

THE STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

“LIVING OUT THE GIFTS HE GAVE US”

Maggie Smith sees a hierarchy of how her life should be ordered. When she serves God the most, she serves better in all other areas of her life.

“At the moment of our creation, God put into our soul the desire to serve Him in a specific way,” Maggie says. “We are closer to God and our story is more fully alive when we live out the gifts He gave us.”

The Stewardship Council exists to help parishioners discern how to “live out the gifts” Christ has given them. By articulating our ministries, the council illuminates ways that community members are already sharing their talents and communicates these avenues with other parishioners.

“Many times, stewardship is the things we’re already doing to share our gifts with the church,” says Maggie, the representative to the council from St. Theresa. “The council names the ministries of the parish so people can see where they can serve.”

For example, one of the ministries Maggie learned about through the Stewardship Council is the Prayer Shawl Ministry.

“It is such a neat ministry where people who have that tactile gift can share it in a prayerful way for the benefit of parishioners,” Maggie says.



Members of our Stewardship Council gather for a meeting.

“I now know how I can support them. The council wants people to be aware of the ministries out there and how to participate in them.”

When Maggie and her husband, Rob Smith, first joined St. Theresa, Maggie took a position with the church working in Faith Formation. A few years later, she and Rob welcomed their fourth child, and when Maggie left her position, she sought another way to help people find and make a connection with the church.

“I had mentioned to some people that I was interested in renewing that passion of mine,” Maggie says. “Then, a friend was leaving to fulfill a call to a vocation, and her position with the

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THE EUCHARIST AND STEWARDSHIP AS A WAY OF LIFE

More than 20 years ago, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops approved a pastoral letter titled *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*. This document was an invitation to follow Christ Who gave of Himself for us. Each of us is called to serve our neighbors and to be stewards of God's creation and of all that has been entrusted to us. However, to truly understand stewardship, we must look to the Holy Eucharist. The Holy Eucharist is the total gift of our loving Savior to us. Stewardship is our response to that gift.

Even the word "Eucharist" implies stewardship. The word "Eucharist" finds its roots in the Latin word *eucharistia*, which in turn came from the Greek word *eukaristos*, which meant, quite simply, "gratitude" or "thanksgiving." How fitting that we, who are called to be a stewardship people, celebrate at the focal point of every Mass an act of thanksgiving and gratitude — namely, the reception of Jesus' gift to us — the Eucharist.

In their pastoral letter on stewardship, the bishops speak of the Eucharist in this way: "The Eucharist is the great sign and agent of this expansive communion of charity... we enjoy a unique union with Christ and, in Him, with one another. Here His love — indeed, His very Self — flows into us as disciples and, through us and our practice of stewardship to the entire human race."

When we receive Christ's Body in the Holy Eucharist, we hear the minister say, "The Body of Christ." To this, we respond, "Amen" — which means in Hebrew, "Yes; it is so." This is the essence of stewardship. We should enter the Church for Mass out of "gratitude." We recognize the presence of the Lord in Holy Communion, and then we truly receive the Lord. What is left for us to do is the fulfillment of stewardship — that is, sharing what we have received in love of God and neighbor. Our entire experience speaks to stewardship — we are

grateful; we recognize the real presence of the Lord; we receive the Lord; and then we share what we have received.

Christ's gift to us through the Eucharist is an invitation to us. We are called to give beyond what is convenient or what may be comfortable. We are called to forgive even when forgiveness may not be deserved; we are called to love even when that love is not returned. We are called to love as God loves us.

The Eucharist is stewardship celebrated. The Mass is more than a ritual. It is an actual encounter with God, with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We need to respond to the Eucharist with our complete selves. What we experience in the Eucharist should, in turn, translate into our daily lives. We are committed to the Church, which is Christ's body. We show our love for His body by acts of charity and generosity. We spend time in prayer, expressing our gratitude and our love.

