



Volume 1 March/April 2011 Issue 1

The Vineyard

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

Welcome to *The Vineyard*

When parish staff members charged with stewardship responsibilities were asked what resources would be most beneficial to their parish stewardship efforts, a periodic newsletter was at the top of the list. To these dedicated folks and all those who work in our archdiocese to foster stewardship, I am delighted to say, “Welcome to *The Vineyard!*”

This newsletter, and those to follow, will contain stewardship prayers, reflections based on the Sunday scripture readings, ideas for stewardship education and formation for parishioners of all ages and news about upcoming events and new resources designed to help nurture the seeds of good stewardship.

Working to build and enhance stewardship as a way of life in a parish can be a challenge. My hope is that this newsletter will offer useful and creative tools you can use in your bulletins, parish/school /Christian Formation newsletters, for leadership formation and in all the other ways you are working to strengthen stewardship in your parish. I look forward to getting your feedback on this first issue. Thank you all for your efforts to encourage workers to come into the vineyard!

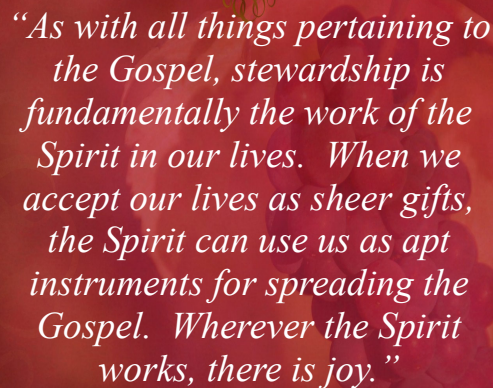
Sincerely,

Barbara Vite

Director of Parish Stewardship
viteb@archmil.org

- REFLECTING ON THE READINGS
 - AN ENERGETIC LENT?
- STEWARDSHIP FROM THE HEART
 - BULLETIN BITS AND PIECES
- LENTEN STEWARDSHIP PRAYER
 - ICSC NETWORKING EVENT

In this issue



“As with all things pertaining to the Gospel, stewardship is fundamentally the work of the Spirit in our lives. When we accept our lives as sheer gifts, the Spirit can use us as apt instruments for spreading the Gospel. Wherever the Spirit works, there is joy.”

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

Reflecting on the Readings

March 13th - 1st Sunday of Lent

In today's gospel Jesus is tempted to abuse his power to serve himself. Jesus overcomes the temptation and stays true to the will of his father. As good stewards, we, too, have the freedom and the responsibility to choose how we will use the gifts we have been given. Lent calls us to examine our decisions through the lens of Jesus' obedience and resolve.

March 20th - 2nd Sunday of Lent

In the second reading today St. Paul tells Timothy that God has "called us to a holy life, not according to our works, but according to His design." Lent gives us the tools (prayer, fasting, almsgiving) to realize our distinctive and unique faith potential and how each of us - even in this 21st century world - is called to a life of holiness.

March 27th - 3rd Sunday of Lent

God heard the cry of His people and responded generously by bringing them out of Egypt. But in the desert the Israelites began to grumble. They lost the sense of gratitude for the gift of their freedom. As faithful stewards, we pray that we will always be grateful for the opportunities and gifts we have been given, and that we will respond generously in sharing our gifts with others.

April 3rd - 4th Sunday of Lent

One of the traits shared by some of the people in today's gospel is doubt. Just like the Jews and Pharisees in the readings, we sometimes let our fear or pride cause us to doubt the simple truth that all we have has been given to us by God to be used for the benefit of all. Let us pray that we can live our faith as good stewards even, and perhaps especially, in today's "me" focused world.

April 10th - 5th Sunday of Lent

Each of today's readings talks about having faith; faith in the face of adversity, hardship and even death. Lent is a time when we can focus in a special way on the things that help to keep us grounded in our faith. Let's take this opportunity to focus on praying for ourselves and others, to fast from the things that take us away from God and to stretch beyond our comfort zones to share our resources generously with others.



April 17th - Palm Sunday

It is always difficult to hear the passion narrative. Yet we see in Jesus' passion something that is at the heart of stewardship - *trust*. Jesus' anxiety in the garden turns to trust, "...if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will but as you will." Good stewards conquer their anxiety to trust in God's plan for their lives. Let us pray for the faith to trust and to embrace the plan God has for each of us to share the gift of our lives with others.

April 24th - Easter Sunday

Our Lenten season has been a time of cultivation, a time of growth, a time of transformation. As we experience 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 our call to *truly* live as faithful stewards, opening our hearts to the working of God in our lives, we can do nothing less.



