

Intent to follow, imitate Christ

St. Patrick Parish in Grass Valley embraces lexicon of stewardship

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■ At St. Patrick Parish, Father Alexander Estrella stands with Tommy Jacobs and Michelle McDaniel.



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- FATHER
ALEXANDER
ESTRELLA



On this 30th anniversary of the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops’ publication of “Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response,” Father Alexander Estrella regards the important pastoral letter with deference. The document is a primary source of his zeal for stewardship and, as pastor of St. Patrick Parish in Grass Valley, his desire for the faithful to know, experience and live the example of Jesus crowns his pastoral purpose.



■ Tommy Jacobs



■ Michelle McDaniel



■ Father Alexander Estrella

“What I hope for my parishioners is that by taking on this intentional identity,” Father Estrella begins, pausing to restate and emphasize the word intentional, “they bring stewardship to the forefront,” and recognize how faithful disciples cannot help but be stewards.

“To look at their lives and [be able to] say, ‘Yes! I am a disciple of Jesus Christ,’” Father Estrella explains is a sure sign of an interior awareness. They know they are disciples because of the way they are living — as followers and imitators of Christ, he explains.

Introducing the lexicon of stewardship

Earlier this year, Father Estrella decided to take a leap of faith and implement a range of initiatives to foster stewardship, which he describes as often latent within communities.

“I think a lot of people live and practice it to various degrees but without putting a name to it,” he suggests, believing the authentic nature of stewardship may exist, although nameless, languageless and, therefore, “a lot of energy cannot be harnessed to augment the parish community.”

With intentional prayer, formation, a welcoming spirit and hearts of service — the model of Jesus — the resulting gratitude manifests in a profound and transforming generosity. In stewardship, disciples find expressive ways to give back to the Lord with their time, talent and treasure.

His astute observation stems from an understanding particularly gained after serving as parochial administrator for the parish since July 2019 and before his current appointment as pastor in September 2021. Now, formalizing stewardship activities, parishioners immerse themselves within the language, meaning and intentionality engrained in discipleship.

Partnering with the Augusta, Georgia-based Catholic Stewardship Consultants (CSC), Father Estrella tapped parishioner Tommy Jacobs and parish administrative assistant Michelle McDaniel to serve as a core team. Together, they coordinate with CSC and unfold various media, messages and events to facilitate growth and clarity of the stewardship vision.

“Every parish has its own unique personality and priorities,” Tommy says, commending the work of CSC for its ability to align with the express vision of the pastor and the needs of the parish.

Tommy meets regularly with Father Estrella and Michelle and schedules a weekly phone meeting with CSC. “I work behind the scenes,” he adds, with deadlines and ongoing attention to content, messaging, hospitality and gratitude. In less than a year, the parish of 800 families implemented a monthly newsletter, a parish survey, a parish retreat and its Annual Stewardship Renewal (ASR) for ministry leaders in preparation for growing stewardship commitments.



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— TOMMY JACOBS

Tommy is satisfied with the parish’s short-term progress. Nearly 40 percent of parishioners responded to the parish survey and all indications show positive receptivity to the intentionality and purpose of Christian stewardship.

Michelle, who handles a range of tasks and details specific to media and logistics, experiences a unique vantage point. She sees firsthand how parishioners appreciate a more complete understanding of stewardship. “Needs are being identified and met,” she says, attributing this to the foundational elements.

“There is forward progress, and everything is meshing,” she believes, sensing an increased awareness among parishioners. More people recognize, answer and own the call to stewardship. They hear messages of what it means to be a disciple, and it resonates.

“More people are saying, ‘I can do that,’” Michelle says.

“The biggest opportunity for stewardship, once we get through the basics, is realizing how parents and leaders of families can ‘be the priest’ of the domestic church,” Tommy says. The greatest and perhaps most daunting challenge is “competing against the secular culture.”

He adds, “The culture is winning;” the lure of it is constant, drawing youth in or away. Far from conceding, however, Tommy

believes stewardship within the framework of discipleship and the New Evangelization offers great hope.

In his work with CSC, Tommy appreciates the focus on strategies for home life, bringing faith alive and complementing existing commitments to Sunday Mass and sacraments.

“The key is going beyond,” Tommy says. He sees a primary tenet of stewardship in response to God’s gifts is to go beyond — in gratitude, in generosity, in holiness.

“Our need to give is greater than the Church’s need to receive,” he says. “We all have an internal need to give of our time, our talents and our treasure and that is a response of gratitude.”

In time

As the timeless and ongoing heart of stewardship centers on giving back to God, Father Estrella also reflects on the present time, and the appropriate and necessary “God time” spent developing relationship with God through prayer, sacraments, and adoration. For him, the sequence of minutes and hours must be well-spent and intentional to facilitate



■ Father Estrella meets with his core stewardship team.

and nurture enduring commitment as disciples of Christ.

“To give parishioners the opportunity to focus on their relationship with God is wonderful,” he says, convinced and pleased with a new beginning, a strengthened sense of community, and a new ownership of the baptismal call to evangelize. †



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■ Father Estrella, Michelle McDaniel and Tommy Jacobs are inspired to bring St. Patrick Parish into a stronger evangelization role.