



Stewardship Sighting

STEWARDSHIP OF THE GIFT OF SEXUALITY

by Deanna Wan, St. Luke's Parish

Deanna is a teacher and board member of The Natural Family Planning Association of Alberta. Her husband is the President of the board. The couple have three lovely children.

It is springtime and I am in the hospital. My weight has plummeted 30 pounds in the past four weeks and I cannot even walk from the bed to the washroom without stopping to rest. I try not to move. I sleep when I can. When I wake, I try to keep from vomiting, and fail. The little energy I have, I spend worrying for our unborn child. Seven difficult months later I give birth to our first child, a healthy 8 pound boy.

Even years later, the memory of my first pregnancy remains vivid. It was the difficulties of pregnancy and the experience of carrying another person in my body that first made it profoundly evident to me that my life was a gift that I did not control. Although I grew up a Catholic, I thought God was a capricious ogre who stifled every joy and waited vindictively to punish me the moment I sinned. Not surprisingly, I thought if only I had complete control of my life and did exactly as I wanted, I would be happy. In my helplessness, I began to see I wasn't in charge of my life, and that I needed God.

At the same time I knew that making good choices during pregnancy was critical for both me and my unborn child. I was responsible for my health because it affected the wellbeing of the child within me. At no other time has the gravity of my choices been so clear to me. As a teen mother in a high-risk pregnancy, I was acutely aware that the choice that my husband and I made to conceive and bear this child to term was a choice of life over death for our child.

After our son was born, we learned the Billings Ovulation Method of Natural Family Planning (NFP). Through using NFP, we gradually became aware that our sexuality and fertility are gifts to care for and exercise with responsibility. By abstaining during times of fertility to avoid pregnancy, we found, to our surprise, our relationship improving, and our lovemaking becoming more pleasurable.

Looking back I can see that what I was learning was stewardship – understanding my responsibility to care for the good of myself and others, at the same time realizing that I don't own my life. Viewing my life as a gift of God to be respected and cared for, and realising that I couldn't and didn't need to be in complete control, was very freeing. I saw that the happiness we enjoyed in our marriage wasn't *despite* the abstinence, but because we were willing to leave God in control of our fertility yet still plan our family prudently. In short, it was the stewardship of our gift of sexuality that led to our happiness.

It is not surprising that my first realisation of this responsibility of stewardship came with marriage and parenting. The gift of being male and female, and the mutual gift of self in marriage is probably the most common way that people experience the call of stewardship. The surprise for me was that through living the call to respect, care for, and nurture my spouse and my children I became happier. The practice of sexual stewardship has had many benefits for myself and my husband: increased marital happiness, more satisfying love-making, and enough space between our children. It's clear to me that it's not my selfishness but God's call to stewardship that is the true path to joy and happiness.

It's in You to Give

by Simone Brosig, Stewardship Office

For several years now I've been thinking that I should give blood. The slogan of Canadian Blood Services, "Blood. It's in You to Give." is compelling. So often, people don't give because they don't think they have anything anyone else would want. Stewardship ministry aims to heighten people's awareness of their gifts, the abundance of resources that God has bestowed upon each one of us, and our responsibility to respond to this generosity with grateful giving. The stewardship implications of Canadian Blood Services' slogan are obvious.

What kept me from giving blood was fear. I'm squeamish. However, it makes me squeamish in a different way to think that by not giving blood I was choosing a few moments of my own comfort over saving a life. For months I had a post-it note on my desk that simply read: Give blood. I'm embarrassed by how long that note remained unheeded until it actually became part of my deskscape and I no longer noticed it. Then one day in December I came across a memo from Canadian Blood Services to Bishop Henry, thanking him for our diocese's participation in their Interfaith Campaign and encouraging us to continue our support. The second page of the memo provided some information about the campaign and a contact person. After all this time, I saw it as an invitation for me to finally act on my conscience and not only give blood myself, but to organise a blood drive for the Pastoral Centre.

