By Pat Haggerty

Over the weekend our parish held a Stewardship Fair. Many parishes do that, and no doubt you are familiar with the process. Tables or booths are set up representing each ministry in the church. Representatives of these ministries are present to discuss their ministry and, hopefully, recruit new ministers for the cause.

The process made me ponder and was cause for considerable reflection. What would we do without these generous souls? How wonderful is it that they devote their time and talent for such Christ-like purposes! How do we get others to open their hearts to the beauty of service?

Service has always been a big part of who I am. I remember in eighth grade I started volunteering in a nursing home in our town. I would go to Mount Carmel (the nursing home) every Saturday and spend the day with the residents. I was dressed in my blue and white pin-striped uniform---always neatly pressed and crisp. I would take the bus in the morning and return at the end of the day feeling that I had received much more than I had given.

Years later, as a middle school teacher, I tried to teach my students the value of service through service learning. This is a teaching methodology that connects aspects of a teacher's curriculum to the needs of the community. It is a fairly common practice throughout the nation, and it enriches both students and the communities they live in.

Recently the Northeast suffered terrible devastation as a result of Hurricane Sandy. Once again, stewards stepped forward to assist those in need. Some have provided hands-on assistance, some have offered financial help, and many have sent up their thoughts and prayers for those undergoing hardship and loss. There are stewards of all kinds who rise to the occasion!

Our veterans are stewards of a different kind who have given so much in service to our country. There are those who have served in the past and those who continue to do so today---many who have put themselves in harms' way to protect our rights and our privileges. We owe them such a debt of gratitude.

Especially at this time of year, let us give thanks for all of those who serve in different capacities---whether it is in our churches, in our communities, for our nation. We need these people to show us how to live the gospel message; to show us how to be Christ's own; to show us how to open our hearts. These people are living examples of the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." (Mt.5:8-9)