

Spirit of Life

Parish Newsletter - Sept/Oct 2009

A Letter From Our Pastor

Make Fall a Season of Commitment

Dear Parishioners,

I don't know about you, but I still get a surge of adrenalin as Fall approaches. Even though I'm no longer in school, I feel a sense of anticipation when I see the shelves filled with brand-new notebooks, composition books, and all the assorted items students use. I'm aware once again of the great hopes, exciting dreams, and good intentions that a new school year holds.

Even for those parishioners not directly involved in school, the approach of the Fall season marks new beginnings. In early September, we marked the end of the summer vacation season with Labor Day, and our calendars reflect that fact. Many of you have calendars a lot like mine – they're full year round with appointments and obligations. But even for us, things get busier in September and October as various organizations that took a break during summer begin their regular round of meetings again.

Nevertheless, I have a request for you as you make out your schedules for the fall. First thing, please put in some time to share the talents God has given you. As you are aware, as Christian disciples – as stewards – we are called to return to God a portion of the Time, Talent, and Treasure he has entrusted to us. We should make our commitments to God when we begin our planning, so that we don't offer him just the scraps of time and energy left over after everything else.



Make this Fall a season when you make a commitment to sing in the choir, including attending rehearsals. Or begin working with our parish religious education in one way or another. Or decide to launder altar linens once a month. Or volunteer to help in the parish office one morning a week. Or help care for the parish grounds. Or

join the Knights of Columbus. Or join a social service ministry. Or, well, you get the idea.

There are many ministries and groups within the parish where you can serve, and you'll find that you receive even as you give. Hardly anyone in the parish can't find at least one activity in which they can participate and which fits their schedule. If you aren't involved, make this Fall season a time to change that.

Thinking about commitments, some people say they don't have time for prayer. Again, it's a matter of priorities, and I challenge any one of you to demonstrate to me that you can't pray at least one Our Father, one Hail Mary, and one Glory Be during the course of the day. That's at least a beginning.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Fr. Chad Gion".

Fr. Chad Gion

Pastor

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Time

The Foundation of Stewardship

Have you heard of Blessed Fr. Damien? This Belgian farm boy, shortly after being ordained a priest, volunteered to serve a colony of lepers isolated on the island of Molokai, Hawaii. From May 1873 until his death in 1889 (at the age of 49) Fr. Damien worked to restore within the lepers a sense of personal worth and dignity.

Leprosy is a hideous disease. In his journal, Fr. Damien wrote: "Many a time, in fulfilling my priestly duties at the lepers' homes, I have been obliged, not only to close my nostrils, but to remain outside to breathe fresh air." Their sight was horrid, their smell putrid. Yet Fr. Damien chose to remain.

Although for some time Fr. Damien took the necessary precautions to ensure that he did not contract leprosy, he knew that physical touch was necessary to communicate his love and concern. He embraced the lepers, dined with them, cared for them, and anointed them in the sacraments. With great humility and sacrifice, Fr. Damien offered his own life in order to save the lives of others.

From where did he draw strength? What was the source of his inspiration? "Were it not for the constant presence of our divine Master in our humble chapel, I would not have found it possible to persevere in sharing the lot of the lepers in Molokai," Fr. Damien wrote. "The Eucharist is the bread that gives strength... It is at once the most eloquent proof of His love and the most powerful means of fostering His love in us. He gives Himself every day

so that our hearts as burning coals may set afire the hearts of the faithful."

Fr. Damien found his strength in the Mass, the greatest prayer of the Church. Prayer was the impetus behind the

generosity of this faithful servant of God, and is the fuel that ignites every heart to flame in love. Without prayer, without the grace that flows from the sacraments, we are incapable of leading lives of service and responding to God's call!

