

April Blog: On the frontlines of Stewardship

I walked into the Parish Center coffee in hand, drenched from the rain, and slightly concerned that I might not be in the right place. To say the least, I was a little bit of a mess. A woman greeted me warmly, also with phone in one hand and a pen in the other. Quickly, she tried to connect me to the person I was meeting with, but the phone rang. So ever calmly, just as if she has done this a billion times before, she picked up the phone and answered with the most sincerity I had ever heard someone say the phrase, "Hello, can I help you?" She expressed concern for the person on the other line and offered help. Each answer from her on this call seemed carefully crafted to provide the most comfort to the person she was assisting. She had a comforting authenticity to her voice.

Between fixing something wrong with the computers, preparing for the funeral in the church, finding the person that was supposed to be meeting with me, servicing the phone at the front desk, and I am sure a multitude of emails to get too, nothing seemed to rattle her gentle and caring personality. I watched each interaction she had with someone, and learned what *stewardship* looks like at a Parish level. She was the Parish Secretary, and the first generous steward many people met.

The Parish Secretary or the "Gatekeepers" as I commonly call them, find themselves daily on the frontlines of every touch point we have within our communities. They are oftentimes parishioner's first point of contact or the last at a Parish. I would wager that the phrase "patience of a saint" at one time or another could easily be changed to, "the patience of a Parish secretary."

Each time I run into a Parish Secretary, I am surprised. For someone in such a demanding role, their personalities tend to shine above all the challenges they are faced with daily. To me, these individuals embody the Easter Season- *a season of joy and surprise*. The surprises that occur on the Parish Secretary's watch are welcomed challenges.

Could you imagine with me for a moment the feeling of surprise at the tomb? How about the feeling of surprise when Jesus appeared to the disciples? Now, what about the surprise of a catechumen being so joyfully welcomed into the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil? Can you imagine the surprise of a newcomer coming into a Parish Center being so warmly welcomed? How about the surprise from a divorcee being welcomed into ministry without judgment, but with comfort? Each surprise leads us to creating a more vibrant and joyful faith community, if we commit to acknowledging the surprising stewardship moments around us.

Living a *stewardship way of life* is full of joyful surprises. Parish secretaries provide prayer for those who are in need of comfort, they provide access to ministries for those searching for something more, they provide their time and care to newcomers, parishioners, and the local community. They often share their own financial resources with the parish and others that might find themselves at the parish's front door. They are a surprising steward.

Who on your Parish staff or Parish community are surprising stewards?

I am reminded of a recent surprise in my life that I'd like to share. I have the joy of witnessing God's grace and love through my daughter, Gracey. On Easter morning, I was explaining to her that this Sunday was very special and that she was going to wear a very special dress to celebrate. I put her in a puffy and sparkly Easter dress and her reaction was nothing less than a big surprise look on her face. She said, "Mommy, Jesus is having a ball!" I laughed at her comment and grinned from ear to ear. Yes, in that moment with my young toddler, we were about to celebrate a surprise celebration and attend Jesus' ball.

My hope during this Easter season is to watch for those surprising moments of stewardship, the Easter surprises we encounter with so many in our parish communities. Let us all embody a spirit of stewardship with eyes wide open to the "ball" that is meant to be celebrated together!