

Living the Principle of Stewardship

Families of Parishes are communities of grateful disciples. Recognizing God's gifts, they use their talents, skills, and resources to build up the Church and live as Christ's Body in the world.



“Stewardship is an expression of discipleship, with the power to change how we understand and live out our lives.”¹¹This simple yet compelling statement from Stewardship: A Disciple's Response captures the impact of understanding ourselves as stewards. Those who have been touched by this spirituality of stewardship recognize that everything we are, all that we have, and all that we will ever be is pure gift from God. Through that recognition, we grow in gratitude for our many blessings: our lives, faith, relationships, the capacity to love and show mercy, our talents, the minutes, days and weeks of our lives, our financial and material resources. With this deep and abiding gratitude, we learn to say “thank you” to God by sharing our lives and resources, living as people of service and mission, reaching out with Christ's love in our lives at home, in our town or city, our Family of Parishes and the world. We find ourselves consuming less, prioritizing our time and activity based in who we are as God's blessed people, and we share more with others.

What a blessing such life is! As our bishops note, this way of life is transformative. It helps us to find meaning and purpose in life; we move beyond selfish impulses toward the needs of others; we find abundance everywhere and share the richness of Christ's life and love as grateful disciples. This spiritual way of life transforms the lives of individuals and the life of our faith community.

“Genesis, telling the story of creation, says God looked upon what had been made and found it good; and seeing the world's goodness, God entrusted it to human beings... Now, as then and always, it is a central part of the human vocation that we be good stewards of what we have received — this garden, this divine human workshop, this world and all that is in it — setting minds and hearts and hands to the task of creating and redeeming in cooperation with our God, Creator and Lord of all.” (SDR, 41)

Grateful: All We Are and Have Are God's

Our beginning point in embracing stewardship is really quite simple and yet profound. We are created in God's image and likeness. Let that sink in for a moment. While we have been taught this fundamental truth, few really let this understanding direct the way in which they live. We are created in God's image. This primary recognition of who we are immediately calls for gratitude, and for response. All we are is a blessing, given to us by God in trust. Our very lives are a gift, breath upon precious breath.

More than that, being created in God's image bears with it responsibility. As Scripture scholar Art Zannoni notes, Sacred Scripture helps us to

understand this: while the early peoples of the world carved idols and believed that the spirit of the god

whom they carved resided within the idol, the people who believe in the One God were told not to create idols, because we are to be the living image of God in the world. It is as though the Biblical narratives help us to see that “we are called to be the transparency through whom God is seen,” Zannoni explains.^[2]

We are called to be the transparency through whom God is seen. We know this through the teaching and example of Jesus Christ. If each of us woke up every morning with the recognition that the day is a gift, through which we may make God’s love seen and felt by those around us, what a different world this would be! How our lives might be changed if we reflected on this call to make God known each evening as we come to the end of the day. Our “examination of conscience” might be the response to a simple question: In what way did I, or did I not, make God’s love seen and felt today? Let us take this further by thinking about the idols that fill our minds and hearts, diverting our energy, attention, and devotion away from God and God’s ways. The U.S. Bishops, in their pastoral letter on stewardship, call our attention to some of the contemporary idols, the “destructive ‘isms’, that are a part of our secular culture. (SDR, Introduction) Accepting the call to be disciples and stewards provides a means for putting God at the center of our lives and shaping our actions and decisions accordingly. In this way, a spirituality of stewardship provides a practical way to connect faith with our daily lives. When we grow as stewards, we learn to recognize that we have a need to give — we are created in the image of God who is the giver of all good things.

“An oikonomos or steward is one to whom the owner of a household turns over the responsibility for caring for the property, managing affairs, making resources yield as much as possible and sharing resources with others. The position involves trust and accountability.” (SDR, 20)

To be a good steward of our lives and possessions means much more than simply “taking care” of them. The steward is one who not only cares for the property or possessions of another; the steward nurtures the other’s possessions and brings them to yield, with increase.

In many ways, growing as a steward is about recognizing the grace of God. The good steward recognizes that all we are, have and will be truly is God’s. We are called to steward it all well, as grateful disciples, leading us to be generous, as a reflection of the generosity of God.

