

My name is Kathy Operhall and I am a retiree. Translated, this means I now have more time to work in God's vineyard, sharing my time, talents and treasure.

I have officially belonged to the parish for 10 years now. Steve Siemion, our former parish organist and choir director was instrumental in convincing me that I had much to offer the parish as a cantor. So, I agreed to give up warming the pew each weekend and said "yes" to this opportunity to praise God and serve the parish. He threw out the fishing line and reeled me in. The bait was too inviting.

Growing up in St. Christopher Parish in Detroit, my parents never talked about stewardship. Back then, that term was never really discussed from the pulpit or in the home. But I knew from watching my parents how valuable it was to share time, talent and treasures with your parish family. I watched my Mom become active in the Rosary Altar Society and the Daughters of Isabella, sharing her talents as an organist for the latter group. I remember Mom sharing stories of singing in the church choir and the great friendships that evolved from that ministry. It didn't come as any surprise to my family when I asked to join the church choir right out of grade school. At the age of 14, I became the youngest member of the adult choir and having been singing in choirs ever since. My father belonged to the Dad's Club at church and at Rosary High School, never missing coaching little league at the parish or working the yearly paper drives at the high school after putting in a full day's work at the steel mill. I always saw my parents put an envelope into the collection basket on Sunday. As children, we had our own envelopes and were expected to give a part of our allowance to the church. My parents didn't need to talk about stewardship – they modeled what it meant to give back to God in thanksgiving for all the blessings He bestowed on our family. They willingly shared their time, talents and treasure with their parish, passing on the joy it brought them to their three children.

Stewardship begins with gratitude to God for all the gifts he has given us. I began to realize at an early age that God gave each of us unique talents and abilities and expected us to use them to build his church here on earth. If we listen to the words of St. Paul, we find that "there are a variety of gifts, but the same spirit, and there are a variety of services, but the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (I Corinthians 12:4-7) The gifts we have received are not ours alone. God gave them to us for the purpose of serving Him and serving others. So, Jesus gave the command and I decided to follow the other members of my parish. I found that as I continued to do more around the church, God provided me with the time and ability to do whatever I committed myself to doing.

Because of my love of music, being a member of the church choir and a cantor was the first ministry I said "yes" to. Music has brought great joy to my life and I always feel closer to God when singing. The good sisters instilled in us that "singing was praying twice", and who doesn't want to double the number of prayers ascending the musical pipeline to heaven? I continue to be involved in many other ministries in this parish: as a lector, Eucharistic minister, a member of the Christian Mothers, Parish Council and the Worship Committee.

I never really felt comfortable retired from the field of education. One year away from students made me realize how much I missed teaching, so I volunteered to become part of the RCIA team. That led to my becoming a catechist and teaching confirmation preparation classes. The beautiful part about sharing your faith is that you enrich your own lives by learning from the students you work with. What a great way to share your story of stewardship and to encourage young people to start sharing their time, talents and treasures with their parish family. God continued to speak and I listened. I accepted the position of Director of Religious Education here at St. Alfred a year ago and fell more in love with my faith than I could ever imagine. I am currently working on my certificate in lay ministry at Sacred Heart Seminary, where I am completing a program in theology.

Christian stewardship also involves the community outside of our parish, as God expects us to minister to all of His children. I continue serving on the board of a community organization that deals with behavioral and mental health. Because education will always hold a special place in my heart, I also serve as a school board member for Summit Academy North. Knowing that you are following God's way when you serve your fellow man gives you a feeling of accomplishment and makes you feel closer to our Creator through positive actions.

Involving yourself in parish life is an incredible, rewarding experience. I have found that some of my closest friends are those who work with me on church projects and committees. When life becomes difficult, these are the family members I turn to. The prayers, love and friendship of my St. Alfred family bring great joy and laughter into my life. I have been blessed!

In the next few weeks, St. Alfred will be hosting a ministry fair after all the Masses. Please take the time to visit the displays and identify a ministry that you would like to become involved in. I can guarantee you that there is something for everyone! Don't say you don't have the time – God will help you make time in your busy schedule to continue His good work in our parish.

It is important to remember that God owns all things and we are simply his managers here on earth. God has given us time, talents, treasures and a "temple" to manage. Stewardship asks us to give back the best of our talents and treasures to God. If we share the talents God has given, no matter how small we may consider them, He will continue to bless us and our special community here at St. Alfred will continue to thrive and be a beacon of God's love in the Taylor community.