



ST. JOSEPH PARISH

NATIVITY OF THE BVM PARISH

PARISH NEWSLETTER

Inside

- 2 The Bible
The Textbook of Stewardship
- 3 Pentecost: The "Birth" of Stewardship
- 4 Engaged Couple Olivia Sliman and Nick Toney Reflect on an *Unexpected Year*
- 6 The Church's Universal Mission *Lived Out*
By NATHAN FRANKART
- 7 *Stacey Ostrander Finds Niche in Ministry Involvement and Parish Life*

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MAY 2021

STRIVING TO TITHE

HOW YOU CAN *GIVE*

When Fr. Timothy O'Connor was in elementary school, his allowance was 50 cents per week. His milk money and school lunch was budgeted from this — the part that always came off the top was the 10 percent given back to the church. His father took the time to show him how to divide the money so that five cents each week went in the collection.

Fr. Tim shares that story to demonstrate the importance of showing our children how to tithe and how it should continue into adulthood. This simple lesson he received from his father left a lasting impact.

"At the end of the year, if I find I have given more than 10 percent of my income back, then I am happy," Fr. Tim says.

Fr. Tim wants to call on each of us to prayerfully consider how we can financially support our parish and charities. We should not only consider the gifts of time and talent — the gift of treasure is important, too. A good way to distribute our ten percent tithe



is to give five percent of our income to our parishes and five percent to other charities.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the weekly collection totals. Although the dispensation from attending Mass is ongoing, Fr. Tim wants to take this opportunity to invite parishioners back to Mass and to thank those who have continued their generosity. With faithful church cleaning and with everyone wearing masks, our parishes are safe places to celebrate the Mass with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

continued on back cover



THE BIBLE

THE TEXTBOOK OF
STEWARDSHIP

Have you ever wished that life came with an instruction manual? What a valuable resource that would be! Whenever you find yourself running in circles, this instruction manual would give you step-by-step instructions on how to fix the problem and reroute your course.

Well, here's some good news. For those living a Christian life, there is such a manual — the Bible.

Sometimes referred to as the “textbook of stewardship,” the Bible is a bountiful resource for the present-day Christian. Written by anointed prophets and sages, this collection of divinely inspired parables, poems and letters is full of testimonials that express the blessings that come from true discipleship, conveyed through lives of stewardship.

Stewardship is not a new concept. The Bible gives proof to this claim through passages such as the 26th chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy. We read Moses' words, as he tells the Israelites to offer the choicest portions of their harvest to God: “When you have come into the land which the LORD, your God, is giving you as a heritage, and have taken possession and settled in it, you shall take some first fruits of the various products of the soil which you harvest from the land the LORD, your God, is giving you; put them in a basket and go to the place which the LORD, your God, will choose as the dwelling place for his name... ‘Now, therefore, I have brought the first fruits of the products of the soil which you, LORD, have given me.’ You shall set them before the LORD, your God, and you shall bow down before the LORD, your God” (Dt 26:1-2, 10).

St. Paul briefly touches on the essence of stewardship when he said, “In every way I have shown you that by hard work of that sort we must help the weak, and keep in mind the words of the Lord Jesus who himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35).

Again, in St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, we read about living a life of Christian stewardship: “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each must do as al-

ready determined, without sadness or compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor 9:6-7).

While this is well and good, what does it mean for the present-day Christian? Why should it matter that the Bible alludes to stewardship in various passages? It shows us that Christians and Jews have struggled with and benefitted from the concept of stewardship for thousands of years. It ties the message of stewardship to the role of a Christian disciple. It gives proof that stewardship and discipleship go hand-in-hand. It offers encouragement to us, that stewardship is in fact a foundational component of the Christian life, a way of life that one of the founding fathers of the Church — St. Paul — preached about and advocated.

The Bible is indeed the textbook of stewardship. It lays out the steps we must take to become true disciples of Christ. Reading and meditating upon God's Word is always a fruitful exercise. Those who regularly delve into Scripture often develop a deeper understanding of Who God is, how and why He loves us, and how we can show Him our love in return.

As you strive to become a grateful steward and live the life of Christian discipleship, develop a love for Sacred Scripture. Allow God's Word to nourish your soul regularly, and watch as stewardship changes from a foreign concept to an integral component of your daily life.

SOMETIMES REFERRED TO AS
THE “TEXTBOOK OF STEWARDSHIP,”
THE BIBLE IS A *BOUNTIFUL RESOURCE* FOR THE
PRESENT-DAY CHRISTIAN.

