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The Vineyard

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

How Good is Your Relationship?

In our current climate of reality shows and advice gurus, there is no shortage of conventional wisdom on how to have a good relationship. Suggestions abound on what to do, what to say, where to go and how to relate. All the “buzz” does prove one very important thing; a good relationship just doesn’t happen. It must be tended

The piece of advice given most often about relationships is that the partners communicate. People are told to talk to each other. They are encouraged to share their thoughts, fears and wishes – after all, we can’t relate if we don’t communicate.

The most important relationship in our lives, our connection with God, is often left to happen on its own. We’ve been baptized, we go to Mass when we can and we live good lives. We know that God is there and we’ll call Him when we need Him. Imagine seeing your spouse or best friend only once or twice a year and thinking about them only occasionally in between. How healthy would that relationship be? We certainly need to talk often and sincerely to those who are important to us. So too must we interact with God through prayer.

It is in prayer that we can share with our Father our deepest fears and our greatest joys. When we pray God, too, has an active role – sending us wisdom, calming our spirits, granting a deeper understanding of our faith and our world.

Talk to the Father often. Say a quick prayer on the way to work in the morning or before bed at night. Pray with your loved ones and alone during a quiet moment. Think about how you can build His kingdom on earth – that’s praying too!

If you listen, you may just here Him say, “Let’s talk!” Be sure to answer.

- REFLECTING ON THE READINGS
- WHERE DOES GOD GO IN THE SUMMER?
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- STEWARDSHIP FROM THE HEART
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- STEWARDSHIP & EVANGELIZATION; THE CHICKEN OR THE EGG?

In this issue

*“Stewardship...
is all encompassing. It provides a
place for the simplest individual
gesture of kindness as well as
stewardship committees working
for systemic justice and peace. It
is, ultimately, the pull and power
of the Gospel come alive in our
times and circumstances.”*

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

Reflecting on the Readings

July 3rd - 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

In the gospel today, Jesus proclaims “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.” We often come to the Lord when our problems seem too numerous or heavy to bear. As faithful stewards, God expects us to share our gifts, but as His children He also expects us to share our sorrows with Him. Talk to the Lord when you are troubled and accept His comfort. Sharing your burdens with God can open your heart to sharing your joy with others.

July 10th - 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Our first reading today speaks about the workings of the word of God. These words can be applied, almost literally, to faithful stewards. God sent each of us into the world not just to occupy space or for our own gain, but rather to do His will. God created every single one of us with a unique purpose; to achieve the end for which we were sent. Faithful stewards, therefore, serve and share joyfully, living as God planned.

July 17th - 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

In our gospel today we hear some very familiar stories. While each parable has its own message, the story of the mustard seed touches on a central concept of stewardship; the smallest gift, given in joy and gratitude, can produce amazing fruit. Many gifts, working in concert, can produce miracles!

July 24th - 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today we hear Solomon ask God for an understanding heart, for the wisdom to know what is right. People in today’s world tend to hold strong opinions. Faithful stewards often repeat Solomon’s prayer, seeking the wisdom to know what is right and just in God’s eyes and the courage to act accordingly.

July 31st - 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

All three readings today assure us that “the Lord will provide”. Do we have the faith to step out of our comfort zones, stretching to share more time, more of our talents, more of our financial resources in proportion to our ability? If we believe what the gospel tells us, our “comfort zone” lies in extending ourselves to live stewardship - practicing what we preach.

Aug 7th - 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today Elijah witnesses grand and terrible demonstrations of power; wind, earthquakes, fire - forces to be feared. Elijah realized that God was not within these damaging forces, Elijah recognized God in the tiny whisper, and because he was open to the message, Elijah was able to hear and follow God’s will. Do we listen for the soft, steady call of our God?

Aug 14th - 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

In the first two lines of today’s first reading, Isaiah reveals God’s instructions to His faithful stewards. “Thus says the Lord: Observe what is right, do what is just...”. This seemingly simple mandate can sometimes be remarkably difficult to follow, but it is our obligation, and our joy, as faithful stewards to try, each day, to meet the expectations of our God.

Aug 21st - 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

In today’s second reading St. Paul proclaims, “..who has given the Lord anything that he might be repaid?” We are called to return a portion of our gifts to God not because God needs anything from us. Living as faithful stewards feeds our need to give - to God and to others. We are at our best when we embrace our need to give, and act on it.

