

The major concern in scripting this message was to squeeze a lifetime of stewardship and the blessings of doing so into 7 minutes. Forgive me but due to eye problems, I am going to have to read this, so please be patient with me.

As I was preparing for this, it occurred to me that we have lived by this motto: *I firmly believe that one's level of faith and belief in the power of prayer is in direct proportion to one's commitment to Stewardship.*

Our family is blessed in so many ways, my wife Susie and I have 2 children – both proud graduates of Holy Family School. Our widowed daughter of 6 years recently remarried a fine Catholic Steward, our son and his wife Gail are both very committed to their stewardship here. We have 3 beautiful granddaughters, 2 attend U of M and then there is Hannah a 6<sup>th</sup> grader here at Holy Family and is already very active in her Stewardship. Trust me, Hannah will be going to MSU.

Susie and I are both cancer survivors and have literally beat the odds in so many circumstances during our 52 years of marriage. Many or most of you have had or are having obstacles much greater than ours, I only want to share with you how **God watched over us** during our struggles.

Our life began great with the birth of daughter during the first year of our marriage while I was a student at M.S.U. and Susie worked at the college. In April, the first year of teaching, I was diagnosed with a chronic disease and was told I had a life expectancy of 20 years. Our faith and prayers led us to a hospital in Grand Rapids that specialized in my disease, which I learned was inherited.

The doctors put me on a program of experimental treatments, regular visits and a commitment to spend 5 days in July and December for treatment in a hospital. Although this routine continued for 20 years, Susie and I contemplated not continuing because our debt was mounting over the costs of the medications. Our faith remained strong and Susie and I continued to attend Mass faithfully and give our offering to God despite our financial challenges. Then one day, another sign God was watching over us, a lifelong friend, a pharmacist, approached us and offered his help. He not only gave me my medications at cost - he never cashed a check. When I asked him

why, he replied, you are a good Catholic and I know when you can, you will pay me back. John was a true example of a steward in his small town Lutheran Church.

During my 20<sup>th</sup> year of my 5 day visits it was recommended to have surgery. They could not tell me if I indeed had cancer or that I did not. Medical science had finally improved so I could have surgery without being an invalid. After Susie and I prayed for a week – we returned and had the surgery. We learned that I did have cancer and without the surgery, I would not have lived to my next exam in July. I was reminded once again that God was watching over us.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> major event occurred 3 years after my daughter was born. Having moved to a larger school, closer to Grand Rapids, I was able to cut back on some of my teaching and coaching duties. By now, we were both determined to have more children. Due to medical complications and a miscarriage, we were truly blessed to find a specialist in troubled pregnancies to care for Susie during her complicated pregnancy of our son. He was truly a God send. Susie was bedridden at St. Mary's Hospital for 120 days. We felt peace with the multiple daily visits from the nuns and chaplain of this Catholic hospital. Without their support and determination, the business manager would have won his case to give up on our pregnancy.

We were constantly amazed at the generosity of friends, family and even strangers as we were given financial gifts and loans with no interest along our way.

A few career changes pursuing higher income brought us to Holy Family in 71. In 1978 I left education and went into private business. It took us until the late 90's to be solvent – where my net worth was not in the red. I point this out because during our 52 years of marriage we never missed putting our envelope in the Sunday offering, even though there were times when it may have included only \$1. We both credit our parents for meeting this goal. They were very strong stewards in their own church and school activities.

Susie and I often bickered over financial issues – how much do we spend on Christmas presents? or do we turn the heat up or down? From day one though, Susie left our offering amount to me. She was always pleased to see our year end statement and that we always gave at least 5% of our income.

We consider Holy Family our home and through the years have not only said thank you to God by giving back a portion of our financial blessings, we have also given of our time and talent in so many ways - including as an Usher, the Men's Club, St. Rita's Guild, and volunteering in the school. All of this started with the invitation from a stranger and now my good friend Harold, who prompted me to help usher and the rest is history.

In closing, I would like to leave you with 2 thoughts. I often think of Harold, who through his stewardship got us involved with the parish. Wouldn't it be nice for all of us to be like Harold – welcoming and inviting?

And I hope after hearing my story that you realize God is watching over you and your family and showering you with blessings, just like he has ours.

Thank you!