

Cultivating GRATITUDE *in parish life*

ST. ISIDORE PARISHIONERS GROWING AS DISCIPLES WHO
ARE THE ULTIMATE STEWARDS OF GOD'S GIFTS

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVE GERMAN

WITH STEWARDSHIP “THERE’S SUCH A REFLECTION ON GOD’S INTENTION AND GOD’S GENEROSITY,” says Father Avram Brown, pastor of St. Isidore Parish in Yuba City since 2016. “It cultivates a spirit of gratitude, a resting in gratitude,” he notes gently, easily describing a perpetual state of thankfulness and hinting that this type of resting is not resting at all. It is active, dynamic, and fruitful, infused with God’s grace.

It is an “authentic place to live as a Catholic,” he says, “remembering that *Eucharistia* is an abiding thankfulness,” inviting hearts to be open, and free to live and share God’s grace and abundance with others.

GROWING IN LOVE AND FAITH

The parish’s patron saint, Isidore the Farmer, aptly reflects its local roots in agriculture. Father Avram senses a certain farm influence on growing disciples who are, after all, the ultimate stewards of God’s gifts.

“You have to prepare the soil, plant the seed, nurture the plants,” he explains metaphorically, describing how in farming there is a recognition that anything worthwhile

YOUR STORIES COVER STORY



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HELEN GOMEZ

takes hard work and patience in preparation for the harvest. So too with stewardship, he notes, of the parish entering more deeply into its own story and experience. And like farming, he believes, stewardship maintains reverence for consistency and longevity.

Helen Gomez, coordinator of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, recalls when Father Avram invited her to spearhead intentional stewardship at St. Isidore. A parishioner since 1978 and one who “wears many hats,” Helen researched an Atlanta, Georgia consulting firm dedicated to helping parishes foster stewardship as a way of life. She knew “they’re

■ Father Avram Brown, pastor, Tomas Hernandez and Helen Gomez on the grounds of St. Isidore Parish in Yuba City.







■ Parishioners join in the celebration of an outdoor Mass at St. Isidore Parish in Yuba City.

potential.” He expounds on how community, engagement and connections among parishioners enrich and strengthen the shared St. Isidore story.

NO PRE-SET TEMPLATE

“Rather than a pre-set template or chart of what to anticipate,” Father Avram explains, “stewardship is about gifts lived out.”

Through prayer and hospitality, the parish aims to encourage personal and communal reflection on time, talent and treasure, and how sharing and giving translates to living out all that God calls the faithful to be and do.

“It is in prayer we grow our personal relationship with God,” Helen says, pointing to prayer as a “pathway to grace” and the necessary preparedness or spirituality that leads people to the will of God. Whether personal prayer, family prayer, in adoration or during Mass, “our peace, trust and love of God grows in time spent with him,” Helen assures, recognizing prayer as essential for a strong and healthy community.

Father Avram recalls the introduction of perpetual eucharistic adoration three years ago in seeking God’s call for the parish. He sees that this consistent, dedicated prayer leads the parish to every next step. “I really see the complementarity of dedicated adoration with this striving for greater fellowship and greater engagement in the

speaking my language.” She soon found herself immersed in conference calls and preparations when the parish decided to work with Catholic Stewardship Consultants (CSC) last March.

“I didn’t want to miss this opportunity to be a part of such an intentional way of helping our parishioners grow in love and faith,” Helen says, emphasizing stewardship as a spirituality “centered on growing disciples.”

Both Father Avram and Helen agree that people often view stewardship incorrectly as a method of raising funds or securing financial support. Father Avram knows many may read the word “stewardship” not with the letter “s” but with a dollar sign leading the charge. Ardently both insist this view undercuts the beauty of stewardship as a

grateful response to God’s love.

Financial support “is really not an emphasis or priority,” according to Father Avram. He feels blessed that “even in this COVID-19 downturn, there has been such an astonishing consistency” in parishioners’ financial support. He relates this back to the “farmer’s outlook,” possibly, hinting that the St. Isidore Parish community already holds fast to principles of dedication and dependability for a fruitful harvest.

“Our emphasis is building community,” Father Avram says of their relatively new stewardship journey, adding, “That is where we have the most



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■ Father Avram Brown during the eucharistic prayer at Mass.

parish,” he avows, confident that prayer is “the place where we can be open to the initiative of God...a place where we can be responsive to the new endeavor God is bringing about.”

The parish elevates hospitality as vital also. “If people feel invisible and unwelcome,” Helen asks, “how are we to help them grow in faith?” Environments that are “infused with a sense of belonging and expectation” not only invite parishioners to enter the St. Isidore story but to grow, Helen says.

“We’re really excited to see what is that spontaneous, organic unfolding as we continue forward,” Father Avram shares cheerfully. Even in these “days of disruption” — his reference for COVID-19’s grip on the world — he sees challenges transform into blessings. “It has really highlighted how valuable community is and how much we miss each other,” he offers, pointing to steps undertaken with CSC’s assistance to savor community, even from a distance. A stewardship newsletter, building up a social media presence, video postings and weekly phone messages ensure St. Isidore’s priority mission of discipleship through gratitude.

“When we continually return to that theme of God’s generosity, God’s vision for you – as a person, as a family, as a parish – it really awakens that sense of gratitude,” Father Avram insists, his voice filled with the exhilaration of truth and joy.

“I’m just very grateful for what stewardship has been introducing to the parish,” he affirms, as personal and parish potential manifests daily before his eyes. “It is unlocking what parish life is meant to be.” †



LEARN MORE

About St. Isidore Parish in Yuba City at www.stisidore-yubacity.org.



How do you measure STEWARDSHIP SUCCESS?

AFTER ATTENDING CSC’S STEWARDSHIP CONFERENCE IN WICHITA, Kansas in August, and months of work in introducing intentional stewardship to St. Isidore Parish, Helen knows how to measure stewardship success.

“When disciples grow in faith and have hearts of thanksgiving for all God has given them, attitudes and behaviors change,” she affirms as a frontline witness to increased

joy, faith and service among parishioners.

With visible signs rather than quantifiable metrics per se, Tomas Hernandez, 29, offers testimony to stewardship alive within him as a disciple returning to active faith, entering the story, and gifts lived out.

“God really does make everything new again,” Tomas confirms, recounting his journey back to practicing his faith. “After a good examination of conscience and returning to the sacrament of reconciliation and Holy Eucharist after 15 years, I realized by the grace of God what was taking place on the altar during holy Mass,” he says, sharing how in “giving my best silent reverence during this holy sacrifice” he experienced spiritual transformation.

Tomas has since become increasingly involved in several parish ministries, giving of himself to serve his community. When asked what it means to be a disciple in today’s world, he replies: “To let my brothers and sisters know about God’s endless love and mercy toward us; to let go of any worldly concerns and troubles, especially in this present time; and to trust in Jesus.” †

■ Tomas Hernandez

