

**Stewardship of Time and Talent Talk**  
**By Greg Russell**  
**September 27-28, 2014**

Thank you Fr. Steve. Good evening/good morning. My name is Greg Russell [and I'm here to talk with you about Stewardship]. My wife Tracey and I have been married 28 years, and we have been parishioners here at Sacred Heart for 20 of those 28 years. We have three children, Michael, Andrew and Claire. All of them attended Sacred Heart School from Kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Claire just graduated last June, wrapping up our 17<sup>th</sup> and final year at Sacred Heart School.

This evening/morning, at the Stewardship Fair after Mass, we will all have an opportunity to find ways to share our time and our talent in a way that serves God and our community. I am going to share with you my stewardship journey over 20 years at Sacred Heart – the times when I struggled with stewardship because I was too busy or distracted or felt unworthy, and the times when I was fully engaged, and the joy and peace I experienced during those times. My hope and prayer today is that my story will help you in some small way on your own stewardship journey.

When we joined Sacred Heart, Tracey and I had two small children and I was very busy as a business lawyer working 80+ hours a week for a large Seattle law firm. Tracey has always had an attitude of service, and she immediately became a lector at church and has continued to serve in that way every year since. For me, unfortunately, I am embarrassed to admit that I really did nothing other than attend church on Sunday. I had many excuses but they all boiled down to the fact that I felt I was too busy and I didn't really want to get involved – the Parish seemed to run just fine without me. Stewardship talks like this would come and go and I consistently ignored them. After about five or six years of this, I remember one Sunday sitting in church during a homily about caring for others in our community and I felt a pull to get involved. Maybe it was a little voice saying I should join a committee or ministry and serve in some way.

So here I should say that I immediately jumped up and starting volunteering and getting involved in Church activities...but I didn't. I ignored it again. For the next two or three years I kept up this pattern – something would strike a chord with me at Mass about service and I would routinely ignore it.

Finally, about 12 years ago, I felt that tug again to volunteer and this time for some reason I submitted an application to join the Pastoral Council. Of course I am not sure why I decided to do that – I expect my application was less than impressive. Basically I had done nothing for eight years but now felt like I should be a member of the Pastoral Council – kind of starting right at the top. Fr Pat Ritter, our pastor at the time, wisely redirected me to the School Commission, where I met a wonderful group of dedicated parents committed to making sure Sacred Heart gave the best possible Catholic education to our children. While I did not appreciate it at the time, looking back on it now I realize that God was calling me to service, to do Christ's work on earth and in our community of Sacred Heart. And that by responding to this call, He had set me on a path of service that I would never have anticipated.

Because from there, I began coaching CYO sports, volunteering for a variety of school events, and working with the Men's' Group to put on the Parish Festival each fall. Eventually I transitioned onto the Parish Facilities Commission, where we evaluated the maintenance needs of our parish buildings. That led to being appointed to the Master Plan Steering Committee which developed our 20 year Parish Master Plan. I was actively engaged at Sacred Heart Parish and School in many ways. Eventually, in 2008, Fr. Pat asked Tracey and me to co-chair our capital campaign, where our parish raised over \$8 M to renovate the school and build a new parish administrative office. It was a lot of work, but I never found myself making the old excuses about being too busy or not having something to offer.

You see, from all of these different activities and ministries, I was getting back much more than I was giving. I met so many new people, wonderful people both inside and outside our parish that I would have

never met without being involved in these ways. I found this work invigorating and inspiring. To this day I feel very blessed that I had those opportunities.

But for me the journey took an interesting turn at that point. While serving the parish over those years, I had developed close friendships with Fr. Pat and most of the parish staff. But after finishing the capital campaign, many of them, including Fr. Pat, either retired or left Sacred Heart. I have to admit that I became a bit discouraged and fell back into my old ways – just attending Mass but not really engaged in an active way with the parish or the school. I think I would have continued in this way for a long time, but then a surprising thing happened – another parishioner reached out to me one Sunday and encouraged me to join a long standing group in the parish – the Knights of Columbus. His name was George Dilloo – I knew George from church and school activities so I decided to go one Sunday and help out at their pancake breakfast. I had a blast – and I met good men who were dedicated to the Church, our parish and serving Christ. I started going to their meetings and helping out and was again blessed by all the new people I met.

The engagement with the Knights encouraged me to volunteer last year at our stewardship weekend to become a Eucharistic Minister – something I had never done and frankly had been reluctant to do. But I decided to try it. I didn't think it would take much time but I remember complaining to Tracey when they scheduled the first training session for new ministers on a football Saturday for several hours. Why did it need to take that long to learn how to handout some hosts and sips of wine I remember thinking. But I went to the training and I was so impressed with how Fr. Steve taught us about the importance of our role, why we do certain things during the Mass, and the sacredness of what we were doing. I learned so much about the liturgy that I left that session energized about my faith and excited about the opportunity to serve our parish in that way. Today I get so much joy from being able to give another parishioner the body or blood of Christ on a Sunday – again the benefits I received from my service have far exceeded the small offering of my time and talent.

So this morning/evening, I would ask that you prayerfully consider how you can offer your time and talent to our Lord to serve our community – both the Sacred Heart community and the greater community outside Sacred Heart. We all have something to offer that is unique and special – no matter what your age or background. I know many of you are already involved in many ways at Sacred Heart, and I thank you for your service to our parish. It is appreciated in so many ways. But I also know that many of us can do more. You have an opportunity after Mass today (this evening) to see all that Sacred Heart has to offer in the way of service opportunities. I think you will be impressed with the depth and breadth of what our parish does. But we need more help – we need all of us to do our part in some way. We are all Sacred Heart. We are a great community of Catholics here who can make a difference in this world in so many ways large and small.

So if you are like I was many years ago and feel a tug in your heart to serve, please accept that call and find a way to give of your time and talent. Or maybe you need a bit of encouragement just as I did. If so, let me be your George Dilloo – and ask you to join a new group or ministry here and allow us to benefit from your time and talent. Don't make the mistake I made of thinking I was too busy, or wasn't really interested, or had little to offer. However you choose to serve, you will be doing Christ's work here in our community and we will all benefit from your involvement.

So please take time today after Mass to go back to the narthex and sign up for something that interests you. Our ministries are represented by other parishioners happy to answer your questions and give you information about what they do and how they serve our community.

On behalf of Fr. Steve, our parish staff and our Sacred Heart community, thank you all for your support and may God bless you and your family.