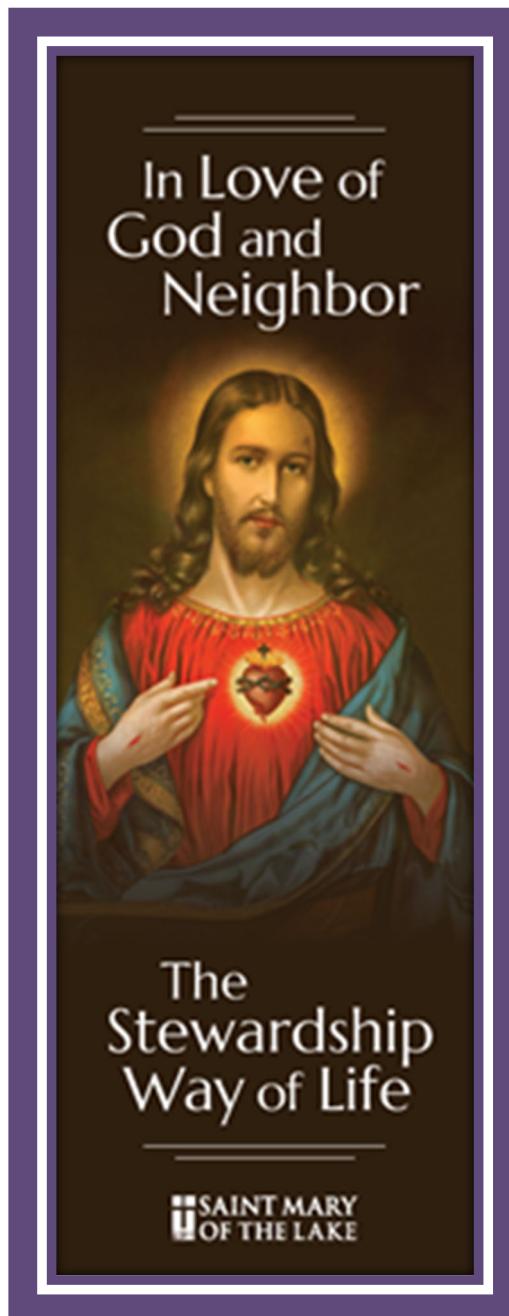




Parish Small Group Study

Lent 2026



For Love of God and Neighbor: The Stewardship Way of Life

St. Mary of the Lake Parish Small Group Study

Written by:

Rev. C. Jarrod Lies, S.T.L.

Vicar of Evangelization, Discipleship, and Stewardship

Diocese of Wichita, KS

Week 1: Why Stewardship? What motivates a parish to become a stewardship parish?

Week 2: Prayer—Love God with Your Whole Heart, Soul, Mind, and Strength

Week 3: Presence/Participation—Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

Week 4: Generosity—There Also Will Your Heart Be

Week 5: Testimony—Light and Love

Week 6 – Missionary sending and communal gathering

Outline for each Small Group Gathering

The Holy Spirit leads, and we simply follow. As we walk through each section, our goal is to create a space where God can speak, and where we can listen, reflect, and grow together as one community in Christ.

Hospitality & Icebreaker: 10 min

Opening Prayer / Scripture: 10 min

Content Engagement: 25 min

Reflection Questions: 40 min

Announcements & Closing Prayer: 5 min

Week 1 - Why Stewardship?

1 ORDER OF MEETING

2 ICE BREAKER - "YOUR NAME & ITS STORY" - 10 MINUTES

3 OPENING PRAYER: THE WEDDING AT CANA - 10 MINUTES

3.1 JOHN 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servers, "Do whatever he tells you."

Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told them, "Fill the jars with water." So they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it. And when the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from (although the servers who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now."

Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him. After this, he and his mother, his brothers, and his disciples went down to Capernaum and stayed there only a few days.

4 CONTENT ENGAGEMENT- 25 MINUTES

4.1 WHAT MOTIVATES A PARISH TO BECOME A STEWARDSHIP PARISH?

By Rev. C. Jarrod Lies, S.T.L.

Homily given at St. Mary of the Lake, White Bear, MN | February 14-15, 2026
Small Group Discussion #1

Dear Parishioners of St. Mary of the Lake, peace to you!

When I was a child, maybe eight or nine years old, my mom and dad had us plug the yard with grass. We didn't sod the whole thing. Instead, we broke off small pieces of sod and plugged them into the ground about six inches apart. It may sound odd, but it was more

cost-effective. Of course, being the youngest and how shall I say, the most emotionally mature of the family, I did it with joy and without complaint! No... not really.

At the time, it felt like endless work. My back hurt, and I remember thinking, "Why does this even matter?" And yet it, apparently, did matter, because I remember it to this day! What began as work became a family memory. And as the weeks went by, I could watch those scattered plugs of grass grow closer and closer together. What looked disjointed slowly became whole. The shared work had its rewards: overcoming challenge, a sense of accomplishment, the reward of seeing the work come to fruition, and, most importantly, an experience that bonded my family.

4.2 THE WEDDING AT CANA

As I have been, over the years, preaching, teaching, and articulating the Stewardship Way of Life, there are several Scripture passages that have revealed themselves as central. Perhaps the most important of them all are Mary's words to the servants at Cana: "Do whatever he tells you."

That line—"Do whatever he tells you"—is one of the most powerful stewardship lines in all of Scripture. It is short, simple, and clear. And, in the context of the wedding feast, it illuminates the intrinsic meaning of stewardship.

Recall, for a moment, what happens at Cana. The wedding feast runs out of wine. That is no small thing. It is a real lack and a real embarrassment. Then Jesus tells the servants to fill six large stone jars with water. Consider that for a second. Imagine their mental reaction to that request: Six stone jars of water?! What good is water when the problem is wine?

It was kind of like me when I learned we were going to plug the yard with grass: Why do we need to do it that way? And it is right there that Mary steps in and says the line that changes everything: "Do whatever he tells you." Knowing their hearts—and ours—she encourages the servants to faith and trust in her Son.

So they do. And what looked pointless (water) becomes purposeful (wine). What began as lack ends in abundance. Their obedience becomes the space where the miracle happens. Water becomes wine—not barely enough, but abundantly; not mediocre, but the best. And people begin to believe in Jesus.

Here we glimpse the heart of stewardship: doing what the Lord asks us to do, even when we do not yet see the outcome, trusting that He can turn lack into superabundance. Like the servants—and like me as a child—questions and hesitancy may rise in our hearts. In those moments, Mary gently beckons us to faith and trust in her Son, repeating the same invitation to us: "Do whatever he tells you."

4.3 ANSWER #1: STEWARDSHIP IS AN ANSWER TO SOCIAL POVERTY

That brings me to why I am here with you today: to ask one question. **What motivates a parish to become a stewardship parish?** Why would a community take on what can sometimes feel like back-breaking work in order to live what Fr. Eilen is calling you to be?

For me, one of the most motivating answers is this: **stewardship is an answer to social poverty.** Let me say that again—stewardship is an answer to social poverty. Not financial poverty, though that is real, but social poverty in all its forms. There is:

- **Spiritual poverty:** hearts that do not yet know the love of God.
- **Relational poverty:** people living in isolation without real community.
- **Opportunity poverty:** especially for the young, when formation and support are lacking.
- **Family poverty:** when homes are marked by division or instability.

