

Living Christianity [Radically] Winter 2009

A quarterly publication for pastors and parish staff prepared by Lea Dacanay for the Department of Stewardship and Development, Archdiocese of Chicago

Continuing to be Good Stewards in a Tough Economy

Time goes by so fast. It seems like fall was just yesterday – memory of cooking my first Thanksgiving dinner is still so fresh in my mind yet when I look around, I know fall is long over and I seem to be in the middle of an early winter. By the time you get this, Christmas and New Year celebrations will have come and gone and I'll know I'm really in the middle of what I think is the worst time of the year – January and February in Chicago. Where I came from, Hawaii, January and February are not much different from the rest of the year. Winter in Chicago for me means the start of another long wait for summer. "Patience, it will come soon enough" as my friend who grew up in Chicago always says.

I admire people with patience. My friends seem to have an endless supply of it, and I obviously don't. It's not an easy thing to have or to practice. That's why I prefer cooking to baking. Baking requires more accuracy and patience. Not only do you need to have the correct temperature, you also can't keep opening the oven door otherwise the food won't get done or worse, your soufflé or cake will crash! I share this example because in my work with Stewardship, I need to practice patience.

One of my key responsibilities in this job is to help parishes with their Planned Offering Program. The recommended time to do this is in the fall and quite a few parishes did this year. Being new to this job, I was excited to call and follow up with these parishes as soon as they got done with their commitment weekend. "How did it go?" "Did you see an increase in your collection?"

Behind this excitement is of course my anxiety. Our economy seems to be at its worst since The Great Depression, and it doesn't look like it will get better soon. There was some concern among pastors whether to continue with their Planned Offering Program as scheduled. It didn't seem to be the time to ask people to reconsider what they were giving and ask them to give more, if it is within their means. It reminded me of the time I moved to Chicago – it was December, right after September 11, 2001. Everyone I knew said it was the worst time to move without a job, switch careers AND to look for a job in the Church.

I moved in spite of the "bad timing." In my heart, I felt that God called me to make this move, and I knew I was doing the right thing. I didn't have doubts that God would provide what I needed to make this move possible and meaningful for me, because I was following His call. I just needed to have patience and more importantly, faith in God, faith in His timing.

Fr. Leo Pantiluhig in his column, *Food For Thought*, says, "Patience and the right timing are two different things. Patience requires awaiting the future. But when it comes to accepting Christ as Lord and Savior, the time to receive His gifts is not in the future. The right time is now! There is no need to wait. God has been patiently waiting for us and we cannot afford to save our relationship with God for the future."

Perhaps the parishes who went ahead with their Planned Offering Program in spite of the economy did so with the same conviction: faith in God, faith in their community and patience. Our Catholic Church reminds us that all is a gift from God. As good stewards, we respond in gratitude and strive to return all gifts to the Father "with an increase." Not everyone would be able to give more financially in this tight economy but these parishes believed that their parishioners, called to be good stewards, would give what they could when they could.

And they responded.

There was a parish that said that they had the highest collection they've had in 2008 in October. One said their collection increased from \$18,000 to \$22,000. Another parish graciously asked me to call back next month as they are still getting their commitment cards. They expect commitment cards to continue coming in the next few months. From what I have seen, there seems to be a good response from most of the parishes that participated.

It's been seven years since I left Hawaii. In spite of the fact that I do miss Hawaii very much, I know that Chicago has been and continues to be a grace-filled experience. God has provided what I needed in more ways that I can imagine. My work as Vicariate Stewardship Coordinator for the Archdiocese of Chicago has provided me the opportunity to meet people who exemplify stewardship flowing from a personal and communal relationship in Christ. This "work" is a gift from God and by accepting it gratefully, it leads me to new heights of discerning how the Spirit leads me to a further response to God's call.

As we move on to the challenges of 2009, we must remember to fully trust in God and know in our hearts that He will provide for us. It is my hope that we will continually strive to be good stewards, remembering that whatever we receive in our lives is a gift from God. Moreover, it is truly in giving of ourselves that we receive.

"That we may remain faithful to the gift of God, to love Him and serve Him in the poor together with you. What we have done we should not have been able to do if you did not share with your prayers, with your gifts, this continual abundance giving. But I don't want you to give me in abundance. I want that you give me until it hurts."

Blessed Teresa, Nobel Peace Prize Lecture, December 11, 1979



Most of our parishes that recently completed their Planned Offering Program are in the process of sending and/or completing their Thank You Letters to parishioners who turned in their commitment cards. This is part of our recommended Program Follow-Up. Ideally, this letter should be mailed within one week of receiving the commitment and should state the nature of the commitment. The reason for this is twofold: to express appreciation and also to subtly encourage follow-through on the commitments. Commitments should be immediately be entered in your database and should also be kept on file. A sample of this can be found in Appendix VI of the "Thanks Be to God" program packet.

I have also been calling parishes to follow up on their experience with the POP. We would very much appreciate it if you can send us your Planned Offering Program Evaluation (found in Appendix IX of the "Thanks Be To God" manual). Your feedback will assist us in serving your needs better. For your convenience, you can fax it to us at 312-531-7354.

