



THE GRRAPEVINE

"I am the Vine, you are the branches" (Jn 15:5)

Number 117

Third Sunday of Advent

December 11, 2011

BITS AND PIECES

It has been a quiet month at St. Mary's! Well, sort of quiet. Jeannine had to go off on an extended sick leave at the end of November, so we have been trying to cover the office and all the work that needs to be done. With Sr. Jude's slip and fall, and the aftermath, some of our plans have not quite worked out. However, we have someone who comes in to do some of the data entry and bookkeeping work, and one parishioner has offered to come in a few hours a week to answer the phone and door. We have teams in place to count the Sunday collection, so that will be taken care of into the future. A few more details, and we should be running at full steam again.

As for me, I am relearning some old skills so I can teach others around the office, and am trying to keep all my jobs juggled and balanced—not always an easy proposition. So much for Advent being a time of quiet and contemplation! However, it has been good for me to be more involved in the parish's day to day operation again, and I look forward to the next few months. Richard, OMI

MARY AND ELIZABETH *Stewards Responding to God's Call*

Mary responded to God's call
without hesitation.
God, understanding the need
all women have for relationship and
community with other women,
chose Elizabeth to also have a son.
And Mary hurried to Elizabeth
to fill her heart with companionship,
courage and wisdom.
Mary and Elizabeth,
kinswomen blessed by God,
rejoiced together
strengthened by their role
in our salvation.
Spiritually bound,
Mary and Elizabeth
raised their sons,
rejoicing in the
cousins' love for one another.
Watching their struggles.
Encouraging their ministries.
Bearing their losses.
Wiping each other's tears.
reveling in the fulfillment
of God's glory.
Mary and Elizabeth,
both chosen by God
both accepting His call,
both bearing sons,
both loving and strengthened
by their shared lineage and destiny.
Christianity born through
their loving bonds of faith.

*By E. Jane Rutter, director of stewardship,
Diocese of Jefferson City, Missouri*



THE SEASON OF ADVENT: A FRUITFUL TIME FOR THE CHRISTIAN STEWARD

Probably nothing challenges a Christian steward's use of time as much as the seasons of Advent and Christmas. Each year, we marvel at the irony of it: a time to honor and ponder God's great mystery, the Incarnation, somehow falls prey to a time of stressful shopping, endless "to do" lists, strained checkbooks, and guilt over what's not getting done. Sometimes those nonstop Christmas tunes begin to grate on our senses.

How does the Christian steward answer this challenge to devote time to reflection and prayer while incorporating the best and most fruitful of our cultural traditions into this festive season? One suggestion would be to set aside a special time of reflection right at the beginning of Advent for determining what our priorities for the season will be. Set aside an hour and begin by rereading the Christmas story in the Gospel of Saint Luke. Ask God to help you know what is the most generous and beneficial use of time in God's service during this season. Ask for help in setting aside time for prayer each day. Don't be afraid to cross things off your "must do" list if they add stress to what should be a peaceful time.

Only you and God can determine the best use of your time. For instance, some people find annual Christmas cookie baking a reflective, creative time and a wonderful way to share. For others, it's a self-imposed burden and a sure-fire way to a messy kitchen and a calorie overload. Likewise, that extra party may be just what someone needs to unwind and commune with friends while for another it may be the gateway to exhaustion or a temptation to overindulge in food or drink.

Ask God which traditions are life-giving for you, and be bold enough to leave the others behind. "I just don't have time," is the frequent lament of the holiday season. But the Christian steward is aware that we all have the same amount of time. However, each one must take ownership of their own time, and not allow others to dictate how one's time is to be spent or used. We are invited in Advent to step back and reflect on our gift of time and how it is a blessing to us and to each is given an opportunity of returning the first fruits of that time back to God. The season of Advent offers just such a grace-filled opportunity.

May the coming celebration of Christ's birth be a time of peace and joy and thanksgiving.

MONTHLY FINANCIAL REPORT

Below is the synopsis of the November financial statement.

| | |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| Bank Balance | 223.40 |
| DDF Balance: | 152902.62 |
| <u>Accts Receivable:</u> | <u>2792.68</u> |
| Total Assets | 155918.70 |

| INCOME | | EXPENSES | |
|---------------------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Donations | 11202.04 | Administration | 10338.92 |
| Fees | 315.00 | Programs | 728.23 |
| Programs | 477.04 | Operation/Maint. | 3373.47 |
| Other | 1532.94 | | |
| Rentals | 4940.00 | Rental Operation | 3417.30 |
| Total Income | 18467.02 | Total Expense | 17911.92 |
| | | Net Income | 555.10 |

While our income was down from last month, our expenses were also considerably down, as the last of the maintenance projects, etc. had been paid in October, so we remain in a fairly stable financial position.

We are not sure yet of all the financial implications of Jeannine's medical leave, but hopefully we can fill her position, as least part time, with some volunteers, and thus save a bit on payroll costs.

So far this year, our collections have increased over last year, so we remain in a good financial position.

Thank you for your generosity, which enables us to continue the mission of the church.



BE A GOOD STEWARD OF THE ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS SEASONS

December is such a busy time of year, and a month that tempts us to lose sight of the profound spiritual importance of the Advent and Christmas seasons. The best way to stay focused on the coming of Jesus Christ is to be good stewards of his presence in our daily lives. Here are simple ways to exercise good stewardship of this sacred time of year.