How much time do you dedicate to prayer each day? One hour? 15 minutes? None at all? When pondering the three Ts of stewardship – time, talent, and treasure – the "time" component holds the position of greatest importance; it serves as the fertile ground from which the gifts of talent and treasure blossom. Only by spending time in prayer each day and receiving the sacraments are we able to consistently and generously donate our talent and treasure to the Church.

Have you considered joining a parish ministry or volunteering your talents in service? Wonderful! But before you make

a commitment, be sure that prayer is your foundation. Identify a prayer schedule that is manageable. This may entail arising 20 minutes early each day to offer your work to the Lord, or attending daily Mass once a week. Every prayer commitment is unique and personal. Yet no matter what, this time offering, this dedication to prayer, is the key to serving the Lord with faithfulness, generosity, and joy.



Soup Kitchen Ministry

Keeping Doors Wide Open for Christ

In 1990, Spirit of Life opened their doors and hearts to Christ in a whole new way through the Fellowship Luncheon, a project run by the Soup Kitchen Ministry.

Through this ministry, our parish family not only began providing free lunches for those in need, but also fellowship in a spiritual and welcoming atmosphere. This food is enjoyed by transients, people of all income levels, the elderly, homeless, handicapped, or those who simply enjoy fellowship. It is open to all people of all faiths. This past season, about 4,000 meals were served. Talk about hospitality and stewardship in action!

“The luncheon reaches all walks of life in our community, either through those who serve, or through those who are being served,” says Mari Jo Sigl, Outreach Minister and Soup Kitchen/Fellowship Luncheon Coordinator. “It provides a place for people to meet and fulfills an opportunity to socialize.”

The luncheon takes place in the Community Center every Thursday from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., from mid-September to mid-May. Overall, it is run by about 80 volunteers — Spirit of Life parishioners, as well as members of other parishes. The volunteers are divided into seven teams, which rotate serving the meals.

The meals include: soup, sandwich, coffee, juice and a dessert. At Thanksgiving, the volunteers put on an annual celebration with a full meal including turkey, dressing, pumpkin pie and all the trimmings. They usually serve more than 325 meals that day. In preparation for Easter, they have a speaker each week of Lent at the luncheons as well as a faith-sharing question related to the readings for that Sunday.

In the end, the luncheon grabs hold of the nuts-and-bolts of the Gospel message, emanating Christ’s love in a down-to-earth way that both volunteers and recipients enjoy.

“My favorite aspect of the luncheon is the sincere appreciation many of those who attend have towards our parish for the commitment we have shown in supporting this ministry,” says Mari Jo. “I look forward to visiting each week with every person who comes through the door and hope I make them feel as good as they make me feel.”

This ministry is funded through the Spirit of Life outreach account in addition to contributions specifically made for soup kitchen and donations of food from our community.

More volunteers are needed to help keep our parish doors wide open for Christ. For more information, contact Mari Jo at 663-1660 or email her at marijo@myspiritoflife.com.



Learning a New Dimension of Stewardship

The lush, rustic lands of Latin America and the humble faith of the Guatemalans came alive for eight teens from our parish when they went on a mission trip with Fr. Chad and Director of Youth Ministry and Confirmation Laura Just.

By the work of their hands, the teens learned a fascinating new dimension of stewardship. They discovered the beauty in befriending the poor, the power of the Church's missionary spirit, and the joy of embarking on a courageous adventure for Christ.

"It was a very, very good trip," says youth missionary Jessica Liffrig. "What touched me the most was seeing how happy the local people are yet how little they possess; this is what struck me the most. Their happiness is not based on their bank account. They are happy with each other."

"My favorite thing was being around other teenagers and seeing their faith," says youth missionary Anthony Moore. "I hope to go again next year."

The trip took place July 6-15, and it was the seventh mission trip Spirit of Life has taken with its teens to Guatemala. The group's main purpose was to help out at the San Lucas Mission, located in San Lucas, Toliman. They volunteered under Fr. Gregory Schaeffer, the mission's founding priest, who promotes programs that empower the people of San Lucas economically and socially through the mission.