In this, the Stewardship Way of Life is an imitation of Jesus Himself, as our Eucharistic Prayer will soon say:

He always showed compassion
for children and for the poor,
for the sick and for sinners,
and he became a neighbor
to the oppressed and the afflicted.

The Stewardship Way of Life responds to all of these poverty because stewardship is faith expressed as compassion. It is noticing need and answering it with care.

It answers **spiritual poverty**, because one of the deepest povertyes of the human heart is the fear that God is disappointed in us or indifferent toward us. That is why that same Eucharistic Prayer immediately continues:

By word and deed he announced to the world
that you are our Father
and that you care for all your sons and daughters.

And this is where stewardship answers **relational poverty**. It turns the sense that “I don’t matter” into “I am a child of a Father who cares for me.” It turns the question, “How can I help?” into the realization, “I have gifts to offer, and you are worthy of my sacrifice.” When we share our gifts in love of God and neighbor, isolation is healed by communion, and invisibility by belonging.

Stewardship also **answers family poverty**. Those wounded by family breakdown or personal crisis find a parish family where they are cared for, where their gifts are needed,

and where trust can be rebuilt. It should always be the case that a parish is a welcome home for the broken-hearted and the downtrodden.

Stewardship also confronts **opportunity poverty**, especially among the young, by making formation available and accessible in PSR, CGS, youth ministry, sacramental preparation, and Catholic schools. Every child is worthy of knowing Jesus and being formed as His disciple. In a true stewardship culture, adults likewise rediscover communion through opportunities for worship, prayer, formation, and service.

So stewardship answers social poverty by building something the world cannot manufacture: a community where grace becomes concrete, where burdens are shared, where gifts are recognized, where the lonely are seen, where the young are formed, and where people can once again say, "I belong here." This is a tall hope. Yet your pastor is calling this parish to dream big.

4.4 ANSWER #2: INTENTIONALLY CALLS FORTH GIFTEDNESS FOR SHARED COMMUNION

Which leads to the second answer to the question: **what motivates a parish to become a stewardship parish?** To be clear, simply having stewards within a parish does not make a stewardship parish. Every parish has stewards. What is distinct about a stewardship parish is that it has **intentional pathways of invitation**, where gifts are discerned, awakened, and called forth for the good of all.

Again, our Eucharistic Prayer, which we will soon pray, echoes this:

Open our eyes
to the needs of our brothers and sisters;
inspire in us words and actions
to comfort those who labor and are burdened.
Make us serve them truly,
after the example of Christ and at his command.

Stewardship fosters a parish culture that recognizes, with open eyes, God's gifts in its people and actively encourages those gifts to be named and shared in love of God and neighbor. So central is this to the Church's identity that St. John Chrysostom wrote in the fourth century:

"The most basic task of a church leader is to discern the spiritual gifts of all those under his authority, and to encourage those gifts to be used to the full benefit of all. For what good is it if the treasure lies hidden? Nothing so strengthens the Church as when each member knows his or her own role and offers it willingly for the common good."

That is what motivates a parish to become a stewardship parish: **it intentionally calls forth giftedness for shared communion.** Without intentionality, parish life drifts. Cliques form. Participation narrows. Unity gives way to convenience. But a stewardship parish

resists that drift. Such a parish preserves a community from becoming one of “haves and have-nots,” one of “insiders and outsiders.” Instead, it says: *we are one Body*. We need each other. We carry one another’s burdens. We widen the circle of belonging. Participation is not an accident; it is an invitation.

In St. Paul’s epistles, he reminds us that to each individual gifts of the Spirit are given for some benefit—not just to a few, but to each—and he lists those gifts in several places. In other words, God has placed real spiritual wealth in His people. Even when we feel poor, we are not empty. Even when we feel stretched thin, we are not useless. Even when we feel like we are plugging grass or filling water jars, we are, in fact, filling lack and creating community.

4.5 PRAYER, PARTICIPATION, GENEROSITY, AND TESTIMONY

I want to honor your pastor, Fr. Eilen, for his clarity and leadership. Throughout this Lent, he is emphasizing four pillars of a stewardship culture: **Prayer, Participation, Generosity, and Testimony**. Ultimately, calling parishioners to a life of stewardship is an act of deep discernment: *What has the Lord given me? What is He asking of me now? Where is He inviting me to give from my substance, not merely my surplus?*

For this reason, we are offering small Lenten groups that will meet once a week for six weeks throughout Lent. In those small groups, we will use guided reflections to listen, to discern, and to respond with faith and trust—like the servants at Cana. Because when the servants at Cana did whatever He told them, the miracle happened. And the headwaiter said, “You have saved the best for last.” That is not just a line about wine. That is how God works.

So let me end where I began. As a child, what felt awkward and back-breaking became relational and life-giving. What began as a complaint ended in satisfaction. So too, if we live Mary’s stewardship line, “Do whatever he tells you,” the Stewardship Way of Life will do what it always does: it will answer social poverty with communion, heal isolation with belonging, replace “I have nothing” with “I have something to offer,” turn maintenance into mission, and help St. Mary of the Lake Parish not merely survive, but flourish.

May you have a blessed Lent as you encounter the Savior who came from heaven to seek and save your soul.

5 REFLECTION QUESTIONS – 40 MINUTES

Be present—we give our full attention, setting aside phones and distractions.

Let God lead—we listen as though Holy Spirit may be speaking through others.

Listen with charity—we receive each person without judgment or correction.

Share honestly and briefly—we speak openly, and then make room for others.

Make space for everyone—we honor every voice, not just the quick or confident.

5.1 OPEN DISCUSSION

5.2 WHERE IN YOUR LIFE OR IN OUR PARISH DO YOU SEE “EMPTY JARS”—PLACES OF LACK, FATIGUE, OR SOCIAL POVERTY (SPIRITUAL, RELATIONAL, FAMILY, OR OPPORTUNITY)?

5.3 HOW HAVE YOU SEEN SMALL ACTS OF SHARED EFFORT (LIKE FILLING JARS... OR PLUGGING GRASS AS A FAMILY!) BECOME MOMENTS OF COMMUNION, BELONGING, OR RENEWAL?

5.4 MARY SAYS, “DO WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU.” WHAT MIGHT JESUS BE ASKING OF YOU RIGHT NOW IN TERMS OF PRAYER, PARTICIPATION, GENEROSITY, OR TESTIMONY?

6 ANNOUNCEMENTS & CLOSING PRAYER – 5 MINUTES

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, whose Heart is inflamed with love,
from You flows every gift and grace.

Draw my heart into Yours, that I may receive the gifts of the Spirit,
given to me by the Father.

Inspire me to be a faithful steward,
sharing my time, my talents, and my treasure as gifts to be given.

May the love I receive from Your Sacred Heart
flow outward in love of God and neighbor,
until, with all the saints, I rest forever in Your embrace.

Amen

WEEK 2 - PRAYER**1 ORDER OF MEETING****2 ICE BREAKER - "A GOOD USE OF TIME" - 10 MINUTES****3 OPENING PRAYER - A TIME FOR EVERYTHING - 10 MINUTES**

"There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens: a time to give birth, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to uproot the plant. A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to tear down, and a time to build. A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance. A time to scatter stones, and a time to gather them; a time to embrace, and a time to be far from embraces. A time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away. A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to be silent, and a time to speak. A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace."

