

March 11, 2011

Dear Parishioners,

Thanks to everyone who has submitted their comments, questions, suggestions and concerns to our ad hoc Full Stewardship Committee in response to the open forums held on February 8 & 13. The committee has attempted to compile all the feedback into 11 questions that we have drafted a response to. We appreciate your patience in awaiting our responses. However, we do not pretend to have all the answers to every question, nor do we have every detail of a Full Stewardship plan worked out. We hope that you will continue to participate in this dialogue of discernment with an open mind and heart, so that together we can form a consensus on what God is calling our parish to do in this moment of our parish history. Each and every one of us received the gift of the Holy Spirit at our Baptism, so everyone's insights are revered and respected as given by the one Holy Spirit.

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- **What is the rationale for proposing Full Stewardship now?**

In the Gospel of Matthew (6:24), Jesus says, “No one can serve two masters. You cannot serve God and mammon!” These words from the Sermon on the Mount are a challenge for us all as disciples of the Lord Jesus to lead a spiritual life of faith that always puts God first. This essentially is what the stewardship way of life is all about. Hence, stewardship is recognizing that all is a gift from God, and that we express our gratitude to God for all that we have received by returning the first portion of our blessings of time, talent and treasure to God. We are not owners, but stewards, of God's gifts to us!

The concept of “Full Stewardship” is a vision of being Church as described in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles (4:32-37), whereby all the members of the community of believers put the needs of the community first, trusting that when they put the needs of others first God would provide for all their needs a hundredfold. “Full Stewardship” is a process of inviting all the members of the Church, the Body of Christ, to invest the first portion of their time, talent and treasure in the life, prayer, work and mission of the Church, mindful that when we

do it together, we do it better. No one of us, nor any one group of us, can be Church by ourselves – we need the full, active and conscious participation of each and every member. “Full Stewardship” is a spiritual process of conversion of heart, not a program; and we know that we will never totally achieve this vision, but we also know that no one rises to low expectations, so we must constantly challenge ourselves to be and do more as a parish community, and as individual disciples.

Sometimes children learn how to ride a bicycle with the assistance of training wheels. But eventually, for them to truly learn how to ride a bicycle, the training wheels have to come off. Since 2002, under the leadership and direction of our parish Discipleship Committee, we have been inviting people annually to renew their commitment to generously invest their time, talent and treasure in the life, prayer, work and mission of our parish. We have been constantly reminded that genuine stewardship is about “needing to give, and not simply giving to a need!” Those who have responded wholeheartedly to this invitation have discovered that this stewardship way of life strengthens their faith, enriches their discipleship and empowers our parish to do extra-ordinary things. Just as parents have to discern when the time has come to take the training wheels off of their child’s bicycle, so as a parish the Holy Spirit has called us to discern if this is the time to move beyond where we are to “Full Stewardship.”

We can come up with all kinds of reasons not to make this leap of faith now: the economy is bad, we’re too invested in building a new church, we have an excellent parish school and PSR program already, we have a wonderful parish picnic each year, we have a long list of parish ministries, we have a sister parish in Guatemala, we have magnificent liturgies, we’re paying all our bills and we have a tremendous spirit of volunteerism. Could these not be the very reasons that we’re ready as a parish to move up to that next level, to challenge ourselves to “Full Stewardship,” so that we can help anyone in need when the economy is bad, so that all children can have full access to our parish school regardless of their family’s financial situation, so that we can truly be “building church while building a church,” so that we can develop even more ministries of care and service, and invite even more of our parishioners to full, active and conscious participation in the life, prayer, work and mission of our parish! To imply that a parish may be ready for “Full Stewardship” is a great challenge, but also a great compliment! If we wait for the “perfect time,” or the “perfect plan,” the waiting will never end.

- **How different is funding now for the school compared to how it used to be in our parish? (We tried full stewardship before at ICS and it failed; why do we think it will work now?)**

Historically, there are 4 models of funding for Catholic schools across the nation:

- Stewardship

- cost-based tuition and need-based tuition(similar to college models which address price, distribution of financial aid and resource allocation)
- negotiated tuition
- traditional subsidy based models

The late CJ Grueninger of our parish says his mother paid \$.50 a month back in 1919 to attend our school. There was no tuition in the 1930's. For decades, the school existed on the generosity of the Sisters of the Adorers of Christ and need based giving. There was even a year when "being in the black" meant we had \$6.25 in the checkbook. Giving only to a need is not good book keeping or good stewardship. After about 75 years of the traditional subsidy based model where the parish covers "cost", an "Education Fee" of \$350 per pupil came into being in the 2000 school year in order to raise teacher salaries to 80% of the local public school schedule. (We made it for a year or two but have slipped back.) Tuition officially came to our parish school in 2005-2006 as the name was changed to reflect what the fee had become.