God's greatest gift to us is Christ's great love for us — this was shown when He was crucified on the Cross to pay the penalty for our sins and to give us eternal life. God's love for us is without limit, and He offers Himself to us in the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist. Stewardship is how we respond to that gift.



A Letter From Our Pastor

RESOLVE TO GIVE BACK TO GOD IN 2018

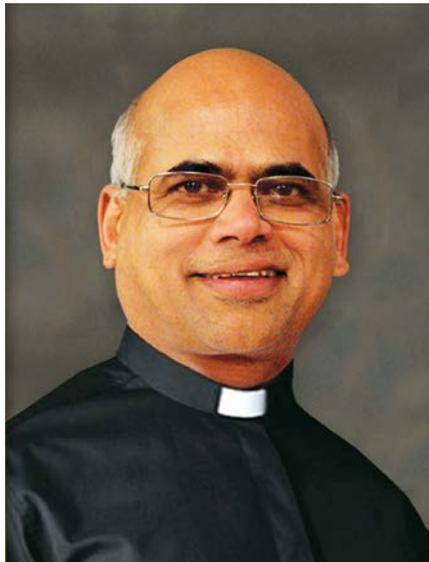
Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Another new year — 2018! There was a time in my life when this date (and others) seemed so far in the future. It is amazing how those dates start to pile up and stream by, isn't it? I have reached a point where measuring one's life by the years and dates is not as significant as many other things.

I recall reading somewhere, "The world around us asks, 'What does a person own?' But God asks, 'How does a person use what he or she has been given?'" This month of January is one filled with reminders of holiness — the official end of the Christmas season; the Epiphany of our Lord; the Baptism of the Lord; and the return to Ordinary Time, which, as we know, is not "ordinary" at all.

At Epiphany we hear, "Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts" (Matthew 2:11), a reference to the Magi and their visit to the Christ Child. The image of the Magi kneeling before the infant Jesus and opening their gifts for Him is one we should all try to follow. Each of us is called to open our gifts before Jesus and offer Him what He needs. I heard a suggestion once that if you have a problem with this thought, you should perhaps keep one of the Magi from your Christmas Nativity set and place it on your desk as a reminder.

During the Baptism of the Lord, God makes it clear when He proclaims from the Heavens, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am



well pleased" (Mark 1:11). God has given us the greatest gift He could give. He gave His only Son. When we think about the enormity of that gift of Jesus sent to save us, in addition to all the other blessings which God has entrusted to us, it is very humbling. God has given us so much. What do we give in return?

Making resolutions is common at this time of year. We will also hear this month about how Jesus called the first apostles. The Lord calls us as well to follow Him. Let us resolve to try to do that better — all of us. That does not mean we have to leave our work and our families behind, but we do need to put our service to Jesus. That should be our top resolution.

In *The Theology of the Hammer*, Habitat for Humanity co-founder Millard Fuller wrote, "The only truly safe investment one can make in life is what is given away." First and foremost, God wants us. That should be our real resolution — to give ourselves to the Lord. May we all do a better job of that in 2018. God bless you all.

Sincerely yours in Christ and His Mother,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Antony Stehler". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Fr. Antony
Pastor

CELEBRATING COMMUNITY CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK

When the Spalding Academy students and faculty celebrate Catholic Schools Week this month, they are celebrating what Catholic education truly means — both now, and in students' lives “down the road.”

“The school is building the future,” says the Principal of Spalding Academy, Mrs. Amy McKay. “This school is educating these kids and putting into society kids who have not only an academic base, but a good faith base and moral awareness.”

Each year, Spalding Academy spends a week celebrating its unique identity as a Catholic educational institution during Catholic Schools Week, or CSW. This year, CSW kicks off with the 5:30 p.m. Saturday Vigil Mass on Jan. 27 at St. Michael's, where school students and their families will be serving in the liturgy. Following Mass, there will be a dinner in the parish center. All parish and school families are invited to attend these events.

“Catholic Schools Week is a chance to showcase our school a little bit, to show what Spalding Academy, as a Catholic school, can offer students,” Mrs. McKay says.

