

Witness Talk
Lynda and John Flayter
October 16, 2011

John: My name is John Flayter and this is my wife Lynda. We have 2 children – Olivia, age 4 and Faith, age 2. We moved to Libertyville and became members of St. Joe’s in early 2008, after having spent the previous 5 years in Florida, at a parish we truly loved. We are here today to share some thoughts about our experience of Stewardship.

In the past, when we heard the word stewardship, we would remember others using the phrase “be a good steward”. We assumed it meant “taking care of something”. In referencing the dictionary, Webster defines stewardship as “the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one’s care”. To be honest though, when we heard the word Stewardship from our Church, we thought it had only one meaning, “Please give us your money”. If it wasn’t money, it was giving time to volunteer for this or for that. All we kept thinking was “Our parish is big enough, someone else must be able to help out – we are a busy family here and we are doing everything we can do”.

Lynda: Today, our personal definition of stewardship is “giving back to God through the faith community that has given so much to us.” As we mentioned earlier, we fell in love with our parish in Florida, even though we were about 20 years younger than the average parishioner. Prior to that, I think it’s fair to say we saw the Church more as a building to attend mass and less as a faith community of friends. San Antonio Parish had such a warm and welcoming aura, we felt connected right away – connected to other parishioners and connected to the pastor and priests. During that time, I became pregnant. We were overjoyed until one day we found out there was chance our unborn daughter could have cystic fibrosis. Mentally and spiritually we were challenged and it was our faith community that gave us the spiritual support we much needed during this time. After several months and a few tests, we were overjoyed to find out our daughter was going to be 100 % healthy. Our faith was starting to grow and the relationship with our parish was becoming important. Funny thing though – while our faith community gave us all the spiritual support we needed, we realized that we weren’t giving much back in return.

John: Fast forward a few years and we decided to move back to our Midwest roots. Lynda convinced me Libertyville would be a good place to call home – as usual, she was right! From the first day in Libertyville, we fell in love with the town – everyone was wonderful and welcoming. We were hoping to be as happy with our new parish as we were with our new town of residence. When we were still new to St. Joe’s, we needed some guidance regarding future children because of the risks of cystic fibrosis. We met with Fr. Ken who was gave us the guidance and support we needed .

We began to become involved in the life of the parish through ministries like Mothers with Young Children, Christ Renews His Parish and parish leadership. Some of these experiences have been the best of my life – church related or otherwise.

Lynda: John and I began to feel that we were giving back to God and being good stewards in the parish community. We attended a Discovery Workshop and learned about our talents and strengths. In our thought process, THIS was good enough. We wanted to put God first. In our Gospel today we heard Jesus say “Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.” So it seems that giving to Caesar is the easy part. It’s the second half “repay to God what belongs to God” – that is the bigger challenge. If all is gift – all that we are and all that we have – do we give it all back? In a sense....yes. It means putting God first in

everything – in our daily life, in our families, in our decisions on what do to with our gifts: talents, time and material possessions. We began to consider how we were supporting the parish financially, whether we were living as grateful stewards. . We heard the message that the parish needs our regular support for its ministries, that we are called to support it with our “first fruits.” and that we are asked to make a “planned offering pledge” to help the parish plan for the coming year. We figured out what we could give based on the first hour of our weekly earnings. We heard the about the Electronic Funds Transfer program and the benefit it gives the parish to know they can count on our support. And it makes it easier for us to know we don’t have to worry about remembering our envelope each week. So we signed up – just last week!

John: As we stand here with you, sharing our stories, we are in no position to tell any of you that you should give more OR that you are not giving enough. We know that our parish – both San Antonio and now St. Joe’s, have given so many special gifts to us. Here are a few:

- A sense of belonging when we entered a new faith community
- An abundance of spiritual strength when we needed it most
- Experiences with the men of the parish that have made me a better husband, father and person
- Acquaintances that have turned into strong and great friendships
- “Living Our Strengths” which allows us to do what we do best

Lynda and I feel privileged to be part of this faith community. Giving our “first fruits” gives us a sense of peace that we are giving back to God in gratitude for the gift of this parish. We are blessed to be a part of this faith community and we want to ensure it is always there for us. When we think of it that way, returning our gifts to God doesn’t seem as difficult as we used to think.

Thank you and god bless.