

Dear Fellow St. Joseph Parishioners:

My name is Rita D'arcy .

Growing up in Whiting we always went to church as a family. When my sisters and I began attending Catholic school, my parents would participate in jobs that needed to be done around the church, such as, cleaning the church pews and polishing the floors for the Christmas and Easter holidays, participating in the Holy Name Society, driving the nuns around town so they could run their errands even making them pierogis and czarnina so they could have those special Polish treats for the holidays. Little did I know or even think about this until almost a year ago is that my parents were laying the foundation for my sisters and myself to become stewards in our respective parishes.

When I moved to this area from Whiting, I began reflecting and visiting other parishes in the area deciding where to become a member. In my previous parish, (St. Adalbert) I was a member of the choir and a lector so I knew that I wanted to continue using my voice to share God's word with others. I was also on the Parish Counsel and volunteered my time for other festivals and fundraisers that we had at the parish.

I used to ride in a vanpool to Chicago with Phyllis Howard, a member of our wonderful choir and she told me that St. Joe's was always looking for new choir members, so that sealed the deal for me. After several years of health issues and not being able to use my voice in singing, I decided to become a lector and have been one ever since.

When I stand up here every first Sunday of the month or filling in for some one else and share the readings with you I feel a sense of peace and joy and thank God that he has given me this gift to use to praise Him and share his word with you.

God has given all of us the gift of a voice and how we choose to use it in his honor is our Gift to Him. We at St. Joe's are always looking for members to join our lector ministry.

Thank you.

Good Morning / Good Evening

I would like to speak to you today about the word "yes". The word "yes" is full of promise. It speaks of possibilities yet untold. It also can express a willingness to move forward, leaving the past behind. "Yes" may also cause fear and worry – it may take us outside what we know and understand.

My first call into stewardship ministry here at St. Joseph's came from a bachelor setting up his new home. He asked if I would be willing to help with the unpacking. I said "yes" and immediately I began to reconsider my decision. I began to think of what I would not be able to accomplish in my schedule while I was doing this. A commitment made is a commitment kept so I went and helped with unpacking, polishing, and sweeping. While I was there my thoughts kept focusing on God and the quality of my spiritual life. At the time I did not recognize the significance of this experience.

Shortly after, Fr. Terry spoke to me and my husband about starting the Environmental & Art Committee at St Joe's. My husband generously offered my "Yes". And so my stewardship journey continued.

Why might you want to experience stewardship more fully? You might say that I can pray anytime I want? You also may say "I can help people any time I do not have to participate in a formal stewardship ministry? But I have to ask, do you? Are you able to put aside the world demands to make the time to pray or make time to participate in helping others?

Participating in stewardship is a spiritual response to God's call of discipleship. "The commitment changes the way we live our lives. It is a counter-cultural challenge of the Gospel to follow Jesus regardless of the personal cost." I know that this statement sounds really scary, but if you remember my response to the bachelor's request, your reaction and mine is not uncommon at all.

During the mass, in our church, the encounter between the divine and the human takes place in the liturgy. It is what makes this sacred space so special. This is why the church is to be sublimely beautiful and diligently cared for. The care with which we prepare the environment is already an indication of the appreciation we have for what takes place here. The environment we create through our decorations, enhancements and lighting has a direct affect on the celebration of the liturgy. Knowing all of this, how could we possibly achieve this task without God's direction?

When I first began my stewardship in the Environment & Art committee it was at times overwhelming. There was so much to do and many times my confidence was tested. Would our efforts be good enough for God? Fortunately we had a very committed group of believers. Some of our community was seasoned stewards and their faith was experienced and strong. Their faith did not waver even in times of great angst – they even seemed calm. I learned from them that all I had to do was trust God and consider that he was in charge. I was only the vehicle. St Paul in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians tells us "...although our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day". As I was humbled in my ministry I found that there was more room for God to work in my life. I also eventually came to truly believe that my confidence was to found in solely in God as He gave me everything – all of my talents, intellect, stamina and desire.

