

STEWARDS AMONG US

Inspiring Discipleship One Story at a Time

Do this: Take a moment to think back to the days when you weren't so engaged in parish life. Remember how it felt to show up for Sunday Mass without knowing a soul or feeling any connection to your parish? Now recall the specific instance when you were invited to join in a particular parish ministry or group. Why did you say yes?

Chances are, the invitation was personal. Someone took the time to connect with you, share something he or she is passionate about, and invite you to experience that same joy. That person likely spared you the functional details (such as roles and responsibilities within the ministry, frequency and location of meetings) in favor of sharing how it *felt* to be a member of that ministry. He or she made an impact on you simply by *sharing a personal story*.

Now look at your Sunday bulletin. How are you using this weekly publication to connect, inspire, and invite? I know, I'm with you... sometimes it's all we can do, week after week, to squeeze in all the details of upcoming events and ministry news. And yes, it is essential to convey the necessary facts of *who-what-when-where*. But I suggest that it is equally essential to dedicate some space in your bulletin each week to answer the question, *why*?

Why gets at the heart of discipleship. It prompts the sharing of the very personal story behind each of the hundreds of individuals who say yes to serving at your parish each week. Each story is as unique as the person

telling it—and it is through these types of stories that others are called to join you in ministry.

At St. Laurence, one of the ways we try to inspire people to engage in parish life is through a weekly column in the bulletin titled *Stewards Among Us*. This little column is less than 250 words and takes up no more than a few column inches, but in it we share the stories of the individuals, the cheerful givers, who make our parish so exceptional. Of course, some of these Stewards Among Us are recognized leaders in the parish, but most are known only within their own ministry, perhaps as a quiet strength, a dependable volunteer, someone who gives selflessly and cheerfully.

The stories we share in this column aim to get at the heart of *why* they do what they do. When we invite people to be featured in *Stewards Among Us*, we impress upon them that this is not so much about putting them on a pedestal as it is about shining a light on their favorite ministries *through their personal stories*. We provide a few simple prompts, give the steward at least a week to respond, and arrange for a photo (usually a simple head-and-shoulders shot).

The responses we get are beautiful! These are the stories of people who choose to devote their time, talent, skills, knowledge, and experience for the benefit of our parish family. Each in his or her own way. Through these stories, readers get to know the people behind the scenes and get a sense for the nearly one hundred separate ministries and groups that comprise this large and vibrant parish.

The stewards may be individuals, a couple, or a whole family. On occasion, we choose to highlight a particular team or set of coleaders (like the Parish Bazaar Chairs or Funeral Reception Chairs), although the article ends up being more of a ministry spotlight and less of a personal witness. When selecting the stewards, our Discipleship Council takes note of the parish calendar and tries to match stewards to a specific Sunday (for instance, a dad on Father's Day or one of the missionaries the week of the Medical Mission). Also, we learned pretty quickly of the necessity for a spreadsheet to keep track of the stewards/feature dates.

We first published the *Stewards Among Us* column in the St. Laurence bulletin in June 2009. Since then, we have featured over 350 individuals, couples, or families—and



HOW IT WORKS IN 3 EASY STEPS:

IDENTIFY

Make this the responsibility for your stewardship committee or pastoral council. It's a great way for them to connect with the ministries they represent. Keep a list of nominees and make it an agenda item at your monthly meeting to select your Stewards Among Us. Schedule each steward to be featured for a specific Sunday, and assign someone to contact them and provide due dates.

INVITE

Contact the stewards and let them know they were nominated and selected to be featured in the bulletin in Stewards Among Us. Our Discipleship Council members at St. Laurence really enjoy this part! Some council members prefer to meet with the stewards over lunch, some call on the phone, and some do it all via email, but the personal contact with these nominees is critical to their understanding of the purpose for this column and helps to obtain the best fodder to tell their story.

WRITE

This, by far, is the most challenging (and most rewarding) part! I love seeing these submissions in my inbox (or in a few precious cases, still handwritten) and as I read them over, I'm often moved to tears. Whether the submission is a series of simple sentence fragments or a spectacularly written mini-biography, I always pray to the Holy Spirit to guide me in capturing the story that is meant to be shared. How rewarding it is each week to be able to pick up on that thread of a story and compose a 250-word column meant to connect to the hearts of parishioners!

we have only just scratched the surface of cheerful givers in our parish! Each month, more names are added to the long list of nominees. Today this little column is one of the most popular features of our bulletin. People say they turn to this page first and then get around to reading the rest of the bulletin.

So, give it a try! Sure, it takes a little extra work to identify, invite, and share these stories each week. But the result is a column in your bulletin that does much more than *push information*—you will *pull people* into parish ministry through the stories of the people who make up your amazing parish family.

SOME SUGGESTED PROMPTS:

- Personal/family info?
- How long have you been in the parish?
- List of groups/ministries/positions you been involved in?
- What led you to become involved in the various ministries?
- How have you grown from being involved in these ministries?
- What advice might you give to someone looking for a way to get involved?
- Any other info/quotes about serving in ministries?

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