

St. Leo's

PARISH COMMUNITY



OPERATION RICE BOWL

Making a Difference Through Stewardship

As we travel our Lenten journey to the joyous celebration of Easter, there is something we can do to make that journey more meaningful for ourselves while making a tangible difference for someone in need.

St. Leo's once again is taking part in the Catholic Relief Services Operation Rice Bowl, a tradition in our parish that has grown in participation each year.

"Catholic Relief Services provides the rice bowls and educational material," says Donna Douglass, Outreach Coordinator.

From Ash Wednesday through Holy Thursday, Donna works to raise awareness about the program. The rice bowls — actually cardboard containers — are made available to parishioners to fill with monetary donations. On Holy Thursday, the bowls are collected and the offerings are sent to the Diocesan office.

"The idea is, if you're giving something up for Lent — such as coffee or soda, or even red meat on Friday — you take what you would spend on those things and put the money into the rice bowl," Donna says. "By having it during Lent, we're reaching out to help others in a real way. That's the best thing about it."

Once Operation Rice Bowl is completed for the year, our parish receives information about where the contributions are going.

"We learn what they are doing in specific countries, where the funds are



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Stewardship of the Cross

The liturgical year is such a gift to us. As we turn the pages of the calendar, reflecting on the life of Christ, we have the opportunity to consider the most sublime events in the history of mankind. Of these events, perhaps none is more beautiful and worthy of contemplation than the one we are about to commemorate — Jesus’ sacrifice of Himself for us on the Cross.

It is fitting and, at the same time, paradoxical. It is fitting that God should do it, because only an infinite God could rid us of the infinite debt we owed by our sin. It is paradoxical that He not only did it, but wanted to do it out of pure love for us, His lowly creatures. What is Jesus trying to show us? Even more staggering, what is He really asking when He exhorts us, in turn, to take up our cross and follow Him?

Jesus freely gave His life for the Church, and He calls us to do the same. Some of us may, in fact, give our entire lives for the Church. But for most of us, this giving takes place by a series of daily actions, both large and small, of Christ-like, sacrificial love — specifically, by giving our time, talent and treasure for the good of the Church. Yet, by joining these actions with His, we have the chance to participate in that very same sacrifice. This month, let us take the time to examine our hearts and actions in light of Jesus’ as we journey with Him toward the Cross.

Jesus gave Himself unselfishly and excessively.

Consider the manner of His sacrifice — one drop of Christ’s blood would have been more than

sufficient to save the entire human race, and yet Our Lord Jesus chose to shed every last bit. From start to finish, Jesus showed us by His passion that He wanted to do more than what was merely sufficient. If there was more He could give, He gave it. He never stopped to count the cost or to look for what He could get in return.

Jesus made His sacrifice a supreme act of love for the Church.

Counter-cultural even to this day, Jesus actually upheld sacrifice as desirable — the most perfect way to show our love: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn. 15:13). In His infinite wisdom, Jesus now offers this path to us as the way to holiness: “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk. 9:23).

Jesus gave Himself willingly and even joyfully.

“No one takes [My life] from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again” (Jn. 10:18). At the first Eucharist, Jesus even went so far as to say, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you” (Lk. 22:15). Needless to say, the Passover sacrifice to which Jesus referred was not a symbolic one, but was in fact His very Body and Blood He would give for us through the sacrifice of the Cross.

Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make our hearts more like Yours.

A LENTEN STEWARDSHIP PRAYER

“O my God, teach me to be generous: to serve You as You deserve to be served; to give without counting the cost; to fight without fear of being wounded; to work without seeking rest; and to spend myself without expecting any reward, but the knowledge that I am doing Your Holy will.”

— ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

FORTITUDE AN IMPORTANT LENTEN VIRTUE

Dear Parishioners,

Lent began toward the end of February, and this month we find ourselves right at the heart of this penitential season. And all of the ways you planned to practice prayer, fasting, and almsgiving during Lent — you're keeping up with all of them, right? Just like all the resolutions we made back in January, I suppose.

That's one of the problems with us humans — our feelings come and go, so it's hard to maintain a commitment once the excitement of a particular event has gone away. That's why we shouldn't depend on our emotions to govern our lives — they are too fickle. We really shouldn't worry about our feelings. We cannot control them, usually they are neither morally good nor bad, but they are not constant.

While we recognize that we can't control feelings, we shouldn't allow ourselves to be controlled by them, either. When we have to make a choice, we need to consider the facts, ask God's guidance to discern what is right, and make our decision. Then, we must resolve to follow through with that decision, even if we may not feel up to it the next day, the next week, or the next month.

That perseverance comes from developing the virtue of **fortitude**. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1808) defines fortitude as “the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life.”

Your immediate reaction may be that the elements of your Lenten rule of life are too little to require something heroic sounding like fortitude. They're just minor things, like giving up a single half-hour television program a week to read the Bible, or something similar. But “the moral virtues are acquired by human effort,” the *Catechism* tells



us (1804), although God's help is needed as well. They become habitual with repeated practice, and it is only through frequent use in small things that they get developed to be ready for great trials.