If you are worried that "I have so much to do; there is no time; or I will get nothing out of it". I can personally assure you that if you can make the initial commitment, God will do the rest - if you are willing – if you keep saying "yes". You will not be alone in your ministry. There will be many other stewards to help and inspire. The Spirit will work in your life in ways you will not imagine. Over time you will realize the joy and freedom the Spirit will bring to you life – if you only keep saying "YES". I am sure there will be times that you will need to struggle with your commitment but you will find that you will always be rewarded. God continues to reveal himself to me as I am ready to receive his message. Stewardship is one of the ways that has allowed my conversion to begin, develop and deepen.

Initially it is not easy to become a self-less steward but Jesus tells us that "those that lose their life will save it". Just take baby steps, gather your courage to be different and just keep saying "YES" like me.

By: Karen Ziolkowski

MY NAME IS TOM HEFFERNAN. I AM HERE TODAY TO TELL YOU ABOUT MY STEWARDSHIP AS A LECTOR. WE HAVE BEEN HEARING ABOUT STEWARDSHIP AND THAT IT IS NOT A PROGRAM , BUT A WAY OF LIFE! I FEEL GOD HAS GIVEN ME THE DESIRE TOBECOME A GOOD STEWARD.

I AM PURSUING STEWARDSHIP BECAUSE I TRULY BELIEVE THAT GOD HAS GIVEN ME TALENTS AND THAT HE EXPECTS ME TO USE THEM TO BE OF SERVICE TO OTHERS. THEY WERE NOT GIVEN TO ME JUST FOR MY PLEASURE.

EVERYTHING I HAVE IS A GIFT FROM GOD THAT I DID NOT EARN OR DESERVE. IF I HAD BEEN BORN BLIND, WITH NO ARMS AND A SPEECH IMPEDIMENT, MY ABILITY TO DO THINGS WOULD BE FAR DIFFERENT THAN THEY ARE.

HERE IS MY STORY REGARDING BECOMING A LECTOR, WHICH IS A PERSON WHO PROCLAIMS THE WORD OF GOD DURING MASS. MANY YEARS AGO AT QUEEN OF APOSTLES IN RIVERDALE A PRIEST SUGGESTED THAT I BECOME A LECTOR. THE FIRST TIME I READ WAS AT A WEEK DAY 7AM MASS, WITH ABOUT 6 PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH, AND I WAS SCARED TO DEATH. I FELT LIKE I WAS IN FRONT OF 60,000 PEOPLE AT SOLDIER'S FIELD.

GRADUALLY I BECAME MORE COMFORTABLE AND EVENTUALLY I WAS IN CHARGE OF ALL LECTORS. I RECRUITED THE LECTORS, MADE UP THE SCHEDULES, AND DELIVERED THEM TO THEIR HOMES. THIS WAS BEFORE THE DAYS OF E-MAIL. I EVEN CONVINCSD ALL THE LECTORS TO ROTATE THROUGH ALL THE MASSES ON SUNDAYS SO THAT ALL THE PEOPLE WERE EXPOSED TO ALL THE LECTORS.

WHEN I MOVED AND STARTED TO ATTEND ST JAMES IN SAUK VILLAGE I JOINED THEIR LECTOR GROUP. THEN ABOUT 5 YEARS AGO I JOINED ST JOE'S, AND AGAIN I JOINED THE LECTOR GROUP.

WHILE I AM INVOLVED IN OTHER STEWARDSHIPS I HAVE BEEN A LECTOR FOR THE LONGEST PERIOD OF TIME, AND HAVE BEEN BLESSED WITH THE OPPORTUNITY OF READING AT MANY BIG CELEBRATIONS SUCH AS THE MARRIAGES OF NIECES AND NEPHEWES, SILVER AND GOLDEN ANNIVERSARIES OF PRIESTS AND VARIOUS FUNERALS. ANOTHER BENEFIT THAT I HAVE RECEIVED BY BEING A LECTOR IS THAT I UNDERSTAND THE EPISTLES READ AT MASS BETTER BECAUSE WHEN I PRACTICE MY READINGS USING THE WORKBOOK FOR LECTORS, EVERY READING HAS HISTORICAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE AREA AND THE PEOPLE AT THE TIME THE PASSAGE WAS WRITTEN.

STEWARDSHIP REQUIRED A CHANGE IN MY LIFESTYLE! I HAD TO START THINKING MORE ABOUT WHAT I SHOULD DO RATHER THAN WHAT WAS PLEASING TO ME.

