

Stewardship

August 30,31, 2014

My name is Matt Aitchison and this is my wife Dawn and we would like to thank the Stewardship committee and Father Secora for asking us to share with you our family's experience with Stewardship. I was baptized and confirmed at St. Cecilia and Dawn and I were married at St. Cecilia. We have 9 children, all baptized at St. Cecilia by their grandpa, my dad- Deacon Gary Aitchison. Lucas is 20 and a junior at Benedictine College, Delaney is 18 and a freshman at DMACC this year with plans to be a missionary second semester in Nicaragua. Claire is 16, Emma is 13, Nora is 11, Charlotte is almost 9, Bethany is 7, Rachel is 5 and the little guy at the bottom of the 7 Sisters is Logan and he is 3.

Dawn- As Matt and I were preparing for this weekend, we came across this quote by Pope Francis given in his address to an audience on April 24, 2013. He says, "In this period of crisis today, it is important not to turn in on ourselves, burying our own talent, our spiritual, intellectual, and material riches, everything that the Lord has given us; but, rather to open ourselves, to be supportive, to be attentive to others. Set your stakes on great ideals, the ideals that enlarge the heart, the ideals of service that make your talents fruitful. Life is not given to us to be jealously guarded for ourselves, but is given to us so that we may give it in turn."

As Pope Francis says we are called to not bury our talents, but rather to open ourselves, be supportive and attend to others. It seems that Pope Francis is saying that relationship is at the heart of Stewardship and Matt and I completely agree!

We have targeted three main areas of relationship in our own lives and in the life of our family, that we feel are directed related to Stewardship.

The first is our Relationship with Jesus. By fostering and growing our own personal relationship with Christ we come to know His will and the talents He has given us. For me personally, I have seen it played out over and over again in our family, that when we take a leap of faith and do God's will, He provides where we are lacking. This could be a hidden talent that we didn't even know we possessed. For example, I never realized how good I would get at changing diapers or wrestling a naughty one year old during mass. Dawn is often reminding all of us not to limit God or put Him in a box. He wants us to dream big. I remember when we were dating, the BIG family we were planning to have consisted of 4 children. But thankfully God kept nudging me to dream big. That nudging by God-not always gentle nudging- came as a direct result of my personal relationship with Christ and my desire to really know His will for our family.

The second area is our relationship within the family. As parents, we are the first and most important teachers of the faith. About 10 years ago, Matt and I started to realize that we needed to prayerfully make a plan as to how we thought God wanted us to teach and live out that faith. Because our family was so big, we knew that we had to be efficient and organized so that we didn't miss anyone! Seriously, it was as much about survival in the midst of our chaos! The plan has changed many times, but even now we sit down, regularly, at least twice a year, and look at where each person in our family is spending their time, their money, and check to see that we are all using our talents wisely. We actually list everyone, by name, when we do this and it is extremely helpful to have it written down. Matt and I feel a

big part of this plan is helping our children discern what their individual talents are and how to use them for God. We encourage our kids to be involved in many areas within the church, especially those that help them deepen their faith. We have also been blessed, many times, by several adults that have come into our older kids' lives, and helped to spiritually mentor them- as well as encourage them in their walk of faith. We are very grateful that these special adults have chosen to share their talents with our children.

And finally, our relationship within the larger community is a way we can further live out God's call for Stewardship. Early in our marriage, Dawn and I were part of the confirmation team. We also were involved in starting a young married's faith sharing group and have consistently been involved in some type of couple's group throughout the years. Being a part of a small faith sharing group is probably one of the most impacting ways that we have seen our faith grow over the years. I have been a part of Life Teen Core for many years, we have both gone on many retreats, chaperoned different teen events, and held small groups in our home, etc.

We have also encouraged our older kids to be involved in our St. Cecilia community by volunteering to help where needed, especially anywhere that Anna needs them, as well as encouraging them to be a part of Totus Tuus- the teen leadership team. We also encourage our teens to give financially, as well as contribute towards most of their church trips. Our younger children also help in many ways at home- sometimes helping me make a meal for someone, or helping me clean the house before we host a small group in our home. For the last three years our family has had the opportunity to be involved in mission work in Nicaragua. It has been amazing to see how God has

allowed each of our children to find a way to be a part of the mission trip, even though they all weren't actually traveling to Nicaragua.

St. Cecilia is a very special community and Dawn and I feel blessed to be a part of it. There are so many ways that each of us can live out our call for Stewardship. We are very grateful for all of the time, energy and love that the people of this parish have given to our family over the years. We really believe that everyone, no matter what their age or state in life, has unique talents and that God can take our tiny offerings and make them into something BIG, really BIG, especially when we let go and let Him.

Thank you very much.