



## Implementing Parish Stewardship

by Dan Frederick, St. John the Evangelist parish, Calgary

St. John the Evangelist is Calgary's newest Catholic community, led by Father Andrew Pyon. We were formed in 2003 to serve the developing Simons Valley area of the city. We have no land and Masses are held in the gymnasium of St. Elizabeth Seton Elementary/Junior High in Hidden Valley.

The mission of the Stewardship Committee of St. John the Evangelist Catholic Parish is to promote the building of our community in anticipation of the building of our church. We will do this through the responsible management of all resources—our time, our talents, and our treasure—entrusted to us by God. The committee's focus is to nurture the spirit of Christian stewardship, to expand the level of participation, and to return our gifts with increase to the Lord.

### How we got started

The stewardship initiative at St. John the Evangelist started in April 2005 with the diocesan workshop. Father Andrew asked René Letourneau and Dan Frederick to attend the session presented by Father Dan Mahan of Batesville, Indiana. Father Dan was a very engaging speaker and gave us a lot of good inspiration to get started. Our stewardship program formally began with our parish's attendance at the International Catholic Stewardship Conference in San Francisco in October 2005. The conference presented us with a wealth of useful information and testimony from successes all over North America.

### What has worked

Coming off of our stewardship conference, there were a lot of easy ideas that we could implement right away. Some of the things we've worked on include:

Increasing our attention to hospitality. We used to have regular coffee after our last Sunday Mass each week, but it stopped when it became too much work for one individual. We now do Coffee Sunday once per month, with a different ministry hosting each month. This makes it a little more of an "event", and spreads the work around to more members of the parish. We now have a coordinator who only needs to ensure all the supplies are made available each week.

Welcoming committee. Father Andrew now sends each new parishioner a personal letter welcoming them to the parish. As well, two members of our stewardship committee are tasked with personally calling each new member of the parish and welcoming them. This provides the personal touch and ensures all new members have someone they can turn to if they encounter any issues.

Parish survey. In early March, we conducted a parish survey with about 30 questions asking about the liturgy, the leadership and their overall impressions. The responses will be used to help focus our efforts for the next year.

Lenten stewardship sessions. During Lent, the stewardship committee presented short 30-minute sessions on different aspects of stewardship at St. John's. The sessions followed the Stations of the Cross every Friday, so did not involve a separate night out for any of the participants.

Mass introductions. Just before the entrance, the first lector welcomes the parishioners and summarizes the readings. So far this has been an inspirational way to commence the celebration.

Bulletin stewardship quotes. Every week, Father Andrew adds a stewardship quote to the bulletin. It's another way to keep the stewardship message current.

### What we plan to improve

Despite our efforts, people are still not comfortable greeting their neighbours before Mass. We haven't been consistent including a "greet your neighbour" time with our introductions, and this has been one area that we need to improve.

Another area of improvement is in our ministry development. We currently hold workshops once per year and it is suspected that we lose people and alienate others by not having a real smooth admissions system for new ministers.

Hospitality needs attention. Despite our success at improving our hospitality, it's not yet a natural part of our culture. This will take time and we risk losing this important aspect of building community if we don't continue to focus on it.

# Stewards of our Baptism

by Quinton Amundson, St. Mary's Parish, Brooks

*As the community of St. Mary's in Brooks Alberta prepared to celebrate Easter and welcome new members into the Catholic faith, parishioner Quinton Amundson, age 13, shared with the candidates for Baptism what being a Catholic means to him. Quinton's message reminds us of the responsibility and sacrifice involved in the Christian life. It is this commitment, Quinton explains, that provides membership both in the community of the church and the community of the Trinity. Our call to stewardship began when we were claimed for Christ in Baptism and it continues with the baptismal promises we renew every Easter.*



I have been a Catholic since I was baptised as a baby. Back then, it was my parents' decision to raise me in the Catholic faith. We have always said prayers at home and have attended and participated in weekly masses. My parents enrolled me in a Catholic school. I then celebrated First Reconciliation and First Communion. It was at the sacrament of my Confirmation last year that I made the decision to continue on the journey of my faith.