For those of you who have not done the Planned Offering Program please give us a call so we can share with you a tested way of increasing your offertory collection. You can call me at 312-534-7713 or email at ldacanay@archchicago.org

And just as a reminder, we are now in our new location at the Quigley Building. Our new address is 835 N. Rush Street, Chicago IL 60611.

*Blessings,
Lea Dacanay*

Stewardship Bulletin Inserts

From the Archdiocese of St. Louis

January 4, 2009

Epiphany of the Lord

"The kings of Tarshish and the Isles shall offer gifts; the kings of Arabia and Seba shall bring tribute. All kings shall pay him homage, all nations shall serve him." - Psalm 72:10-11

What gifts do you set before the Lord? Does your list of New Year's Resolutions include better ways to give back to God and thank Him for His many blessings to you and your family?

January 11, 2009

Baptism of the Lord

"Thus says the Lord: Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased." - Isaiah 42:1

At our own Baptism, each of us became a servant of the Lord. God has chosen us and equipped us to do special work for Him. Everything that we accomplish in this life is a direct result of all that God has given to us. The question is: Are we accomplishing the things God put us here to do? Are we acting as God's servant or are we only serving our own needs? Is God pleased with the way we are fulfilling His special plan for us?

January 18, 2009

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

"Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to them, 'What are you looking for?'" - John 1:38

What are you looking for? That is a question Jesus asks each of us. It has been said there is a God shaped hole in every soul that only God can fill. Instead of spending time with God, though, we fill our days working for things that do not satisfy us but that society says we need to impress one another.

January 25, 2009

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

"Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." - Mark 1:17

Jesus' call to "Come after me" is a call to all Christians. Jesus asks us all to help Him in His work. By being good stewards, we, too, can help bring others closer to God.

February 1, 2009

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

"Brothers and sisters: I should like you to be free of anxieties." - 1 Corinthians 7:32

How many anxieties do we bring upon ourselves by constantly worrying about attaining ever more material possessions? Yet, God tells us that only the hand that is open to give can also be open to receive His peace and joy. A heart or a hand clenched in anxiety and greed can never receive

anything.

February 8, 2009

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

"Rising very early before dawn, he left and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed...He told them, 'Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also. For this purpose have I come.'" - Mark 1:35, 38

Through today's Gospel reading we see a perfect example of stewardship. Jesus gives His time to doing all that God wishes - healing the sick and preaching. Yet Jesus also makes time to be alone in prayer. It is only through prayer, through spending time with God, that any of us can find the strength to do all that God wishes us to do. Be sure to find time this week to be with God.

February 15, 2009

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

"Brothers and sisters: Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God." - 1 Corinthians 10:31

Are you doing everything possible for the glory of God? Or is there maybe some other way that you could use your time, talent or treasure for God's glory? Think about it.

February 22, 2009

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

"He rose picked up his mat at once and went away in the sight of everyone. They were all astounded and glorified God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this.'" - Mark 2:12

Have you taken any time lately to think about how truly good God has been to you? He may not have to cure your paralysis if He has already given you the gift of mobility. But do we glorify and thank Him for such simple gifts as sight, and speech, and general health? Do we give back to God in proportion to all the many blessings He has given to us?

March 1, 2009

1st Sunday of Lent

"After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God..." - Mark 1:14

Do you ever think about how difficult it must have been for Jesus to come into Galilee, knowing that John had just been arrested for teaching the same message that Jesus was proclaiming. It must have taken great love and trust for Jesus to do what the Father had sent Him here on earth to do. In the same way, following a life of stewardship takes great love and trust from us. We must be willing to surrender completely to God, trusting that God will always give us all that we need to fulfill His plan for us.

March 8, 2009

2nd Sunday of Lent

"I know how devoted you are to God, since you did not withhold from me your own beloved son." - Genesis 22:12

Abraham was so devoted to God that he was willing to sacrifice his only son. How does our own devotion compare? Do we withhold time, talent and treasure from the God who sacrificed His only Son for us?

March 15, 2009

3rd Sunday of Lent

"You shall not carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth." - Exodus 20:4

Have you created idols for yourself in different shapes? An idol can be in the shape of money, sports, fashion, travel, or anything else that we value more than God and His Word to us.

March 22, 2009

4th Sunday of Lent

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son..." - John 3:16

Of all the wonderful gifts that God has given to us, the gift of His own Son is truly the greatest. How can we ever thank God for a gift like that? God does not ask us to sacrifice our own precious firstborn, but He does ask that we make some sacrifices for Him.

March 29, 2009

5th Sunday of Lent

"I will be their God and they shall be my people." - Jeremiah 31:33

What does it mean to be God's people? It means that first we recognize that everything we have and everything we are truly belongs to God. It also means that we are willing to use our gifts and our lives to care for the world just as God cares for us. **December 14, 2008**

3rd Sunday of Advent

"The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted..." - Isaiah 61:1

The Lord God has anointed all of us through Baptism and He has sent each of us on a mission. Each of us has been given unique gifts and talents so that we can help fulfill God's mission here on earth. Are you doing the things Jesus sent you here to do?

"The promotion and practice of stewardship is important for the mission of the Church and for the spiritual well-being of each individual Christian. Everyone benefits from the sacrificial gift one makes of time, talent and treasure.

Pope Benedict XVI