Around that same time, the proposed Tuition Covenant model from the Diocese of Belleville was partially adapted to our school as we sought a better balance between parent and parish funding.

The recommendation was to have negotiated tuition according to each family's needs (rejected by parents & school board); and to set a percentage schedule for the future parish subsidy to the school from Sunday collections so that the financial needs of both the school and other parish ministries could be met (this was adopted by the Pastoral Council, Finance Council & School Board). Our current tuition rate of \$2725 for the first child is in the mid-range for Diocesan schools. Yet our projected cost per pupil for this year is \$5,966. Each student receives a "scholarship" or subsidy from the Parish, Parents and Friends, the *Eugene J. Schorb - Immaculate Conception Church Fund for Catholic Education*, benefactors and other fund raising efforts.

Scholarships have become an integral part of our program to be sure no child would ever be denied a Catholic education because of financial hardship. The Parish, Parents and Friends, Sponsor Our Students campaign, and outright donations on behalf of grandparents and benefactors have allowed our families in need to continue attendance.

Hidden within any Catholic school financing or parish financing is a debt to the underpaid nuns and lay teachers who established a tradition of Christian caring and academic excellence in our school and parish. There is debt to be paid to the past so we can prosper in the future.

We may not realize it but Immaculate Conception Parish is probably the largest charity based 501 (c) 3 in the City of Columbia. In effect, we are a charity. Helping each other learn about God is a charity and part of the evangelizing command of "Go and Teach" that the Master Teacher has given us. Stewardship is a Scripture based response to the

charity of a gift of a Catholic education, be it in a Catholic school or Parish School of Religion.

From the beginnings of Hebrew Scripture's story of Cain and Abel's first fruits to Jesus reminder to "*render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's*", the message of stewardship is embedded in our story from the ambo. Stewardship has always been our call throughout our parish history. One of the results of a Full Stewardship parish is that we could have a tuition free school; but simply having a tuition free school in the past does not mean we were a "Full Stewardship" parish in the past. Because of the dedicated efforts of our parish Discipleship committee since 2002, we are in a much different place now than we were then.

- **Will there be enough money for the School?**

As previously discussed, Full Stewardship is not just about money, but money is a necessity to operate the school. The major contributors to the current budget are Tuition and Fees - 42%, Parish Subsidy – 33.3% of per student cost, Endowment fund – 8%, Parents & Friends – 5%, Various Donations 3%, and the remaining 9% consist of programs such as lunch and latchkey that have offsetting cost associated with the revenue from fees for these services.

The Catholic School model that many of us grew up with was comprised of Nuns and lay teachers, in which many cases the teachers payment basically consisted of room and board and a small living stipend. As this model is no longer available, our goal has been to provide our teachers with a living wage in the range of 80% to 84% of the local public school system.

We currently operate with a very lean administrative and general service staff compared to the public school systems. We are also currently operating at a teacher to student ratio of about 13 students to 1 teacher, far below our suggested maximum class size of between 23 to 28 students (depending on grade level). While the current student/teacher ratio offers an optimum learning environment, it also creates a larger operating cost/student ratio, that is difficult to sustain, and in many cases, makes the school unavailable to many parishioners, even with the current tuition assistance program. The Full Stewardship model does not necessarily change any of the operating cost challenges, but it does offer an opportunity to make our school available to more parishioners, that in turn through participation in Full Stewardship, will not only bring down the operating cost/ student ratio, but also likely increase participation and involvement in our parish as a whole.

- **Who will keep score or track of one's contribution of time, talent and treasure? Who will be the bean counter? Will there be any accountability procedure?**

The Discipleship committee coordinates the annual commitment of renewal each year for Stewardship of Time, Talent and Treasure. All parishioners are invited to commit their time and talent on one form, with a separate form for Stewardship of treasure for

confidentiality purposes. All responses for the stewardship of Time and Talent are forwarded to each respective committee chair. Follow-up communication regarding volunteering is then the responsibility of each committee chair. All responses for the Stewardship of Treasure are confidential and managed only by designated Parish Office staff. The annual commitment amount is entered into the parish data base to assist with the aggregate parish budget and the generation of the individual parishioner year-end annual giving statements. This is current practice and has been managed this way for many years.