4 CONTENT ENGAGEMENT - 25 MINUTES

4.1 Prayer—Love God with Your Whole Heart, Soul, Mind, and Strength

By Rev. C. Jarrod Lies, S.T.L.

Small Group Discussion #2

Dear Parishioners of St. Mary of the Lake, peace to you!

4.1.1 TIME: Our most precious gift

We live in a crazy, mixed-up, messed-up world. How are we going to help our families, our children, our friends navigate it? How will we remain faithful when the world seems to stand against us? Can one Sunday Mass, one homily a week, give us the faithfulness needed to protect us from its confusion? How will we persevere in FAITH, HOPE, and CHARITY?

The answer is this: we must let Jesus Christ sanctify our TIME.

You must give your TIME to Jesus Christ. Without this gift, Jesus cannot convert your heart, inspire your mind, or motivate your actions. He cannot be an afterthought or a momentary consideration. Jesus Christ must be your focal point—the prism through which your whole life passes, the filter for every thought, word, and deed. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb 13:8). He is the "way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

Jesus is the WAY: the method and model for how you are "to live, to move, and to have your being" (Acts 17:28).

Jesus is the TRUTH: the answer to every erroneous ideology the world throws at us, found in his teaching, life, death, and resurrection. He “taught as one having authority” (Matt 7:29), with a teaching founded on love: “Love the Lord your God... and love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:37–39).

Jesus is the LIFE: “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3).

But how can we follow him as the WAY, know him as the TRUTH, and live in him who is our LIFE unless we spend TIME with him?

4.1.2 TIME is the most precious gift

In so many ways, TIME is the most precious gift we have to offer. Why? Because I cannot give my time without giving my very self. When I give you my time, I give you my SELF.

Are you time-poor? Is your life overwhelmed with conflicting schedules and intersecting activities? Does your work encroach on your family life? Do sports and activities make your home feel like pool balls scattering and slamming into one another? Do you go to bed only to find your mind moving so fast you cannot rest?

“Yesterday is the past. Tomorrow is the future. But today is a gift—that is why they call it the present.” Or as Padre Pio says, “My past, O Lord, to Your mercy; my present, to Your love; my future to Your providence.”

4.1.3 There Is Nothing as Rare as This Present Moment

A 1929 bottle of Macallan Scotch was sold for \$1.9 million. Why? RARITY. That bottle is among the rarest in the world. If rarity determines value, then know this: there is nothing as rare as this present moment. This moment is the only one of its kind—ever.

The moments of your life are unrepeatable. You cannot recover them or undo them. Time moves on. Either we capture the moment and appreciate it, or we live distracted lives and miss it.

So I ask again: are you time-poor?

Everyone has the same amount of time—604,800 seconds each week. The question is not how much time we have, but how we PRIORITIZE the time we have been given.

4.1.4 Priorities

Are your priorities in line? Without priorities, the demands of life run over us—and our families—like a steamroller. Each person ends up moving in a different direction, with everyone feeling left behind.

Jesus Christ gave us the hermeneutical key—the decoder ring—to priorities: LOVE. “Love the Lord your God... and love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:37–39). Love is the filter

through which we prioritize life. If our loves are properly ordered, our lives will be properly ordered.

If our priorities are money, power, pleasure, or fame, we will organize our lives around them. But if love is the filter, we organize our lives according to relationships.

There is a proper order to love: first God, second neighbor, third self. Today we focus on the first.

4.1.5 Love of God: Prayer

For many people, loving God before all else can seem counterintuitive. It can feel as though adding a period of prayer each day only adds one more event to an already full schedule—like trying to stuff another item into an overstuffed suitcase. Because of this, prayer is often the first thing we sacrifice.

But prayer is not like this. It is not “one more thing” among many events. Prayer is the great **equalizer** of time. The God who created the universe in seven days can certainly help us balance the events of our week. God is the creator and master of time, and when we prioritize Him, He helps us order our lives according to His wisdom.

4.1.6 Prayer Shrink Wraps the Events of Our Life.

Giving God the first place in our day is like shrink wrapping leftovers in the refrigerator. We could put leftovers in the fridge on the plates or bowls we served them in, but then the refrigerator quickly becomes disorganized. Most people transfer food into bags or Tupperware to bring order, but even that can be bulky and waste space. Shrink wrapping, however, maximizes space and lets us see clearly what is there. A few moments of cleanup save many moments later from rifling through a mess.

Prayer shrink wraps the events of our **lives**. A few moments of prayer each day call down God’s wisdom so we can put first things first and move from one event to another with clarity and purpose. Prayer adds nothing to our day—rather, it organizes our day according to the priority of love.

4.1.7 Pray Your Calendar

Every morning, I encourage people to “pray their calendar.” What do I mean by this? Set aside some moments—maybe 10 or 15 minutes—for silent reflection and consider your day. Take your calendar, with all its events, and present it to the Lord, saying, “Lord, sanctify my day.” Then, in the silence, God speaks to the heart.

It is important to find silence and solitude as we are able, because God speaks in silence—like I speak in English. Silence is His native language. When we present our day to Him, He moves in the quiet recesses of our hearts and inspires us, through the Holy Spirit, to approach the day according to His wisdom.

I also call this the “locker room moment” of the day. Just as athletes prepare for a game in focused silence, each of us needs a moment to give our minds to the Lord. We pray our calendar, give our day to God, and allow Him to prepare us for what lies ahead.

We can do this at home, on the back porch, in the adoration chapel, at daily Mass, or during breaks throughout the day. However we do it, it must be done—because when it is done, God shrink wraps the events of our day and helps us prioritize our lives according to love.

4.1.8 Liturgy

Your pastor’s first responsibility is to lead the liturgy, which is the in-breaking of the Father’s love into the world through the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, poured out in the Holy Spirit. In the liturgy, the Triune love of God floods our lives with His victory of life over death.

The Mass is our participation in the life of Christ, by which His death and resurrection claim victory over the powers of darkness. The Mass is the victory of the Cross made present across all time and space, placing before us the very Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ, through whom we have conquered the world.

Prayer sanctifies our day. As the psalmist says, “Seven times a day I will praise you” (Ps 119:164). Your parish is filled with prayers constantly rising from earth to heaven—like mist lifting off a lake—in adoration and petition. This happens not only at Mass, but also in Adoration, through the Rosary, in Scripture study, and in the many prayer groups of the parish.

4.1.9 Conclusion

We do live in a crazy, mixed-up, messed-up world. Life can be overwhelming, temptations relentless, hearts heavy and overburdened—and we always need God’s mercy and forgiveness.

Time. In many ways, it is the most precious gift we have. Why? Because the gift of time is synonymous with the gift of self. When we give our time, we give our very selves.

Are you time-poor? How are your priorities? Have you organized your life according to relationships—according to the love of God?

Make Sunday Mass the first hour of your week. Never miss it. Never prioritize anything over it.

When you learn to let God possess your life, you will know for certain that the God who created time can teach you to give your time as a gift—offered first to Him, and then poured out, through your presence, for those He has already placed in your life.

In our next session we will turn to the second great commandment: the love of neighbor. We will focus on learning the art of praying together, playing together, working together,

and eating together—actions that bring balance to life and allow us to live above exhaustion and anxiety.

May you have a blessed Lent as you encounter the Savior who came from heaven to seek and save your soul.

