

SPIRITLINK

St. Gerald Parish Newsletter † Ralston/Omaha

November 2007 † Volume 11, Number 3



“The generosity of parishioners always overwhelms the committee.”

PARISHIONER CATHY WIESE:

St. Gerald Angel Tree Project Fills Many Christmas Wishes

By Sherry Wachtler, Parishioner

“If I could just have a coat...”

That was one of the hundreds of Christmas requests received last year by the St. Gerald Angel Tree committee. Chances are the request came from someone who had given hers to someone else who needed it more. Perhaps she'd arrived from a warm climate with only the clothes on her back, or maybe someone stole her coat. Regardless, she got a coat, thanks to the St. Gerald Angel Tree Project, and so did hundreds of others.

As someone who truly exemplifies the spirit of stewardship at St. Gerald, **Cathy Wiese** wanted something more to do, and about 10 years ago she came to the Human Needs Committee.

The Angel Tree Project needed a chairperson and Cathy was off and running. For the past 10 years, Cathy and a dedicated committee – plus hundreds of parishioners – have worked to help make Christmas brighter for others in the community. They'll be doing it again this year.

“The needs . . . don't stop at Christmas . . .”

“The needs are many, varied, and they don't stop at Christmas,” Cathy said, but “to fill those requests is a tremendously rewarding experience.” Last year, her committee of about 15 filled nearly 1,000 requests. Less than 100 requests are from the parish, the rest are from ENOA, Stephen Center, women's shelters, and others who need help around the community. “I always worry,” Wiese said. “I hope there's enough for everyone.”

“But once the angel trees go up the first week of December,” she said, “the project almost runs itself. There are tag-writers, sorters, deliverers, and matches are made.”

“We just have so many amazing people . . .”

“We just have so many amazing people,” Cathy said. “Diane Stanton is a caseworker at ENOA, and she channels the elderly within our parish and does such a great job. She's my right-hand person.”

Cathy's left-hand person – or people – are **Deb** and **Todd Banchor** and their family, who, with their Scout troop, adopt a family, something they've been doing for years. “They faithfully call and ask for a family to adopt, and the Scouts collect the money, shop, and wrap,” Cathy said.

Cheryl Bolin handles all the phone calls at the office and works with family members.

Jay Spargo makes reindeer out of candy canes – cases and cases of them - to go with everyone's gifts. “We call him Candy Cane man,” Cathy said. Requests can even come at the last minute, but that doesn't stop Wiese. “I'm always out with all the last-minute shoppers,” she said. The generosity of parishioners always overwhelms the committee. “Someone will open a present and say, ‘My daughter only asked for a scarf, but there's a whole outfit in here!’ You get to see all the creativity in the parish,” she said. “People add their own razzle dazzle.”

Cathy also started a health clinic at a homeless shelter, compiling a list of volunteer doctors, nurses and other health care professionals. She has spent hundreds of hours volunteering at shelters with her family and in her job as a health professional. It may be about stewardship, but Cathy sums it up differently. “It turns out that it's more fun than anything,” she said. †

Angel Tree Project

HOW CAN I VOLUNTEER?

Call Cathy Wiese, 339.6017

ST. GERALD PARISH MISSION STATEMENT

We, as St. Gerald Parish, are a Eucharistic community who will help each other to be good and faithful stewards of God's love. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we will accomplish this through prayer, worship, education, and service.

The Pillars of Parish Stewardship

In a Stewardship Parish Jesus Christ is the Foundation.

From the foundation four pillars arise:

- HOSPITALITY** “When I was a stranger. You welcomed me.” We welcome each other and the newcomer.
- PRAYER** “Thy will be done.” The faithful steward must pray daily, especially prayers of gratitude.
- FORMATION** Educating the mind and forming the heart are necessary steps in the steward’s growth.
- SERVICE** There will always be needs in this world. Even if there were no needs, however, we still have a need to give. God created us with this need to give. “It is in giving that we receive.”

