

St. Mary Magdalene strives to become a full stewardship parish

Written by Christina Lee Knauss | The Catholic Miscellany
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SIMPSONVILLE—Members of St. Mary Magdalene Church have started a new stewardship program to help them discover the gifts they possess, and how to use them to give back to the parish and the world around them.

On March 6, over 100 people involved in parish programs met to learn about the true nature of stewardship, and how it's often misunderstood as a euphemism for giving money to the church.

Father Teofilo Trujillo, pastor, said stewardship in its purest form is “the belief that all we have and all we are comes from God.” He described how Christ's life and teachings stress the importance of giving and sharing.

“Stewardship is a way of life deeply rooted in the person of Jesus Christ,” he said. “It is a way of life that would have us imitate Jesus and his generous self-giving. Jesus came not to be served but to serve.”

Father Trujillo said he has seen a great sense of gratitude at St. Mary Magdalene since he was assigned there in November 2008.

“It is wonderful when we are thanking one another, when we are recognizing the hand of God in one another's life,” he said. “Stewardship is about opening our lives up fully to the possibilities of God's actions, God's grace and letting God do more and more in us and through us.”

Shortly after his arrival, Father Trujillo indicated that he wanted to focus on stewardship, and a council formed in July 2009.

“We call it the stewardship journey because we know it will never end,” said Sabrina Moore, council chairwoman.

Moore has been a member of St. Mary Magdalene for 15 years and has seen its rapid growth. She said recent data shows that more than 50 percent of parishioners joined in the last two to five years.

At the leaders' meeting, people split into small groups to discuss ways to remedy recurring issues identified during an October survey. Moore said the survey was meant to take the pulse

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of the parish.

Respondents said factors that have kept the church from reaching its full potential include limited space, people who want Mass only to last an hour, a need to engage members more in liturgy and faith development, and overcommitted families.

“We have families that may be bringing their children to religious education during the week, but they’re not attending Mass as a family, or vice versa,” she said. “We also have a lot of people who believe Mass should be one hour and one hour only. We want to break that mindset and help people experience liturgy without looking at their watches.”

Moore said the large parish, which has 3,100 households registered, also needs to bring Hispanic and non-Hispanic members together more often. Currently, the two communities rarely interact.

“These issues could preclude stewardship from taking root, so we brainstormed solutions that will hopefully change and help our parish grow spiritually,” she said. “We want to bring people together, to help people to regard stewardship as the idea that God owns everything, we are to be grateful for all those blessings, and in return we need to give back.”

Several people who took the survey said the large size of the parish made them feel isolated and unwelcome.

As a result, Moore said a welcome committee has been formed to help identify visitors and new members and introduce them to what the parish has to offer. A new communications committee will spread the word about events, and a liturgy committee will teach people about the elements of the Mass and how to get more out of daily and weekly worship.

Moore said spiritual growth is one of the most important ways to nurture stewardship, because as people learn more about their Catholic faith they also become more willing to give and to share what God has given them.

Those who attended were encouraged to spend time at eucharistic adoration, take Bible study classes or attend RCIA for a refresher course on the fundamentals of the faith.

Moore said two new Bible study groups are already starting, and other stewardship missions and retreats are being planned for the next few months.

“Our goal is to eventually become a full stewardship parish, where everyone is giving something back,” she said. “We know that’s going to take years, but people are excited to begin this journey.”