Every morning while in San Lucas, the group woke up early to prepare breakfast for the local people, which, for many of them, was their only meal of the day. Fr. Gregory then lead the local people and volunteers in Morning Prayer. The volunteers then set out to focus on one of two missions. First, they leveled a soccer field at the school by the mission.



of Stewardship in Guatemala

In the end, it turned into quite a project but they made a good dent in it!

The second project was digging into the side of a volcano so the ground was level enough to pour a concrete patio that would be used to dry coffee beans. They filled gunny sacks with dirt, hauled the gunny sacks on their backs about 500 feet, and dumped them off the side of the volcano.

For many reasons, the trip was an undeniably awesome experience for all those who went.

“This was a ‘once in a lifetime experience,’” says teen Katie Kuchynski. “Fr. Greg is an inspiration to us all. He has not only given the Mayan people the land to live and work on but he lets them make their own decisions on how to work the land, they take ownership and great pride in the crops they grow. Fr. Greg lives his life in a true ‘Christ-like’ manner and sets an example of service to others that has left an impression deep in my heart.”

In all, the teens had a real “eye-opening” experience, like Laura did.

“Any time we are given the opportunity to help others, we grow,” says Laura. “The awareness of the poverty in our world and yet the joy and faith of the people living in it, despite their lack of even the bare essentials, opened my eyes to how much I take for granted.”

As far as trip fundraising, each teen was asked to contact friends and family to help raise the money they needed for the trip. For example, they put on two successful fundraising events, a Valentines’ Day Supper, for which the teens helped prepare and serve a meal, as well as the April Polka Mass and German Supper with silent auction.

Many thanks are extended to all those who supported our teens in going on this life-changing mission for Christ. It was, indeed, the trip of a lifetime.



What is a Stewardship Renewal?

This isn't a parish fundraiser – far from it. Our annual Stewardship Renewal is the time when we ask each other to re-prioritize the way we use God's gifts in the Church. It is the time we write down how we will support Spirit of Life.

Why should I fill out a commitment card?

Your Commitment Card allows you to make commitments to prayer, parish ministries, and offertory giving, or what we at Spirit of Life call "time, talent, and treasure." There's a two-fold reason to complete your card. First, it is an excellent opportunity to move forward spiritually and personally. Second, when you fill out a card, our parish is much better able to manage our many volunteers and make budgeting decisions.

How many parish ministries are there at Spirit of Life?

"Ministry" is a general term for any parish group, organization, or regular activity. There are dozens of ministries in our parish. You can sign up for certain ministries, or re-commit yourself if you're already involved.

What if I sign up for a ministry, but later find I'm not very interested?

You are not making a solemn promise to participate in a particular ministry when you mark it on your commitment card. If you find that the parish group is different than you thought, or simply that their meeting time doesn't fit your schedule, you can change your mind. There are plenty of other ministries to consider.

I'm hesitant to make a firm financial pledge. What if I lose my job?

Your commitment card isn't a legal contract. If your circumstances change, your gift will change. In scripture, we are asked to "give according to our means." So if you lose your job, you may be unable to give at the level you pledged. Likewise, if you get a promotion, you may be able to give more. That is why at Spirit of Life, our standard of giving is based upon a percentage of income.

What happens if I don't fill out a commitment card?

Returning a card is an important part of being an active member of Spirit of Life. If for some reason you lose your card, we'll send you a reminder letter with an extra commitment card. Please make every effort to return it!

DISCIPLESHIP THROUGH STEWARDSHIP

2009 STEWARD RENEWAL

Spirit of Life Catholic Church

2009 Commitment Card
My Offering of Time, Talent & Treasure

First & Last Name (One card per family) _____

Street Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Telephone (Important) _____

Email _____

After completion, please bring this card to Mass on **October 3rd or 4th**, or mail using the envelope provided. Thank you and God bless you!

