



CALLED BY CHRIST GIFTED BY THE SPIRIT

To Share Christ in and through the Church

STEWARDSHIP

Caring for the Household of Faith

“What identifies a steward? Safeguarding material and human resources and using them responsibly are one answer; so is generous giving of time, talent, and treasure. But being a Christian steward involves more. As Christian stewards, we receive God’s gifts gratefully, cultivate them responsibly, share them lovingly in justice with others, and return them with increase to the Lord” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response*, Tenth Anniversary Edition, 2002, page 42).

PART FOUR: STEWARDS OF THE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

We now apply what we have learned about our call to stewardship to our participation in the mission and ministries of the Church. We seek to be convinced that we are called by God to be energetic stewards of the Church, caring lovingly and responsibly for the household of faith.

SUMMARY OF THE UNITED STATES BISHOPS’ PASTORAL LETTER, *STEWARDSHIP: A DISCIPLE’S RESPONSE*

Unless otherwise indicated, quotations are from the Bishops’ Pastoral Letter, Tenth Anniversary Edition.

1. We are especially called to exercise our stewardship in the Church.

The teaching of Jesus about stewardship applies most directly to our membership in the Church. It is in the Church, and through the Church, that the gifts and talents of all can be cherished and fostered. It is in the Church, and through the Church, that each person can find a way to make a contribution toward building up the Body of Christ.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the ideal of tithing was presented as a standard for the quality and quantity of one’s giving (cf. Deuteronomy 14:22 and Leviticus 27:30). Not only was a faithful believer required to give 10 percent of one’s gain, but indeed the first fruits of that yield, the first 10 percent.

The Catholic tradition of stewardship has always emphasized the voluntary nature of giving. The goal is not so much the amount as it is the personal participation in and the support of the Church’s mission of proclaiming, teaching, serving, and sanctifying. There are no “owners” of the Church, yet we have been entrusted, under the guidance of our shepherds, with giving a steward’s care to the mission of the Church. There have always been different manifestations and levels of participation, but the fundamental obligation is in the “... *placing of our gifts, our resources, and ourselves at God’s service in and through the Church*” (page 31). Christ is our model and motivation. Our giving is of necessity sacrificial. We look to Christ, Who not only emptied Himself, but was enriched by the giving, and indeed was the cheerful giver, even in the midst of great trial and difficulty. Like Christ, our gift must be generous, from the heart, and with concern for the extension of the Church’s mission, near and far.

2. Our stewardship expands into evangelization.

“Stewardship of the Church leads people to share in the work of evangelization ...” (page 32). The support of the Church comes from our own free initiative, from our convictions that the work of Christ must continue through the work of our hands. The expression of our stewardship should be most obvious in the way we live, at home, in our lifestyle, within our household. We are stewards in the everyday matters of the home, the domestic Church. Our ordinary decisions about the way we live and manage our responsibilities have the best potential to lead others to Christ through the school of neighborly example.

We know that we are called to stewardship in our parish. We know that parish stewardship has been described in the traditional triad of time, talent, and treasure. But such must be seen through the lens and jewel of evangelization. We seek not just to maintain our parishes, but to express, through our parishes, our share in the work of Christ. This work is never finished. The needs of the Church will always cry out for our attention. We need to manage our parishes in an open, consultative, collegial, and accountable style. We must accept our share of the responsibility, according to our gifts and abilities, and contribute freely and generously.

We know that the Church does not stop at the parish. We are constantly reminded that our stewardship and our concern extend to the Archdiocesan Church. The Catholic Services Appeal gives us the opportunity to be partners in the ministries that no single parish can provide. Endowment campaigns help us to stabilize educational and charitable efforts for years to come. We also find opportunities throughout the year to be linked to the evangelizing mission of the Church Universal, and even to respond to immediate and emergency needs. We constantly connect ourselves with the efforts of Church people everywhere to further the Gospel. *“As stewards of the mysteries of God ... people desire to tell others about them and about the light they shed on human life, to share the gifts and graces they have received from God, especially knowledge of Jesus Christ”* (page 33).

3. Our evangelizing stewardship matures into solidarity.

Our stewardship has the potential to shrink the disparities that exist between people. Through our giving in the selfless pattern of Jesus, we are empowered *“... to grasp and respond to the practical requirements of discipleship and stewardship in the light of the complex realities of today’s national and international socioeconomic life”* (page 34). Our giving, even on the most local level, contributes to social justice and the betterment of the world. Our outreach does make a difference. *“Our individual lives as disciples and stewards must be seen in relation to God’s larger purposes”* (page 34).

4. The fullest expression of stewardship is our Eucharistic sharing.

“The Eucharist is the great sign and agent of this expansive communion of charity” (page 34). In the Eucharist, we unite ourselves with the continuous offering of Christ’s love. At the sacred meal, we offer our own lives and personal vocations. We make our individual contribution, which we see as a thanksgiving sacrifice for gifts received. The Eucharist leads us to a life of grateful stewardship. We give and do not count the costs, for with Christ, we begin to taste, even here on earth, the fruits of a banquet that will never end.