5 REFLECTION QUESTIONS – 40 MINUTES

Be present—we give our full attention, setting aside phones and distractions.
Let God lead—we listen as though Holy Spirit may be speaking through others.
Listen with charity—we receive each person without judgment or correction.
Share honestly and briefly—we speak openly, and then make room for others.
Make space for everyone—we honor every voice, not just the quick or confident.

5.1 OPEN DISCUSSION

5.2 WHERE DO YOU FEEL MOST TIME-POOR OR STRETCHED RIGHT NOW?

5.3 WHEN DOES YOUR TIME FEEL MOST LIFE-GIVING OR WELL SPENT?

5.4 WHERE MIGHT GOD BE INVITING YOU TO ORDER YOUR TIME DIFFERENTLY THIS LENT?

6 ANNOUNCEMENTS & CLOSING PRAYER – 5 MINUTES

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, whose Heart is inflamed with love,
from You flows every gift and grace.

Draw my heart into Yours, that I may receive the gifts of the Spirit,
given to me by the Father.

Inspire me to be a faithful steward,
sharing my time, my talents, and my treasure as gifts to be given.

May the love I receive from Your Sacred Heart
flow outward in love of God and neighbor,
until, with all the saints, I rest forever in Your embrace.

Amen.

Week 3 – Presence/Participation

1 ORDER OF MEETING

2 ICEBREAKER – “WHO HELPED YOU RECENTLY?” – 10 MINUTES

3 OPENING PRAYER: THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN. – 10 MINUTES

3.1 LUKE 10:29-37

“And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, ‘Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.’ Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers’ victim?” He answered, “The one who treated him with mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.” take the numbers out of this

4 CONTENT ENGAGEMENT- 25 MINUTES

4.1 Presence/Participation—Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

By Rev. C. Jarrod Lies, S.T.L.

Small Group Discussion #3

Dear Parishioners of St. Mary of the Lake, peace to you!

4.1.1 Bear one Another’s Burdens

St. Paul calls us to “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal 6:2) and also to “carry our own burden” (Gal 6:5). Stewardship is the shared life of a community that helps us carry one another’s burdens even as we shoulder the load given to us in our vocations. This shared life is both the gift and blessing of stewardship. We are a parish family called to care for one another—each carrying our own part while helping others carry theirs.

In this way, stewardship makes each of us a Simon of Cyrene for our brothers and sisters. Simon was pressed into service to help Jesus carry His Cross. What may have begun in reluctance ended in faith, as he came to recognize the holiness of the One he served.

So it is for us. At times stewardship feels demanding, yet God cannot be outdone in generosity. What begins as obligation becomes, over time, an act of faith in Jesus Christ—and in Him crucified.

4.1.2 Love of Neighbor: Vocation

The first priority of our lives is LOVE OF GOD. When we prioritize the love of God, all other loves find their proper balance. Just like a top, whose centrifugal force maintains balance on a single point, all the events of our lives—swirling as they may—find stability on the single point of God's love.

Then, flowing out of the love of God like chocolate cascading down a fountain at a wedding reception, the next level of love is the LOVE OF NEIGHBOR. But who is our neighbor?

Who is Our Neighbor

In common speech, “neighbor” often means the person living nearby. Yet, we gain a clearer understanding through the Latin root *proximo*, which means “next to.” In other words, your neighbor is the person next to you, proximate to you. The person literally sitting beside you right now is your *proximo*—your neighbor.

Jesus makes this clear in the Good Samaritan. The priest and Levite passed by, but the Samaritan saw the wounded man as the person next to him and responded with mercy. This is stewardship in action: those who have received God's care share that care with others.

The question is not abstract—*Who is the person next to me?* It may be your family member, your friend, the coworker, the cashier, the driver beside you, or the lonely person few others notice. These are your neighbors.

Our Vocation

A practical concern arises: must we personally care for everyone we encounter? Our vocation helps define our primary responsibilities. Provided love of God is firmly in first place, vocation determines the next priority of love.

A married person's priority is their spouse. Parents prioritize their children. A single person discerns their priorities through God's will in their circumstances. A priest's priority is his congregation; a religious' priority is their community.

Our vocation defines the next most important love of our life and must take precedence over competing loves. A husband must love his wife, or vice versa, before all other earthly loves. Power, pleasure, money, and fame cannot take her place. It must be stated clearly: a spouse's love for the other spouse precedes even the love of their children. Love for children properly overflows from the love shared between spouses; when that order is inverted, the marital bond weakens.

Single persons also live love of neighbor through their vocation. Surrounded by friends, family, coworkers, parishioners, and those in need, they live not in isolation but intentional availability. By offering time, presence, and attention, they often become a stabilizing and generous presence within the wider community.

4.1.3 Pray, Play, Work, and Eat

Whether single, married, ordained, or religious, we must keep our loves in proper order. How do we do that? By living in community through four shared actions: Pray, Play, Work, and Eat. Every person, in every circumstance of life, is called to these practices.

As St. Paul teaches, “No one lives for oneself” (Rom 14:7). No Christian is an island. These shared actions shape both family life and parish life.

Pray

Praying with one another is a natural extension of being the Body of Christ, especially at Sunday Mass. The Third Commandment is clear: “Keep holy the Lord’s Day.” Sunday Mass is not optional. For children in Catholic education, Sunday Mass is the first hour of the school week.

Why do we celebrate Mass within a community? As I often say—and I hope you remember this—the God who is Himself a communion of Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—desires to be worshiped in a communion of persons: the Mass. We are made in the image and likeness of God, and God’s image is relational. Therefore, we must pray together, both at Sunday Mass and in our homes.

In the home, the family that prays together stays together. Prayer allows every member to stand equally as children before a Heavenly Father who loves us. Parents become good parents to the degree that they honor and obey their Heavenly Father, and children grow in faith when they see their parents living that faith. Just as chocolate flows from one tier to another in a fountain, so the love of God flows from one soul to another—within the family, from spouse to spouse, and from parents to children.

Play

Whereas praying with one another places us under God’s Fatherhood, playing with one another treats each person with equal dignity. Playing together ensures that each person becomes the focus of another’s attention. Whether playing cards, shooting hoops with the family, flying a kite, or water skiing, the activity is secondary to the relationships being strengthened. The purpose of play is not the outcome but the relationship—to be present with others.

Work

Whereas prayer keeps God first and play keeps people first, work allows us to order our lives according to responsibility. Work is a common task that unites people in a shared endeavor. One of the great gifts of work is that it strengthens bonds of authority, teaches

the distribution of roles, serves as an apprenticeship of talents, and allows a group to rejoice together in what has been accomplished.

I remember this clearly from working with my own family growing up. At times we were silly, at times serious—sometimes quiet, sometimes talkative—but always together. We grew as a family through shared labor.

Eat

Finally, families—and single persons as well—need to eat together. Around the table, the simple question, “What did you do today?” becomes a dialogue that helps each person process the events of the day. Eating together serves as a kind of review of life—each person taking a turn sharing their day, offering their perspective, and being heard by the others. In this way, every member has the opportunity to be known and appreciated.

The table is where wisdom is shared. Children need the wisdom of life, and parents offer that wisdom in the ordinary conversations of the meal. Single persons both receive and contribute wisdom at table with family and friends. In this way, eating together becomes not merely the sharing of food, but the sharing of life itself.