A LETTER FROM OUR PASTOR

PENTECOST

THE “BIRTH” OF STEWARDSHIP

Dear Members of St. Joseph and Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parishes,

As we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost on May 23, which is one of the most significant events in the life of the Church, I can't help but relate the outpouring of the gift of the Holy Spirit upon the first disciples as “the birth of stewardship.”

As stewardship parishes, we have come to understand it in our personal lives and our parish life as the work of the Holy Spirit, active and inspiring us to be the disciples Jesus called us to be, just as He did those very first disciples. It just makes sense to once again realize and acknowledge the work of the Holy Spirit in our decisions to be authentic disciples of Jesus Christ.

As every parent knows, birth brings new life to every family, and the “birth of stewardship” here in our parishes has brought new life to us, personally and communally, and continues to do so. We had a “Pentecost event” when the message of stewardship was first brought to our parishes, and it hasn't been the same since. Many curious people here and from around the country ask the question, “How did all of this

begin?” The only answer is, “moved by conversion, we knew stewardship was going to be the ‘plan’ for our future as disciples.” It makes sense.

For some, like me, it took a conversion of sorts to move us from unbelievers to believers, and from fear or suspicion to courage and confidence in the values and ideals of stewardship. Reading the accounts of the Acts of the Apostles, it wasn't much different for them. Their experience is our experience and continues to encourage us to be open to the Holy Spirit at work in our lives. That “Spirit” renews the “Pentecost event” in each of us, as we practice discipleship as we know it through the stewardship way of life.

Also, as with each new birth, the life that begins needs to be nourished, nurtured and loved. Through our understanding of the four pillars of parish stewardship — hospitality, prayer, formation and service — we each are called to nourish, nurture and love our parish families with the gifts we bring to each other. And without ever really knowing how much of an impact we

have on each other's spiritual lives, we trust the Holy Spirit to continue the “good work of faithful stewardship” in each of us and to those around us. Isn't that what the first Pentecost event started, and isn't that what you see in our parishes, especially since our own “birth of stewardship”?

God has blessed our parish families and continues to do so, as the Holy Spirit continues to pour out gifts upon us and send us forth to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. As we grow and mature in our stewardship efforts, how fortunate we are that the stewardship way of life has become our way of life. May we always give thanks to God for the Holy Spirit's gift to each of us — for, when we do, it seems only natural to be inspired to live discipleship as it was intended to be lived in the first disciples and in each of us.

Gratefully in Christ,

Fr. Timothy J. O'Connor

Fr. Timothy J. O'Connor,
Pastor

ENGAGED COUPLE
Olivia Sliman AND *Nick Toney*
REFLECT ON AN *UNEXPECTED* YEAR

As hard as it may be to believe, it was just about this time last year that Americans were beginning to look around and realize that life as we knew it was about to change in a dramatic way. While many of us scrambled to shift to working or schooling from home and found our usual gatherings cancelled, parishioners Nick Toney and Olivia Sliman faced a particularly daunting question — what would this global pandemic mean for their July 2020 wedding?

Through much reflection and prayer, the couple decided last April to move their wedding to July 2021. While postponing their dream of marriage for a year was certainly disappointing, Nick and Olivia have both found great comfort in their faith.

“It was difficult leading up to the decision, but once we made it, we were more at peace with it,” Nick says. “That’s part of your faith, too — knowing this is God’s plan. As the saying goes, you make plans and God laughs! Other people have been in much worse circumstances in this pandemic, and we’re just thankful we could wait another year and everyone is healthy.”

As someone who came into the Catholic Church as an adult, Nick doesn’t take the grace that comes with a strong faith for granted. Having gone through the RCIA process at St. Joseph just over five years ago, he credits his faith with giving him a greater sense of calm throughout this topsy-turvy year.

continued on page 5



After postponing their wedding due to the pandemic, Nick Toney and Olivia Sliman will be married in July.

“THIS PAST YEAR, WE’VE *ALL* EXPERIENCED SEEING HOW LITTLE CONTROL WE HAVE OVER THINGS, BUT NICK AND I BOTH FEEL VERY HOPEFUL, POSITIVE, AND *FULL OF FAITH* ABOUT WHAT IS TO COME. LOVE IS PATIENT.” — OLIVIA SLIMAN

OLIVIA SLIMAN AND NICK TONEY *continued from page 4*

Knowing the importance of being able to lean on their faith in tough times, both Nick and Olivia made it a priority to keep their ministries going in the midst of COVID-19 closures and restrictions. Olivia is the facilitator of the Wonderful Women group, while Nick leads a men's group. Both moved their ministries to online platforms last summer.

