

Stewardship of Time and Talent
Witness Talk by Barbara Hagen
October 1-2, 2016

Good morning. My name is Barbara Hagen. My husband Jeff and our three children have been a part of Sacred Heart Parish since we relocated back to this area three years ago. Our twin girls, Caitlyn and Morgan, are 11 years old and are 6th graders at Sacred Heart School and can also be found as altar servers here at Mass. Our son, Tristan, is 7 years old and just started 2nd grade at Sacred Heart School. You can often find him singing with the Sacred Heart Children's Choir.

This weekend is stewardship weekend, a time when we are all asked to not only give thought to how we would like to share our time and talents with the parish community but also to take action and sign up. Immediately after my brief talk, we will all have time to fill out the Stewardship forms in the pews and submit them in the collection basket.

But before we get to that, I'd like to share a bit of my personal experiences with stewardship and what I have learned along the way.

Growing up, the Catholic Church was central to my childhood. My family was always involved in something with our parish and my mother was the key driver of this. She is a French Canadian who grew up in Montreal in the late 40s and 50s. At that time, about 98% of that city was Roman Catholic with over 200 churches on that tiny island. All schools, including public schools at that time, were part of a parish. For high school, my mother attended a Catholic boarding school in Montreal contained within a convent and fully staffed by nuns. Needless to say, Mass and stewardship were a daily part of her life.

When my mother married and moved to the states, she brought all of her Catholic stewardship with her and included our whole family. My childhood parish was St. Joseph the Worker, in Liverpool, NY and my three siblings and I all attended St. Joseph the Worker Catholic School, where the majority of our teachers were nuns.

At our parish, we were the family that everyone knew. My older brother was an altar boy – perhaps I'm dating myself but back then they were called altar boys as girls were not yet allowed to serve. But that changed quickly as my older sister was so persistent with our priest, Father Major, to be an altar server too, that eventually Fr Major gave in and my sister became the first girl altar server in the entire Syracuse, NY diocese. I followed in their footsteps quickly and was also an altar server as soon as I was able.

My family was always at the church, helping with parish events, attending family worship, helping in the rectory, or participating with CYO sports. My mother pretty much sewed every altar cloth, liturgical stole and vestments for the priests and parish. And Sunday Mass wasn't something we had to fit into our schedule – it WAS our schedule, complete with my mom's homemade crepes and waffles before Mass, of course.

I didn't realize it then but my childhood years, and my family's deep involvement with the parish, truly established the groundwork for the Church and stewardship in my life. In fact, I didn't discover my father wasn't even Catholic until I was in high school! He was always so present and involved with us at Masses and parish activities. I had always wondered why he never went to Communion but honestly never thought to ask when I was younger.

In my early adult single years, as I went off to college and moved out of my parents' home, I remained a pretty faithful Catholic. With few responsibilities other than myself I had time to be involved in my parishes in the different places I lived. I contributed in a variety of ways as a reader, a catechist, greeter, and even helping to put on the popular Basilica Block Party at the Basilica of St. Mary in Minneapolis.

Soon though, my life responsibilities increased with work demands, a husband and eventually kids and I saw my involvement in activities with my parish begin to diminish. My desire was still there but I just didn't know how to make the time for involvement.

When I was first asked to speak with all of you today, I immediately thought about recent years when I listened to the great speeches of other parishioners. I remember sitting in the pew, listening and being inspired, but feeling conflicted at the same time. I wanted to be more involved in this parish.

But how would I ever find the time? Between full time work where I was traveling across the country just about every other week, three kids and other overscheduled initiatives I thought there is no way I can afford the time. So our first year here at Sacred Heart, we came to Mass and parish events but had little additional involvement.

Then two years ago Fr Steve invited me to participate on the Futuring Committee and help build a five-year plan for the parish. At the time I wasn't sure how I was going to find the time, especially with my travel schedule, but surprisingly, I found the time when I could and when I was out of town and unable to make a meeting people were understanding. I also found that there were others on the committee who also had time challenges but who gave when they could.

My discovery that year was this: it is perfectly okay to give the time when you have it – there is no expectation that when you say yes it means 100% all the time. Perhaps one month you are only able to give 60% but the next you have 95%...that is okay and whatever time you have is always welcome.

After the Futuring Committee's work ended, another opportunity came to me – to be a part of the Stewardship Commission. Discernment for this was more challenging for me personally, as I had just been accepted in and was about to begin a very intensive, global degree program with NYU, a second Master's degree, this one in Predictive Analytics, a field I did not have a deep

background in and I knew would require additional work on my own time to just stay competitive with my peers in the program.

Despite being even further challenged with a lack of time, I said yes because stewardship is a part of the parish I had a lot of personal passion for. As you can imagine, my time commitment ebbed and flowed. I missed some fun events I really wanted to be at, and I probably made a few people a bit nervous during some planning stages with too much of a “just in time” approach to planning than was desired, but my passion for what we were creating and the enjoyment of working with amazing fellow parishioners helped pull me through.

That led to my second discovery – **don’t underestimate the power passion has in helping you find something – like time – that you didn’t know you had.**

Over the past two weeks I’m sure you noticed the vast number of ministries we offer here at Sacred Heart which have been set up in the narthex after Masses. Hopefully you had a chance to stop by and learn more about not only the number but the wide variety of ministries we offer at this wonderful parish as well as the amazing people who put in their time and passion to make it all possible. I know there are many of you here today who are involved in stewardship with Sacred Heart, even more so than I am, so let me just say thank you for all you do to make our parish a thriving one.

But it doesn’t stop there. We need more of the parish’s passion, time and talents!

So right now, I’d like to invite everyone to take the sheet from the pew and sign up – sign up to be a part of stewardship with this parish. As you do so please keep three things in mind:

- 1) First, find the areas where you have a personal passion and start there in consideration. Think about the types of activities you enjoy or have great talent in and find the ministries which align to your passion and talent.
 - a. Do you love to cook? There are many meals to be made for the homeless in the month of November.
 - b. If you are a party planning, come join the Parish Life Committee.
 - c. Do you have a passion and talent with teaching? Become a catechist!

The list goes on.

- 2) Second, don’t let Time be a barrier or hold you back. There are many opportunities to participate and the time demands vary so if you have just a little bit of time this year, go ahead and check involvement for something that is not as demanding of time. If you have more time to give this year, feel free to get involved in several areas!
- 3) Third, and finally, is for all younger members of our parish. There are opportunities for you, too! Youth group, altar servers, greeters, hospitality helpers, children’s choir, and

more. I encourage each of you to fill out your own sheet on how you would like to participate within the parish.

The last point I'll leave you with today is an exercise I do quietly with myself sometimes. I pause and observe myself through the eyes of my children. Like the impact that my mother left on me as a role model, I challenge myself to envision – how do I show up and what impression do I give as a role model for my kids? What will they speak about in 30 years when called upon in their parish to provide this witness speech? I can only hope their memories and the examples of stewardship I provide today will be as rich and impactful as mine are from my parents.

I know I have more to give to this parish and that is my commitment for the coming year. I hope you will join me and together we will see how passion, time, talents and stewardship can have a profound impact on our parish, our own lives and the lives of those around us.

On behalf of Fr Steve and the Sacred Heart community, both parish and school, thank you for your stewardship today and for what's to come in the future.