The week is filled with activity, including a focus on vocations, student and staff appreciation days, an open house, and more. Catholic Schools Week comes to a close on Feb. 4, with a liturgy at 11 a.m., followed by the school's fundraising auction.

Many of the week's activities are done in multi-age groups, designed to build community among the students as they work together with their diverse “Saint Families.” In addition, all the students come together each day to participate in morning prayer and assembly.

“You might have a preschooler, a third-grader and a couple high school kids, all mixed together doing activities,” Mrs. McKay says. “That builds the sense of community. We've got great teachers, a great atmosphere, a great sense of community, where our students look out for each other.”

Catholic Schools Week also provides an



opportunity for those in our broader parish community to get a glimpse into our school. Mrs. McKay hopes that anyone who is interested will attend the school open house, and come experience a day in the life of a student at Spalding Academy.

“With the open house, we bring whoever would like to come,” Mrs. McKay says. “We invite them right into what the kids are doing.”

AND CATHOLIC EDUCATION WEEK AT SPALDING ACADEMY

For more information on the events of Catholic Schools Week, or to schedule a visit during the open house and to come join the fun, please contact the St. Michael parish office at 308-497-2662 or the school office at 308-497-2103. Special thanks to our faculty and staff at Spalding Academy whose efforts make possible all the special events that take place during Catholic Schools Week!

“A lot of times at our open house, we’ll end the day with the kids being in their ‘Saint Families’ and we’ll do various contests all together in the gym,” she continues. “When you look out, it’s just everybody mixed — parents and community.”

This year’s theme for National Catholic Schools Week is “Catholic Schools: Learn. Serve. Lead. Succeed.” Mrs. McKay hopes that as our students grow and mature, they will continue to be involved in the Catholic community.

“A lot of kids, when they graduate from Catholic school, are more apt to stay involved with their faith and their Church,” she says.

Being a national celebration, Catholic Schools Week is a chance for all members of our school and parish community to come together, joining in solidarity with people all across the country, to celebrate the special contribution of Catholic education in our local community, and society as a whole.

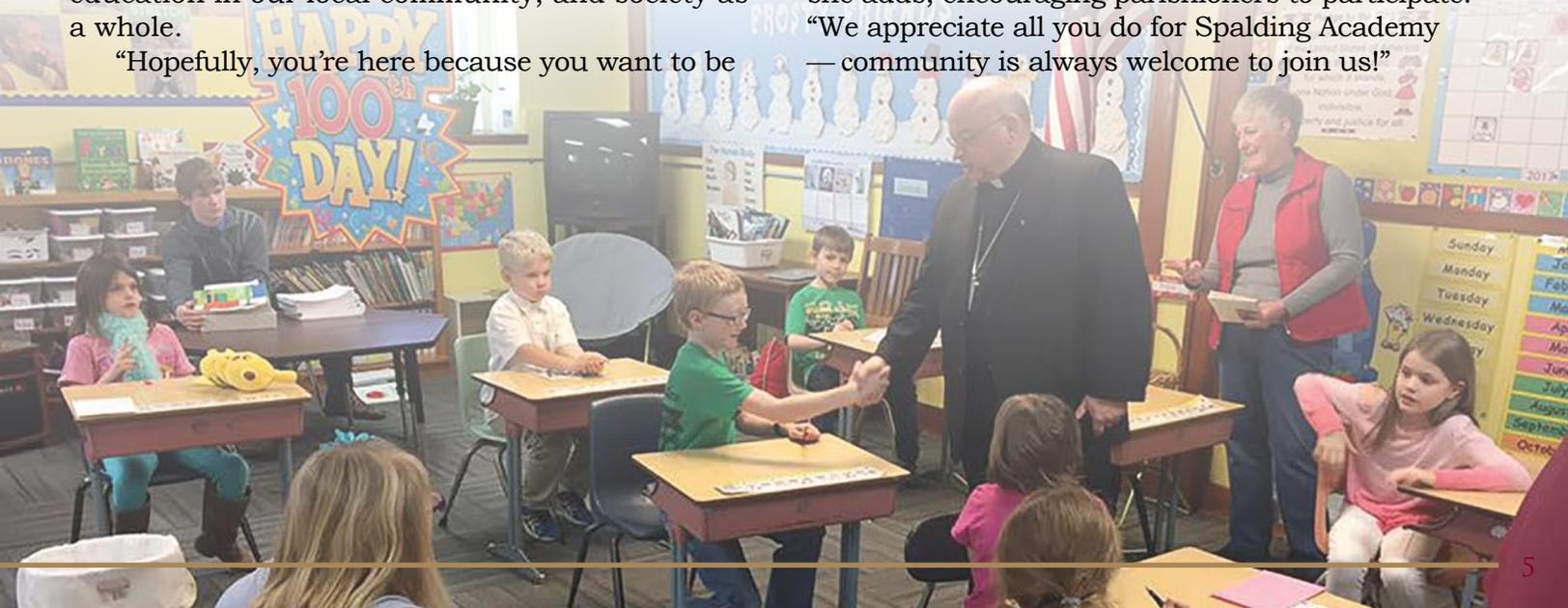
“Hopefully, you’re here because you want to be