Aug 28th - 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

In the gospel today Jesus challenges us to put aside worldly distractions that separate us from embracing life with Him. When we put ourselves and our possessions at the center of our lives, we focus inward, squeezing God to the margins. A faithful steward focuses outward, with God as the center and source of all things. One day we will each be called to account for our decision to hold on, or to let go, spreading ourselves and our gifts outward in service to God and others.



*“God watches over His Word
and His creation. Even today,
he keeps track of what people
do with both.”*

Gien Karssen



Where Does God Go in The Summer?

He goes wherever you go!

Summer brings joy and challenges. One of the challenges is staying connected to God in the midst of all our summer activities. It's summer after all, and time for catching up with friends and spending time with family, a time for vacations and having fun.

The pace is slower, the days are longer, everything is more casual – it's time to relax in the sunshine. Summer is also the perfect time to reawaken your relationship with the Lord. If you look, you're sure to see Him everywhere:

Patio Prayers. Enjoy a refreshing glass of lemonade on out on your deck or patio while reading something inspirational. The scriptures go very well with a cool drink! As you sip, consider how God refreshes your soul.

Gardening with God. When you garden, your hands are touching God's amazing creation. The soil, crumbling beneath your fingers supports the life of the flowers, plants and trees that God created to beautify our world and sustain us. As you work the soil, work out problems with God as Counselor. As you weed and remove old blooms, ask God to "prune" the distractions from in your life so that you can grow stronger in relationship with Him. As you plant, ask God to help you plant seeds of His love in others.

Vacation Prayers. When you leave behind those things that have become routine in you life, you may find that you pray your best. Whether your vacation is quiet and relaxing, adventurous and thrilling, alone or with many others, nearby or far away, remember God is with you. You can pray in a car full of children or in the silence of nature's beauty, while scaling a mountain or sitting in your backyard. Where ever you are and whatever you are doing, God watches over you and listens. *How better to relax, recharge and refresh this summer than by keeping God close?*

A Child's Summer Prayer

Thank You God for each new day
and for the time to work and play.

Please be with me all day long
through every story, game and song.

Teach me how to give and share
the gifts You've given to my care.

May all the happy things I do
Make you, our Father, happy too.

Amen



A Family's Summer Prayer

This day is full of beauty and adventure.
Help us to be alive to it all.

This day is full of possibilities and hope.
Help us to embrace it wholeheartedly.

This day is full of energy and inventiveness.
Help us to live it well.

And when night comes, may we look back
at this day without regrets, having served
You and others.

Amen



Stewardship from the Heart



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 below is shared by the McIntyre family from St. Mary Parish in Menomonee Falls.

Several years ago, when our three children were younger, we had a delightful little neighbor girl who enjoyed eating dinner at our house a few nights a week. Our family would recite our traditional "Bless Us, O Lord" prayer, while she listened.

After a few meals at our house, we asked her to share her family prayer with us. She proceeded with her prayer, which ended with these thought-provoking words, "We are so happy to be in this family." I remember thinking WOW, what a wonderful way to thank God for our food and call to mind the true blessing of family - our comfort, our rock, our support.

We have continued this tradition and it has traveled to our extended families and to other families who have eaten dinner in our home. Creating an atmosphere of faith and gratitude is important to us. What a simple way to call to mind our gratitude for our family on a daily basis. We are truly blessed.

Rob, Ann, Andrew, Molly, Abby McIntyre

The following reflection from Kim Stewart, also from St. Mary Parish, reinforces that we can practice good stewardship countless times each day:

We all live out our Covenant with God on a daily basis, whether we do it consciously or unconsciously. It is in the random acts of kindness towards others, such as smiling at a stranger, holding the door open for someone at the grocery store or allowing a car into your lane during rush hour traffic.

As a parent, it is providing reassurance and hugs in the middle of the night after a bad dream, putting a band aid on a scraped knee or watching your child as your heart bursts with joy during a school play.

As a spouse, it is packing a healthy lunch, ironing a shirt at the last minute before an important meeting or watching a sporting event (even if you have no idea of what is going on!).

As a friend, it is celebrating every day closer to the 40 week mark during a high risk pregnancy or delivering a home cooked meal for a friend going through chemotherapy for breast cancer.

As a child, it is making your bed without being reminded, giving countless pictures to Mom and Dad, or giving your favorite toy to your cousin who is visiting.

As a sibling, it is organizing an anniversary brunch celebrating 40 years of marriage, taking time for a cup of coffee or helping to find the right doctor.

As you can see, the smallest act can have a significant impact on someone's life. What a great way to Live Jesus with Hearts on Fire and help fulfill out Covenant with God.

