

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

St. Paul tells us that he knows how to live in humble circumstances and how to live with abundance; how to live in every circumstance, including being hungry or well-fed. He testifies, “I can do all things in him who strengthens me.”

Today we are blessed to receive testimonies from members of the Parish Stewardship Council who are striving, in the circumstances of their lives, to be faithful to the God who is always faithful to us.

I am happy to present to you Joe Dagney, Chairman of our Parish Stewardship Council, who will introduce these testimonies of faith.

My name is Joe Dagney and on behalf of our parish council and our pastor, Father Eschbach, I was asked to be at the masses this week end to discuss our Baptismal call to stewardship principles.

I am excited about the direction the Lord is leading this parish! A parish with growth and service as our call. A parish that is heeding the Lord’s call to make disciples of all nations, a parish that is understanding the definition of stewardship as managing all of God’s resources for His Glory!

I am pleased to introduce two families who take their role of steward very seriously. Two families who are not here to impress you but to humbly impress upon you the way they are trying to be living examples of a life pleasing to God.

I would like to first introduce Sandy Hodorovich....

Hi! My name is Sandy Hodorovich. As a member of our newly established Stewardship Council, I am grateful for this opportunity to speak with you today. When the idea of sharing our stories with the congregation was raised, I thought, “What story?” I don’t have a story!” Well, I guess we all have a story, but we don’t have enough time for that one.

As many of you know, my husband, Darren, is on Pastoral Council, and it was mandatory that they read “Rebuilt”, the book that we were all asked to read, after the council had supposedly read it. After a few months of seeing the book sitting around collecting dust, I figured I would do his homework for him and read it. Besides, I never have an issue sharing my opinion and I always want to be part of the solution not the problem.

The book was awesome! About $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way through, it began talking about tithing. It was presented in a way that I had never thought about money.

To me filling out my envelope every week was an obligation to help pay the bills of the church, to support the Archdiocese, and to make sure that the priests got paid. While all of this might be true, I never considered that it was not my money to begin with, that it was God's gift to me.

I feel extremely blessed to have a good job, and a house and I completely understand that not everyone is in that same position. I have often thought, "Why am I so blessed while there are others that struggle daily?" In attempting to change that thought process, and not question why I am blessed, I want to take God's gift, the blessings that he has given me, and share them with others.

While reading this chapter on tithing I thought just for fun I would do a calculation on what 10% of our income would really mean we would be giving to the church. After I did this calculation (twice), I almost fell out of my chair laughing. I was not laughing at what I was supposed to be giving, but at what we were actually giving.

Now, there was a time when that was all we could give. But as our financial situation has evolved and years went by, we had re-evaluated how much we pay on credit cards, what kind of vacation we could take, buying a new appliance, and the list goes on and on. We never re-evaluated what we were giving to God. It was always just what we did and it was not discussed.

After discussing this as a couple, we decided that we should increase our contribution, which is the reason that I am here today. It is not because I am a good public speaker.

We will be working towards that 10% because we have made a commitment to each other to re-evaluate our contributions regularly. Instead of it being what is left in the bank account at the end of the month, it is becoming a line item at the top-- that reads GOD. We feel that it is our obligation to give what we have been blessed to receive and put it back into our faith, this church and most importantly to God.

The only way that I can fully thank God for what I have is to take every opportunity to give back to Him.

My 8 year old son, Jared, told me that the three most important things in his life in this order were God, my mom and dad, and Star Wars. After I chuckled to myself, I looked at him and said, "That is exactly right! We all need to put God first in our lives and to really understand what that means, especially before Star Wars". Thank you!

Thank you Sandy!

Now, I would like to introduce to you Mary Damiani.

Good Morning (Evening)! For those of you who don't know me, I am Mary Damiani and today I would like to share with you the impact that tithing has had on my life and that of my family, both in good times and and bad. While many focus on the financial aspect of tithing, it is my belief that tithing is not so much about money but about faith, and that was especially true with my husband, Rick Damiani.

The man that died almost 5 years ago was not the same man I married 20 years before and nowhere was that more evident than in his faith. When we got married and moved out to this area, neither of us belonged to a church. As it is with many couples, it was the birth of our first son, Joe, that helped us to realize we needed to get ourselves to church because, as our parents had done, we also wanted to raise our children in church. This was a little more difficult in our situation because I was Baptist and he was Catholic, but we were both in agreement that we wanted our children raised with faith. I found Parkesburg Baptist and he went and registered at Our Lady of Consolation. In the beginning, we went to church separately. However, I felt very strongly about attending church as a family and even before the birth of Joe, I asked Rick to join me sometimes at the Baptist Church, and I suggested we alternate Sundays at the two churches. Rick wasn't always onboard with that idea. He didn't want to push the Catholic faith on me, but sometimes he was willing to attend church with me, and even though he didn't want to push it on me, I attended Mass with him. It was a Sunday I was at Parkesburg Baptist alone that I first heard a sermon about Tithing.