Pillar opportunities:

- HOSPITALITY** St. Gerald Boutique, Social Committee
- PRAYER** Perpetual Adoration, MOMS
- FORMATION** Pro-life Committee, Religious Education
- SERVICE** Nursery, Human Needs Committee

Blessed Junípero Serra, OFM

Have you wondered about the “Prayer for Vocations” we pray each week after Communion? Who is Junípero Serra, and what does he have to do with vocations? Miguel Serra y Abram was born in Spain in 1713. When he was sixteen, he joined the Franciscan Order and took the name Junípero (which means “Jester of God”), after the colorful companion of St. Francis of Assisi.

In 1749, he felt called to leave his comfortable life as a professor of philosophy to become a missionary in what is now Mexico.

In 1768, Father Serra took over the missions that the Jesuits were forced to leave in the Mexican provinces of Lower California and Upper California.

When he was sixteen, Miguel Serra y Abram joined the Franciscan Order and took the name Junípero (hō̄n ē’ p̄ā’rō̄) which means “Jester of God”, after the colorful companion of St. Francis of Assisi.



A tireless worker, Serra himself established nine missions, with a total of twenty-one missions eventually being established along the El Camino Real, from San Diego to Sonoma, a distance of 700 miles. In keeping with his vow of poverty, and despite chronic pain in one leg, he always traveled on foot. Estimates are that Blessed Junípero traveled more than 5,500 miles between the missions he founded along the California coast. Serra was in large part responsible for the foundation and spread of the Church on the West Coast of the United States.

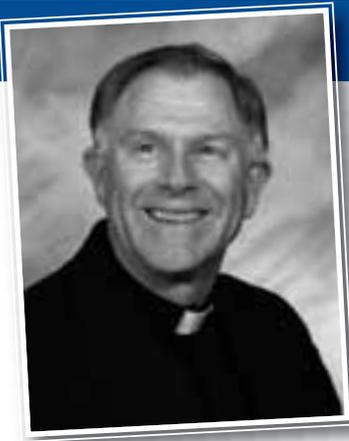
The thousands of Native American converts were taught sound methods of agriculture, cattle raising, and arts and crafts. Blessed Junípero is the one man most responsible for bringing the Spanish culture and the Catholic faith 500 miles deep into the California frontier. Junípero Serra died peacefully in Carmel on August 28, 1784, and was beatified in 1988.

Serra International chose Junípero as their patron when they began their apostolate in 1934 to foster religious vocations throughout the world. †

Illustration of Blessed Junípero Serra (left) used with permission from the USA Council, Serra International.

The Three “WHYS” of Giving

By Rev. Gary Ostrander, Pastor



“When I give a gift of my treasure, I first don’t check how much the need is, rather I check out what I’ve been given and that determines what I give.”

“Spiritual Stewardship ... the motivating force comes from deep within me”

During October we focused on stewardship. It got me thinking about the ways people give and the why behind that giving. I believe the following breakdown can apply to all three areas of time, talent, and treasure. Time, talent, and treasure are all gifts given to us from God. As we get older we may even feel that time is the greatest of these three gifts.

Here are two possible “whys” to giving, to sharing our gifts:

The first is in the hope of getting something back. If we were to buy a raffle ticket from a parish or a charitable organization, we have a chance of getting something in return. I am not against these forms of fundraising. I buy lots of raffle tickets myself and it’s fun. But there is an even better reason to give.

The second reason is that there is a great need. This reason has always been an important element as to why I give. If there is a need I feel I have an obligation to give. If there is a leaky roof and I use the building then I have a responsibility to pay my fair share of the repair work. If I come to Mass and “use” the heat, lights, hosts, candles, etc., then I have a moral obligation to “pay” for that. I have to pay my fair share. This would be true if it was about the church or any organization I belonged to. As admirable as this is, there is an even better reason for sharing my gifts.

The last reason is spiritual stewardship. The motivating force comes from deep within me. It has nothing to do with the hope of winning anything or a feeling of paying my fair share. It’s about giving the first-fruits of my gifts back to God. It’s looking at what I’ve been given and then giving a share of that back to God.