Canadian Blood Services makes it very easy for groups to give blood. They provide information, brochures, and customised flyers and posters. On the day of the donation, they send their Life Bus to pick up donors, take them to the clinic, and then return them to the pick up point. It couldn't be simpler and it seemed like a fitting endeavour for the stewardship office. I proceeded to distribute flyers among the staff at the Pastoral Centre as well as Calgary Catholic Immigration, who share the building.

As the date of the group blood donation drew closer, I learned that many people are unable to give blood on account of medications they take or existing health conditions. Thus, the responsibility of those who can give blood is even greater than I had previously thought, the gift even more precious. At last, on

February 6th, a generous group of 7 boarded the bus to the blood clinic. Potential excuses were running through my head but when I saw the 6 other women who were willing to give their time and lifeblood, I was ashamed of my cowardice and by the time we reached the clinic, I had resolved to follow through.

To make a long story short, I didn't make it past the first questionnaire before the nurse told me that I could not give blood, ever! A small part of me was relieved, or rather the knot in my stomach went away because nothing more would happen, but mostly I was disappointed. It turns out I was in the UK for a period of time that is singled out as when people were at risk of contracting Mad Cow disease. Until a blood test is developed for this disease, I cannot give blood in Canada. After all the noise I made about the blood drive, I would not be giving blood myself.

The people at Canadian Blood Services are wonderful. They gave me soup and really good cookies as I waited for the rest of my group. I went to chat with those who were resting from making their donations. All these people had left the comfort of their offices to give blood. I was so grateful and thanked them for giving what in the end, I couldn't give myself. As I spoke with Gloria, from the Tribunal office, a few tears escaped my eyes. I really felt like a failure that blood isn't in me to give. Gloria said to me, "Simone, you should be very proud of yourself. Were it not for your efforts in coordinating this blood drive, I would not have given blood today."

Gloria's words were more than kind; they point to a full spirituality of stewardship. It is true that I cannot give my blood. Yet, because of me, several other people gave blood. As a friend pointed out, I gave other people's blood away that day! It was my gift to organise the event, blood was Gloria's gift.

At once, I decided to stop sulking and took the time to speak with several of the volunteers at the clinic. None of the three volunteers I met that day are able to give blood themselves. One used to be a nurse and decided to volunteer at Canadian Blood Services because as a nurse she knows how important the gift of blood is for the lives of others. Another volunteer started working there when he was out of work and

needed something to kill the time. Now he is employed but keeps volunteering because, he says, each day he leaves in a better mood than when he arrived. Josefa Sanchez is 79 years young and has been a volunteer at Canadian Blood Services for 12 years. She volunteers because it is fun! One of the Life Bus drivers explained that he decided to go on staff after he retired from his previous job because this work, he knows, really helps people and he likes the caring way the staff treat one another.

As I continue to reflect upon the meaning of this experience in a stewardship context, I have come to realise that sometimes what I want to give is different from what God wants from me. I want to give my blood. It seems that God wants me to give by motivating and coordinating others to give blood. The life of discipleship is full of surprises. It involves a process of discernment

and an openness to go where God is calling. Instead of feeling rejected and disheartened, it is my challenge to humbly accept the unique combination of gifts and limitations given to me by God. Although I cannot give my own blood, I have promised myself to coordinate another blood drive for the office in a few months. Perhaps this is what St. Paul had in mind when he preached to the Corinthians: *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.* (1 Cor 12.4-7) The Spirit. It's in you to give.

To participate in Canadian Blood Services' Interfaith Campaign at the parish level, contact Stephen Wright at (403) 410-2733 or visit www.bloodservices.ca.

Why I Donate My Blood in Canada

by Amy Zhao, Calgary Catholic Immigration Services

Two years ago, I moved from China to Calgary, an oil and gas city in Canada, which is surrounded by the grand Rocky Mountains. The sky here is so clear, huge and low that I feel that "God" is watching me everyday.

