

ST. JOHN'S JOURNAL

REFLECTING STEWARDSHIP AS A WAY OF LIFE

ADVENT 2011

A FAMILY'S STEWARDSHIP RESPONSE BY JULIE GIBSON

When my husband Drew and I were discerning whether or not to expand our family through international adoption, there was one factor that kept us from declaring an emphatic "yes" to the call we were hearing in our hearts. Our bank account!

International adoption is not an inexpensive process and we were apprehensive about the financial commitment. Yet we felt God's patient persistence and we decided to attend a meeting at a local international adoption agency that we were interested in.

On the evening of the meeting, we were driving down the road and had only gotten about a mile from our

home when we saw paper flying in the middle of the street. As we got closer and looked carefully, we realized it wasn't just paper, IT WAS MONEY! Seriously, money was flying in the street!

We pulled to the side of the road, we got out of the car and we started running around like kids at Disneyland, picking up twenty, fifty and hundred dollar bills (yep, one-hundred dollar bills) that were blowing in the wind.

It was like a scene from a movie. While we were happily catching the flying money we also stumbled over a wallet that the money obviously had been in. Of course, we knew that

we needed to get in touch with the owner and return his money.. I'm pretty sure he'll never set his wallet full of cash on the outside of his truck and then drive away again.

I think for Drew and I though, we also knew something else, that God will provide. He will take care of us. We continued on to our meeting that night knowing full well that we would move forward with the adoption process.

In the end we didn't receive any financial help from money randomly falling from the heavens but we made some significant adjustments so that we could make the finances doable.

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EDITOR'S LETTER

"Because you have so little faith, I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move.

Nothing will be impossible for you." Matthew 17:20

Sure, but have you ever

tried to move a teenager? Have you ever tried to inspire a PTA? Have you ever tried to make people understand your point of view?

Sometimes it feels like we really are trying to move mountains. We push and push and push. The moun-

BY GRETCHEN OJALA

tain never moves. Our faith lags, we feel defeated. We feel exhausted and depleted and we become jaded to those who we think are pushing at the other side of the mountain.

Lately, I have felt like I've

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... STEWARDSHIP RESPONSE CONTINUED

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Was it scary? At moments yes, but we were also at peace because we knew we were responding to God's call. We are incredibly blessed by all three of our children and the plan that God had in creating our family. God provides all that we need.

Drew and I both grew up in Catholic homes and the notion of God's amazing provisions were not new to us when we came to St John the Baptist in 1999. However here at St. John's we have been able to live out the heart of stewardship in a more intentional, purposeful and prayerful way.

We have come to understand that all that we have belongs to God, he shares His gifts in

amazing ways and He asks us to give back to His mission. Each of us is being called in a different way and God will be patient and persistent until we respond. He may even get inventive, like having money blow around in the middle of the street, but when you hear His call, RESPOND! Respond with a joyful heart because what an amazing privilege to have our Heavenly Father call on each of us.

We asked our three daughters to add their thoughts on stewardship...

Danica, age 14 – God has provided me with many great things like a fantastic family, an amazing school and a safe home with everything I need and more. I moved to Washington when I was just one year old and I believe it was

so my faith could grow at St. John the Baptist.

My church and all of the people in it are so important to me. I love spending time with the younger kids and I learn so much from the older ones.

God has provided me with the strength and knowledge I need to keep me going each day. I respond by thanking God every day for all of His wonderful gifts.

I attend LifeTeen Mass and LifeNights. I am a member of the LifeTeen Outreach group and I am a member of "The Crew" on Sunday mornings for the elementary CCD program. I also share some of the money I earn. God and I have a great connection that I will keep for years to come.

Jenna, age 9 - God provides

me with a family and friends to celebrate with. He has also given me assistance like helping me to do my work. I want to give him my worship, love and kindness. I love Jesus.

Kendra, age 8 – God has provided me with everything I need to survive such as pizza, my house, a cozy bed, TV and my family, friends and dog. In return I give my love and I share my money. I hope you do to. —

This time of year St John the Baptist conducts its Stewardship campaign and I pray that we all listen to the messages God is speaking to us. I pray that we hear what He is calling us to. And finally, I pray that we respond!