That is the whole idea of tithing stewardship. We give a certain percentage of our time, talent, and treasure to God. When I give a gift of my treasure, I first don’t check how much the need is, rather I check out what I’ve been given and that determines what I give.

I hope EVERYONE will come to this third level of giving for that is true spiritual stewardship. †

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops suggests a tithe of **10% overall**.
5% to your parish
1% to your diocese
4% to other charities.

Please prayerfully consider where you might fall on the chart to the right.

Thank you for giving God your *First-Fruits!*

Annual Income	Weekly Sacrificial Giving				
	1%	2%	3%	4%	5%
\$ 12,500	\$ 3	\$ 5	\$ 8	\$ 11	\$ 13
\$ 15,000	\$ 3	\$ 6	\$ 9	\$ 13	\$ 16
\$ 20,000	\$ 4	\$ 8	\$ 12	\$ 17	\$ 21
\$ 25,000	\$ 5	\$ 10	\$ 16	\$ 21	\$ 26
\$ 30,000	\$ 6	\$ 13	\$ 19	\$ 25	\$ 31
\$ 35,000	\$ 7	\$ 15	\$ 22	\$ 29	\$ 36
\$ 40,000	\$ 8	\$ 17	\$ 25	\$ 33	\$ 42
\$ 50,000	\$ 10	\$ 21	\$ 31	\$ 42	\$ 52
\$ 60,000	\$ 13	\$ 25	\$ 38	\$ 50	\$ 63
\$ 70,000	\$ 15	\$ 29	\$ 44	\$ 58	\$ 73
\$ 80,000	\$ 17	\$ 33	\$ 50	\$ 67	\$ 83
\$ 90,000	\$ 19	\$ 38	\$ 56	\$ 75	\$ 94
\$ 100,000	\$ 21	\$ 42	\$ 63	\$ 83	\$ 104

“First Fruits” – a Way of Thanksgiving



**“When you tithe,
you aren’t sacrificing
10% of what *you have*
to give to God –
you are retaining 90%
of what
He gave to you!”**

**“Honor the Lord
with your wealth,
with the first fruits
of all your crops;
then your barns will be
filled to overflowing,
and your vats
will brim over with
new wine.”
(Proverbs 3:9–10)**



Autumn is a delightful time of year. The falling leaves decorate the earth with a beautiful carpet of colors and shapes. The air becomes crisp and clean. Sweaters are dusted off and jackets donned. Perhaps more than anything else, the highlight of autumn is the feast of Thanksgiving. It is a time for family and friends, and it provides us time to reflect on the blessings that surround our everyday lives.

For most, the Thanksgiving table is built around the beauty of a large, deliciously-roasted turkey. It’s buttressed on all sides by tantalizing side dishes. The entire process of cooking it teases us all as the aroma of the roasting bird wafts forth for hours. No wonder we love this holiday!

And the image of the Thanksgiving table is a perfect analogy for pondering our lives as stewards. Do we feast on the bird and stuff ourselves to the brim with all of these delightful foods before we collapse into a chair to watch football? Do we leave for God the skeleton of the turkey and whatever meat might have been overlooked, or do we set aside the first-fruits, the best portions for God? Do we let God have the choice breast meat, the coveted drumstick, or do we leave Him the scraps?

In our modern economy we use money to acquire goods and services. And one of the advantages of using currency is that it is easy to determine how to give the first-fruits to the Lord. Tithing, or returning the first portion of *what already belongs to God*, is a practical way to live out the spirituality of stewardship.

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house, and try me in this, says the LORD of hosts: Shall I not open for you the floodgates of heaven, to pour down blessing upon you without measure?” (Malachi 3:10)

SO MANY PEOPLE THINK THAT IT'S HARD TO TITHE, BUT IN FACT, IT'S EASY.

What they probably mean is, "It's hard to put God before the other desires in our lives."

That may very well be true. If we treat tithing like a bill we pay each month, we miss the boat entirely.