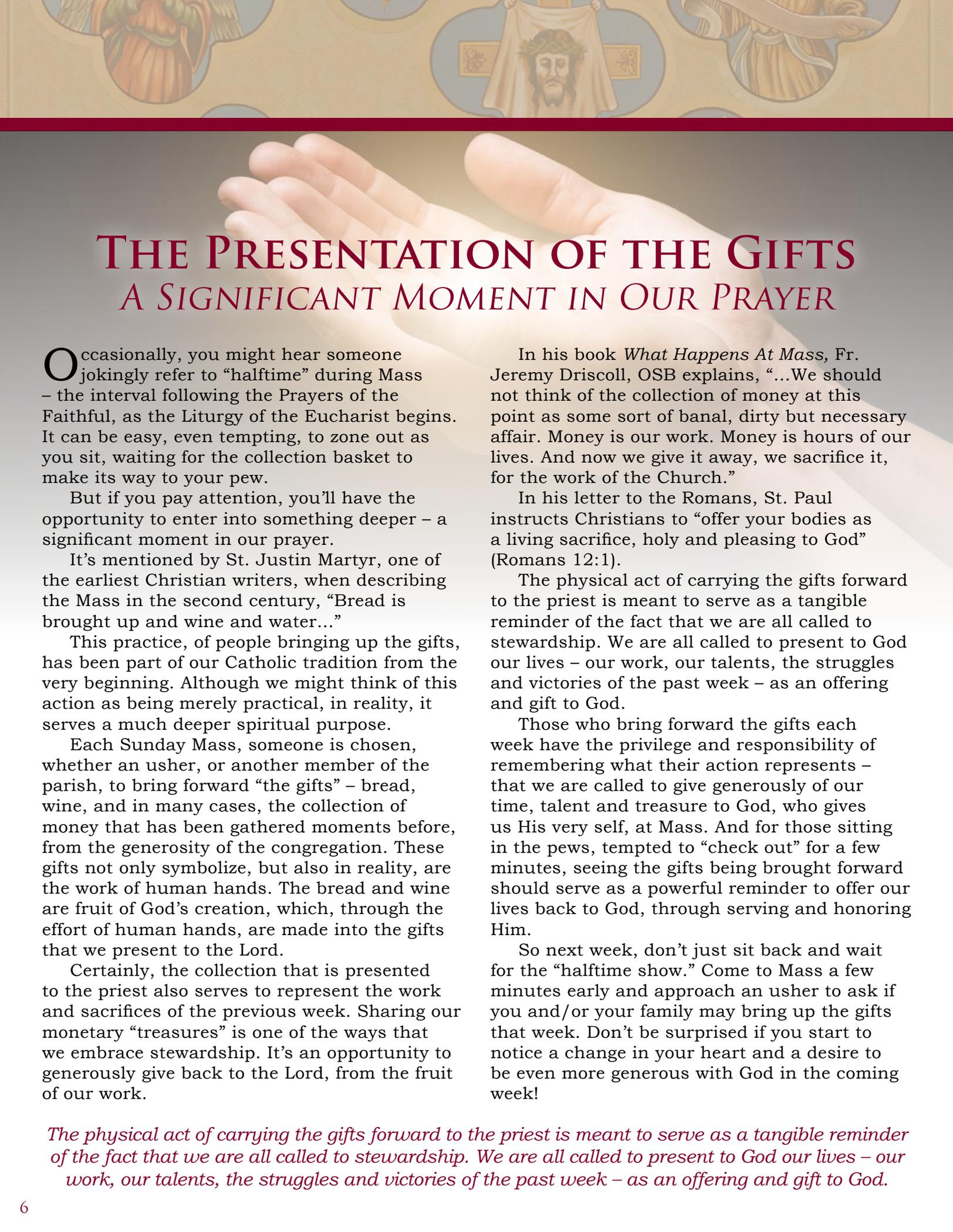
part of that bigger picture of the Catholic Christian faith and during National Catholic Schools Week, you’re joining everybody else in celebrating this aspect of education and celebrating what Catholic schools around the nation do for our country,” Mrs. McKay says.