As for the Family, So for the Parish Family

Just as the family is strengthened by praying, playing, working, and eating together, so too the parish family is strengthened by these same shared actions. When a parish gathers in small groups, serves side by side, shares meals, and works on parish projects together, it begins to carry one another’s burdens in real and practical ways.

In the parish family, we discover that no one walks alone—where we are known, supported, challenged, and encouraged. The same habits that build unity at the kitchen table—listening, speaking honestly, and making time for one another—also build a vibrant parish community. In this way, stewardship becomes not a program, but the shared life of a people who belong to one another in Christ.

4.1.4 Love of Self: Gift

So **LOVE OF GOD** and **LOVE OF NEIGHBOR**—these two loves—rightly prioritize all other loves. Yet both are sustained by a third love: the **LOVE OF SELF**.

This love of self is not the “self-help” love the world proposes, nor the superficial affirmation that simply repeats, “You’re good enough, you’re smart enough, and doggone it, people like you.” The Christian understanding of love of self is neither self-centered nor self-focused. Rather, it is ordered outward—directed toward becoming a gift for others.

We love ourselves so that we can be a joyful gift given to God and neighbor, not for our own sake alone. Love of self is the act of ensuring that each of us is healthy, happy, and holy, so that we can become a healthy, happy, and holy gift to others.

Returning to the image of the chocolate fountain, love of self is the fountain machine itself. If the machine is broken, the chocolate cannot flow. In the same way, love of self ensures that each of us is healthy, happy, and holy, so that we can become a healthy, happy, and holy gift to others. In this image, the self is the machine, the chocolate is the **LOVE OF GOD**, and the cascading rings represent the ordered priorities of **LOVE OF NEIGHBOR** widening outward.

To become healthy, happy, and holy is not selfish; it is the condition that allows us to be a gift to others. The Church has long expressed this truth in the Latin phrase *nemo dat quod non habet*—you cannot give what you do not have. A person cannot give themselves away as a generous gift if they do not first possess themselves as a generous and loving person.

Selfishness, by contrast, hoards pleasure, power, money, or fame for one's own benefit. But to live as a free and loving human person, made in God's image and likeness, is precisely why God created you—good, so that in your goodness you may become a blessing to others.

4.1.5 CONCLUSION

God has ordered our lives so that we may help one another bear what is too heavy to carry by ourselves. This shared life—rooted in love—is the heart of stewardship.

The love of neighbor is not vague or abstract. It takes shape through vocation and proximity, through the people God has placed “next to” us. This life of stewardship becomes concrete when we choose to PRAY together, PLAY together, WORK together, and EAT together. In these ordinary actions, community is formed, burdens are shared, and relationships are strengthened. Through them, we learn to be present to one another with patience, dignity, and joy.

May you have a blessed Lent as you encounter the Savior who came from heaven to seek and save your soul.

5 REFLECTION QUESTIONS – 40 MINUTES

Be present—we give our full attention, setting aside phones and distractions.

Let God lead—we listen as though Holy Spirit may be speaking through others.

Listen with charity—we receive each person without judgment or correction.

Share honestly and briefly—we speak openly, and then make room for others.

Make space for everyone—we honor every voice, not just the quick or confident.

5.1 OPEN DISCUSSION

5.2 WHO IS THE 'PERSON NEXT TO YOU' THAT GOD MAY BE ASKING YOU TO NOTICE MORE INTENTIONALLY?

5.3 HOW HAS YOUR VOCATION SHAPED WHO YOU ARE MOST RESPONSIBLE FOR RIGHT NOW?

5.4 WHERE HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THE PARISH HELPING YOU 'BEAR A BURDEN'?

6 ANNOUNCEMENTS & CLOSING PRAYER – 5 MINUTES**Closing Prayer**

Lord Jesus, whose Heart is inflamed with love,
from You flows every gift and grace.

Draw my heart into Yours, that I may receive the gifts of the Spirit,
given to me by the Father.

Inspire me to be a faithful steward,
sharing my time, my talents, and my treasure as gifts to be given.

May the love I receive from Your Sacred Heart
flow outward in love of God and neighbor,
until, with all the saints, I rest forever in Your embrace.

Amen.

Week 4 – Generosity

1 ORDER OF MEETING

2 ICE BREAKER – “SOMETHING YOU VALUE” – 10 MINUTES

3 OPENING PRAYER—THERE ALSO WILL YOUR HEART BE – 10 MINUTES

3.1 THE WIDOW’S MITE (LUKE 21:1-4)

And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. So He said, “Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had” (Luke 21:4).

I once saw a picture of this story that stopped me in my tracks. It portrayed the widow not as an older woman, as I had always imagined, but as a young mother with three children. Now imagine the scene with that image in mind. She stands there, watching others place their gifts into the temple treasury. One can only imagine how nerve-racking that moment must have been.

Jesus noticed her from a short distance. Perhaps He had seen her before—a widow, a young mother with children. Is it possible He already knew her story, the sorrow she carried? When she entered the temple where He was teaching, she would have drawn His attention at once.

For her part, who really knows what moved her to place her two small coins into the treasury? Perhaps she felt embarrassed by her poverty, standing among the wealthy who were making larger offerings. It is even possible she had once been accustomed to giving more—perhaps her late husband came from a family of means—and now, no longer able to do so, she offered her coins simply to save face.

But that explanation doesn’t quite fit the story, does it? Would Jesus—who reads hearts—have held her up as an example if she were merely saving face?

So what truly moved her?

Was it an attempt to bargain with God—if I give, You will give in return?

Was it love for her children, and the desire to model faith for them?

Was it the sorrow of a heart broken by loss—a plea to God in a moment of desperate need?

Or was it something deeper still: trust in God as Father, the belief that the One who sustains all creation could also sustain her and her children?

Was it all of these? Was it none of them? Who truly knows—except this: Jesus saw her trust. Whatever He knew of her story, He knew this—out of her poverty, she gave all she had to live on.

Here was a woman whom life had dealt a hard blow. She had almost nothing, yet she placed her last two coins into the treasury. The Gospel does not tell us why she gave—only that she did—and that Jesus preserved this moment as a lasting lesson for His disciples. The lesson is simple: trust God more than money, even in real need.

4 CONTENT ENGAGEMENT — 25 MINUTES

4.1 GENEROSITY—THERE ALSO WILL YOUR HEART BE

By Rev. C. Jarrod Lies, S.T.L.

Small Group Discussion #4

Dear Parishioners of St. Mary of the Lake, peace to you!

Who among us does not feel, at times, a sense of financial pressure? While most of us are not destitute like the widow in the Gospel, we still experience the weight of real obligations—bills, loans, taxes, family responsibilities, and uncertain futures. Financial needs present themselves with immediacy, and even those who are relatively secure know the stress that accompanies them.

Because of this shared experience, we can understand the sacrifice of the widow who gave “all the livelihood she had.” For many people, generosity is not offered from surplus but from need. To give financially, therefore, is often both difficult and sacrificial—yet it is precisely within this tension that stewardship becomes an act of trust.

As Msgr. McGread liked to say, “You will never find a U-Haul behind a hearse.”

4.1.1 Why Should I Give Money to a Parish?

Every parishioner can ask a simple question: *Why should I give money to a parish?*

At the risk of sounding simplistic, the answer is this: people give money to what they value. We spend money on what matters to us—homes, vehicles, memberships, technology, education. The same principle applies to our giving.