A NEW RICHNESS TO THE ROMAN MISSAL

BY FR. JIM COYNE

As you hopefully have heard by now, the new translation of the Roman Missal will be introduced on November 27th, the First Sunday of Advent. This English translation will be more faithful to the original Latin. For example, the response "And also with you" will now be "And with your spirit." This and other newly translated responses and acclamations will call for greater intentionality and focus on your part and mine as well.

That's not necessarily a bad thing. Having memorized Eucharistic prayers II and III, I have been guilty of rattling through those prayers in a mindless way at times. I now will be forced to pay attention to the new translation in such a way that the words will take on a deeper meaning.

My prayer is that the reception of the new Roman Missal will be an opportunity for us to translate anew the Eucharist and all it entails into a richer fabric in our daily lives.

The new language may seem awkward at first, but it is my hope that it will lead us to a greater awareness of the richness of the liturgy of the Eucharist. May the Lord grant us the patience we will need to receive that which is new and may we also have the courage to carry the message of being broken open in the service of others.



A TRADITION THAT STRENGTHENS FAMILY BONDS

BY GARY LARA

Simbang Gabi (seem-bung gah -bee) is a nine day Catholic mass tradition that begins on December 16 and ends on December 24 with a Christmas Eve mass.

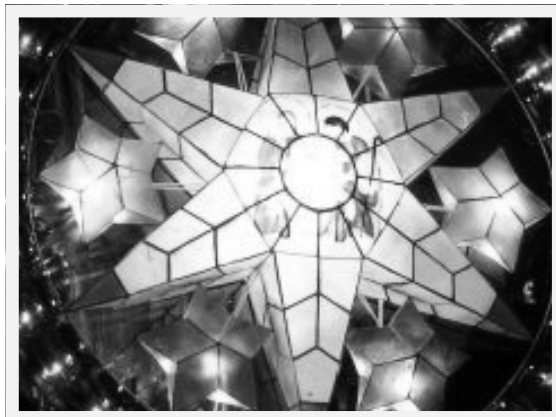
It was introduced to the Philippines by Spanish missionaries in the 17th century.

This tradition got started not just out of devotion, but also due to practicality. Many Filipinos were fishermen or farmers who started or ended their days with the dawn. To avoid the intense mid-day heat, other laborers also adopted a morning schedule which begins with the rooster's call at crack of dawn. Due to the work schedules of the Filipinos, the missionaries realized the best time to gather people for mass was at dawn.

It was then that the missionaries introduced the devotion to the Virgin Mary, which takes place the nine days leading up to Christmas. Since mass began as early as 4:00 a.m. during these nine days, the Masses became known as the Misa de Gallo, Spanish for Mass of the rooster. It is also known as Midnight Mass or Mass in the Night, as liturgy takes place while still dark. This time honored Philippine Christmas Catholic tradition has been observed for hundreds of years

The church goers would be welcomed with the distinctive Filipino Christmas decorations like the beautiful parol (star lantern symbolizing the

star of Bethlehem) and Belen (The Nativity Scene).



Parol (star lantern)

After the mass, outside the church are stalls that await the churchgoers with traditional favorite delicacies for everyone to enjoy, There were different kinds of rice cakes, hot pandesal (breakfast rolls) and hot drinks such as salabat (hot ginger tea), tsokolate (cocoa) and coffee.

In Catholic communities in the Philippines, Simbang Gabi has remained unchanged. In certain areas, however, the Mass times have been changed to accommodate the schedules of a new generation. This is also true of celebrations in the United States.

The dawn masses have been replaced with nine evening services. Mass is held at a different parish each night allowing the tradition to reach as many people as possible. Parols and Belens would still adorn churches and Filipi-

no homes. And after mass, traditional Filipino dishes are still served. Although the parish celebrations differ slightly, the intent remains the same. Filipinos and non-Filipinos alike gather in churches around the city to experience a piece of the past, but more importantly, to mentally and spiritually prepare for the celebration of the birth of our Lord.

Growing up in the Philippines, for me and for most, it



Belen (The Nativity Scene)

was a challenge to complete all nine masses every year. My grandparents say it was a way of asking the Lord for blessings. And some people believe that if one completes Simbang Gabi, wishes will be granted.

Simbang Gabi is more than tradition to me. It strengthens relationships among family members but also because it is the time where our faith strengthens. This is the time where we mostly feel the presence of the Lord. Simbang Gabi deepens my spiritual preparation for the birth of Jesus Christ, which leads to a more meaningful Christmas season.