IF YOU THINK YOU WOULD LIKE TO BECOME A LECTOR OR HAVE ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING THIS MINISTRY I WILL BE IN THE BACK OF CHURCH AFTER MASS. THANK YOU.

My Dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, I thank you for these few moments to allow me to share with you my journey as a catechist, my first step in my pursuit of stewardship at St. Joseph Parish. It all began approximately ten years ago, when, by the grace of God, I opened up my heart to the Holy Spirit. Among many things, the Holy Spirit filled me with a great desire to learn our Catholic faith, and I was given the gift of clarity and understanding regarding the Faith. It was at this time my own Children, Carly and Taylor, were enrolled in St. Joseph's Religious Education Program. I had grown very disappointed at the lack of catechesis being taught as I would weekly ask my Children what they had did in class. As I expressed my displeasure to my wife, Susan, she would challenge me, saying- why don't you teach? The thought was intriguing to me, however I just couldn't see myself as a teacher; much less an Religious Ed Teacher. I am a very introverted person with a great fear of speaking before groups of more than two people. Also, I led a very busy lifestyle and I wasn't at the point where I thought I could give up one night a week to teach, much less give up the time to prepare. I never even thought about the extra curricular activities that went along with teaching. Needless to say, my complaining continued. This changed when the Parish Bulletin began running an ad searching for potential catechist. This was the perfect opportunity for my wife to again challenge me and say- well, why don't you teach? Well, the seed which had been planted earlier, had begun to germinate. I reflected upon the new found desire for the faith I had received from the Holy Spirit, which had inspired me to study about the teachings of Jesus Christ, and I began discerning becoming a catechist. After the third week of seeing the ad, I finally succumbed to the prompting of the Spirit and called the RE office. This would be the beginning of a wonderful journey. A journey filled with

opportunities to share The Faith and the Teachings of Jesus Christ with the Children of this Parish. This fall, I will be entering my ninth year as a catechist, one year teaching sixth grade, the last seven teaching the eighth graders. Being a catechist has been awesome! Each year my knowledge of the Faith has increased and my relationship with Holy Trinity has deepened. As an Eighth grade catechist, I have the privilege and responsibility in preparing the students for Sacrament of Confirmation. This includes, not only, classroom preparation but also weekend retreats such as the Source & Summit Retreat, mini-retreats such as the ones given by Fr. Terry Deffenbough, and Generations of Faith which brings the R. E. Families together to learn and share the Faith. We also introduce to the students to different works of stewardship such as visiting the aging in Nursing Homes and preparing and serving meals at the St. Victor Soup Kitchen.

Life as a catechist has led me to many encounters with Jesus Christ. Whether in the classroom, on a retreat, or serving at the Soup Kitchen- these encounters with Jesus Christ were real, deepening my relationship with God. This has led me down many avenues; many of which I could of never imagined going down. I have grown to love the Catholic Faith and I thank God for the gift of allowing me to share this Faith with the Children of St. Joseph Parish. I encourage anyone who feels a pull or a tug to becoming a catechist to respond to that feeling- for that is the way the Holy Spirit works. Now, I know not all of us are called to be a catechist, however we are all called to use the gifts that we have been blessed with to serve our Creator Father. I encourage all of you to take time to reflect upon the gifts that God has blessed you with. Take these gifts to prayer and ask God how you can use those gifts to advance His Kingdom here in this Parish and on

this earth. The best thing that we can do is to open our hearts to the Holy Spirit more and more each day. As we learn how to do this, we'll begin to hear him speaking to our hearts. I have learned that the Holy Spirit speaks in many ways- He speaks through the silence of prayer, The Spirit speaks through our family and friends, the Spirit speaks through our Pastor and fellow parishioners and the Holy Spirit may even speak through our Parish bulletin. I have witnessed recently the life of the Holy Spirit growing within this Parish, through our Pastor Fr. Terry and through our dedicated Stewardship committee. I ask you to turn to our Heavenly Father in prayer and listen for what he is saying to you. He may lead you to places you hadn't planned to go. He may open doors to new relationships or a new ministry. Whatever God has to say to you, it is a message of grace, love and promise. May God bless you all,

Gary Blue