Mrs. McKay hopes that parishioners and school families alike will come and take part in the festivities.

“Just come and join us for the opening Mass and the dinner, everyone’s welcoming and we’d love to see you there and have that chance to interact with you,” she says. “Hopefully, you’ll get more of a sense of belonging and being part of the team and school community.

“Even if you don’t have a connection [to the school, through a child or grandchild], you’re more than welcome to join us in any of the activities,” she adds, encouraging parishioners to participate. “We appreciate all you do for Spalding Academy — community is always welcome to join us!”





THE PRESENTATION OF THE GIFTS

A SIGNIFICANT MOMENT IN OUR PRAYER

Occasionally, you might hear someone jokingly refer to “halftime” during Mass – the interval following the Prayers of the Faithful, as the Liturgy of the Eucharist begins. It can be easy, even tempting, to zone out as you sit, waiting for the collection basket to make its way to your pew.

But if you pay attention, you’ll have the opportunity to enter into something deeper – a significant moment in our prayer.

It’s mentioned by St. Justin Martyr, one of the earliest Christian writers, when describing the Mass in the second century, “Bread is brought up and wine and water...”

This practice, of people bringing up the gifts, has been part of our Catholic tradition from the very beginning. Although we might think of this action as being merely practical, in reality, it serves a much deeper spiritual purpose.

Each Sunday Mass, someone is chosen, whether an usher, or another member of the parish, to bring forward “the gifts” – bread, wine, and in many cases, the collection of money that has been gathered moments before, from the generosity of the congregation. These gifts not only symbolize, but also in reality, are the work of human hands. The bread and wine are fruit of God’s creation, which, through the effort of human hands, are made into the gifts that we present to the Lord.

Certainly, the collection that is presented to the priest also serves to represent the work and sacrifices of the previous week. Sharing our monetary “treasures” is one of the ways that we embrace stewardship. It’s an opportunity to generously give back to the Lord, from the fruit of our work.

In his book *What Happens At Mass*, Fr. Jeremy Driscoll, OSB explains, “...We should not think of the collection of money at this point as some sort of banal, dirty but necessary affair. Money is our work. Money is hours of our lives. And now we give it away, we sacrifice it, for the work of the Church.”

In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul instructs Christians to “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” (Romans 12:1).

The physical act of carrying the gifts forward to the priest is meant to serve as a tangible reminder of the fact that we are all called to stewardship. We are all called to present to God our lives – our work, our talents, the struggles and victories of the past week – as an offering and gift to God.