Bringing Filipino celebrations to St. John's like Simbang Gabi encourages sharing of faith and strengthens our fellowship and family life in the community. It also provides an opportunity for promoting, sharing and experiencing diverse religious expressions and cultural traditions. In the end it's all about staying true to our Filipino traditions, how we keep it alive, prepare and welcome Christmas.

This year, Simbang Gabi at St. John's will be celebrated on Sunday December 18th during the 5:30 PM mass. A potluck reception will follow at the McMullen Center.

FANNING INTO FLAME THE GIFT OF FAITH

BY JOAN WILLIAMSON



Have you ever sat around a campfire as the flames began to subside, the fuel almost consumed? Remember the feeling of the chill that comes when the fire dies down?

Did these moments ever drive you to find ways to bring back the flame?...adding more wood?... more kindling?...some paper? Have you ever gotten on your knees to blow more oxygen onto the embers in hopes that a flame would come forth? Remember what it felt like when you succeeded, the flame ignited again! Remember the warmth and the magic

of the campfire returning?

And so it is with the gift of faith given by God. At times this gift is a consuming fire, at other times it is simply a little ember fighting to stay alive! Jesus desires the fire to burn brightly so all the world can see (Matt 5:14-16), and be changed!

In Faith Formation, this year, we began with the theme "Fanning into Flame the Gift of Faith." We had 75 of our Catechists (Pre-School through adult) join in a day-long training focused on this theme.

Throughout the year we will be working to be the vessels that God uses to bring the oxygen to the flame of faith in all who are involved in Faith Formation. These volunteers have given of their talent to lead, teach, and help form the faith of their fellow parishioners. These volunteers have

given of their time to pray for those that they teach/lead. We give back our gratitude.

As the disciples, who had been walking on a road to Emmaus (Luke 24.13-35), once said, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us (NRSV)?" We too, are invited to walk with Jesus, experiencing that great passion of love that comes when we are with the Lord. The more time we spend with Jesus, the bigger flame our gift of faith has, the more the light of Christ shines in our world!

As is true in this passage from Luke, it is in the breaking of the bread that we recognize Jesus...as Catholics this is our source, our nourishment each week. It is very good to gather, greet, connect, and worship with each other at week-

ly mass, and other gatherings.

Other ways that we can fan into flame that great gift of faith are: have coffee with friends from church, after mass go out to breakfast/dinner with another family from church, play praise/worship/Christian music on the radio in the car, join a series in Apostolic Formation, have your children involved in Life Teen/Youth Group/PS-4th Faith Formation, volunteer in one of the 78 ministries within our community, take time in personal prayer while at home/hiking/biking/walking, experience a retreat, participate in Taize Prayer, and/or have Advent prayer at home on a weekly basis with your family.

There are many other ways to fan the flame of faith, the most important thing to do is FAN THE FLAME!!!!

ADVENT FAMILY FUN DAY

All ages, families, sizes and shapes are invited to join the fun in preparing for Advent at St. John the Baptist parish!

Sunday, November 20th we are gathering from 1:30pm – 4:30pm.

We will begin, in the **sanctuary, with prayer at 1:30pm**. Feel free to drop in at any time, or spend the whole time, in the fun! Families/Individuals will then be able to select from various projects, or do all, that will help them be ready for Advent! The options include: making an Advent wreath, an Advent calendar, an ornament, and decorating cookies. For those who would like, we will also have storytelling and Pictionary. All of the supplies will be provided, so come and have a blast with your family and/or friends, and take home prayers and activities that you can use throughout Advent!

OUR YOUTH GIVING BACK

BY GRETCHEN OJALA

It began many years ago with an idea to help a community in Guatemala that is still recovering from a 36-year civil war that ended in the early 90's. The idea was to forge a relationship with the people in this community and perhaps help them build a larger church to accommodate the 10 villages that surrounded the area.

The relationship started with two St. John's parishioners, Paul and Rosanne Fairweather and founding pastor Fr. Jack Walmsley visiting in 2001 to get the lay of the land. They saw and experienced the lives of people of a different culture, a culture where time has essentially stood still.

What started with three has grown with each subsequent visit to the twenty-one adults and youth heading back to Union de las Aldeas Corpus Christi in August 2012. There will be ten youth and eleven adults in this first ever youth mission to our sister parish.

