

**Prayer:** Be still and know that I am God ... this verse from the book of Psalms helps me to set my focus on God. It reminds me that God created me out of love, to share His love with others.

**Introduction:** Good morning, my name is John Schneider. My wife Amy, and I have been parishioners of St. Margaret Mary since 1995. In the last 15 years God has blessed us with 5 wonderful, healthy children, four of which attend our parish school.

**Stewardship Definition:** Today I stand before you to share my witness of stewardship. So what is stewardship? I have to admit my definition of stewardship has changed over the past 15 years. 15 years ago I might have said stewardship is time, talent and treasure with a focus on treasure. But today I have a different notion of stewardship. Stewardship is the response, to the awareness that everything I have is a gift from God. My health, my spouse, my children, my faith, the way I interact with others, the inspiration to do a selfless act, the joy I receive from the smile and laughter of a child, the happiness I experience when I hear a kind word or see an act of compassion. Stewardship is allowing God into my life to transform my wants and desires into His, and then sharing that changed heart with others.

**Scripture Reference:** In today's reading from Maccabees we hear an example of stewardship on steroids, seven brothers who give their very life, when asked to what degree they will honor the God who gave them life. I pray none of us are ever put to that test of faith.

As I mentioned, my definition of stewardship has changed over time, now I would like to share the history that is responsible for that change.

**Stewardship Story:** Amy and I were married in September of 1995 and moved to Lake in the Hills days before Christmas. I joined the Knights of Columbus back when they were renovating the rectory basement, which used to be a meeting room before we acquired the Eastview School. I used to be very active, and hope to become more active once again. The Knights are a great example of stewardship.

A year before Matt and Jack were born I heard Matthew Kelly speak for the first time. Matthew Kelly is a Catholic inspirational speaker and author. His message is all about becoming the person God has created you to be; about becoming the best version of yourself. I've read most all of his books and have really tried to live his message, sharing it with those around me.

A year later, some colleagues of mine encouraged me to go independent with plans to start a new consulting company with them. I really respected these colleagues, and to be honest I did not consider myself their equal. I accepted their invitation and I have been working for myself for the last 11 years. Being self-employed allows Amy and I to have complete autonomy over every dollar I generate; another blessing which helps us with our financial stewardship.

Amy and I both went on a Christ Renews His Parish weekend; it was a great experience. Shortly after that my habits started to change. I started to listen to Christian music. Now, that is the only music I listen to. Not to say that secular music is bad, but I've just been drawn toward Christian music. I was never really a big reader, but now I read much more and my reading list focuses on scripture and faith centered inspirational books. One of my CRHP buddies invited me to join his "prayer group" that discussed the daily mass readings on Saturday morning. Now, eight years later, Saturday morning at 7 am is still reserved for "prayer group". I started sending "thought of the day" messages to my CRHP team. Now, I'm sending "thought of the day" emails to a distribution list of 50 or so, and it really helps me to keep my focus centered on my faith. Amy and I served on a committee for the "Future is Now" campaign, and helped plan a dinner dance. Currently, Amy is on the school board and I am coaching over at the school. I truly believe that the Holy Spirit is the source of our enthusiasm to become more involved in the parish and the source of every moment and dollar we give.

Once a month I bring Holy Communion to the seniors at Village Green. It's a family event; the boys participate by reading and the girls share their smiles. It's really a match made in heaven, the kids experience the wisdom of the seniors and the residents enjoy the youthful energy of the children. It's a commitment that I really enjoy. I truly believe the joy I experience is the presence of God.

Amy and I participated in the “Why Catholic” program and came to the realization that the entire teaching of the Catholic Church has one end in mind: to bring us closer to God. That’s it, everything that the church teaches guides us to a fuller relationship with Christ. Our current culture would have us believe that the church is trying to limit our freedoms and control us. The reality could not be further from the truth. It is our culture that is trying to enslave us to our own selfishness, and brand us as consumers of the lie that the more we have the happier we will be. And it is the Church, the Body of Christ of which we are all members, that is trying to free us from our culture’s grip. I’ve come to understand that freedom is not a license to do whatever I want or to satisfy my every selfish desire. Freedom is the capacity, desire and action to do what is good and pleasing and perfect in the eyes of our Creator. I have a favorite bible verse which reminds me of this fact. Romans 12 verse 2: *“Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.”*

I’ve become aware that God is at the heart of Stewardship. He is the source of all gifts. He is the inspiration to give. He is the peace, joy and contentment experienced through giving.

Five months ago I went an hour early to Thursday morning mass to spend an hour at Adoration. It was during that hour of prayer, reading and reflection that I felt the call to share this witness of stewardship.

**Invitation:** So in closing, I invite you to open your heart, mind and soul to God to transform your spiritual capacity to embrace all that He wants to reveal to you.

- I invite you to spend more time with His Son, our Redeemer and Savior in adoration.
- I invite you to spend more time with the Word made Incarnate, by reading and reflecting on Holy Scripture.
- I invite you to spend more time in silent prayer to just listen. God has a plan for all of us and part of that plan is allowing Him to mold us into the people He created us to be, and to share that person with the whole world so that they might know Him through us.
- I invite you to be the best stewards of God’s gifts by bringing Him to everyone you meet. Thank you.