Those who bring forward the gifts each week have the privilege and responsibility of remembering what their action represents – that we are called to give generously of our time, talent and treasure to God, who gives us His very self, at Mass. And for those sitting in the pews, tempted to “check out” for a few minutes, seeing the gifts being brought forward should serve as a powerful reminder to offer our lives back to God, through serving and honoring Him.

So next week, don’t just sit back and wait for the “halftime show.” Come to Mass a few minutes early and approach an usher to ask if you and/or your family may bring up the gifts that week. Don’t be surprised if you start to notice a change in your heart and a desire to be even more generous with God in the coming week!

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Meet The Carrahers

EMBRACING STEWARDSHIP AS A FAMILY

To Kurt and Holly Carraher and their four boys — Keaton, 15; Connor, 13; Drew, 11; and Brady, 7 — stewardship definitely starts at home.

“To our family, stewardship means serving God, our church, and others,” Holly says. “Stewardship is important to us because God calls us to be stewards of our church and community. We try to live it every day by serving others. In our house, we try to practice stewardship by being kind and helping each other out. This is a huge task, as having four boys, there is never a dull moment.”

By striving to make their house a “domestic church,” they share the gift of faith with one another.

“Our favorite family devotions are praying together before meals and at bedtime,” Holly says. “It is always special when we go to weekend Mass together. We also like lighting the candles on our Advent wreath. Children learn by example. A child’s faith begins at home, when it is modeled by their parents.”

Furthermore, the Carraher family brings the stewardship vision to life outside the walls of their home as well in many beautiful ways. For example, Kurt enjoys being active with the Men’s Club and previously served on the Parish Council. Holly began working as the Director of Religious Education, or DRE, at our parish in July, and cherishes her call to pass on the “torch” of faith to the next generation.

“I enjoy helping parents teach their kids about God and how to live a good, holy life,” she says. “I experience the most joy when the children receive a holy sacrament, or do random acts of kindness. These are all very special moments. Being the DRE has taught me so much about the Catholic faith — mostly about the Mass.”

She is also a member of St. Anne’s Altar Society and taught Religious Education for 10 years.



The Carraher family — (back, from left) Kurt, Keaton and Connor; (front, from left) Brady, Holly and Drew

Keaton, Connor, and Drew are all altar servers as well.

“We began helping at the parish when we first moved back to Spalding, mostly because in a small community, we felt like it took everyone’s participation to make our parish successful,” Holly says. “After getting involved, we realized it was very rewarding. My boys enjoy altar serving because they say it makes it so much easier to pay attention at Mass.”

When asked why she would encourage people to take advantage of the blessings of being deeply involved with ones’ faith, Holly offers her insight.

“God calls everyone to be stewards of the Church, so I believe everyone should try to serve God by getting involved or helping in any way one feels comfortable,” she says. “For some people, serving actively is difficult, but praying for others is also a way to serve God. There are many ways of living out stewardship, and everyone needs to do their part. However, no one should judge others about their involvement in the Church. God’s judgment at the end is all that matters.”

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THE STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL *continued from front cover*

council came open.”

Recently the members of the Stewardship Council collected responses from our Annual Stewardship Appeal. Part of what Maggie has been involved in this year has been working with parish representatives to communicate with ministry leaders.

“Ministry leaders are available contacts who help people know what the ministry is about and how they can participate,” Maggie says. “They are a good resource for interested parishioners.”

Maggie would like to encourage everyone to learn about stewardship, whether that means reading a resource like *Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response* or simply checking out the newsletter.

“I didn’t realize all the nooks and crannies and details there are to be done and what it really takes for us to make stewardship alive in our parish,” Maggie says. “Learn what it means to be a good steward and how this applies to you.”

If you would like more information about the Stewardship Council, please reach out to Maggie Smith at 402-416-9531.

MASS SCHEDULE:

5 p.m. Saturday - St. Michael in Spalding | **7 a.m. Sunday** - St. Michael in Spalding
9 a.m. Sunday - Sacred Heart in Greeley | **11 a.m. Sunday** - St. Theresa in Ericson