Stewardship & Evangelization; The Chicken or the Egg?

One school of thought tells us that stewardship leads to evangelization. In their pastoral letter on stewardship, the U.S. bishops tell us, *“Every member of the Church is called to evangelize, and the practice of authentic Christian stewardship inevitably leads to evangelization. As stewards of the mysteries of God (cf. 1 Cor. 4:1), people desire to tell others about them and about the light they shed on human life, to share the graces and gifts they have received from God, especially knowledge of Christ Jesus...”*.

From this perspective, the most important goal of stewardship formation is not learning more about God. The most important goal is deepening our relationship with Jesus so that we can live more faithfully as his disciples in the world. In other words, the ultimate goal of stewardship formation is evangelization. When our faith lives are alive and on fire, we cannot help but share our love of Jesus with others.

Stewardship is an essential expression of Christian discipleship. Disciples who practice stewardship as a way of life recognize God as the source of all they have and are and will be. Faithful stewards recognize the most precious gift given by our gracious and generous God is the gift of faith and they recognize that this gift must be shared with others in our faith community and the larger world.

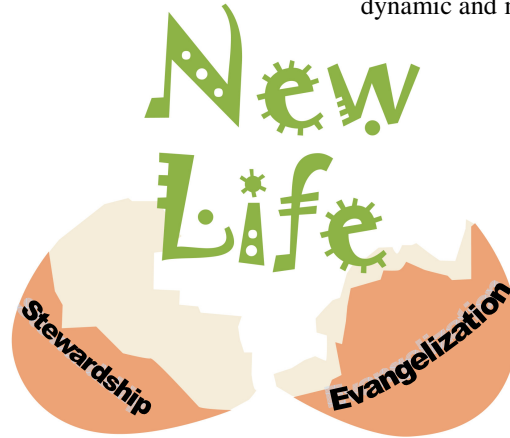
Good stewards evangelize through their actions; expressed in deeds of service, and support of parish and diocesan ministries and other worthy causes. Good stewards evangelize through their words; inviting other Catholics to fully embrace their call to discipleship. Good stewards evangelize through their prayers; asking for God’s grace to strengthen the call to conversion that all may come to know Christ and thus experience new life in His church.

A second school of thought tells us that evangelization must come before stewardship. From this perspective, evangelization begins with each individual as an on-going call to a conversion of heart and mind. Evangelization within is the call for a renewed enthusiasm for our faith. It is the invitation to know the fullness of our sacramental life. Evangelization is the means through which the Church offers individuals of all ages dynamic and meaningful opportunities to grow in their faith.

This viewpoint identifies evangelization as the method for forming disciples through education, family faith life and community liturgical and sacramental life. It is central to the mission of all we do as Church. Through evangelization we come to know, and to share, the Good News of Jesus Christ. We come to embrace God’s relationship to the human family and our individual and communal response - and responsibility - as disciples. Evangelization, simply stated, is growing in our faith, embracing the call to discipleship and sharing that call with others.

As disciples, we want to make the world a better place. We want to do our part to build God’s kingdom here on earth. We do this by living as faithful stewards; sharing all we have in service and support of our parishes, our archdiocese and other good causes that serve the poorest, the most vulnerable, the most defenseless among us.

No one can definitively answer the question of which comes first - the chicken or the egg. Perhaps we might be wise to consider stewardship and evangelism as two branches of our faith “tree”. Both flow from embracing our faith fully - the gifts *and* the responsibilities- and acting accordingly. Both call us to share all we have; our time, our talents, our resources and our faith as we do our part to live as God intended, and invite others to do the same. Stewardship and Evangelization - one does not exist without the other.



Practical Steps for Practicing Evangelization and Stewardship

From an article by Dr. Susan W. Blum Gerding, President Evangelization - Jeremiah Press

How can we, as Catholic evangelizers, share our faith and invite people to deeper conversation? How can we attract inactive and non-believers in a normal and natural way? The following are some practical and helpful hints.

1. Talk about your faith with your friends, neighbors and family. Share what the Lord is doing in your life.
2. Discuss headlines and news stories in light of faith. Mention that you are praying for the child who was abducted, or for government leaders, or for the success of an outreach project.
3. Treat others honestly and sincerely.
4. Invite others to adult education and support groups or social functions at your parish.
5. Seize the moment! Take every opportunity to share the goodness of God in whatever situation you find yourself.
6. Involve others in your faith community. Let others know that the church needs them.