I sat down to talk with Jessica Mendoza and Jim Tanassee, who are heading up this youth mission, about how they were called to lead the youth.

Jim has "always felt called to the notion of how we are called to serve our brothers and sisters." He was involved in "Just Faith" a Catholic program centered on Catholic social teaching. His journey with "Just Faith" energized to participate with the second group heading to Guatemala in 2005. Jim also joined the

Guatemala group in the last two visits in 2007 and 2010.

Jessica's first experience with mission work was through her position at Western Washington University as a Peer Minister of Social Justice in the school's Newman Center. She went with a University group on a mission trip to Mexico and came away with an understanding of the importance of building relationships in other cultures, as well as sustaining ties with her own family's culture. It was also powerful for her to see how faith and culture were at the forefront of the Mexican people's lives. Jessica first became involved with the Guatemala group in 2007 when Jim asked her if she'd be interested in coming as an interpreter.

Both Jessica and Jim had their own faith fanned by their visits to Guatemala. Jessica is always uplifted by the faith of the Guatemalan people; "their joy throughout the strife" of poverty and war. "They serve as an example of what our faith should be."

Jim contrasts the lives we live and the lives of the Guatemalan people. "Their faith and family are the center of their lives. They remind you how important it is to take inventory of what is really important. We get distracted in our lives – [the Guatemalans] live God's time differently – they get the most out of life every day. [Americans] miss the real gift of time."

I asked Jessica and Jim what their hopes are for this first youth mission trip to our sister parish. Both of them, because of their past experiences and their faith, are passionate about inspiring others to social action and serving others.

This trip will be project oriented, focused on the current project of building weather tight houses within the communities. Jessica knows the significance of youth leaving their comfort zones to experience a different place in the bigger human family. They hope to show the youth how we are all connected as children of God. The youth will be able to make their own comparisons to what life is like in the rest of the world. And ultimately they hope they will think more of the global culture and know they can have an effect on the larger humanity.

Jim sees this as a culmination of the investment we have made in our youth in the last five years. Seventy-five percent of the group have gone on Agape or done other service work at St. John's. This is an opportunity for them to dive into service work in a deeper way. All the kids felt called to go on the trip. Now they have the opportunity to live it. "Jesus emulated how we should be in the world. Catholic social teaching brings Jesus to life."

The youth have been meeting with Jessica and Jim monthly

for the past four months to prepare themselves for this mission trip; they will continue to meet until July 2012. In the monthly lessons they'll learn the building blocks of Catholic social teaching and what it means to be a community. The youth will experience poverty and hunger through a food fast called "30 Hour Famine" sponsored by World vision. They will also participate in fund raising projects that will help them be directly invested and involved in this mission trip.

As Jim summed it up, "The youth are prophets. The number one mission is how we continue to inspire the Gospel and the gift of Eucharist and how we put the Eucharist back into the world."

And so we send our youth out into the world.

[For more history on St. John's relationship with our Guatemalan sister parish, see St. John's Journal July 2010 online at sjtbcc.org.]

The ME25 Survey measures member Engagement and Spiritual Commitment.

Please contact Sue Ray in the parish office with any comments or questions.

The full engagement survey is available on our website: www.sjtbcc.org



Parishioner Engagement is a deep emotional connection to the parish community. Research by the Gallup Organization tells us that people who are engaged in their parish are vastly more likely to be Spiritually Committed individuals. Spiritually committed people are much more likely to be happy with their lives (even in the midst of trial or challenge); they are also more likely to invite others to worship or to an event in their community, they are more likely to give selflessly of their time and their resources, and they are more likely to serve in wonderful ways. *In other words, they are living disciples!* **How engaged are we? How can we be more engaged?** In the ME25 survey that nearly 1100 of us completed in the spring, 32% of the people who

responded answered the questions in a way that demonstrates **parishioner Engagement**. This is in comparison with a **national Catholic average of 16%**. When you go to a parish other than St. John the Baptist and return saying it “feels” good to be back with your community, you are experiencing us as a community growing in **Engagement**. Here are the twelve statements regarding **Member Engagement**:

