

## “Spiritual Valentines” Stewardship Talk (spring 2011)

Good morning. My name is Beth Cressey & my husband Carl and I have been parishioners here at St. Elizabeth’s since 2000, after having lived in St. Louis for a couple of years. We have 3 children enrolled at St. Elizabeth school: Mara in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, Elise in 4<sup>th</sup> grade & Frank in Pre-K. I feel incredibly blessed and proud that we are able to send our kids to St. Elizabeth’s, not only for the obvious reasons of the excellent educational & catholic-teaching traditions, but also my own extra pride of having grown up in St. E’s parish & graduating from its school.

Thinking back, it wasn’t an easy transition for me when my family first moved to our new house in St. Elizabeth parish. I was a very quiet, introverted and painfully shy 10 year-old with no friends. My brother & sister weren’t even in preschool yet, so I felt very alone & I had a very difficult time making friends since I was so shy.

Come February, as you can imagine, I felt my prospects for decent Valentine’s booty was pretty slim. Nonetheless, I optimistically filled out Valentines for my classmates & went to school with hope in my heart. I proceeded to pass out my valentines, and when I returned to my desk, excitedly peered into my personal mailbox... I counted three...from the three girls I had actually befriended. One of these girls apparently noticed the sad look-- to this day I don’t know if she planned this or if it was spontaneous— so she came over to my desk & exclaimed, “What, another valentine for Beth?!” She stuffed it into my mailbox & went on her merry way. A second later from across the room, I hear, “*Another* valentine for Beth??”, and she ran over &

stuffed 2 more valentines in my box. This happened several more times and by the time she was done, I had about 20 valentines in my mailbox, I was feeling the love, and a beautiful friendship that has spanned more than 30 years was born.

Buzzwords such as stewardship and spiritual conversion have been in the forefront of our thoughts in recent weeks. My valentine story shows stewardship at its most simplistic form; not a conversion per se, but a FOUNDATION of caring for another, layered one valentine at a time. A foundation that was strengthened a few years later when my then 7 year-old brother suddenly developed viral encephalitis. He spent several dark & uncertain days in the ICU at Children's Mercy teetering on that fine line between life and death. He did recover from his illness, and though he has faced many challenges as a result, the outpouring of support, prayers & love to my family was staggering & invaluable. And another valentine was received.

My life as a Christian steward—of my own grateful response to those gifts God has given me—has been ongoing & subtle. As subtle as those early spiritual valentines (as I like to call them) I received when I was younger.

While Carl & I lived in St. Louis, I decided to become a lector after a friend commented that my voice had a “reader's quality” (whatever that means!) to it. I did & enjoyed it very much. It wasn't until I came back to St. Elizabeth and took lector training that I realized it was much more than just reading clearly. I realized the tips that I received in training, such as meditating on the weekly Scriptures and learning the back stories on the readings:

- Deepened my understanding
- Brought me closer to Christ
- Helped me convey God's word more clearly to those in the pews

Thus I am able to return some of those valentines that I've received.

Over the past ten years, I've had many opportunities to give and received these spiritual valentines, and I thank you all for that. I'm proud to be part of a community where generations of families keep coming back to their spiritual home of St. Elizabeth to raise their own families; where generosity & community are deep-rooted traditions; where everyone can have a place to share and rejoice in God's grace.

Being a Steward in Christ isn't about opening your checkbook and saying, "Oh here we go again, they want more money." It isn't about volunteering for something because you feel that old Catholic guilt. You don't have to be the smartest or the loudest or an expert in a certain field to be a steward. You can be a QUIET, THOUGHTFUL INTROVERT, MAYBE EVEN A LITTLE SHY, and have something to share!

We are kicking off our new Stewardship Campaign this weekend and stewardship packets will be available for you to pick up in Seton Hall right after Mass (or in back after the 7:30 am Mass).

I encourage you all to prayerfully consider & acknowledge the gifts you've received from God and join with your fellow parishioners as we offer them together in a community celebration during Mass the weekend of March

19-20. Because everyone needs a little valentine sometimes. Thank you & God  
Bless.