1. Give God a very special gift this year: Let this gift be something personal that no one else needs to know about, and let it be a sacrifice. Perhaps your gift will be to commit to spending more time with God daily. Perhaps there is a habit you know you should give up. Why wait for a New Year's resolution? Start now.
2. Celebrate the season of Advent: Light the Advent wreath candles each night before dinner. If you have children, let them offer their own prayers to the Christ child for whom we are waiting.
3. Set aside a special time to read the Christmas story in the Gospel of Saint Luke 1:5-56 through 2:1-20: Consider reading this account with your family and discussing it together.
4. Put a crèche up in your home at the beginning of Advent: Consider having one set that is "kid-proof" which your children are allowed to handle. Kids love to make the Nativity story their own, and they especially love the angels!
5. Plan a project to help someone this Christmas: Identify someone with a genuine need, involve your whole family and see how happy you can make someone this Christmas. Participate in your parish Adopt-a-Family program or call Catholic Charities or another charity and find a family through their programs. Make sure your children take part in shopping for a family who needs extra help and make them aware of the needs in your community.
6. Take a group Christmas caroling to a nursing home or a children's hospital: Get people together. Make it festive. Bring the gifts of your joyful smiles and voices to those who may need these gifts.
7. Give a surprise gift of service to each member of your family: The idea of giving an unexpected gift of service to members of your family reveals your own love and concern for them. You might consider giving your spouse a day away, running an errand for your brother, or cleaning out a closet for your mother. Make it personal and meaningful.
8. Send Christmas cards and thank you notes that convey a spiritual message: This is an easy way to share your faith during the Advent season. Don't just sign your name! Include a personal message with each card. Set aside some time after Christmas Day to write thank you notes and help your children to write thank you notes for the gifts they receive. This is a wonderful habit for a lifetime, and a good way to foster a steward's gratitude for all gifts.
9. Write a Christmas letter to someone far away such as someone in the service, or perhaps someone working or ministering in a foreign country: It has been said that receiving a letter when you are far away from home is like opening a priceless gift on Christmas morning, no matter what day of the year. Many people are unable to travel home for the holidays, so it can be a very lonely time for them. Write a special Christmas letter to someone of your choice.
10. Attend Christmas Mass together with your family: December 25 falls on Sunday this year so there should be few excuses. If you are alone this Christmas or don't have family living near you, invite a friend or a neighbor to join you.



FROM ACROSS THE MOUNTAINS

Rejoice! Rejoice ! Rejoice! It is the season of waiting and anticipation! It kind of makes you wonder a bit doesn't it?

Rejoice! You get to wait in line at the grocery store for a very long time.

Rejoice! You get to wait in traffic snarls as snow and ice play havoc with the roads.

Rejoice! You get to be on hold with the airlines for 10, 20, 30, 40 minutes as everyone else in the country deals with winter air travel.

Rejoice! You just waited 3 hours in line for the latest computer game for your child and now they're sold out.

Rejoice! Rejoice?? Who ever said that we were supposed to rejoice in any of those scenarios? Grumble, maybe. Grouch and complain and bemoan the state of the city, the world, the country, the people, the airlines, the weather. But rejoice?

Yep, rejoice. And not rejoice with a frozen smile and gritted teeth. Rejoice with joy and enthusiasm.

That's what the readings are calling us to do today. We are called to rejoice during this time of Advent waiting. We are called to rejoice at all times and everywhere.

Don't you think it's kind of odd that John the Baptist could rejoice at being "just" a messenger? If he was anything like us... he would have been complaining and wondering why he didn't get top billing, why he wasn't chosen as the Messiah, why it didn't happen for him! John the Baptist has a lesson to teach us. No matter where we are in our life, no matter what we do, we can rejoice in that.

We can rejoice in our ministry to the captives, the poor, the disadvantaged,

the drug addicts and the alcohol addicts.

We can rejoice in the line-up at the grocery store. We can rejoice as we sit in traffic watching a long line of tail lights ahead of us. We can rejoice behind that super-slow driver. We can rejoice as we sit on hold with the airlines. We can rejoice waiting in line for a computer game that is ultimately sold-out.

The question is... do we choose rejoice... or do we choose grump and grumble and complain? The choices come fast and furious during this season of pre-Christmas preparation.



Joy isn't something that comes from outside of us. Joy is something that comes from within each one of us. If we sit and wait for life to hand us moments of joy... well, we could wait a very long time. Joy isn't something out there... Joy is something in here... it is something that we can create.

Rejoice... we have an opportunity, everywhere and all the time... to manifest the joy and love of Christ. Whether we're waiting in line... or waiting on the phone... or waiting for a sold out computer game. We can grump and grumble with the rest....

Or we can rejoice... and bring something different to that space... to that place... to that encounter.

Yeah, sure... so what if everyone else is complaining. We're not talking about them... we're talking about you. You can't change them... you can't change the clock... you can't change the store or the airline or the traffic. You can only take a look at you and how you're handling this here and now.

Are you going to "rejoice in the Lord always"... everywhere and all the time... or grump and grumble and grouch and gripe? Those come easy... rejoicing isn't always so easy. That's why it stands out against the darkness... because it's something different... it's joy...

FEEDBACK

In case you're wondering, or haven't figured it out yet, the last page of the Grapevine has been, and is being, written by Giselle Jakobs, former pastoral associate here at St. Mary's. Although I've been living in Calgary for the last couple of years, I've wanted to maintain a connection with St. Mary's and the people here.

For a while now, I've been wanting to gather my reflections on scripture together into book format and I'd appreciate some feedback on them. For that purpose, I've set up a blog with them, and would appreciate any and all comments.

You can visit my blog at:
www.soaringontheword.blogspot.com

You can contact me at:
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Looking forward to getting some feedback and comments!