Everything you have is *from* God – and everything you have *belongs* to God. Think about that statement for just a minute.

When you tithe, you aren't sacrificing 10% of what you have to give to God – you are retaining 90% of what He **gave to you!** It makes a world of difference when we understand that we are merely loaned resources in this world – all of them belong to God, and it's our responsibility to care for them well; and to return a portion of them back to the Lord who graced us with them.

"The earth belongs to the Lord, and everything in it, the world and all its people." (Psalm 24:1)

By tithing a specific percentage, rather than a dollar amount, the varied households of St. Gerald equally support the parish family. Consider if we asked that every parishioner tithe \$40 per week. Some families might be tithing at 20% and others at a fraction of 1%. The only way that we equally support our parish family is by tithing a specific percentage.

The spiritual reality of tithing is giving the first-fruits, the best portions, off the top, to the Lord. The dollar-value of the tithe is inconsequential – if we all tithe, the parish would have no need for fundraisers, second collections, building funds, and so forth. Tuition could be lowered over time, and could disappear altogether. That's what our parish life could be like if each of us take a step in faith and begins tithing.

IT'S A SIMPLE TWO-STEP PROCESS to begin tithing within your own home:

1. Simply use the chart (**found on page 3**) to find your income level and scroll across to the amount of your weekly contributions at Mass. This will show you the percentage of your current giving. (If you happen to contribute monthly, just divide your monthly contribution by four to find the weekly amount).
2. Set a goal to increase your percentage over time to 5%. Assess where you are now and take a step in faith to increase your tithe. If your income changes due to a promotion or new job take another step in faith, and so forth.

So, will it be easy to convert to tithing? It may be difficult to make the choices, that is, to make the sacrifices to live our lives in this fashion, but it is absolutely worth it.

"Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine." (Proverbs 3:9–10)

IT'S JUST A MATTER OF PRIORITIZING – if we offer to God the first-fruits of our income, and then pay our bills we may end up with less disposable income for entertainment, going out to eat, or whatever. But that is *good for us* in two ways:

1. It teaches the value of sacrificing something of little value to return our thanks to God who gives us everything.
2. It also reminds us to be thankful for all we have. God has given everything to you because He trusts you. He trusts you to love and be faithful to your spouse. He trusts you to care for your children and educate them. He trusts you to look after your parents who gave you life. He trusts you to use your gifts of music, art, leadership, or coaching to help others. He trusts you to give of yourself to the lonely.

AS TITHING BECOMES A PART OF OUR LIVES, WE WILL BEGIN TO NOTICE SIDE-EFFECTS IN OUR HOMES.

If we choose to eat at home on a given day, rather than going out, we will have shared more time together in the preparation and cleanup of dinner. We will have had fun trying another recipe and sharpened our cooking skills. As we make sacrifices in our budgets to provide God with the first-fruits we will notice that sacrificial spirit flowing into other areas of our lives. It will become easier to concentrate in prayer; it will enable us to study harder at school or work more cheerfully at our jobs. Self-mastery will make us more efficient and more helpful to others.

"His master said to him, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities.'" (Matthew 25:21)

God loves you and provides for you each and every day - *not a hair on your head moves without God knowing it*. As we deepen our spiritual lives through tithing we will feel and see His presence in our lives in new and beautiful ways – each and every day.

May the gifts of your Thanksgiving table bring your family togetherness and joy. And may the Lord of the harvest amplify your care for one another *until we are all reunited in heaven with Him for the banquet that will never, never end.* †

PARISHIONER MICHELLE WATKINS:

Making a Life of Stewardship ... *By Eric Olson, Parishioner*



“It’s a growing experience for me in my faith ... what I am receiving is worth more than money”

On one of their first dates, **Michelle Watkins’** future husband found out in a hurry what kind of person he would someday marry. The two went out and bought baby supplies for a maternity shelter.