One day, I was looking for help on the street because I needed to borrow a screwdriver to replace the old lock for the room I had just rented. I saw an old lady busy working in her yard. Quickly I ran up to her and asked if she had a screwdriver. To her, I was like a little child from another planet. She told me her name was Irene and that she would be very happy to lend me her screwdriver. Then she asked if I had food or even an apple to eat. I was laughing in my heart but I also felt warmth pour into my body. I had certainly met a warm-hearted lady! How lucky I was! After that first meeting we came to know each other and became good friends.

My early time in Canada went fast.

I had lots of fun in the program I took from Calgary Catholic Immigration Services (CCIS), an organization dedicated to helping new immigrants to Calgary. I shared with my classmates the exciting moment when I saw in person Queen Elizabeth II waving to Calgarians and my experience of *smelling* the cowboy-styled Stampede for the first time. After I graduated from the program, I was offered a job within this organisation. Life was going smoothly and happily in Canada.

One day, an idea came into my mind: "Since so many people have been so kind to me, why I don't do something nice for others?"

By chance, I was recommended to Canadian Blood Services to volunteer as a Server Ambassador. I felt people here in Canada are even nicer than I thought! Canadians even donate their blood to help other people! One donation card really shocked me; it showed that

the donor had already donated 131 times. After a rough calculation, I figured out that the amount of the blood he had already donated is equal to the blood contained in 11 people. I asked him why he donates? He smiled to me and just said: "It is not a big thing".

Why does he think this way? I couldn't understand very well, but one thing of which I am very sure is that his generosity is saving the lives of many people. I asked myself, what can I do? I have blood too.

After 6 months working at Canadian Blood Services in Calgary, I felt my day for donating was near. I chose one Saturday when my physical condition and my mind were ready. That day, I donated my blood for the first time in my life. I felt great and left with a smile across my face.

I feel good about my life here in Canada and I am going to continue to help other people!

Upcoming Conference

The second Western Canadian Catholic Stewardship Conference will take place **June 15 and 16, 2007** in Edmonton Alberta. It is a local opportunity for stewardship leaders in your parish to receive formation and renewal. It is also a place to gather with others in similar situations for sharing and communion. Please see the invitation below from the Office of Stewardship from the Archdiocese of Edmonton. I hope to see many of you in Edmonton!

It is with great enthusiasm that I write to you today. This June, The Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton will host the second bi-annual,

Western Canadian Catholic Stewardship Conference (WCCSC.)

The Stewardship movement in North America has, in recent years, gained a great deal of momentum due in large part to the work of the International Catholic Stewardship Council. Their annual Stewardship Conference has provided many Canadian Catholic leaders with training opportunities to enhance their understanding and acceptance of stewardship, as a way of life. Through the efforts of Dan Potvin, Director of Stewardship and Development for the Archdiocese of Winnipeg, Western Canada experienced its first regional Western Conference in May 2005. The purpose of these stewardship conferences is to provide pastors and lay leaders with the opportunity to come together regionally to receive inspiration, formation and practical information to advance stewardship in their parish communities. These conferences are designed to reflect the Canadian experience and are offered at an affordable cost.

The Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton began its own stewardship journey a little over four years ago. Our long term goal remains to . . .

“live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all” (Eph 4: 1-6.)

Hosting the WCCSC conference is a gift and a pleasure for me and The Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton. I encourage you to seize this opportunity to cultivate your leadership gifts. I invite you to attend the WCCSC or to send a delegation from your (arch) diocese.

For your convenience, an electronic version of the conference brochure is available on our website www.edmontoncatholic-church.com to facilitate easy circulation of this information. Also, additional brochures are available upon request. Please do not hesitate to contact my office if you require further assistance or have any questions.

Yours in Christ,



Mary-Ann Yusep
Director