

Stewardship: Not Just for Parishes

By Simone Brosig, Ph.D., Stewardship Coordinator

The word has been out for a while now: Christian stewardship is not about money or fundraising. We need to exercise good stewardship in our relationship to money, but finances are only one area of stewardship. Similarly, while sharing our gifts in the parish can be an expression of stewardship, parish-based ministry is only one example of stewardship. So then what is this stewardship that is not simply the giving of time, talent, and treasure in the parish? A participant in a stewardship workshop once remarked: I am busy working full time, trying to be a good parent, an attentive spouse, I look after ageing parents, and I am active in my parish. How can I possibly add stewardship to this already overburdened agenda? Therein lies the answer. The primary locus for our discipleship is not the parish. Our baptism in Christ demands our discipleship first and foremost in the family, the workplace, and on the street. The parish is not where we end up, but where we begin and return repeatedly for formation and nourishment. Timothy Radcliffe OP concludes his latest book saying: Why go to church? To be sent from it (Why Go to Church: The Drama of the Eucharist, 2008).

Stewardship is not something to add to an already overburdened agenda. Stewardship is a way of life. In other words, stewardship is a *disposition* that orients everything you do towards Jesus. Whether you are busy being a spouse, parent, employer, employee, caregiver, student, etc. if you do all these things as a disciple, that is stewardship. We need to be stewards in every area of our lives from finances to the food we consume, from our education to our entertainment.

This year the parent committee at Ecole St. Cecilia formed a stewardship committee to foster shared Catholic values, especially a need to give that comes from within. The committee identified several principles to direct their initiative:

1. **Service learning:** The committee aims to link giving in the school explicitly to student learning
2. **Attitude of abundance:** In place of the culture of want and a focus on what the school doesn't have, the committee wants to take an inventory of the gifts with which they have been blessed and find ways to use these gifts for the common good and good of those in need
3. **Everyone has something to give:** Every family, every parent, every child has something to give. The committee wants to create an atmosphere that welcomes a broader scope of gifts so that there are opportunities for everyone to give
4. **Looking outward:** The stewardship committee is widening the perspective of stewardship to include local needs, the environment, children's health, social justice, and global matters.

Ecole St. Cecilia is a great example of taking the commitment of discipleship seriously. With the plan they've developed, parents, teachers, and students will put stewardship into practice both in their own lives and using the resources in the school community. Stewardship is not only for the parish; it is for all Catholics all the time in all places.

[Sidebar]

The committee at St. Cecilia has selected three activities for the 2009 – 2010 school year to kick off stewardship education and action in the school. Remember, the first principle of stewardship is "to receive God's gifts with gratitude". God showers us with blessings even if we fail to ask but gratitude depends on realising that all our gifts come from God. The source of all these good stewardship ideas and the fuel to carry them through is prayer.

June and September 2009: Surplus School Supplies

Many families find themselves with a surplus of unused school supplies at the end of June—pencils that were never sharpened, packages of unopened paper, duotangs and report covers labelled but never used. Yet, there never seems to be enough to make up a full package for the following year. This year students will have an opportunity to donate these surplus supplies to help students at Ecole St. Cecilia's sister school.

October 2009: Feed the Hungry

Hosted at St. Mary's Hall fifty Sundays a year, dinner is served to individuals and families in Calgary who are hungry. Ecole St. Cecilia will be supporting St. Cecilia Parish in the dinner they sponsor this fall. The opportunity to help on site will be limited to students in grade six accompanied by a parent.

March 2010: Chores During Lent

Students will be invited to create a chore schedule with their parents so that they can earn money to donate to the recipient organisation selected for that year. Students who already receive an allowance for chores may choose to donate a portion of the allowance instead. Instead of a financial target, the objective will be a high level of participation and learning about service. The recipient organisation for 2010 is the Juvenile Diabetes Research Fund of Canada.