Michelle has made a life of stewardship, and she’s been eager to share her time and talents with us in the six years she has been a parishioner at St. Gerald. She has headed the Pro-Life Committee for over a year, leading the

effort to educate folks about issues such as abortion, stem-cell research, euthanasia, and care for the elderly.

Michelle also is a member of the prayer chain, and she volunteers in the church library.

She knows that her stewardship helps others, but it also strengthens her faith and allows her to immerse herself in the St. Gerald community.

“Now I can go to Mass and know people,” she said. “I feel I’m involved.

I feel like I’m part of the activity, and I’m also paying attention better to the way the parish functions and what is being said in Mass. It’s a growing experience for me in my faith.”

Volunteering “... is my leisure time”

Michelle grew up in Lincoln, where her parents emphasized the importance of giving back to the community. She attended UNO and now is an architectural designer for Davis Design. When she’s not at work, she’s likely doing volunteer work at the church or somewhere else.

“That,” she said, “is my leisure time.”

Michelle said she always has been involved in the pro-life movement, but her conviction was strengthened by the 2005 case of Terri Schiavo.

Schiavo was the brain-damaged Florida woman whose husband, over her family’s protest, asked doctors to remove the feeding tube that had sustained her for more than a decade. Schiavo starved to death after two weeks.

“If more people are educated,” Michelle said, “we won’t have to watch another Terri Schiavo case.”

The Pro-Life Committee has only six members, and Michelle invites anyone interested in the cause to join them. The group meets periodically to discuss ways to educate parishioners, whether it’s by obtaining more books for the library, arranging for guest speakers, or coordinating St. Gerald’s role in the annual life chain.

“... It puts my life in perspective.”

Michelle’s involvement with the prayer chain keeps her on an even keel because it makes her realize that many of the challenges she encounters in everyday life are relatively minor compared to the problems other people face.

“I’ll get a call, and we’ll be asked to pray for someone who has cancer or is dying, and it puts my life in perspective,” Michelle said. “Maybe I was frustrated that day because I had to wait in traffic. Guess what? That really isn’t very important when you look at what some people have to deal with.”

Outside the parish community, Michelle has volunteered for pregnancy shelters, the Eastern Nebraska Office on Aging, and has helped pack care packages to send to men and women serving in the military overseas.

Her husband Gary has been supportive of all her good works. In fact, he often joins her in the activities.

Michelle said the rewards have been great.

“I am not getting paid to do it,” she said, “but what I am receiving is worth more than money.” †

Another Point of View!
by Kathy Kensinger, Youth and Young Adult Minister

Giving Thanks by Sharing...

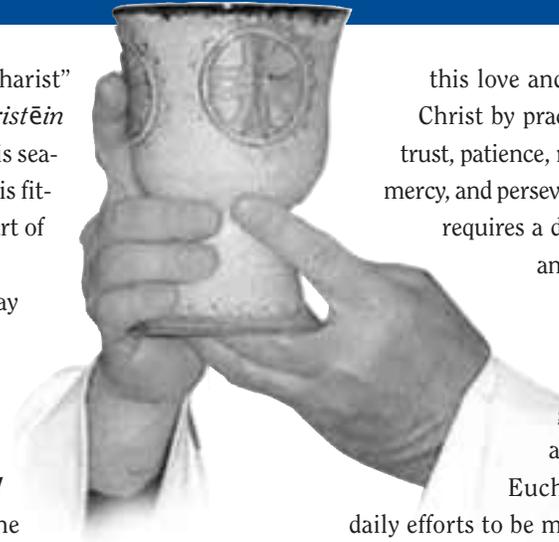
That’s Stewardship!

The Christian Steward Nourished by Eucharist

Did you know that our word “eucharist” comes from the Greek word, *eucharistēin* which means, “to return thanks?” In this season of the holidays and Thanksgiving, it is fitting to think of the Eucharist at the heart of our stewardship.