What's the easiest way to remind ourselves of our commitments even when the feelings that inspired them have gone away? The best way is to write them down. That way we have something to remind us of what we determined to do. So if you decided to attend weekday Mass every Wednesday during Lent, as one possible example, and a particular Wednesday you're extra tired and it's raining, having

a written statement may be the best way to force yourself out of bed and into the Church.

The same practice will serve us well in other areas of life when we determine a particular course of action. It can apply to our Lenten rule of life, or our New Year's resolutions, or our stewardship commitment. Writing them down helps us follow through, even when our feelings have gone away. And by the way, the traditional notable duties we try harder with during Lent fit in well with the main aspects of stewardship. We offer time for prayer; we can fast from self-indulgence by serving others with our talent; and we present our treasure for almsgiving. Maybe our bishops were onto something when they identified stewardship as “a disciple's response” to what God gives.

Have a blessed Lent, and you'll have a joyous Easter.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Rev. Donald A. Buhrman
Pastor

MEET THE FISHER FAMILY: *Trusting in the Lord*



The Fisher family — (from left) Sydney, Mitch, Angie, Greg, Trevor and Danny. All four of the Fisher children have served on the altar and assisted with music ministry.

Long before he heard the term “stewardship” in relation to faith, parishioner Greg Fisher was learned important lessons about entrusting the fruits of one’s labor to the Lord while growing up on his parents’ farm and ranch.

“I learned how to be a good steward of the land and learned at a young age that a farmer’s entire livelihood is truly at the mercy of God,” Greg says. “Some years were blessed with ample rain that resulted in an abundant harvest, and some years the rain didn’t come or too much rain came at once. At times, the day my dad was getting ready to harvest the crop, a hail storm came through and completely destroyed it! Regardless, every year I watched my dad faithfully plant a crop and faithfully care for the livestock knowing full well he may not see the fruits of his labor.”

Though he didn’t fully appreciate it at the time, these early experiences and examples were pivotal in Greg’s subsequent faith journey teaching him from an early age the importance of entrusting one’s time, talent and treasure to the Lord regardless of the circumstances. Stewardship has since become an important principle for Greg and his, wife, Angie, as well as in their professions and the raising of their children.

“We are expected to use these gifts to serve one another for His glory, not for our own,” Greg says.

“It’s all about recognizing that God is the source of all our gifts, and it is up to us to use these gifts in a way that glorifies Him,” Angie adds.

Over the years, Greg and Angie have been blessed to surrender their gifts to the Lord in

d with a Life of Intentional Discipleship

a wide variety of ways. Professionally, they are each fortunate to work at the Chancery Office for the Diocese of Grand Island — Greg as the Director of Operations and Human Resources, and Angie as both the Director of Communication and Bishop Joseph Hanefeldt's secretary. Angie has also taught Religious Education for a number of years and together, the couple has assisted with Confirmation preparation during the years their four children were confirmed. They currently assist with St. Leo's Marriage Preparation program and enjoy serving as greeters for Sunday Mass.

Through all of their service, the Fishers have been blessed in many ways. They've received a growing awareness of the Lord's presence in their lives simply by Him saying 'yes' to what Greg describes as little things. They've also been able to build lasting friendships with their fellow parishioners who both encourage and inspire them in the faith journey.

"I believe that when a person faithfully pursues being a good steward, they begin to understand the truth in Romans 8:28 and see it working in their lives — 'We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to His purpose,'" Greg says.

Yet, perhaps the greatest blessing of all has been witnessing stewardship's impact on their four children, who have each at different times served on the altar and assisted with music ministry.

"When our kids see us serving the Church, they know they are expected to as well," Angie says. "By



Angie and Greg Fisher feel blessed to have the opportunity to serve God and our parish community.

servicing together as a family, it naturally brings you closer because it gives us an opportunity to talk with our kids about how important it is to be involved and why we should serve others."

Though still "works in progress" like the rest of us, Greg and Angie feel blessed to have been able to serve. For them, it's simply what it means to be a Christian — what we are all called to do as disciples of Christ.

"I believe striving to be a disciple of Christ requires an effort to be good stewards," Greg says. "Naturally, the effort to conform your life to Christ brings you closer to Him in every way. In fact, I believe as a person grows closer to Christ, they humbly begin to realize what is written at the end of John 15:5 when Jesus said, 'Without me you can do nothing.'"

"When our kids see us serving the Church, they know they are expected to as well. By serving together as a family, it naturally brings you closer because it gives us an opportunity to talk with our kids about how important it is to be involved and why we should serve others." — ANGIE FISHER

DRAWING FROM THE TRADITIONS OF SPIRITUALITY IN OUR CATHOLIC CHURCH

If you knew that the person who loves you most in the world was longing to spend some time with you, would you want to meet with them? What if this person was also the only one capable of saving your soul for all eternity, not to mention blessing you abundantly on earth?

It would seem ridiculous to say “no” to getting to know them just a little better, right?

That being said, you may wonder how you can best go about getting to know this particular person. To do just that, as Catholics, it is important that we seek out and read things from our Catholic Christian tradition — immersing ourselves in the spiritual works of those who have found Christ in a very deep way in accordance with the Church. Indeed, there are many great saints who have flowered out of the community of believers, and we can turn to them to get to know God better.