To me, being a Catholic has given me a support system; I know I can count on God 24/7. I know that God expects me to love and serve Him all the days of my life. I think that anyone who is thinking about becoming a Catholic has to realise that this is a life-long commitment. You can't just be a Catholic when it suits you. You have to stay committed and have faith through all the ups and downs in your life. The way

I look at it, your preparation for Baptism is comparable to sitting by the side of a pool, dangling your feet in the water. Once you're baptised it will be like taking a plunge into a deep pool; you will be totally immersed in the Catholic faith.

Some Catholic activities in which I have really felt God's presence include: The Face to Face Retreats 2004/2005, Youth Mass at St. Michael's in Calgary, and receiving the sacrament of Confirmation. Lately, I have really been inspired by the fellowship of the Youth Revolution. I enjoy taking part in the Fishers for Christ Program held weekly at St. Joseph Collegiate.

Every day I feel blessed to know that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are providing me love, forgiveness, and guidance. I hope that all of the baptismal candidates grow in fellowship with the Catholic community as we continue on our faith journey.

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## Challenges

The biggest challenge for our committee is time. Our parishioners are mainly young, with young families. Our committee members struggle to attend our stewardship meetings, let alone to contribute to any initiatives that result from our meetings. In that way, our focus needs to be to spread the time commitment out to more members of the parish. We recognize that this is an uphill battle, but one that should pay off with greater community involvement.

## Next Steps

Some of the items on our agenda for the near future include:

Ministry formation: We'll be looking at ways to either have a continuous formation program, or to hold ministry workshops at least semi-annually, in addition to the creation of new ministries.

Youth ministry: Our youth programs will be evaluated and developed in an attempt to appeal to a larger audience and provide more value to our youth.

Evangelisation: Community outreach through neighbourhood pancake breakfasts and other activities.

## *Deus Caritas Est*

### God is love: Stewardship Reflections

*Last January, Pope Benedict XVI published his first encyclical entitled “Deus caritas est”. The document is an extended reflection on the nature and responsibility of Christian love. God loved us by sending the Son to be incarnate in the world and to give his life for the redemption of humanity. Stewardship is the incarnation of that love in our lives as disciples. Love is at the centre of our discipleship and the guiding principle of stewardship practices. Below are some highlights from the encyclical. I invite you to spend time with them, reflecting on how the love of Christ is incarnate in your life and the life of your church community.*

#### **Anyone who wishes to give love must also receive love as a gift. (7)**

Pope Benedict begins the encyclical by juxtaposing two ancient Greek terms for love: *eros* and *agape*. *Eros* is an ascending love, seeking God and intoxicated by the promise of happiness. Along the way, however, *eros* encounters others and draws nearer to God. Thereby *eros* is converted and loses something of itself as it increasingly seeks the happiness of the other and wants to bestow itself for the other. In this way *agape* enters into love. *Agape* is a descending love that is concerned with the discovery of the other. *Eros* searches and receives. *Agape* passes on the gift received. The one reality of love depends as much upon receiving as it does upon giving. The first principle of stewardship is to receive God’s gifts with gratitude. It is not possible to become a giver unless one first receives. *We love because God first loved us* (1 John 4:19). Receiving is difficult. Receiving challenges our self-sufficiency, requires humility, and puts one into relationship with the giver. When Pope Benedict talks about the path of *eros*, he describes it as a path of ascent, renunciation, purification, and healing. Taking the risk to genuinely receive from God puts us on that same path, a path that through the discovery of God purifies our selfish seeking *eros* into grateful giving *agape*.