Are Your Threads Tangled?

A sign in a cotton factory read "If your threads get tangled, call for your foreman." One day a new worker, unsure about how to handle the seemingly countless bobbins spinning before her, lost control, ending with her threads knotted in a jumbled mess. The more she tried to disentangle them, the worse the situation grew. Finally, in desperation, she sent for the foreman. He asked, "Why didn't you send for me earlier?" She replied, "I was doing my best." "No", he replied. "Your best would have been to send for me."

Prayer is a powerful yet comforting gift from God. During this Lenten season, pray often. Strengthen your personal relationship with Him by seeking His comfort, forgiveness and guidance.

"Our help is in the name of the Lord, Who made heaven and earth." Psalm 124:8

An Energetic Lent ?



One of the most serious challenges we face in our faith today is apathy. Every year during Lent we hear about prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Every year we give up something here and give a few extra coins there while counting the days to Easter dinner and spring break vacations. Lent leaves us pretty much the same way it found us.

The life-giving power at the heart of our tradition is often lost amid the clamor of 21st century life.

As faithful stewards we are called to trust that each one of us is a precious child of God – a God who loves us as we are, and empowers us to become more. Mindful of who we are, and of who we would like to be, we can respond authentically, engaging in our Lenten disciplines with renewed energy.

Almsgiving

- Donate some canned goods to your local food pantry
- Visit someone who may be lonely
- Donate clothing you no longer wear
- Reflect on your regular contribution to support your parish. Can you do more?
- Donate diapers, baby food or clothing to a women's shelter
- Make a contribution to the Catholic Stewardship Appeal
- Volunteer as a Catechist

Let our almsgiving expand to include acts of charity and kindness. May our Lent be a time of exhilarating renewal!

Fasting

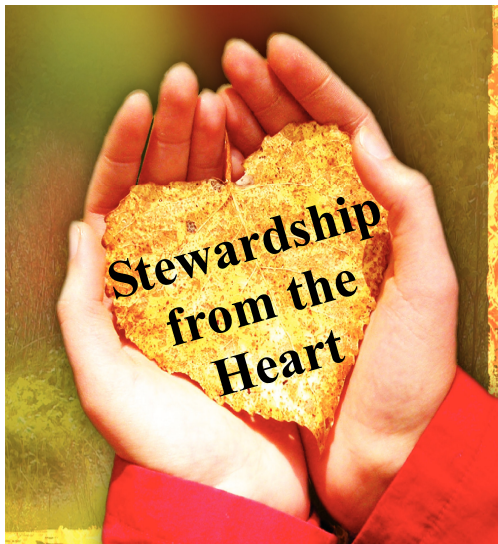
- Talk to your family about eating one simple meal a week and donating the money you save to a local meal program
- Fast from indifference; get involved as a volunteer
- Fast from isolation; give up *Facebook* to come together as a family at least once a week to talk and share
- Fast from resentment; offer an apology for harsh words spoken in anger
- Fast from pride; reach out to mend a broken relationship

Let our fasting free us to give up the things that prevent us from deepening our relationship with God.

Prayer

- Spend 15 minutes in personal prayer every day
- Read inspirational material each week
- Participate in the Sacrament of Penance
- Attend the special liturgies on Ash Wednesday, Holy Thursday, and Good Friday
- Commit to making the Lord's Day a priority by attending Mass every week
- Pray together as a family

Let us invite Him into our minds and our hearts through simple, direct and heartfelt prayer.



Coming to an understanding of stewardship as a way of life is a very personal experience. Some of us change our perception of stewardship little by little. Others experience a conversion moment; a significant event that reshapes our stewardship response.

Many Catholics throughout our archdiocese share the gift of their real life stewardship stories with fellow parishioners; stories that teach, encourage and inspire all of us as we continue our growth as faithful stewards.

This section of each newsletter will be devoted to examples of lay witness, offered in word and action, that speaks to the heart of stewardship. All examples are printed with permission, for your personal inspiration and for use in your parish stewardship efforts.

The lay witness in this issue is shared by Michael Bula, from the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist Parish in Milwaukee.

My name is Michael Bula, and I am the Trustee/Secretary of the Parish and a member of the Finance & Administrative Services commission.

For my talk I would like to briefly share with you a profound stewardship lesson that I experienced last year. A lesson that was literally in my blood. Last summer, I signed up to donate blood during the Parish's annual blood drive. My blood type is O negative, which is relatively uncommon (only 7% of the population share my blood type) but it is very important. Any person can receive O negative blood regardless of the recipient's blood type. People with O negative blood are referred to as universal donors. Needless to say, O negative blood is a vital part of the blood supply.

