

Stewardship in Action at St. Bernard



ST. BERNARD STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL: A YEAR IN REVIEW

Parishioners,

As chairperson of the Council, I would like to take this opportunity to share some of the highlights and accomplishments of the Stewardship Council over the past year. At our meetings, held every three weeks, September to June, Council members address current initiatives and also engage in catechetical formation so as to let the philosophy of true stewardship guide the direction of the Council. The Council also provides support to other ministries to help them reach parishioners in order to meet their goals and objectives. Your Stewardship Council continues to strive to get everyone involved in order to make St. Bernard parish the best that it can be.

As we begin a new season, the Stewardship Council continues to thrive and is an example of St Bernard's *time, talent* and *treasure* hard at work. Our next major initiative will be hosting the Ministry Fair in October. More details to come on this event.

Highlights and Accomplishments

Community Service Days

The Council hosted two community service days in conjunction with the Youth Ministry group. Service activities were conducted both on the parish grounds as well as in the community at large.

Parish Picnic

In June, approximately 100 parishioners attended the annual parish picnic. The efforts of many volunteers both from the Council and from other ministries made the event a success.

Stewardship in Action!

This monthly newsletter celebrates acts of Stewardship by parish members and ministries. We are always looking for ideas on ministries and parishioners to profile. Please contact me if you have a recommendation.

Stewardship Tree

The Stewardship Tree program provides a "call to service" for parishioners as minis-

tries are able to connect with volunteers to help fill areas of need for the various ministries. The program runs during the Advent and Lenten seasons.

As always, thank you for your prayerful support.

Yours in Christ,

Mark Dransfield
Chairperson
Stewardship Council



STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL MEMBERS

Mark Dransfield, Chairperson	Russ Nesbitt
Deacon Gerry Sims	Steve Ossi
Camille Bene	Michael Read
Karen Brophy	Vince Riello
Liz Dransfield	Doreen Sekora
Fran Lim	Lisa Swan
Michael Macchiarola	Gemma Thompson

CONGRATULATIONS DEACON GERRY SIMS!

This past June, Deacon Gerry Sims celebrated the 25th anniversary of his ordination as a deacon. There is no better way to describe his journey in faith than to have Deacon Gerry tell his own story.

The back page is a transcript of the homily given by Deacon Gerry earlier this summer when he did just that. On behalf of the Stewardship Council, please join us in applauding Deacon Gerry for his years of dedicated service and commitment to the Lord, to his family and to the parish of St Bernard.

Many thanks to Laura Hennessey, Joe Huchko and Martha McCray for their many years of service and dedication to the Council.



When I was a child, I had a simplistic view of this parable of the wheat and the weeds. The wheat were the good people like my parents, my friends and the people I met at church. The weeds were the evil people in the world who cause all the trouble, like Hitler or Stalin or Osama Bin Laden. And these evil people were allies of Satan, the “enemy” in the parable.

But as I grew older, I came to see that such a view was simplistic. We Catholics are not Calvinists who believe in predestination. God did not predestine us to be either good wheat or evil weeds. Rather, He has given us free will.

The fact is, each and every one of us was made into the purest wheat when we received the incredible gift of the sacrament of Baptism. However, we then proceeded on with our lives and were able to use our free will to either continue to live a holy life as wheat or, instead, to sin and move ourselves, to some degree, into the weed column.

The fact is, each of us a combination of the two. We are all sinners to one degree or another. Even Pope Francis, when asked to describe himself in one sentence, said, “I am a sinner.”

And that is why the landowner in the parable, God, tells his servants not to remove the weeds. God is being **patient** with us. He wants to give each of us every grace and every opportunity to repent and transform ourselves from being something of a weed into the golden wheat He intended and wants us to be.

I can very much relate to this idea, this concept, and I very much appreciate God’s patience. As you may know, this year I am celebrating the 25th anniversary of my ordination to the diaconate. And while I may look holy and spiritual up here in my beautiful vestments, I was not always a particularly religious person.

I was blessed that my parents gave me a good Catholic upbringing, going to mass each Sunday and sending me to Catholic grammar school and High school. However, when I went to college and later law school, I became rather full of myself and was distracted by ambition and the things of this world.

I stopped attending church and rarely thought of God. In fact, I was an agnostic. Still, I wouldn’t describe myself as a terrible person, but, on the other hand, neither was I living a particularly holy life, the life God intended for me.

I was blessed with a wonderful wife, my first child and a good job at a large law firm. In one sense, I was living the American dream. Eventually, however, that was not enough. I felt a certain unease and emptiness. I began to see that, even with the love of a family, a life focused ambition, money and materialism was not enough to satisfy the deeper longings of one’s soul.

Having been raised a Catholic, I began to wonder if my problem was that God was missing in my life. My wife, Debbie, had similar feelings and we began attending church again. However, at that time, my faith was like the small mustard seed Jesus speaks about. But with God’s grace and the example of some great Christian men and women, that mustard seed began to grow in both Debbie and I.

We became active parishioners in the church and then, in 1984, I was blessed when our former pastor, Fr. John Brundage, told me about a new class for deacons forming in the then new Diocese of Metuchen. After much prayer and consideration, my wife and I came to believe that God had given me a vocation to the diaconate and that I should enter the formation program.

During the next four years, I attended college classes two nights a week as part of my formation while continuing my secular job as an attorney. Then, four years later, I was ordained to the diaconate on June 16, 1989. Now, I must say that I consider myself one of the most blessed people in the world.



First, and foremost, I have been given the gift of faith, faith in a God who is merciful and loves me and loves my wonderful family.

I have a beautiful and loving wife and have had four great children and, so far, four grandchildren. I also had a great career as an attorney. And my 25 years serving as a deacon have been incredibly rewarding. In fact, I’ve been able to baptize my youngest son, witness the weddings of my older son and of my daughter and baptize my four grandchildren. But that is merely the tip of the iceberg.

It has been an incredible privilege to serve for 25 years here at St. Bernard and a true blessing. I have worked with two superb pastors, Fr. John Brundage and Msgr. Joe. I have also met so many good and inspiring people here at St. Bernard, people who are deeply committed to God and to the church. They are models of faithfulness and stewardship which I try to emulate.

As I’m sure you know, we all meet obstacles and difficulties in life. Some are so serious as to challenge one’s faith in the goodness of God. Indeed, the year before my ordination, my wife and I had to endure the sickness and death of our son, Jason, because of leukemia. But the support we received from the people of St. Bernard parish, both then and also later through all the years we’ve been here, have made an enormous difference in our lives.

The various ways in which you make visible the strength of your faith, whether through service in our many parish ministries, or your active participation in our beautiful liturgies or the personal word you pass on to me regarding your experiences of God’s love and forgiveness, is simply amazing. Each of these things speak so deeply and sincerely to my heart, that they enliven and strengthen my faith.

Your faith and your actions encourage me to do even more to serve others and thereby, in turn, support your faith. Truly, we are, together, a family of faith. We are the living stones that make up the church. We are called to worship our good and loving God and to serve our neighbor. And we do that in a particularly remarkable way here at St. Bernard.

It has been truly a great privilege to be able to know and serve with so many of you good people here at St. Bernard. And all I can say is that I am thankful that God has been so patient with a weed who continues to strive to become the wheat God intended him to be.

Deacon Gerry Sims, July 20, 2014

Interested in learning more about the Stewardship Council?

Please contact Mark Dransfield (mlrek@optonline.net or by calling 908-526-6649)