These are more than just inspiring ideas. As stewards of the Church, and especially in the weekly Eucharistic celebration, we give of ourselves to continue the work of Christ. Our aim is the unity of all people around one banquet table of love. Since Christ is the source and summit of our efforts, even though we may tire, we find in the Eucharist a renewal of our strength to continue to give, and to receive in the midst of giving. Here is no magic formula for increasing revenue for the work of the Church; instead, we encounter the flesh and blood example given us by Jesus that is renewed in the living memory and tradition of conscientious stewards of the Church.

“Each mature Christian is invited to stewardship ... The maturing of our vocation and conscience makes us more reliable and trustworthy. Our discipleship is seasoned until we are able to contribute ... to the life of our community. As co-stewards with other mature Christians, we share the responsibility of our generation of believers to hand on the pearl of faith to the future.” James and Evelyn Whitehead

SOME LEADING QUESTIONS

1. How might the members of our parish communities do an examination of conscience about their Church support? What are some of the traditional and creative ways to give the best portion, the first fruits, of our personal presence, abilities, and resources?
2. Do you think that it is significant that the weekend collection follows the Liturgy of the Word and the homily, and precedes the Liturgy of the Eucharist? What are some practical ways for improving the attitude and effectiveness of stewardship in your parish?
3. How have you grown in your appreciation of stewardship as a way to describe the lifestyle of the Catholic Christian in today's world? How might you foster the links between stewardship, evangelization, solidarity, and the Eucharist in your personal and parochial life?
4. What are some of the hesitations and resistances that you find within yourself, or in the lives of people you know, to this approach to stewardship? How might you be able to be a better evangelizer about this spiritually-based approach to the lifestyle of stewardship?

PAINTING A BIBLICAL PORTRAIT OF THE STEWARD

“God loves the cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 8:9). Despite the challenges and difficulties, and even the dilemmas of being a steward, we believe that our service will lead us, and many others, to the joy and happiness that God gives. Even in the face of overwhelming problems, the steward takes comfort in the conviction that *“... all things work together for good for those who love God ...”* (Romans 8:28). As eager as the disciple who has embraced the way of stewardship is to respond to the needs of the Church and society, so equally is he or she accepting of the affirmation of God directed at the faithful servant: *“Come, you who are blessed ... inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”* (Matthew 25:34).

“Here I am, the servant of the Lord, let it be done unto me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). The New Testament, while it encourages all disciples to become responsible stewards, also graces us with a portrait of Mary, the first disciple, the model evangelizer, and an exemplar of stewardship. All the essentials of a steward's response are found and embodied in her. Mary was clearly called and gifted by God from her mother's womb. Her generous, creative, and prudent response to God's invitation has been sung throughout the centuries. She accepted the call to be a servant, and ministered as parent to Jesus from womb to tomb and beyond. She has been Mother of the Church from the Pentecost Vigil until now, and her stewardship was articulated so beautifully in the final chapter of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (see Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 52-69).

DEVELOPING MODELS FOR HOUSEHOLD AND PARISH STEWARDSHIP

In your household: Stewardship decisions are made in the privacy of our homes and our hearts. Reflect on the process that you use to determine the amount of your own contribution to weekly parish support, special collections, and campaigns for parish improvement and Archdiocesan needs. Contemplate ways that we can help one another to better arrive at our stewardship decisions.

In your parish: Despite being the largest religious group in the nation, Catholics lag behind other denominations in Church support. As a national average, most parishioners contribute one percent of their income to their Church. The needs in the Church are great; as responsible stewards of the Church, suggest ways to foster and inspire a level of giving that will help the Catholic communion be more responsible in attending to those many needs.

REFLECTIONS ON STEWARDSHIP

What we are trying to do is create the future. We are living in the present and sometimes we do not have the capacity to respond to the problems of today. But as we look to tomorrow, we can create tomorrow. We can create that future and be an integral part of the future that we create for our Church, our community, and our society. We should be full of optimism for tomorrow, because the work we do is God's work. We should trust in the providence of God. We're all here for just a little time, and one day we are going to be called to God's kingdom. God has His hand over us, watching over us, filled with prayer, filled with faith. Christian stewards are confident that God will see us through.

FINAL BLESSING PRAYER

Ever-living God,
You gather us together, as responsible stewards,
to carry the Gospel of Christ to all people.
Bless all the members of our parish communion.
Let Your Spirit enlighten our minds
and guide all our actions,
that we may be renewed in faith,
united in love,
and bring to fulfillment the work of Your Church
to Your greater honor and glory.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Book of Blessings, § 1902.



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