Consider the widow who gave her two coins. Why did she give her whole livelihood? In part, because she recognized the value of supporting the worship of the living God. Our treasure follows what we value most.

The Hard Product

So the real question becomes: *Why is St. Mary of the Lake valuable to you?* What is the “product” of the parish that merits your support? The answer is threefold: **worship, evangelization, and service** (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2179).

Worship

Jesus Christ is the “way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn 14:6). Jesus Christ is present in the Eucharist—Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. The Eucharist can only be found in a parish.

Evangelization

The parish exists to carry out Christ’s command to “make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19–20). Through liturgy, education, prayer, and formation, the parish forms its own members and invites others to encounter the Gospel.

Charitable Works

The parish also serves both its members and the wider community. Parishioners visit the homebound, support the sick, teach the young, serve the poor, and care for those in need. These works of charity are made possible by the generosity of the parish family.

So the deeper question is not simply *Why give?* but *Do I recognize the value of my parish family?* Jesus Himself said, “For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be” (Mt 6:21).

4.1.2 Missionaries in a Mission Field

To belong to a parish is to be a missionary in a mission field.

We often think of missionaries as those who preach the Gospel overseas—Saint Damien among the lepers, Mother Teresa among the poorest of the poor, or Saint Ignatius carrying the faith to distant lands. What is harder is to recognize ourselves as missionaries in our own parish and neighborhood.

Yet a parish is itself a local mission. It exists to worship, evangelize, and serve, and every parishioner shares in that work. While most of us are not sent to distant or dangerous places, we are sent daily into our homes, workplaces, and community as witnesses of Christ.

The church where we worship, the school where our children learn, the offices where pastoral care is offered, and the halls where we gather are all missionary spaces where the work of this parish is carried out. St. Mary of the Lake is a local mission entrusted with a missionary task.

Just as missionaries require churches, classrooms, and support, so too a parish needs buildings, staff, and financial resources to fulfill its mission. A parish does not exist for money, but it cannot function without it. Financial support sustains the places where worship, evangelization, and service occur.

That mission is clear: to worship, to evangelize, and to serve as a joyful and welcoming Catholic community centered in the Eucharist—forming disciples who know, follow, and go forth to share Jesus Christ.

4.1.3 Bear Your Share of Hardship

Our mission as a parish—and as fellow parishioners—is to serve one another in love. We are called to “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2), doing so by “bearing your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God” (2 Tim 2:3).

The old saying holds true: many hands make light work. This applies both to the sharing of our talents and the sharing of our treasure.

Talent

Consider your own home. Every household requires work, and in a healthy household responsibilities are shared so that the whole can function well.

The parish works in the same way. Each parishioner takes on a portion of responsibility so that the mission can flourish. Some serve at Mass, others serve on councils, care for the building, or serve the poor and prepare what is needed for worship. In this way, each bears a share of the work for the sake of the Gospel.

Another image may help. Think of the parish as a ship powered by both wind and oars. The Holy Spirit is the wind that moves us forward, but each of us has an oar to row. The more who row together, the more smoothly the mission advances.

These images all point to the same truth: the mission only moves forward when everyone contributes what they have been given.

Treasure

The same principle applies to our treasure. Rather than saying, “Many hands make light work,” we might say, “Every stone strengthens the building.” Even a single missing stone weakens the structure; many missing stones threaten its stability.

So it is with our financial support of the parish. Every contribution sustains the mission. As St. Peter teaches, we are “living stones...built up as a spiritual house” (1 Pet 2:5). When participation is absent—spiritually or financially—the work of the parish is weakened.

Whatever You Can Give, Give

Some stones are large and others small, but all are necessary. Likewise, some families are able to give more and others less—but every gift matters.

At times, giving requires the faith of the widow, offering what feels like two small coins. The essential point is simple: whatever you can give, give. Many small gifts, given together, build something strong and lasting.

Seasons of Giving

One beauty of stewardship is that, when all give according to their ability, we support one another through different seasons of life. As St. Paul teaches, one person’s abundance supplies another’s need, so that, in time, the balance may be reversed (2 Cor 8:13).

Just as a tree passes through seasons, so too our financial lives change. Early years may bring heavy expenses and limited income; later years may bring greater stability and the ability to give more. For this reason, stewardship of treasure is a lifelong commitment—through which the generosity of some sustains the needs of others, and the whole parish is strengthened.

4.1.4 Sustaining the Mission: Wisdom for Stewardship

For stewardship of treasure to sustain a parish's mission, it must be embraced as a lifelong commitment. Scripture and the early Church offer wisdom—not to burden us, but to help us remain free, generous, and faithful.

One challenge arises when people receive from the parish but never contribute. From the earliest days of Christianity, believers understood stewardship as mutual responsibility. As the early Christian text *The Letter of Barnabas* (c. 125 A.D.) teaches:

"Share with your neighbor whatever you have, and do not say of anything, this is mine. If you both share an imperishable treasure, how much more must you share what is perishable... Do not hold out your hand for what you can get, only to withdraw it when it comes to giving...Never hesitate to give, and when you do give, never grumble: then you will know the one who will repay you."

St. Paul speaks plainly as well: "Anyone unwilling to work should not eat" (2 Thess 3:10). The point is not condemnation but participation—everyone has an oar to row. While someone may give little in one season and more in another, what matters is remaining engaged in the shared responsibility.

Another challenge arises when financial priorities crowd out generosity. Scripture warns that when possessions master us, freedom is lost. The prophet Malachi offers both warning and promise:

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse... and see if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing" (Mal 3:10).

Giving is not loss but trust. God cannot be outdone in generosity.

This returns us to the faithful widow. She gave not from security, but from trust—choosing the treasure of heaven over the fragile security of a few coins.

In the end, stewardship of treasure is not about pressure, but about freedom, trust, and sustaining the mission we share together.

4.1.5 sacrificial, proportional, and generous

Throughout the Church's teaching on stewardship, three qualities consistently describe the giving of treasure: it is **sacrificial, proportional, and generous**.

4.1.5.1 *Sacrificial*

Giving treasure often feels sacrificial. Just as giving blood is a real sacrifice, so offering our financial resources is a true act of self-gift. Blood is necessary for life; money is necessary for the household. For this reason, financial decisions carry real weight.

To give financially is to offer from our own substance to bear one another's burdens and fulfill the Law of Christ. As Christ poured out His blood and gave Himself completely for us, we share in His sacrifice through the sharing of our treasure. As St. Paul teaches, "*Though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that through His poverty you might become rich*" (2 Cor 8:9).

4.1.5.2 *Proportional*

A financial gift is never meant to impoverish the giver. As St. Paul explains, it is "acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have" (2 Cor 8:12). For this reason, our giving is meant to be proportional.

Scripture calls us to give from our first fruits, traditionally expressed as a tithe—ten percent of income: eight percent to the parish and two percent to other charitable works. Whether rich or poor, a gift is proportional when it is offered according to a consistent percentage.

A pledge is a personal commitment to support the parish's mission of worship, evangelization, and service, prayerfully determined and strengthened over time.

4.1.5.3 *Generous*

A pledge is always a free gift and never a tax. Stewardship is a voluntary offering made by those who desire to support the mission of the parish. As St. Paul writes, our gift is to be "a bountiful gift and not an exaction," for "whoever sows bountifully will reap bountifully" (2 Cor 9:5–6).

