



# THE WINCHESTER STAR

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## St. Mary's bucks trend with innovative stewardship program

The need for Catholic parishes to reach out to parishioners and help them to reaffirm the tenets of their faith and their calling within the parish is, now more than ever, strongly felt across parishes in the nation.

St. Mary's parish in Winchester has lost no time in responding to the need to strengthen relationships among parishioners and establish trust in leadership. Over the past several months, Father Messina, Pastor of St. Mary's, along with the stewardship commission, has put into place several programs and activities to identify, retain and build the sense of community among parishioners.

St. Mary's is one of 141 parishes in the Boston Archdiocese that has initiated a stewardship program. The goal of the program is to connect with each parishioner and invite him or her to participate in their parishes and reinforce their faith. The success of St. Mary's stewardship program is exemplary. Over the past year, the parish has seen a strong increase in parishioner involvement across all its ministries and committees, as well as recorded an 18 percent increase in the end of year Grand Annual appeal as compared to last year. This is an all time high in the history of St. Mary's. And at a time when parishioners across churches in the nation have questioned the institution of their faith, St.

Mary's continues to see a rebound in attendance at Sunday Mass.

What sets St. Mary's apart is the new and innovative approaches that they've taken to demonstrate how each parishioner can fulfill his or her calling. With more involvement from members of the stewardship commission, Father Messina has implemented straightforward but very specific steps to foster a deeper connection with parishioners. These strategies include frequent and consistent communication with parishioners. An informal but informative bimonthly newsletter from Father Messina that discusses details of accomplishments and priorities embodies the spirit of openness and at the same time drives the mission of spirituality within the community.

Proactive communication helps enlist parishioners who might otherwise feel out of the loop. The stewardship commission also takes the time to encourage more open sharing of the fiscal details with the community, facilitating accountability and trust in the parish leadership. Despite several other pastoral duties, Fr. Messina stresses the importance of taking the time to connect with parishioners on a personal level to express his gratitude and appreciation of the time, talent and treasure that each one gives to the community.

In Father Messina's words, "We are all invited to live as one family in Christ and we have to do everything in our power to break down any barriers to foster the atmosphere of oneness at St. Mary's." Fr. Messina, recognizes the need to rid old patterns of behavior and employ new and more effective methods to enlist the help of all, including external community-building resources.

On Feb. 1, St. Mary's hosted best selling author, Paul Wilkes, for a day of interactive discussions on how to rekindle the spirit of involvement among parishioners as captured in his new book "Excellent Catholic Parishes: The Guide to Best Places and Practices." Author of sixteen books, Wilkes is a recognized authority on discerning the strengths and weaknesses of parishes and finding new way towards true discipleship. Wilkes highlights the importance of encouraging lay leadership as a resource of fresh ideas and new skills. The event was sponsored by Parish Growth Partners, an organization also based in Winchester and founded to help parishes implement best-practices for realizing the time, talent and treasure of their valued parishioners and reaching the full potential as a parish community.

For further information on the stewardship program at St. Mary's please call Father Richard Messina at 781-729-0055.