Over the centuries, the Catholic Church has been profoundly touched, enriched and enlightened by spiritual masters whose works are powerful enough to convert souls. It is also important to recognize that the spiritual traditions in the Church express many of the same ideas but in different ways, bearing witness to the ineffable, mosaic-like beauty of Catholicism.

St. Benedict began the first formal monastic tradition in the western Catholic Church, basing it on the *Rule of St. Benedict*. To this day, Benedictine spirituality is centered around the recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours, simplicity and the appreciation of the Holy Eucharist.

The Franciscan spiritual tradition began with

St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi. These saints brought about the Counter-Reformation that still marks the Church with splendor today. St. Francis is widely known for his Gospel-centered living, love of poverty, devotion to Christ Crucified, and mercy for all men and creatures. *The Life of St. Francis of Assisi* by St. Bonaventure, as well as *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* both help one to learn more about this magnificent saint.

Similar to St. Francis, St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila also sparked a critical reformation within the Carmelite Order, which later influenced the entire Church in a positive way. Carmelite spirituality is a desert spirituality, which bases itself on silence, deep contemplative prayer, the Liturgy of the Hours, outstanding penance, and various traditional Catholic devotions. *The Story of a Soul*, which is the autobiography of renowned Carmelite St. Therese of Lisieux, the *Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*, and the works of St. John of the Cross all capture the essence of Carmelite spirituality.

Furthermore, Salesian spirituality stems from the great life and work of St. Francis de Sales. *The Introduction to the Devout Life* is a fantastic primer for those desiring to enter more profoundly into a life of union with Christ.

Ignatian spirituality is known for educating people on the discernment of spirits. *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, as well as *The Discernment of Spirits* by Fr. Timothy Gallagher are excellent resources for learning more about this powerful spiritual tradition.

Last but not least, *The Fulfillment of All Desire* by Ralph Martin is modern-day spiritual work that can help those who are seeking Christ, to find Him.

The rich variety of spiritual traditions we have in the Catholic Church are an indication of how diverse our Church is. There are so many different ways of following Christ and praying — and to do so, we can draw from the spiritual “greats.” But of course, we must always pray in the way that God is leading us, in a way that we can truly encounter God in conversation.

From the *Catechism* WHAT IS ALMSGIVING?

“Giving alms to the poor is a witness to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2462).

During the seasons of Advent and Lent, it is not uncommon to hear about fasting, prayer and almsgiving. Most of us are familiar with at least two of the three penitential practices — prayer and fasting. We engage in prayer each day, while fasting becomes a regular part of our Lenten routines.

But what is almsgiving?

It is simply giving to those less fortunate than ourselves. This can be through donations of canned goods to the local food pantry, spare change to the Salvation Army during the Christmas season, or even through person-to-person contact with the poor.

This Lent, if your family has not regularly engaged in almsgiving, consider making a change. Search for opportunities to serve the poor and vulnerable, making their lives easier — even if in a small way.

Things to do with your family:

- Place a coffee can in a prominent place in your home, and commit to filling it with loose change throughout the week. Then, donate the money to a local charity.
- The next time you shop for groceries, buy a few extra canned goods and donate them to a food pantry or food bank.
- Research a charity that works with the poor, and make a commitment to regularly give to that organization.
- Resolve to never judge those who are less fortunate, and teach your children the same.





OPERATION RICE BOWL *continued from front cover*

helping women become educated, among other things,” Donna says. “This allows us to be a part of that — you don’t always get to be a real integral part. They tell us where the money is going and we get a special story about it.”

Other projects funded by Operation Rice Bowl include providing systems for clean drinking water in vulnerable communities; providing seeds and training to help farmers improve their harvests; and providing health exams and treatment for children.”

Donna will be posting information in the bulletins on how this year’s contributions will be allocated, so we can understand how our donations make a difference.

“One of the things I will be putting in the bulletin is that a portion of what we give stays right here in the diocese,” Donna says. “Last year we had a lot of flooding, and the contributions

helped flood victims. I’m not sure where the money will be used for this year.”

By taking part in Operation Rice Bowl, we will be putting our stewardship into action. The act of giving of our treasure is an integral part of stewardship.

“Any time you take what God gave you and give it to others, is stewardship,” Donna says. “Everything we have is from Him, and the donations in this case are being given back to people in need.”

Besides Operation Rice Bowl, there are other ways we can help make a positive difference in others’ lives through acts of stewardship. St. Leo’s conducts regular food drives, and we also are giving away coats. We collect bottled water for the American Red Cross and provide cookies for the blood drives.

“There are lots of ways to give back right here,” Donna says.

If you would like more information about taking part in Operation Rice Bowl, please contact Donna Douglass at 308-382-4753.

LITURGY SCHEDULE

Daily Mass: 9 a.m., **Saturday:** 5 p.m., **Sunday:** 8 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.

Confession: Saturday 4 - 4:30 p.m. **Adoration:** First Friday of the Month, 9:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Abide Adoration: Fourth Sunday of the Month, 7 - 8 p.m.