



THE HISTORY OF STEWARDSHIP IN THE DIOCESE OF WICHITA

Stewardship is a way of life and a vital part of the Diocese of Wichita. Giving of our Time, our talent and our Treasure and bringing us closer to God was the message Father Thomas McGread brought to Saint Francis of Assisi parish in Wichita, Kansas when he was appointed pastor in 1968. He brought with him a vision from the words of Saint Peter:

“As each one has received a gift,
Use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”
(1 Peter 4:10)

This vision was then conveyed and began to be lived by the 600 families of the parish.

Monsignor McGread’s message was simple: Strive to share our gifts of time, talent and treasure for the service of God and all of His people. Do this out of thanksgiving to God for all that He has given us.

The following elements assisted in this vision:

- a. The parish realized and embraced **a unified mission**, which at St. Francis is: *“To nourish our love of God through Jesus Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Centered in the Eucharist, we are developing a faith community through prayer, education, worship, and Christian fellowship. As stewards of God’s love, we strive to share our gifts and talents for the service of God and all His people.”*
- b. Secondly, **the message remained consistent**. Over and over Father McGread would preach the message of stewardship, especially the gift of time which every single person was given;
- c. Thirdly, stewardship was seen as **a way of life and a manner of action**. Parishioners were challenged to recognize, receive and accept their God given giftedness, then within a well-organized process, to annually commit to the sharing of their time, talent, and treasure generously, sacrificially, and proportionately in the service to the broad mission of the parish and the wider universal Church.

In observation of what was emerging at St. Francis and other parishes such as the Church of the Magdalen, and seeing the growing challenges and needs within the diocese of Wichita, Bishop Eugene J. Gerber designed and facilitated a diocesan wide listening and planning process in 1984.

It was called, "A People Gathered." Similar to a diocesan synod, over 100 listening sessions were conducted throughout the diocese in 1985. Bishop Gerber asked three questions:

1. What are the qualities that make a good parish?
2. What are the obstacles that prevent a good parish from accomplishing its mission?
3. As a parish, what would you do if you had unlimited resources?

As the gatherings continued with input from priests, pastors, parishioners and parishes, it became clear there was a general consensus to embrace a diocesan wide, parish based stewardship way of life process.

The primary goal of this diocesan wide, parish based stewardship way of life was: To free the gifts of the Body of Christ in the Diocese of Wichita through parish enrichment and diocesan assistance, with a view toward increased diocesan unity.

The process was called United Catholic Stewardship (UCS), and its design would be:

1. It would be Parish based;
2. It would provide the opportunity for individuals, young and old, to experience and live out their call to discipleship, through the parish, with the added invitation and opportunity through the parish to extend this discipleship (stewardship in action) to the wider diocesan and universal church;
3. Parishes would seek to become viable and vibrant places when they strived to identify, plan, and provide for the needs of their parishioners by establishing well organized pastoral structures and mission statements along with related goals, objectives, and action plans;
4. Parishes would be challenged to become places of hospitality, prayer, formation, and service. And importantly, in that order;
5. It is believed, if parishes would seriously take this role upon themselves, we could expect and experience an increase sense of parishioners gratitude, generosity, and sacrificial giving and sharing of their God given giftedness in support of the broad mission of the parish and of the wider church;

The process was implemented in the fall of 1985. What are the results?

For parishes who faithfully implemented the process, and others more gradually, it was witnessed parishes became more viable and vibrant. They were truly seeking to identify and to provide the needs of the parishioners, causing them to recognize a high level of hospitality where parishioners felt invited and encouraged to be involved. Hence parishioners developed a vested interest and commitment to the parish.

This involvement and commitment to the parish resulted in a significant growth in volunteerism and a willing, generous, sacrificial, and proportionate sharing of treasure at the parish level. Parishioners began to annually commit to the sharing of their gifts in their parishes out of their need to do so, rather than only committing/participating when there was a need.

Tangible outcomes then resulted:

- a. Our diocese has witnessed a greater spirit and overall unity within our parishes as a diocese. We are all together in this stewardship way of life;
- b. A high level of weekly Mass attendance, more than double the national average which is 24%
- c. Volunteerism is high in parishes and other ministries, such as the Lord's Diner, Guadalupe Clinic, etc.;
- d. It was realized the responsibility of the Catholic education of the children of the parish would be the responsibility of ALL the parishioners, not just the parents; Faithful stewardship provides Catholic education for every child desiring education;
- e. What was expected of parishioners (tithing generously, sacrificially, and proportionately) would be expected of parishes to the wider church;
- f. Most visible is the desire for prayer in the parishes. 25% of the parishes in the Diocese of Wichita have 24/7 Adoration Chapels; 63 of the 90 parishes have some sort of adoration opportunities;
- g. The number of seminarians and those choosing religious life vocations has dramatically increased (in 2014 there were over 50 seminarians) There are more active priests under the age of 50 than over.
- h. Other diocesan ministries has been created and overwhelmingly been supported: Guadalupe Clinic (40 doctors, 3000 patients); The Lord's Diner (6,500 volunteers, 2,500 meals served per night); Catholic Care Center
- i. Stewardship of Treasure. In 1985 the combined annual diocesan income of all the parishes was under 15 million. By 2014, that income was over \$51 million. The annual giving of families significantly rose. Why? Because families were informed, inspired, and invited to live the Stewardship Way of Life.

Dangers on the horizon for living the Stewardship Way of Life in the Diocese of Wichita?

1. Complacency
2. Not informing, inspiring, and inviting new parishioners to this way of life
3. Stopping an annual renewal of commitment
4. Failure to recognize the benefits being committed to the responsibility of the Catholic education of all the children of the parish;
5. The need of ongoing formation of new parishioners, 2nd and 3rd generation of stewards, new priests and pastors;
6. The lack of parishes to have a formed and articulated mission and vision;
7. Lack of lay leadership involvement in the parish;
8. The relying upon fund-raising rather than a sacrificial, generous, and proportionate gift of self and treasure;

In 2004, Bishop Michael Jackels became the 10th bishop of the Diocese of Wichita, asking the question: “What is stewardship?” He realized we were living the stewardship way of life, but each of us explained it differently. Understanding you cannot teach what you cannot articulate, the following was prayerfully discerned as our definition of stewardship:

“Stewardship is the grateful response of a Christian disciple,
Who recognizes and receives God’s gifts,
And shares these gifts in love of God and neighbor.”

Stewardship is a way of life and a vital part of the Diocese of Wichita. Beginning with the vision of Saint Peter, preached by Msgr. Thomas McGread, and implemented as a Diocesan process by Bishop Eugene Gerber, we truly understand:

“As each one has received a gift,
Use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”
(1 Peter 4:10)



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