

Hello, my name is John and with me is my beautiful wife, Sandra. We have been members of the St. Louise Parish Community for 22 years. We are blessed with four daughters. Our younger two daughters, Melissa and Sophie, currently attend St. Louise School. The older two have graduated from St. Louise. Olivia is a sophomore at the University of Washington and Emily is a sophomore at Sammamish High School.

Our Catholic faith is an integral part of our family life. Sandra and I, both grew up in India where Catholics are a minority. So staying strong in our faith was a bit of struggle for us. However, we were both blessed to have parents who did a wonderful job of raising us as Catholics and keeping us rooted in our faith.

We still remember when we moved from New York to the Seattle Area. It was July 1998 and as a surprise to no one, it was raining! We were looking for a church in the area and deciding on where to attend Mass. We met Fr. Phil, in the St. Louise parking lot, where we actually asked him for the directions to Sacred Heart church. In his polite tone, he said he was going that side for dinner and asked us to follow him. He took us right up to Sacred Heart Church in downtown Bellevue, without asking any questions. The next morning, however, we ended up attending the 7:30 AM Mass here at St. Louise, where we heard Father Phil talking about “The Good Samaritan parable” and sharing with the congregation about our meeting with him in the parking lot. His homily touched both of us and we realized that St. Louise was the community that we had been searching for all along.

St. Louise has always been and continues to be a very welcoming parish. In many ways, this has become our home away from home. St. Louise has been blessed with so many incredible pastors and priests such as, Fr. Phil, Fr. Tom, Fr. Fabian and now Fr. Gary & Fr. Carlos. All of them have been so supportive of the ethnic diversity that we are so blessed to have here in our community. Fr. Phil encouraged us to celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Vailankanni. And, over the years, several other ethnic communities began celebrating and honoring their cultural traditions along with their Catholic faith. The Marian Wall (*point to the right*) is symbolic of how St. Louise has welcomed and embraced different cultures & ethnicities. In addition to the sacramental preparation, this vibrant parish of ours continues to support various activities – such as prayer groups,

bible studies, community service, faith formation, retreats, youth groups, adoration and so much more to help foster community and spiritual growth.

Despite the restrictions due to the pandemic, Fr. Gary, Fr. Carlos, Deacon Sam and the parish staff have continued to nurture our spiritual needs, via online mass streaming, rosaries, and their continued support and prayers.

(Sandra)

Today, we want to talk to you a few minutes about stewardship, by sharing our personal experience, in trying to be good stewards in this parish. Often times, we hear that Stewardship, is giving your time, talent and treasure, back to God in appreciation for all that God has given to you. However, that is only a part of it. Stewardship is about giving your whole self to God, because we are already His. As humans, our way of showing God that we recognize we are His, is by giving our time, talent and treasure, to the church and people in need. And, that we are willing to sacrifice those things, because we know that He will take our gifts and multiply them into something, beyond our imagination.

John and I, strongly believe that everything we have i.e. our lives, health, jobs, marriage, finances; belongs to God.

1 Peter 4:10 says – Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.

When we first came to this Parish, we were not sure how to get involved. We were nervous to get involved because we were new to this community and State. There was an opportunity to assist at Sunday school, so I decided to take a leap of faith and signed up to volunteer. After the birth of our children, I decided to take a step back and help the parish in smaller ways. But John continued to help in various ministries, such as serving on the Pastoral Council, helping with Ethnic Fest, assisting with NPH events, joining the Knights of Columbus and many more. More recently, he has had the opportunity to serve on the Stewardship Commission & Worship Commission. As for me, now that kids are grown up, I have had opportunities to serve on the church Finance Council, Greeter ministry and the 60th Anniversary Committee.

And our children are always eager and excited to help out in our community as well. They have served as altar-servers, sacristans, choir members, greeters, and trekkers. During this COVID time, they have been helping as hospitality ministers for weekend public masses.

I can't begin to tell you the joy and happiness, we have received as a member, actively contributing and working in this parish. It has been incredible to see how God, has been able to use even our smallest contributions, to make a huge difference. St. Louise Parish is no longer a bunch of strangers, but a group of friends and family. We have built lasting friendships here. Our involvement has provided us with a sense of belonging.

In **2 Corinthians 9:6-8**, St. Paul says, ***“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”***

Jesus tells us in **Matthew 6:21**— ***“For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.”***

In keeping with God's command to us to give back our first fruits, John and I have made a commitment to give a percentage of our income, every month to the Church. This isn't always easy, but it is always very gratifying to know that we are doing the right thing and helping our parish stay strong. We recognize that, no matter what the contribution amount is, it goes a long way in supporting our parish. As we continue to give, we've learned that we are growing more spiritually and that our faith is deepening. By giving as we have, we have tried to place material things and money, in their proper perspective. That has caused us to look at what we need, versus what we want.

Like many other families, our family too was affected by COVID. John had been working for a cruise company for six years. But, due to the pandemic, the company was forced to shut down all its operations, and John received a notice that he would be furloughed from work- from June until November of this year. At first, we struggled to understand why something like this would happen and how we would be able to get out of this situation. Despite our worries, we surrendered this situation to God. We did not experience any stress and were

truly blessed with a peace that was beyond imagination. However, with our main source of income now gone and with a big family to support, we were not sure if we would be able to honor our financial commitment to the parish. Amazingly, God provided us alternate ways to contribute that is, with our time and talent. John was able to support the parish staff with the AV for outdoor masses and then subsequently for the indoor online mass streaming. My kids and I began to serve as hospitality ministers. My kids also had the opportunity to help with the CCS Food program. Thanks to the prayers of Fr. Gary, Fr. Carlos, our family and friends, and by the grace of God, John was blessed with a new job in August, which he loves. He continues to help with online streaming for Mass on Tuesday and Rosaries on Thursday evenings and occasionally for weekend Masses. (So, if there are any glitches, you know whom to blame!)

(John)

We know that it can be scary to start giving more of yourself to God by giving more to His Church. However, we want to assure you, from our own experience, that no amount of giving is too small for God. Most talks about stewardship primarily focus on finances. While financial giving is important, don't let the lack of financial resources stop you from giving your time and talent. God wants not just our finances; He wants our whole self. We invite you to live our parish mission "To Ignite Faith and Witness God's Love" and remember that God can use ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

(Sandra)

In closing, we leave you with this thought on gratitude, by Thomas Merton- "To be grateful is to recognize the Love of God in everything he has given us – and He has given us everything.

Every breath we draw is a gift of His love, every moment of existence is a grace, for it brings with it immense graces from Him.

Gratitude therefore takes nothing for granted, is never unresponsive, is constantly awakening to new wonder and to praise of the goodness of God.

For the grateful person knows that God is good, not by hearsay but by experience. And that is what makes all the difference."

We are thankful to both God and to this community for allowing our family the opportunity to participate as active members in this great parish of ours.

Thank you & God Bless.