While the details for accountability have not fully been defined, the Full Stewardship subcommittee has recommended the following:

- Stewardship of one's Time, Talent and Treasure is a confidential matter and will ultimately be between each parishioner and God.
- Stewardship is solely based on one's ability, and comes from the heart. Equal sacrifice, not equal gifts, would always be the focus.
- W-2's would not be verified; the stewardship of treasure commitment is recommended to be 5% to the parish and 5% to other charities.
- Biannual or quarterly statements will be mailed to all parishioners for self monitoring and review.
- More details regarding the use of the database and statements are still yet to be defined
- The true measure is that you are giving from the heart. Whenever you sacrifice in a spirit of love and generosity, we open the door for the Holy Spirit to fill our offering with divine grace and power.
- Give cheerfully and generously, not just because the parish has a need, but more importantly because we each have a need to give as an act of faith.

Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the first produce of your entire harvest; then your barns will be completely filled, and your vats will overflow with new wine
Proverbs 3:9-10

The just man's offering enriches the altar and rises as a sweet odor before the Most High. The just man's sacrifice is most pleasing, nor will it ever be forgotten. In generous spirit pay homage to the Lord, be not sparing of freewill gifts. With each contribution show a cheerful countenance, and pay your tithes in a spirit of joy. Give to the Most High as he has given to you, generously, according to your means. Sirach 35:5-9

- **If only 40% of the parishioners are going to Mass, how do we get the other 60% involved in full stewardship?**

We are companions on a faith journey and we are called to be disciples to one another. It is up to all of us to build our relationships with others. Our relationship with Jesus is found in our relationship with the community of Jesus – the Church. Because we have experienced the love of Christ, we want to share it. The Gospel must overflow from each heart until the presence of God transforms others on their journey. The official church

term for this is Evangelization. Evangelization is like one hungry person telling another hungry person where they found food!

- **Is the Full Stewardship model financially sustainable for the parish?**

As previously stated, Full Stewardship is not all about money. However, gifts of treasure constitute part of the Full Stewardship commitment and are necessary to operate the parish.

The parish operates on an annual budget of about \$1.227-million. Budgeted expenses approximately equal budgeted income. Included in budgeted expenses is approximately \$566,000 in subsidies for ICS and the PSR program. The balance of the budget for educational programs is provided by tuition, fees, grants, and fund raisers.

Many school families already practice full stewardship through donations, tuition payments, and volunteer fund raising efforts. Under the proposed model, school families are required to make time, talent, and treasure commitments before completing enrollment. Therefore, it is likely that these families' financial commitments will remain at current levels or increase, since donations to the church are tax-deductible whereas school tuition is not. Furthermore, school enrollment will likely increase since tuition will be eliminated. Additional participation in the school should lead to more church donations as more families become active stewards.

School tuition has increased dramatically over the past decade in an effort to balance the school budget and provide reasonable and competitive salaries to school staff. At some point, increased tuition is not sustainable, especially in difficult economic times. Full stewardship provides a financial strategy to keep our parish school available to all parish families, regardless of their family income.

The parish is also involved in building a new church building. Donations and pledges have been received in amounts that will qualify the parish to obtain Diocesan approval to commence construction. Private loan commitments have been received for the balance of the construction costs. A capital campaign will be required to service the debt on the new church, which is planned to be retired in five years. Gifts designated for the new church fund are kept totally separate from the parish operating income, and are not considered part of the recommended 5% Full Stewardship commitment to the parish. However, these gifts are considered to be part of the recommended 5% Full Stewardship commitment to other charities.

The Parish Finance Council will be involved with working out the details of the financial component of full stewardship. For instance, the Finance Council will continue to approve budgets for the parish and the school and determine the portion of parish income that will be available to support the school and PSR programs.

- **Are there any local parishes practicing full stewardship? How and why did the Ocala parish and the Wichita diocese begin?**

At the present time, there are no parishes in the Belleville Diocese as far along in the stewardship process as Immaculate Conception. If the decision were made by our Parish Council to move forward with full stewardship, we would be the pilot parish.

There are parishes in the St. Louis Archdiocese that practice full stewardship. The committee will make every effort to contact a few of these parishes to inquire about their journey.

Blessed Trinity in Ocala FL began the path to full stewardship in 1990 as a way to fund the school. After looking at the stewardship model they began with prayer and education on the spirituality of stewardship. They are a currently a parish, not in a rich area, of 3700 families and are the only Catholic parish within 50 miles. The enrollment of their grade school more than doubled in the first seven years of practicing full stewardship. While the demographics of Ocala are different from Columbia and their public schools are not on the same level as ours, the fact remains that full stewardship has made it possible for Blessed Trinity to expand their ministries and reach out to the community as a whole.

