

STEWARDSHIP IN ACTION

PARISHIONER HONORED FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

The journey to being a true steward of what God has given us looks different for each person. For parishioner Marie Harwanko it began as a few tentative steps toward a fuller relationship with God and a better understanding of her faith.

Marie, a life-long Catholic who had a good foundation in the faith, found that her desire to know more grew as she did. After graduating from college Marie spent a brief time teaching at Immacula ta High School and credits that experience with sparking her love of education. The thirst to grow in her faith led her briefly into Religious Life and continued to remain with her in a business career in the secular world.

Marie's faith journey toward Stewardship wasn't without its twists and turns, however. Like many, Marie had periods in her life where she felt God's presence more than others. Marie admits that her life changed, as did her view of God and the Catholic Church, through a few significant events. "I went through a real period of conversion and it was that experience, along with a great deal of prayer, which led me to want to do more and know more," Marie noted. Marie also credits a retreat she took and a prayer by St.

Ignatius of Loyola (See sidebar for entire prayer) for nudging her further along on the path to stewardship. "I came away from that retreat with this powerful prayer and a real desire to move forward," Marie said.

Prayer for Generosity

*Lord, teach me to be generous
Teach me to serve you as you deserve;
To give and not count the cost
To fight and not heed the wounds,
To toil and not to seek for rest
To labor and not to ask for rewards
Save for that of knowing that I do your will.*

-- St. Ignatius of Loyola

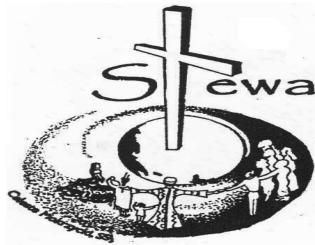
While still working full-time and caring for her elderly mother; Marie decided to take a few classes in Spirituality. It is a scary step, especially when you haven't been in school in awhile but for Marie it felt right. She began by looking into programs and finally decided on one at Seton Hall, which offered a certificate rather than full degree. As Marie is the first to tell you - it all began strictly for

her own personal, spiritual growth; but God had other plans...

Marie was soon to discover that returning to school; while difficult was more of a joy than a burden. It was during this time that she began getting more involved in the Parish she had called home for so many years. She first brought her knowledge and passion to the RCIA program. Marie was particularly interested in assisting those seekers who were in the initial stages of entrance into the Church. "I felt a connection to those who had questions. I knew what that was like and I was happy to be able to help them find answers," Marie commented.

After getting involved Marie discovered that she could make a difference and that she had much to offer. Her participation also included IHN, being a Eucharistic Minister and being a member of the newly formed Evangelization Commission. Marie's education continued as well and after three years of being a part-time student, she received a Certificate in Christian Spirituality from Seton Hall. Despite her mother's health and her own busy schedule; Marie felt called to continue. She entered the Master's program and slowly began accumulating the credits needed to receive an MA in Pastoral Ministry.

Through it all she did what all of us are called to do – she offered



Responding to God's Hospitality

unsure if you will be successful but if it is what God wants then things will come

her time and talents in service to the Church. "Being an introvert it was frightening at first. I wasn't sure what I could contribute but it all just seemed to fall into place," Marie said. In 2006 Marie graduated from Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology at Seton Hall University and was awarded the Pope John Paul II Medal for Academic Excellence. "It is an award given by the faculty to the student with the highest GPA," Marie explained. She attended a special ceremony before graduation where the award was given by one of her toughest professors. "She spoke more about me as a person than about my academic achievement – it was very humbling," Marie said.

Marie is not sure what the future holds for her but she knows that she will continue to be open to what God is calling her to do and that she will continue to give of herself to the Church. "I had to overcome some fear in order to do the things I have done but it was worthwhile," Marie commented. Her advice for others who feel called to dig deeper into their faith or to get involved is to do the same. "It may be scary and you may be

together."

Marie continues to work full-time and care for her mother but she hasn't stopped giving of her time and talents. She has recently begun a program entitled 'Take A Second Look.' This guided tour is meant to help parishioners and seekers learn more about the faith as well as the history of St. Bernard and Marie was also one of the keynote speakers at a recent Evangelization Ministry Day. Not bad for a person who started out just wanting to take a few classes in spirituality...

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW TO GET INVOLVED CALL THE PARISH OFFICE AT 908-725-0552

THE ABC's of STEWARDSHIP

Being a good steward doesn't require special talent or a large amount of time or effort.

Whether we know it or not, each of us has a unique part of ourselves that is able to fill a specific need in our community or our world. It can be as elaborate as the ability to organize and execute an event or as simple as being able to listen to the lonely and suffering with a compassionate heart. Each is important and each is needed.

Getting started is the hardest part but these tips might help...

A – Ask God what needs done

God will let you know if you are open to what He is saying.

B – Be open to taking risks

Trying something new may be scary – especially if that something is calling you to give time you may not think you have or volunteer for something you aren't sure you can do. God will give you what you need to succeed if you ask Him.

C – Contact someone who is already involved

Taking the first step is the hardest but some information and some reassurance can help.