#### **The Eucharist draws us into Jesus’ act of self-oblation. (13)**

The greatest gift of love, of course, was God’s sacrifice of his only Son on the cross for our salvation. Through Jesus’ institution of the eucharist, this oblation is present for us time and again in the celebration of mass. As we were all taught when we were children, and as we still teach children today, the appropriate response to a gift is an expression of thanksgiving. As adults, we still need to be reminded to say ‘thank you’. How often have you heard an adult say that he or she has not been getting anything out of mass? Although receiving and giving can never be completely separated, this criticism stems from a lack of understanding about the purpose of the eucharist. The word ‘eucharist’ comes from a Greek word meaning ‘thanksgiving’. It is an action word, a verb. Not surprisingly, gratitude affects how we celebrate and experience the eucharist. When we recognise God’s gifts and have gratitude, then we have something to bring to the church’s one great act of thanksgiving. The celebration of the eucharist is not something we receive but something we offer. In offering the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, we are united with and drawn into Jesus’ offering of himself. It is in the eucharist that we join our imperfect offering to the perfect prayer of Jesus. As the encyclical explains, this sacramental expression of gratitude brings us into union with God through sharing in Jesus’ gift of his body and blood, which in turn brings us into union with all to whom he gave himself. Therefore, eucharistic communion brings together worship and service, the reality of being loved and of loving others in turn.

#### **Seeing with the eyes of Christ, I can give to others much more than their outward necessities;**

#### **I can give them the look of love which they crave. (18)**

*Caritas* is often understood as the meeting of material needs: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, freeing captives. These certainly are expressions of love. Yet, even in the most just society or among the most materially privileged, there is still a place for love, which offers people “refreshment and care for their souls.” (28b) Moreover, in order to see with the eyes of Christ and truly give a look of love, the giver of charity is challenged not to merely give to needs but to share *in* the needs and suffering of others. The Christian steward has a need to give. *Caritas*, as explained in this encyclical, demands a transformative gift of self: “If my gift is not to prove a source of humiliation, I must give to others not only something that is my own, but my very self; I must be personally present in my gift.” (34) With such a complete act of charity, both the served and the servant return to God.

## St. Bonaventure

*Bonaventure (1217-1274) was a Franciscan saint, theologian, administrator, and Doctor of the Church. The church celebrates his feast on July 15th. This season of the church year, which includes Pentecost Sunday, the Feast of Trinity Sunday, and the Feast of Corpus Christi, is well-suited to remember the writings of the 'Seraphic Doctor'. In Bonaventure's thought, Christology and Trinitarian theology are inseparable. His spirituality urges Christians to conform to Christ as a means of conforming to the Trinity. With cruciform love, human nature participates in the divine life of the Trinity. At the end of his spiritual tract, "The Tree of Life", St. Bonaventure offers this prayer to obtain the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit—a prayer appropriate to Pentecost and always.*

We, therefore, pray  
to the most kind Father  
through you, his only-begotten Son,  
who for us became man, was crucified and glorified,  
that he send us  
out of his treasures  
the Spirit of sevenfold grace  
who rested upon you in all fulness:  
the Spirit, I say, of WISDOM,  
that we may taste the life-giving flavors  
of the fruit of the tree of life,  
which you truly are;  
the gift also of UNDERSTANDING,  
by which the intentions of our mind are illumined;  
the gift of COUNSEL,  
by which we may follow in your footsteps on the right paths;  
the gift of FORTITUDE,  
by which we may be able to weaken the violence  
of our enemies' attacks;  
the gift of KNOWLEDGE,  
by which we may be filled with the brilliant light  
of your sacred teaching  
to distinguish good and evil;  
the gift of PIETY,  
by which we may acquire a merciful heart;  
the gift of FEAR,  
by which we may draw away from all evil  
and be set at peace  
by submitting in awe to your eternal majesty.  
For you have wished  
that we ask for these things  
in that sacred prayer which you have taught us;  
through your cross,  
for the praise of your most holy name.  
To you,  
with the Father and the Holy Spirit,  
be honor and glory,  
thanksgiving, beauty and power,  
forever and ever.  
Amen.

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