We all know that a Stewardship way of life is a “giving” way of life — ***it is an attitude of being aware of the gifts we have received, and being thankful enough for what we have that we share these unconditional gifts with God and others.*** One of the gifts we receive is “nourishment through the Eucharist,” the sacrament of love. The Eucharist is the culmination of our efforts to be like Christ. John Paul II wrote that through the Eucharist, we “enjoy a unique union with Christ and, in Him, with one another. Here His love — indeed, His very self — flows into His disciples, and through them and their practice of stewardship, to the entire human race.”

Nourished with the Eucharist, Christian stewards can go forward to more fully love God, family, and others. They strengthen



this love and deepen their resolve to live as Disciples of Christ by practicing the characteristics of prayer, humility, trust, patience, responsibility, gratitude, generosity, simplicity, mercy, and perseverance. For any good steward, this “way of life” requires a daily loving commitment of trying to be more and more like Christ. Such a commitment may seem overwhelming at times if we rely only on ourselves. In actuality, we need to rely on God’s ever-present grace and love. That grace and love is there for us if we ask for it and ***respond to it.*** The nourishment of the Eucharist is a needed gift that helps us in our daily efforts to be more Christ-like...to be one with Christ.

We all have a lot to be thankful for. The Eucharist helps us to experience this gratitude and living out the love that comes from that gratitude. It is a special gift from God. It is a key part of the Stewardship way of life and something we need. †

(For further information see the documents: *Stewardship, a Disciples Response*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; and *Characteristics of a Christian Steward*, The Catholic Diocese of Wichita, Kansas.)

AN ADVENT PRAYER, from Isaiah:

He gives strength to the fainting;
for the weak he makes vigor abound.

Though young men faint and grow weary,
and youths stagger and fall,

They that hope in the Lord
will renew their strength,
they will soar as with eagles wings;

They will run and not grow weary,
walk and not grow faint.

Isaiah 40: 29-31

LET US PRAY:

We pause in the midst of Christmas rush.

We quiet down.

We wait in silence.

(Pause 30 seconds.)

Renew our Advent hope,
awaken our hearts to your coming.

Give us eagles’ eyes to see
beyond winter’s dark horizon

–the first faint light of
Bethlehem’s dawning.





In this issue



SPIRITLINK

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* * *

Stewardship is giving thanks by giving back.

Cathy Wiese
heads Angel Tree project
front page

Michelle Watkins
makes a life of stewardship,
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St. Gerald Catholic Church

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ST. GERALD CATHOLIC CHURCH MASS AND RECONCILIATION SCHEDULE FOR DECEMBER 2007

Weekend Masses

Saturday 5:00 p.m.	Church, 96th & Q
Sunday 7:00 a.m.	Chapel, 78th & Lakeview
7:30 a.m.	Church, 96th & Q
9:00 a.m.	Church, 96th & Q
10:30 a.m.	Church, 96th & Q
12:00 p.m.	Church, 96th & Q

Weekday Masses

8:15 a.m.	Chapel, 78th & Lakeview
5:30 p.m.	Church, 96th & Q

Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession)

Saturday 3:30 – 4:45 p.m., Church, 96th & Q
Anytime by appointment

Immaculate Conception - Holy Day of Obligation Mass Schedule

December 7	6:00 p.m.	Church, 96th & Q
December 8	7:00 a.m.	Chapel, 78th & Lakeview
	8:15 a.m.	Chapel, 78th & Lakeview
	9:00 a.m.	Church, 96th & Q
	10:30 a.m.	Church, 96th & Q

Christmas Mass Schedule

December 24	5:00 p.m.	Church, 96th & Q
	7:00 p.m.	Church, 96th & Q
	9:00 p.m.	Church, 96th & Q
	(Midnight) 12:00 a.m.	Church, 96th & Q
December 25	7:00 a.m.	Chapel, 78th & Lakeview
	8:00 a.m.	Church, 96th & Q
	10:00 a.m.	Church, 96th & Q
	12:00 p.m.	Church, 96th & Q

Penance Service December 17 7:00 p.m. Church, 96th & Q

Living Nativity December 17 7:00 p.m. Church, 96th & Q