St. Peter likewise teaches, "As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Pet 4:10). Generosity flows from gratitude and becomes a concrete way we serve one another in love.

4.1.6 Conclusion

Who knows what finally motivated the widow to give her two coins? Perhaps it was a kind of bargain with God—"I give to you, please provide for me." Perhaps she was setting an example for her children or making a desperate plea in her need.

Yet, since Jesus Himself held her up as an example, it seems more fitting to believe that she gave because she trusted that her Heavenly Father, who sustains the entire universe, would also sustain her in her deepest need.

We are invited to that same trust—to place our confidence not in money, but in the faithful providence of God.

May you have a blessed Lent as you encounter the Savior who came from heaven to seek and save your soul.

5 REFLECTION QUESTIONS – 40 MINUTES

Be present—we give our full attention, setting aside phones and distractions.
Let God lead—we listen as though Holy Spirit may be speaking through others.
Listen with charity—we receive each person without judgment or correction.
Share honestly and briefly—we speak openly, and then make room for others.
Make space for everyone—we honor every voice, not just the quick or confident.

5.1 OPEN DISCUSSION

5.2 THE SESSION DESCRIBES THE PARISH AS A SHARED MISSION. WHERE HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THAT SENSE OF SHARED RESPONSIBILITY—OR WHERE DO YOU THINK IT COULD GROW?

5.3 STEWARDSHIP IS DESCRIBED AS CHANGING WITH THE SEASONS OF LIFE. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR CURRENT SEASON?

5.4 WHAT HELPS YOU TRUST THAT GOD IS PROVIDING, EVEN WHEN YOU DON'T SEE HOW?

6 ANNOUNCEMENTS & CLOSING PRAYER – 5 MINUTES

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, whose Heart is inflamed with love,
from You flows every gift and grace.

Draw my heart into Yours, that I may receive the gifts of the Spirit,
given to me by the Father.

Inspire me to be a faithful steward,
sharing my time, my talents, and my treasure as gifts to be given.

May the love I receive from Your Sacred Heart
flow outward in love of God and neighbor,
until, with all the saints, I rest forever in Your embrace.

Amen.

Week 5 – Testimony

1 ORDER OF MEETING

2 ICE BREAKER – “WHAT MAKES SOMETHING CREDIBLE” – 10 MINUTES

3 OPENING PRAYER – PETER AND THE SANHEDRIN – 10 MINUTES

“Then Peter, filled with the holy Spirit, answered them, “Leaders of the people and elders: If we are being examined today about a good deed done to a cripple, namely, by what means he was saved, then all of you and all the people of Israel should know that it was in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead; in his name this man stands before you healed. He is ‘the stone rejected by you,[b] the builders, which has become the cornerstone.’ There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved.” Observing the boldness of Peter and John and perceiving them to be uneducated, ordinary men, they were amazed, and they recognized them as the companions of Jesus.

4 CONTENT ENGAGEMENT – 25 MINUTES

4.1 TESTIMONY—LIGHT AND LOVE

By Rev. C. Jarrod Lies, S.T.L.

Small Group Discussion #5

Dear Parishioners of St. Mary of the Lake, peace to you!

4.1.1 Light Received and Reflected

I've always been a bit afraid of the dark. When I was a kid, I wouldn't go into the basement room until I reached around with my hand and turned on the light. I'm better about it now, but still I wasn't real crazy of the "sounds in the dark" the few times I went deer hunting.

There is a word that appears again and again in Scripture, and it is not accidental: Light. To cite three passages:

Isaiah says, *“Your light shall break forth like the dawn”* (58:8).

The Psalm 112 proclaims, *“The just man is a light in darkness”* (v. 12).

Jesus Himself declares, *“You are the light of the world”* (Matt 5:14).

Light is not something we produce. It is something we receive—and then reflect. And that is what a steward is to be in the parish, in the family, and in the work-a-day world. But, in order to do this, we need to be clear on what this "light" is.

4.1.2 Corporal Works of Mercy

Isaiah 58 gives us a remarkably concrete description of what this light looks like. He does not speak in abstractions. He does not say that light is, "Having good intentions," or "Thinking generous thoughts." He says:

Share your bread with the hungry.—Shelter the oppressed and the homeless.—Clothe the naked.—Remove from your midst oppression, false accusation and malicious speech.—Satisfy the afflicted.—And do not turn your back on your own. (*cf. Is 58:7, 9-10*).

These are what the Church has always called the **Corporal Works of Mercy**:

Feed the hungry—Give drink to the thirsty—Clothe the naked—Shelter the homeless—Visit the sick—Visit the imprisoned—Bury the dead.

In other words, these actions are the light that shows our faith! These are not optional add-ons to Christian behavior. They are the visible expression of a Disciple who has been converted by faith in the Lord.

And Isaiah ends with a promise that should strike us deeply. He uses an important word: Then.

"Then your light shall break forth like the dawn." Not before. Then. In other words, *your "light" becomes visible when mercy becomes embodied*.

The Psalm 112 deepens this picture even further. The just person is described as gracious, merciful, steadfast, unafraid. Why? Because his heart is firm—trusting in the Lord. Our stewardship—our talent, time, and treasure—or our prayer, presence, generosity, and testimony—is not rooted in only our surplus or luxury. It is rooted in trust. That trust frees him to give lavishly, as our psalm said, not only of his finances, but of his time, his presence, his attention, his patience.

The just person is able to be light because his heart is anchored somewhere deeper than fear, scarcity, or self-protection. He believes—really believes—that **God will not be outdone in generosity**. *The Christian is not afraid to be the light!*

4.1.3 Spiritual Works of Mercy

Which brings us to the Spiritual Works of Mercy. These are:

**To instruct the ignorant—To counsel the doubtful—To comfort the afflicted—
To bear wrongs patiently—To forgive offenses willingly—To admonish the sinner—To pray for the living and the dead.**

If the corporal works address bodily poverty, the spiritual works address something just as real—and often more hidden, more costly. While the corporal works can, in the realm of possibility, be given at a distance, the spiritual works require personal presence: You cannot comfort the afflicted from a distance.

You cannot counsel the doubtful without listening.

You cannot bear wrongs patiently unless you are willing to be inconvenienced.

In other words, they require relationship. And yet—the loss of relationship is precisely where so much of the pain and hurt in our world lies today. Not merely in empty stomachs, but in empty hearts. Not only in lack of resources, but in isolation, confusion, and loneliness.

4.1.4 The Cross

Saint Paul helps us understand why this matters so deeply. He tells the Corinthians that he came knowing “Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” Why?

Because the Cross is where light shines most clearly in the darkness.

The Cross teaches us that love does not remain theoretical—it is sacrificial. Love gives itself. Love pours itself out. Love becomes visible precisely when it costs something.

That is Christian charity in action: good works, the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, are sacrifices that participate in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Christianity is not a technique. It is a way of life shaped by the Cross.

Finally, in the Gospel Jesus turns to us and says something that should hit us between the eyes. He says,

“*You are the light of the world*” (Matt 5:14). Not “you might be.” Not “you should try to be.” You are.

Then He adds: “*That they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father*” (Matt 5:16). Our good deeds are not for self-display; but for **God’s glory**. And that’s why they are light: they reveal the infinite compassion of our Heavenly Father!

When a parish feeds the hungry, shelters the homeless, comforts the grieving, forgives patiently, prays faithfully, and walks with people in their doubt—that parish, and those parishioners, become a lamp on a stand.