ME25 Survey Statement	Why this measure is important	% of St. John's community who Agree or Strongly Agree
As a member of my parish, I know what's expected of me.	<i>We need to know we expect of each other, in order for St. John's to be a place where each of us has a sense of belonging.</i>	75%
In my parish, my spiritual needs are met.	<i>The parish is a place in which each of us should find spiritual support.</i>	72%
In my parish, I regularly have the opportunity to do what I do best.	<i>We need to be able to discover our talents and offer them in service to God and others.</i>	63%
In the last month, I have received recognition or praise from someone in my parish.	<i>We need our service to be recognized so we know that what we do is of value.</i>	49%
The spiritual leaders in my parish seem to care about me as a person.	<i>Our leaders – pastor, deacon, parishioner leaders and staff – strengthen our parish by telling us we matter through their care.</i>	70%
There is someone in my parish who encourages my spiritual development.	<i>We know we matter when we have someone who encourages our life of faith.</i>	58%
As a member of my parish, my opinions seem to count.	<i>Every person's thoughts are important! This is one important way we grow as a parish.</i>	60%
The mission or purpose of my parish makes me feel my participation is important.	<i>It takes each of us to participate in order for us to be the community we can be.</i>	73%
The other members of my parish are committed to spiritual growth.	<i>When we really belong, we look around and see others who are growing in faith like us.</i>	73%
Aside from family members, I have a best friend in my parish.	<i>We each need to know there is someone in our parish whom we can turn to, in joy or in need.</i>	42%
In the last six months, someone in my parish has talked to me about the progress of my spiritual growth.	<i>It is important that each of us has someone who cares enough about us to ask about our spiritual life. That is a sign that we are growing together.</i>	31%
In my parish, I have opportunities to learn and grow.	<i>Our parish should be a place for everyone to learn about our faith and to grow as a result.</i>	78%

We value your input and we invite you to attend our monthly Member Engagement Meeting. Please check the bulletin for time and location. After all, *“Belonging Leads to Believing.”*

...EDITOR'S LETTER CONTINUED

(Continued from page 1)

been pushing an unmovable mountain. When I step back and observe my mountain, it's not so bad. I certainly know people who have it much harder than I. So what is my problem? Why can't I pull myself together and just deal with the mountains we call life?

Here I am, trying to write an editor's letter for this newsletter and somehow inspire 1100 families. Oh great. Of course, that thought made it all worse. So I did what every woman who can does when she is stuck... I went to my mom's house and cried on her shoulder.

I told her my woes with my family, my health, and with the various groups I am involved with. I said to her, "If they keep doing the same thing, they can't expect a different result." My mom said, "Did you tell them that?"

No, I hadn't told them that, it just seemed obvious to me.

I also told my mother how stuck I was writing something for this newsletter. I even told her that God has never let me down before, but he was certainly waiting a long time to come to my rescue. My mother felt I was in the same rut many of us fall into when we are dealing with our families, work and our worldly environment. We get so focused on the outside world and getting things done ourselves, we leave God behind when He is waiting to help us.

She suggested I go home and spend some quiet time with God.

After I left my mother I felt some peace; she understood, she was a wife and mother of teens and had been caught up in the worldly environment at one time.

Then I went grocery shopping

with a renewed faith God would descend on me at any moment and inspire me to write my Editor's Letter. When I got home, I cooked dinner, did dishes, ran over the weekend's activities with my family and then proceeded to do exactly what I do every night... watch TV.

I got exactly the same results. I felt stuck mentally, spiritually, and emotionally. I knew I needed to start putting the newsletter together, except I was missing my Editor's letter. I had really wanted to have it mostly done by the end of the day, but I still had no inspiration from God.

But it's Friday night, there's not that much on TV on Friday night, so I turned to Netflix and started watching the reality show "Ruby." It's about a woman who was once 700 pounds and as of this view-

ing (2009) is down to a little over 300 pounds. She went to see her therapist because she felt stuck. Her therapist said to her, "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing, but expecting different results."

Where had I heard that before? Here I was waiting for inspiration and it had come out of my own mouth earlier in the day. I just can't think that was a coincidence. He had given me the answer, but because I thought of it myself (or I thought I did), I didn't think it was the message I was looking for. It was so simple, and it was there in front of me the whole time. God stepped into my rut to show me the message I had missed earlier in the day.

So here it is... When we are stuck in a rut, all we have to do is step out of the rut and do something different.

I think I just moved a mountain.

even
a little faith
moves a
mighty mountain



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