Grateful Disciples: Jesus as the Supreme Teacher

Christian stewards are not only people who recognize God as the giver of all good gifts. They are also people who look to Jesus as their Lord, Savior, and Teacher. “Jesus is the supreme teacher of Christian stewardship as he is of every other aspect of Christian life; and in Jesus’ teaching and life, self-emptying is fundamental.” (SDR, 19)

As we grow in this awareness that all is gift, and we begin to consider how we are called to share our gifts, it can be easy to delude ourselves into thinking we are just fine. “I give a little of my money to my Family of Parishes every Sunday,” we might think. Or, “I volunteer at my children’s school sometimes; surely that is enough,” we may say to a friend. Yet, when we consider the life and example of Jesus, we recognize we are called to more. More gratitude, and more giving. In fact, through Jesus we see the true image of the living God and realize that God is love, lavishly given, beyond

“Once one chooses to become a disciple of Jesus Christ, stewardship is not an option.” (Bishop John J. McRaith, in SDR preface)

understanding. Fr. Michael Himes says this very powerfully: “And who, finally, are you? You are the image and likeness of God. If God is pure self-gift, then self-gift is the image in which we are made, the blueprint on which we are built. Therefore, to give ourselves away is what we most deeply desire.”^[3]

Through baptism, we become members of the Body of Christ. We are called to follow Jesus with our lives, into a life of discipleship, and to do so in community. A disciple is a student, one who learns the ways of a master teacher. Jesus is our Master Teacher. When we grow in relationship with Jesus, we are called to act as members of his body in our day-to-day lives and in the community of believers, the Church. Jesus shows us that God is One who gives completely for the sake of the other. Grateful disciples witness to Christ’s life and self-giving love through the stewardship of our many blessings.

Our primary “text” for our reflections on stewardship are taken from the U.S. Bishops’ pastoral letter, *Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response (SDR)*. In it we hear this:

“Mature disciples make a conscious, firm decision carried out in action to be followers of Jesus Christ no matter the cost to themselves. Beginning in conversion, change of mind and heart, this commitment is expressed not in a single action, nor even in a number of actions over a period of time, but in an entire way of life. It means committing one’s very self to the Lord.”

(SDR, Introduction)

Good Stewards Pray

Living and growing as stewards is a lifetime of conversion. In many ways, the “change of mind and heart” (SDR, 1) that is essential for a life of stewardship goes against the grain of human nature and our contemporary secular culture, which is often self-centered, self-reliant, and selfish. To become a good steward is to place our lives in the hands of God, to recognize God’s grace in the midst of daily life, and to respond by sharing our lives, faith and resources with others. Prayer is necessary for this conversion — in fact, it is the lifeline through which we discern the ways in which we are called to steward our many gifts.

When we bring our hearts to God in prayer, we risk being changed for the better, perhaps in ways of which we would never conceive on our own. This openness to transformation requires humility and trust, which we learn from Jesus whose own life of prayer exemplified these qualities: “Jesus’ prayer before the events of salvation that the Father has asked

“Following Jesus is the work of a lifetime. At every step forward, one is challenged to go further in accepting and loving God’s will. Being a disciple is not just something else to do, alongside many other things suitable for Christians; it is a total way of life and requires continuing conversion.” (SDR, 15)

him to fulfill is a humble and trusting commitment of his human will to the loving will of the Father.” (CCC, 2600)

A Steward’s Prayerful Reflection

How might you grow as a good and faithful steward? Use these questions in reflection and commitment:

- **Gratitude:** For what are you grateful today? Offer a prayer of praise and thanksgiving for the many blessings you have been given.
- **Gifts:** What gifts (faith, talents, friendships, time, resources, blessings of circumstances) do you perceive in your life at this time? Thank God for these gifts.
- **Response:** Ask the Lord, “What should I do with all I have been given?” How will you respond by giving of yourself or your resources? Who or what will benefit from your service, sharing, caring, and sacrifice of time, talent or treasure? Make a prayerful commitment to share yourself and your resources as a reflection of your commitment to follow Christ as a grateful disciple.
- **Trust:** In what ways are you called to trust in God in order to respond faithfully? Your sharing may include giving of your time, talents, or faith in ways that feel uncomfortable; you may be tempted to hold on to your money, or your time and need to trust that God will be with you as you share as a grateful disciple. Pray to hold firm to your commitment, and recognize God’s presence with you as you carry it out.
- **Gratitude:** The reflection turns full-circle, as you reflect on the service, caring or sharing you have offered. In what ways have you recognized the grace of God as you have carried out that which you committed yourself?

Stewardship in Our Families of Parishes

Why is stewardship one of the guiding principles of Beacons of Light? When we commit ourselves to living as disciples and growing as good stewards, our lives change. We will listen to the Lord’s call, discern our vocation, and respond generously. Our Family of Parishes will come to life in new and deeper ways as we embrace stewardship as individuals and within our faith community. Now is the perfect time to embrace stewardship as a guiding principle, not only in our Family of Parishes, but in our lives as followers of Jesus Christ!

^[1] Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response, Introduction (Hereafter, quotes from this pastoral letter will be noted in the text as SDR)

^[2] Zannoni, Art, The Bible Speaks on Stewardship, ThePastoralCenter.com

^[3] Himes, Michael, Doing the Truth in Love, 1995, New York, Paulist Press, 56