The Wichita Diocese began the conversion to full stewardship in 1985 in all of their 114 parishes. Prior to 1985, two parishes in the diocese were already practicing full stewardship and the process was known within the diocese. In 1968, Msgr. Thomas McGread arrived at St. Francis of Assisi in Wichita and began building one of the most vibrant parishes in the country, by teaching parishioners how to use their personal gifts, which he called “time, talent and treasure”. Msgr. McGread was influential in the drafting of the U.S. Bishops’ pastoral letter, “Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response”. The Diocese of Wichita has also expanded the ministries offered in their parishes as well as built high schools, a Spiritual Life Center and has also had over 40 young men enter the seminary.

- **When I read that full stewardship is by invitation, I am concerned that stewardship will lead to a feeling of exclusivity among members of the parish.**

Rather than leading to feelings of exclusivity within our parish, our hope is that embracing full stewardship will help our parish draw even closer together as one community. All members of our parish family are invited to participate fully in the life of the parish through their commitment of time, talent, and treasure. It is up to each household to decide how to respond to this invitation and how to participate. How each household responds to this invitation is ultimately between the household and God. At a practical level, however, this response will be known to a limited number of parish staff. Members of the parish will NOT be aware of any other member’s stewardship time, talent, and treasure commitment. Households will not be publicly acknowledged or designated as “full stewardship” households. During our “Profession of Faith” at Mass,

we declare our belief in “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.” In such a Church, there is no place for division among members.

“For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3: 27-28

- **What is our time line for Full Stewardship?**

The act of Immaculate Conception being a Full Stewardship parish is an ongoing process. Our goal is to renew our Time, Talent and Treasure all at the same time. Our commitment weekend would be the weekend before Thanksgiving. We propose to the parish that we would start our commitments January 1st of the following year. Immaculate Conception has been working in this direction for a number of years. We as a parish have a strong foundation already in place. As a parish family we need to discern if now is the time to build on this foundation and begin this journey toward Full Stewardship. If we wait to have the “perfect” plan we would never get started.

- **What Does it mean to be an active parishioner/full stewardship member?**

Stewardship is a grateful response to God's love. Based in Scripture, all that we are and all that we have flows from God as gift. In turn, we serve as stewards of our spiritual and material gifts and we share these gifts in love of God and neighbor.

STEWARDSHIP IS A FAITH DECISION

When we believe that stewardship is a faith decision, we believe that God will always meet our needs. Every registered parishioner is invited and encouraged to become an active member of the parish, thus becoming a Full Stewardship Parish Community and making Stewardship our way of life.

An active Immaculate Conception parishioner is:

One who is involved in the mission of our Parish

- in our liturgical life
- in our formational and educational goals
- in our community life and
- in our outreach activities and

One who adopts stewardship as their way of life

- by completing an annual intention card of Time, Talent and Treasure and

then faithfully fulfilling one's commitments of Time, Talent and Treasure.

We believe God blesses each of us with gifts of time, talent, and treasure and that everything we have comes from God. God calls each of us to be “faithful stewards” of our lives, our time, our talents, and our financial blessings by sharing them consciously and deliberately. Faithful stewards give back to God out of gratitude for all the gifts that God has bestowed on them. Faithful stewards give their “first fruits” to God...meaning they give of their time, talent, and treasure back to God first... and then use the rest for their own needs and wants.

Stewardship is a lifestyle conversion that, when nurtured, continues to grow and flourish! We welcome and challenge all parishioners to live their baptismal call and to be a visible expression of the Body of Christ.

- **Where do we go from here?**

As a Full Stewardship committee we will continue to listen to parishioners as they bring forth very important views and concerns. We as a committee do not have all the answers, but continue to listen and respond, as best we can, to all concerns, comments and questions as quickly as possible. There is no definitive timetable to begin Full Stewardship in our parish, as we know we have a lot concerns to address yet. As a parishioner we ask you to continue to express your concerns, but also to keep an open mind to try and understand what Full Stewardship is all about. Full Stewardship is call to serve our God with our time, talent, and treasure. Please know we will continue welcoming and listening to all your feedback as together we discern whether or not our parish is being called to Full Stewardship. As we go forward, please pray that we may all be one in Christ, and that together we continue to build His kingdom here on earth.