The Wonderful Women group typically meets monthly to explore topics that celebrate the lives of women and deepen their call to discipleship. When in-person meetings became impossible, Olivia decided to begin recording videos to share to the group's email list, which reaches about 150 women.

"I make videos every month now that I send out," she says. "They follow a pattern similar to what we would do before, with a discussion topic and a song. I felt that our group had such momentum going, and I didn't want it to be one more thing to get canceled. It helps push me to grow in my faith and helps me stay connected. I just get so much out of it, and I hope it's as beneficial to the other ladies watching."

Similarly, the men's group that Nick coordinates shifted from in-person meetings to a Zoom videoconference format.

"Especially when we first shut down and you lost being able to go to Mass in person, it was so valuable to be able to interact with people and share your faith," Nick says. "It was amazing to see how much people relied on their faith during a time that was so uncertain. I thought it was important for us to help each other through a difficult time."

In addition to keeping their ministries going, Nick and Olivia have continued to share their faith with one another in other ways. At the beginning of 2021, they began listening to Fr. Mike Schmitz's *Bible in a Year* podcasts together. As the country begins to open up once again, they look forward to continuing to serve at St. Joseph in various roles.

"We feel thankful that our parish allows us to do these

things," Olivia says. "Fr. Tim is so supportive — any idea I've brought to him, he has always told me to go for it. I just feel blessed that we have a parish that wants to participate in so many ways."

In just a couple of months, Nick and Olivia will finally say "I do." Although their unexpected wait for the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony was difficult at times, they are nonetheless thankful for the hidden blessings of this past year.

"In a lot of ways, this has helped us realize what is important," Olivia says. "It was stressful, and it has been tough at times since I'm a planner by nature. But we feel so blessed that this was something that could be rescheduled. So many people have experienced such hardships, and in the larger picture, this is not a big deal. This past year, we've all experienced seeing how little control we have over things, but Nick and I both feel very hopeful, positive, and full of faith about what is to come. Love is patient."



Olivia Sliman and Nick Toney at St. Joseph celebrating Nick's completion of the RCIA process.

The Church's Universal Mission *LIVED OUT*

By NATHAN FRANKART



"Jesus teaches us another way: Go out. Go out and share your testimony, go out and interact with your brothers, go out and share, go out and ask. Become the Word in body as well as spirit." — Pope Francis

Pease of Christ to you! After consistently writing in the parish newsletter for the last two and half years, I am sorry to say that I will be taking a break over the coming summer months. It certainly is not because I have run out of ideas or that I have lost the passion to write more articles! Rather, it has to do with the recent opportunity that I am taking advantage over these summer months, which prevents me from writing consistently.

Well, what is this new opportunity? It is directly related to Pope Francis' comments on our roles as missionaries for the Catholic Church. He tells us that "Jesus teaches us another way: Go out. Go out and share your testimony, go out and interact with your brothers, go out and share, go out and ask. Become the Word in body as well as spirit." This stems from Christ's universal call to proclaim the Gospel to all people and to all nations, that we should be emboldened by the Holy Spirit to lead lives of true Christian discipleship in our words and actions. How we choose to answer this universal call depends on our season in life, and what we can devote our time, talent, and treasure towards in building the Kingdom of God on Earth.

So, what is that for me? It's being a missionary for the high-adventure camp based out of Centerburg, Ohio — Catholic Youth Summer Camp! This camp is run by Damascus Ministries, who prioritize creating an adventurous and prayerful environment for young people to have a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. As a missionary fulfilling the role of counselor, I will be walking with new groups of high school teens every week, encouraging them to dive deeper into their faith, and challenge them to live more authentic lives. It will be a long, difficult, joyous, incredible summer for myself, and in a special way, I ask for your prayers. May the Lord complete the good work that He has started with Damascus Ministries, and may He perfect myself and my fellow missionaries to spread the Gospel to all who we will encounter this summer!

STACEY OSTRANDER Finds Niche in Ministry Involvement and Parish Life

There are certainly many different facets to parish life. If you're wondering how to contribute, Stacey Ostrander would encourage everyone to think about your strengths and how you might give back to the faith community, and to find your niche.