As I was getting checked in to donate blood, the Blood Center representative saw my blood type and asked me if I would be willing to provide a double red blood cell donation. As it was explained to me, this type of donation involves the donor providing two separate donations of whole blood. The red blood cells are separated and collected and the plasma and platelets are returned to the donor's body.

At the first mention of this process, I became very uncomfortable and a bit scared. I immediately came up with a whole host of reasons not to go through with the double red cell donation:

It would be painful;

It would take too much of my time;

I would be exhausted for the rest of the day;

And I probably would be unable to exercise for the following week.

I came pretty close to talking myself out of it, when the light went on, and I realized that all of my thoughts and excuses were strictly about me. I then shifted my self-centered focus to consideration of all of the good my donation could do for other people. The gift of my blood could help a child get well. My donated blood cells could save the life of an accident victim on a Flight For Life helicopter. When my focus shifted from one of pure selfishness to one of selflessness, I instantly gained the courage to say "yes".

I'll be honest with you. The double red blood cell donation was a bit painful, and it took much longer than a regular blood donation. But afterward, as I was drinking my juice and eating cookies, I had such a strong sense of satisfaction and joy knowing that my gift would be making a real difference in the lives of other people.

From that experience, I learned that stewardship involves being aware of one's unique, God given gifts and talents. For stewardship to take hold, we have to be open to the countless opportunities to share our gifts. And, perhaps most importantly, we have to shift our focus and move beyond the obstacles, fears and excuses that are so often rooted in selfishness.

Stewardship can sometimes be painful. It can often take us outside our comfort zone. And, stewardship can be challenging as we struggle to overcome the urge to hold onto things that we desperately want to keep for ourselves.

Stewardship – it is an integral part of who we are as daughters and sons of God our Creator. Stewardship – it is what we are called to do as disciples of Jesus Christ our Redeemer.

Stewardship – it is in our blood!



Bulletin Bits & Pieces

Service

Needs are great - here in our parishes and out there in the world.

God blesses us abundantly and invites us to use all we have - not just the leftovers - in love for Him and His people.

All the wonderful gifts we have are meant to be shared over and over until they multiply, spreading God's goodness far and wide.

Stewardship is a way of life - something we practice in a dozen little ways every day, allowing it to change our hearts and fill them with joy.

How will you answer His call to Serve?

Sacrifice

What if this year, we challenged ourselves to go beyond the status quo in our financial support of our parish and other good causes?

Perhaps we would take a step out of our comfort zones, and give from our abundance rather than our surplus.

Through faith, we change in ways we never imagined. Sometimes without even noticing, we find ourselves thinking differently about money and things and people and time.

Stewardship is a response - choosing to stretch, tending what has been given to our care and holding ourselves accountable for the results.

How will you answer His call to Sacrifice?

Sharing

We are often told to count our blessings. If we were asked to make a list of all we had to be thankful for, what might we take for granted?

In addition to our families and our resources, would we list the people with whom we work, our health, our freedom, each breath we take?

Would we include our faith? Would we list the teaching, the healing and comforting, the joy we experience when our faith community celebrates God's greatest gift of all?

Stewardship is sharing - sharing our blessings, which draws us closer to each other and to God.

How will you answer His call to Share?



Lenten Stewardship Prayer

Lord Jesus,

At this time of year our thoughts are turned to the ultimate sacrifice You made for us on the cross.

Inspire us to make whatever personal sacrifice is needed to bring us closer to You.

May our practice of sacrificial stewardship during this Lenten season lead us to the victory of the Resurrection.

Amen

Save the Date....

Mark your calendars for an exciting Parish Stewardship Networking event coming this summer! Pastors, parish staff members, and stewardship, pastoral and finance council members from all across the Midwest will gather to pray, reflect and compare best practices in parish stewardship. Join other representatives from the International Catholic Stewardship Council, Regions VI and VII (MI, OH, WI, IL and IN), to share ideas for enhancing stewardship within a parish setting.

Date: June 22nd & 23rd, 2011

**Location: St. Pius X Parish, Granger, Indiana
(10 minutes from Notre Dame)**

Watch for more information coming soon!

Is Your Parish Doing Something Creative?

Faithful stewards share all of their resources - including good ideas. Future issues of this newsletter will include a parish showcase section. If you would like to share something creative your parish is doing to help stewardship grow, please contact Barb Vite (viteb@archmil.org).