Time, Talent & Treasure

Stewardship of Time

Our definition of Stewardship of Time: Using my time on earth wisely; making time for personal prayer, family prayer, and quality time with friends and loved ones.

The bottom line about prayer: Without prayer, we cannot thrive spiritually. As Catholic Christians, it is a necessity to spend time each day speaking to God. This includes reading scripture and saying prayers such as the Our Father and Hail Mary, but even more importantly, it should include a heart-to-heart conversation with Jesus. He wants us to bring him all our fears, longings, needs, and desires.

What kind of Time commitments should I make?

Your commitment card lists several suggestions for how to spend time with God in prayer. Review your current prayer life and take a step forward. For instance, start having daily prayers with your children or spouse. Commit to praying the rosary on the way to work or reading scripture before bed each night.

Stewardship of Talent

Our definition of Stewardship of Talent: Using my God-given abilities to strengthen the Church and help others, especially through parish ministries and activities.

The bottom line about parish ministry: No Catholic Christian exists in a vacuum. Scripture makes it clear that we must function within the wider faith community, putting our gifts in the service of others. It's not enough to go to Sunday Mass; we need to be involved in parish life and ministry.

What kind of Talent commitments should I make?

If you're not involved in anything in our parish, now is the perfect opportunity to take a step forward. Check out our commitment card for a list of ministries. If you're already involved, re-commit yourself to the important work you do. And if you feel God is calling you forward – sign up for something new!

Stewardship of Treasure

Our definition of Stewardship of Treasure: The wise and just management of my financial resources; giving a proportionate amount of my income to the parish.

The bottom line about financial support: We need to take seriously the Biblical concept of the tithe, and start giving based on a percentage of income. It's our responsibility to support the Church with our personal involvement and our financial support.

What kind of Treasure commitments should I make?

Our goal at Spirit of Life is to give 5 percent of income to the offertory. Grab a calculator and figure out your target gift based on your total household income. Then make a plan for increasing your gift incrementally to reach 5 percent. During our Stewardship Renewal, choose a weekly or monthly gift to the parish, and be faithful to it for the next year.

Please bring your Commitment Card
to Mass on Commitment Sunday, October 3-4.
How will you use your time, talent & treasure in our parish?



Spirit of Life

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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

Respect Life Month

Join the Ranks in October

All Catholics are summoned to action, yet not all respond. In an apostolic exhortation entitled *The Church in America*, Pope John Paul II described the “stamp of the culture of death,” present within American society.

The “powerless” are the unborn, helpless victims of abortion; the elderly and the ill, subjected to euthanasia; the marginalized of society, and victims of the death penalty.

In light of the looming culture of death, Pope John Paul II summoned all Catholics to action: “Faced with this distressing reality, the Church community intends to commit itself all the more to the defense of the culture of life.”

The call is clear, the stakes are set, and Christ’s army is currently engaged in battle. As parishioners and members of the holy Catholic Church, we all are among the ranks.

October is Respect Life month and the perfect time to prayerfully examine our consciences in light of these issues, which directly violate the dignity of the human person. This includes not only the evil of abortion, but also euthanasia, stem cell research, capital punishment, and contraception, all of which are vital contributors to the pervasive culture of death.

Ask yourself: Do I, in my personal, day-to-day choices, respect life? If so, do I boldly proclaim this belief or merely stand idle? Do I exercise my right to vote and support candidates who promote a culture of life? Am I known within my home, family, and/or workplace as someone that respects life?

As with every movement of a Christian heart towards goodness, it is imperative that our efforts issue forth from a prayerful foundation. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, we will receive the zeal necessary to promote the sanctity of human life, even in the face of suffering.

During the month of October, please pray for a revitalization of the culture of life. As you pray, allow the Holy Spirit to fill you with apostolic boldness; ask the Lord to guide your heart towards ways in which you – personally – can contribute to the culture of life.

The call is clear, the stakes are set, and all Catholics are summoned to action. How will you respond?