"My family moved around, and because of that, we realized you have to put yourself out there, even though that can be scary," Stacey says. "But take that chance and see how fulfilling it is to be involved in parish life."

A cradle Catholic, Stacey describes stewardship as a lifelong habit in her family — a habit instilled in childhood.

"Growing up, I was involved in Catholic youth organizations and went to faith formation," Stacey says. "Then, we were stationed at different military bases and got involved wherever we were, and different bases had different opportunities."

Since 1998, Stacey has served as a lector and has been involved in different ministries, including the Catholic Women of the Chapel, or CWOC.

"Most military chapels had something similar to Altar and Rosary Societies, although the chapels were used by different denominations," Stacey says. "I was also on Parish Councils, but the military parishes were pretty small."

Although Stacey and her family moved many times, over the years they occasionally visited Nativity, where Stacey's mother was and is a parishioner.

"When we moved here, it felt natural for me to join Nativity with my mom there," Stacey says. "People already knew me, and since 2010, it has been my parish too. Nativity always felt right to me."

As a teacher and now a corporate trainer, Stacey has always felt that being in front of people was very natural to her. She remembers when a parishioner reached out to ask her about becoming a lector at Nativity.

"To me, lectoring is really personal because I love to read," Stacey says. "I am admittedly not one who is going to sit down and read the Bible, but with lectoring, I study



Stacey Ostrander

the readings beforehand, and the practicing of that helps me absorb the words so much better."

Stacey appreciates the workbooks provided to lectors that provide background and help her consider the appropriate emotional emphasis for the readings.

"The time I take to prepare to lector helps settle me into the role," she says. "The Holy Spirit is working through me when I am at the lectern. Whenever I am going to be a lector, I pray, 'Your Word, Lord, not mine.'"

Stewardship has also impacted Stacey's daughters, Meghan, 31, and Terah, 27.

"Both of them are very service-minded," Stacey says. "They're very giving to others and practice a Christian attitude in their lives."

Stacey is very grateful to the parishioners who have welcomed her as an adult into the faith community and made her feel like part of the parish family.

"Put yourself out there," says Stacey. "People in the parish are so receptive to it and so welcoming."

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Fr. Tim O'Connor Serving Both Parishes

Mass:

Monday, 9:00 a.m. - *St. Joseph*

Tuesday, 8:00 a.m. - *Nativity of the BVM*

Thursday, 7:00 p.m. - *St. Joseph*

Friday, 9:00 a.m. - *St. Joseph*

Saturday, 4:00 p.m. - *St. Joseph*

5:30 p.m. - *Nativity of the BVM*

Sunday, 8:30 a.m., 11:00 a.m., 5:00 p.m. - *St. Joseph*

Confession at St. Joseph:

Thursday - Individual Reconciliation 7:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

Saturday - Individual Reconciliation 11:00 a.m. - noon

Eucharistic Adoration (Chapel) at Nativity of the BVM:

Monday-Friday 11:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Striving to Tithe *continued from front cover*

"I know the pandemic has been unbelievably hard for some families," Fr. Tim says. "I want to thank everyone for all they have done to help get each other through this. I have heard amazing stories of neighbors helping neighbors."

As Fr. Tim reminds us, we are all the church. Just as we file our income taxes in the spring, we must also be sure we give to the church and charities. It is up to us to be sure the church finances are taken care of.

"It's important because in our own family living, finances are part of that," Fr. Tim says. "It is something we are all aware of. It takes money to run the church, just like a home."

If you are not currently tithing, start somewhere and try to slowly increase the percentage, maybe each year. Fr. Tim says this is a great way to get started.

"The main reason we want to be giving is that we want to be stewards of God's bountiful blessings," Fr. Tim says. "We want to share not only our time and talent, but also our treasure."

Fr. Tim asks us all to consider our many blessings and give some of that back to God. When we give, we can be sure we will be rewarded. Fr. Tim wants to thank parishioners for their generosity in time, talent and treasure. He knows people have made sacrifices to help during this difficult time, and that means everything.

"This is an invitation for people to come back to Mass," he says. "As for the finances, we are all in this together."

There are several ways to tithe. You can put money directly in the collection or sign up for automatic withdrawals. You may also consider an estate gift to St. Joseph or Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Please visit stjosephamherst.com, or call the parish office at 440-988-2848 for more information.