And people won’t say, “What a great parish.” They say, “God must be real. God must be near.”

4.1.5 You are the Light of the World

But Christian faith is more than action alone. There is a familiar saying often attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: after walking through Assisi with his brothers, one friar remarked, “Francis, we went all day without preaching.” Francis is said to have replied, “Our love for one another and for the stranger was enough. Preach the Gospel at all times; when necessary, use words.” While the sentiment captures something true—that Christian love must be visible—it is not the whole picture. In fact, there is no reliable source that attributes the saying to Francis, and more importantly, the Gospel must also be proclaimed in words (*cf. Evangelii Nuntiandi*, §22). Authentic discipleship holds both together: good

works that embody faith (stewardship) and spoken proclamation that names Jesus Christ (discipleship).

4.1.6 Discipleship

If we are stewards, it is first because we are disciples. Why are we here—right now, in this room? Because we know Jesus Christ. We have been baptized into Him, confirmed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, nourished by His Body in the Eucharist, instructed by His Word in Scripture, and touched in our hearts by the Gospel. In short, we are here because we have heard the Good News: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life”* (*In 3:16*).

This is our Good News: the greatest gift we have received is our salvation in Christ. He has overcome the world, and we share in His victory. Christ has conquered the darkness of this world—and the darkness is real. We live in mixed up, messed up, crazy world—a time of intense ideological conflict, not only cultural but global. Christian faith is increasingly pushed from public life, reduced to a private sentiment, and evangelization dismissed as proselytism.

Worse still, powerful ideological systems are being imposed across cultures through political, economic, and media forces—a new form of ideological colonization. These forces are shaping societies, nations, and families. Our children are immersed in them through social media, journalism, film, entertainment, education systems, and the secular spaces. The digital world has entered our homes, promoting messages that are anti-Christ, anti-Gospel, and anti-Life, proclaimed openly in workplaces, schools, and universities at every age.

4.1.7 The Kerygma

But we have something stronger than the world: **the Gospel**. This is the heart of Christian testimony. God came to earth searching for us. Think of that—God sought us. This is the Good News, the **kerygma**.

The kerygma is the basic proclamation of the Gospel. Jesus Himself is the kerygma—the Good News we proclaim. “Jesus,” in Hebrew, means “God saves.” As the popes have taught, the kerygma is not an “optional contribution” but the Church’s “first and fundamental” task (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, §5). Proclaimed with *parrhēsia*—boldness (*Evangelii Gaudium*, §259)—it carries a unique power to awaken faith because it proclaims the Word who is Jesus Christ and the life of the Spirit for the salvation of souls.

In the **Bible**, John 3:16 is the most succinct scriptural summary of the kerygma: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.” Contained within this passage are the five “parts” or “aspects” of the kerygma. These can be remembered by the acronym **G.R.A.C.E.**, for as St. Paul says, we are “saved by grace” (*Eph 2:8*).

For God so loved the world...

G - Gripped | God has **gripped** humanity in mercy, drawing us into His own Sacred Heart. His love is not a distant affection but a divine grasp—the “leading step” in proclaiming the Gospel. It is personal, unconditional, and eternal, and it earnestly desires that we be in full communion with the God who is perfect Communion.

...that he gave his only Son...

R - Ransomed | Sin has separated humanity from the Father and left us in enmity with Him. “Personified evil” – the Devil – induced our first parents to sin by promising a false freedom that only led to slavery (GS 2). Yet the Father has **ransomed** us from this bondage. Out of love, He gave His only Son to draw us back to Himself, so that we might be restored to friendship with Him.

...so that everyone who believes in him ...

A - Anchored | Through faith in Jesus, we have hope “as an anchor of the soul, sure and firm” (Heb 6:19)—stabilized against life’s uncertainty. The coming of Christ secures us amid every storm; His Cross and Resurrection fasten the soul to divine adoption and lasting peace.

... might not perish ...

C - Chartered | Christ has overthrown sin and routed the devil; by confessing Jesus, we are **chartered** on a new course of discipleship—away from perdition and toward the Beatific Vision. Through His Resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit, our lives are re-directed toward the Kingdom. We live differently, sharing mercy, repentance, and salvation with others (Mt 28:19).

... but might have eternal life.

E - Enkindled | The sacraments are a foretaste and pledge of the eternity to come; therefore, Eternal Life already burns within those who believe and follow Him. Cleansed by Baptism, made “one flesh” with Him in the Eucharist, and anointed by the Spirit in Confirmation, our hearts have been **enkindled** with the fire of Divine Life.

4.1.8 Conclusion

This is our Gospel message, and it has the power to overcome every sophistry and worldly ideology. Our faith is proven in our works. As St. James writes, “Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works” (2:18).

And this is our testimony: We are saved by G.R.A.C.E: **Gripped**, **Ransomed**, **Anchored**, **Chartered**, **Enkindled**! Our good works—the corporal and spiritual works of mercy—give visible witness to the faith we profess.

When I was a child, I was afraid of the dark. As disciples, we cannot be afraid to be the light. Discipleship is the decision to stop hiding—to trust that God will provide and to let mercy take flesh in daily choices. Then the world, seeing our good works and hearing our testimony, will give glory to the Father.

May you have a blessed Lent as you encounter the Savior who came from heaven to seek and save your soul.

5 REFLECTION QUESTIONS – 40 MINUTES

Be present—we give our full attention, setting aside phones and distractions.
Let God lead—we listen as though Holy Spirit may be speaking through others.
Listen with charity—we receive each person without judgment or correction.
Share honestly and briefly—we speak openly, and then make room for others.
Make space for everyone—we honor every voice, not just the quick or confident.

5.1 OPEN DISCUSSION

- 5.2 ISAIAH CONNECTS LIGHT TO VERY CONCRETE ACTS OF MERCY. WHICH CORPORAL OR SPIRITUAL WORK OF MERCY FEELS MOST REAL OR MOST NEEDED IN YOUR CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES?**
- 5.3 THE CROSS IS DESCRIBED AS THE PLACE WHERE LIGHT SHINES MOST CLEARLY. HOW DOES THE IDEA THAT LOVE BECOMES VISIBLE WHEN IT COSTS SOMETHING SHAPE YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF FAITH?**
- 5.4 THE SESSION HOLDS TOGETHER GOOD WORKS AND SPOKEN PROCLAMATION. WHICH COMES MORE NATURALLY TO YOU—AND WHICH FEELS MORE DIFFICULT?**

6 ANNOUNCEMENTS & CLOSING PRAYER – 5 MINUTES

Closing Prayer

**Lord Jesus, whose Heart is inflamed with love,
from You flows every gift and grace.**

**Draw my heart into Yours, that I may receive the gifts of the Spirit,
given to me by the Father.**

**Inspire me to be a faithful steward,
sharing my time, my talents, and my treasure as gifts to be given.**

**May the love I receive from Your Sacred Heart
flow outward in love of God and neighbor,
until, with all the saints, I rest forever in Your embrace.**

Amen.

Week 6 – Missionary sending and communal gathering

Date to be announced (after Easter Sunday)

Long – Term Hope

- Discern the fruits from the study.
- Define the parish vision emerging organically from the Holy Spirit and conversion.
- Cultural shift rather than short-term results.
- Stewardship is understood as the ordinary way disciples live together.