust. We can't always see what's in store for us. *We assume that the narrow, harrowing passage way will never end, when God knows we have only six more feet to go.*

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from *Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.*

As we get wrapped up in the red hearts, cards and candy of valentine's day, let's remember to care about God enough to send the very best. Take a quite minute daily to pray.

Try this: Simply place your hand – palm down, fingers together – over your heart. Close your eyes. Breathe deeply. Sit quietly for a few moments until you feel your own pulse and respiration. Try practicing this subtle, self-compassionate gesture, and then turn your thoughts to the Source of all love.



This reflection was shared in by Jenny Grieb, a parishioner at St. Mary Parish in Menomonee Falls.

Are Our Children Listening?

When asked to write this Covenant Corner, I thought it wouldn't be too hard to come up with ways we serve the Church and school. I wrote a version that talked about the things we do like go to church each week, give clothing to the Hope Network, give food to the Food Pantry, being in charge of the Family Fun Fair at School, etc. But after writing that article, I felt like I was not really explaining what I felt about living out God's will. So, I scrapped that first article and thought for a while about what I really wanted to say. I kept coming back to two different thoughts. So I decided to base my article on these points instead.

My first thought was about living my faith as I thought others might expect me to. Being one of the two daughters of a Deacon, I always felt like others expected me to be really religious and to do great things. I always felt like I failed to live up to these expectations, even though I was trying. I have come to realize that I am not here to fulfill others expectations, but God's. I struggle sometimes to figure out what that is, but I still keep doing my best each day.

I was listening to Michael W. Smith in the car today and his song "Place in this World" is about finding what God is calling us to do. It made me think about where I am in my journey and where I go from here. I know I haven't completely figured this out yet, and my human nature sometimes prevents me from following God's path. But I will keep up the fight to be a disciple of Jesus and to serve the Lord before myself. I will keep my heart and spirit open to new possibilities. The one thing I am sure of on my path is that, right now, I need to teach my kids about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and how to live as a disciple of God. This brings me to my second thought.

I wonder sometimes if I do enough to teach my kids about God, and how to live as a good disciple. Sometimes I think they get it and sometimes, like when they don't behave or pay any attention at church, I am sure I have failed. But this summer, a special moment happened that made me realize that I have reached at least one of my kids.

My son, Max, came into the house and told me he found two \$10 bills in the backyard and was really excited about this. I told him we had to hang onto the money for a while, to see if anyone came looking for it. If no one came, then the money would be his. After a couple of weeks, I told Max that the money was his and asked what he was going to do with it. He said he was going to give half of the money to a charity. Right then I knew I had taught him to think of others before himself and he got it. It was God's way of telling me to keep at it – the kids are listening.

I know that I have to put my faith in God to guide me on this journey. I will trust that I can pass the right things onto my children. I know that this is not going to be easy and the path will not always be clear, but I will always try to live up to God's expectations.

-Jenny Grieb

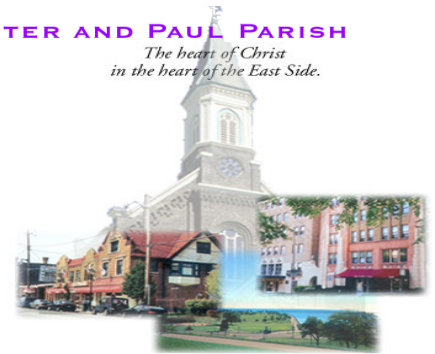


Faithful stewards share all of their resources - including good ideas. This *Parish Showcase* feature comes from SS. Peter & Paul Parish in Milwaukee. Read on to see how celebrating the faithful stewards in the parish community helps to reinforce an atmosphere of gratitude. If you would like to share something creative that your parish is doing to help stewardship grow, please contact Barb Vite (viteb@archmil.org).

Sharing Stories of Living Stewardship

submitted by Jane Ore, Director of Administrative Services,
SS. Peter & Paul Parish, Milwaukee

SS. PETER AND PAUL PARISH
*The heart of Christ
in the heart of the East Side.*



When I first came to work for SS. Peter and Paul parish they had just established a Stewardship Committee. I was delighted to be a part of a parish that valued Stewardship. At our first meeting we began to talk about ways in which we could engage our parishioners to live stewardship as a way of life. Someone suggested that we offer a study group on what it means to be a true Steward of the gifts that God has given us. We discussed the concept of a formal pledge drive and “first fruits.”

The enthusiasm and energy around the table was something to behold. One member began to talk about our Service Committee. There were people in the parish who had been giving of their time and talent to certain Service opportunities for years. Another member shared a story of a husband and wife team who chaired the Annual Parish Festival for many years. There was the story of the young mother who agreed to carve time out of her busy schedule to serve on Parish Council.

As these stories began to pour forth, it became apparent that we had people in our parish who, even though they might not recognize it, were living as faithful stewards. They were beautiful examples of how we can share the gifts that God has entrusted to our care with one another!

The Holy Spirit was definitely at work within our committee. We began to brainstorm ways in which we could share these stories with our parish and use them to demonstrate ways to live out one’s faith. After many meetings and much discussion we decided to honor these marvelous individuals in several ways;

Once a year we would ask the parishioners to nominate a “STEWARD of the YEAR.” We created guidelines and a nomination form that would be included in the bulletin and on our website. The person who received the most nominations would be honored as “Steward of the Year.”

Our first year was very interesting as the nominees were all terrific! In order to show appreciation to all individuals who were nominated we came up with another category – “Disciples of Christ.” This was similar to an “Honorable Mention” award.

After our second year, we noticed that there were individuals in our parish community who showed a dedication to a particular ministry for many years. We wanted to honor them and came up with another award which we titled, “The Heart of Christ” award. All of these awards are now presented at our annual “Volunteer Appreciation” breakfast.

This exercise in gratitude and recognition of service culminated in the creation of the “Lifetime Stewardship Award”, established to honor individuals who have given a lifetime of service to our parish, our neighborhood and if possible to the global community. Because this was such a special achievement we interview each recipient and then write up a “bio” of sorts to be read when the award is presented. This award is presented at our Annual Parish Feast Day celebration. A plaque memorializing the “Lifetime Stewardship” award recipients hangs in a prominent spot in our church gathering area.

It is amazing how the Holy Spirit works! What started out to be a brainstorming session on ways in which we could encourage parishioners to live a stewardship life quickly morphed into a brain storming session on ways in which we could celebrate and teach by sharing the stories of these amazing people who were living a life of stewardship!