After that sermon, I had a strong desire to tithe and felt it was very important. I went home and brought it up to Rick, talking about the sermon and why I thought it was important. To say Rick did not share my enthusiasm is an understatement. His words, I believe, were "Are you nuts? We give enough!" and proceeded to list people he considered to be strong in their faith who he knew didn't tithe. At the time, we were giving \$20 to each church each week, and, in his mind, that was certainly enough. We had a child now; I wasn't working anymore; and there wasn't anything that Rick worried about more than finances and the ability to provide for his family. No! Absolutely not! We would not be tithing!

I was heartbroken. I felt very strongly about this. I talked with my pastor and his only advice was to pray, and pray I did. I stopped talking about it with Rick and I prayed that God would make a way and that we would eventually be able to tithe. One morning as I was getting ready to head out to church, I picked up my church envelope that Rick had already filled out and put the check into, as he always did. I noticed the amount was not the normal amount. It was more, and it was an odd number, something like \$38.00. Shocked, I asked him about it and all he said was that he figured it wasn't that much more than we were already giving. So he figured we'd give it a try.

Anyone who knew Rick, knows that once he committed to something, he didn't back down and tithing was no exception. Things weren't always easy back in those early days and there were times when we just didn't know how we were going to pay for everything.

One of those months, there was a big storm that caused a neighbor's tree to break and fall on our cars, my car especially. I took the car to the claims office and they wrote a check out for almost \$1000. As it ended up, a friend came with some sort of polish and since the damage was all surface scratches was able to buff them out, which meant no need to repair the car and the check was all ours. This was a defining moment for Rick in his faith. God provided a way when we saw no way.

After that, he never, and I mean never, doubted tithing and his faith and our faith as a family grew. Tithing was a given in all of our financial planning. For instance, when we planned to buy the house we have now, we weren't ready to sell our current house, meaning we would, for a time, have to pay 2 mortgages while Rick did some repairs to the house before putting it on the market. When planning whether we could do this, our tithe was part of the financial planning. Nothing was allowed to interfere with our tithe! We became active participants, as a couple and as a family, in both churches, every week, and in all aspects of church life and activities. Our family grew from 2 boys to 4 and our family has benefited spiritually from both Our Lady of Consolation and Parkesburg Baptist. Nowhere was Christ's love and support more evident to us than when Rick was diagnosed with, and only 2 months later, died, from Pancreatic Cancer. Both churches, friends, Rick's work and others, showed us the love of Christ in the flesh during our time of need and grief. I thank Jesus and all of you for that.

God is faithful, all the time! I've learned that our faithfulness to God doesn't mean we won't have heartache, pain and struggles. These past 5 years have been the hardest of my life. I miss my partner in life; my children miss their father; and we all miss the life we had together. Our lives are forever changed. Every time I come across another struggle, I wish to just go back in time and back to Rick, which of course is impossible. However, what has remained constant is Christ's love--even when I was cursing Him because the miracle that so many prayed for wasn't granted.

I have continued to tithe in both churches and I try to take the children to both churches although we can't always get to both every week anymore. I struggle with trying to do it all without my partner and the one person I always knew I could depend on and get through any of life's struggles with. But, I am trying to remain faithful to God.

The easiest way I do that is with my tithe. When I don't have the strength or I feel overwhelmed with life, I at least remember to give the church that first 10%. Life is still a roller coaster but God finds little ways to show me he is still in control and looking out for us.

For the past several years, I've known I've needed to get at least a part time job, but I just didn't see a way. While Joe is working now and Michael is in college, I still have 10 year old, John, and 12 year old, Nick, at home. Finally, some difficulties that had kept me from being able to get a job were ironed out and what appears to be a perfect job in relation to hours, flexibility, etc, just seemed to drop into my lap. While I still miss my old life with Rick, I have learned to be truly thankful to God for His many blessings.

In closing, my testimony, born of experiences, both sweet and sad, is that tithing, giving back to God of the first fruits, is not about money, it's about faith, and finding a way to be faithful, even when life seems impossible, and allowing that faith to grow and prosper.

God Bless.

Thank you Mary-

Hearing these testimonies, I hope you realize Stewardship isn't about money. It's not about buildings or giving or capital campaigns either.

Stewardship is about recognizing that God is the Owner and we are the stewards—the managers.

Stewardship is managing all of God's resources His way for His glory. I mean all of God's resources—everything He's entrusted to us--like our time, family, career, body, and yes, our money. When people see a much broader view of true, biblical stewardship, all sorts of unexpected things start to happen. Relationships grow deeper. Work becomes a joy. People get out of debt. They become outrageous givers. They fall deeper in love with their heavenly Father. And all this stuff happens because they start to view their lives and everything in them as resources to be managed for the Lord.

Many Catholics have missed the benefit of practicing stewardship, but it's not too late! We can start today to honor the Lord with all with which He's blessed us. God's way is much better than our way!