

# Stewardship: A Way of Life



## A Parish Stewardship Primer

Archdiocese of Omaha

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Who is a Christian steward? One, who receives God's gifts gratefully, cherishes and tends them in a responsible and accountable manner, shares them in justice and love with all, and returns them with increase to the Lord. The definition, rooted in biblical and Church tradition, corresponds with God's decision to entrust to humanity the universe He has created (Gn 1:26-31) and with Jesus Christ's famous parable of the talents (Mt 25: 14-36).

For disciples of Christ – everyone who responds to Jesus' invitation, "Come, follow me" – Christian stewardship is an obligation, not an option.

Correctly and fully understood, Christian stewardship holds every individual accountable to God and therefore applies to everything – all personal talents, abilities, and wealth; the local, national, and worldwide environments; all human and natural resources wherever they are; the economic order; and government affairs. This stewardship does not tolerate indifference to anything important in God's world.

### **Why is the "stewardship lifestyle" so important to the Christian disciple?**

Every archdiocese, diocese, parish and disciple should make education and formation for stewardship a major priority. This is vitally important today because:

- it helps disciples, families, and communities better understand what it means to follow Jesus in an affluent, consumer culture, and
- it establishes an appropriate, scriptural basis for responding to the Church's growing need for human, physical, and financial resources.

### **A lifelong process**

Stewardship involves a lifelong process of study, reflection, prayer, and action. To make stewardship a way of life requires a change of heart and a new understanding of what it means to follow Jesus without counting the cost.

This conversion of mind and heart will not happen overnight, but, as always, the Holy Spirit is at work in the Church today. Those parishes that embrace the theology and practice of stewardship are beginning to see a change of attitude on the part of clergy, religious, and lay people to be more fully developed disciples.

### **A solid foundation**

A comprehensive approach to stewardship education and formation is essential if parish communities truly wish to make stewardship a way of life for disciples, families, and communities.

Increased offertory and fund-raising programs that bypass stewardship education and formation must be more than a “jump start” to financial giving. Such programs could separate church funding from its vital connection to Christian discipleship. The foundation of everything that the Church takes on should be rooted in the mission Christ has placed before His disciples.

It was St. Augustine who wrote, “Gratitude is the first of the virtues, as we acknowledge that everything we have is an unlimited gift from a loving God, who only asks that we use it well for His honor and glory.”

It was St. Therese of Liseux, the Little Flower of Jesus, who observed, “I only want my life to be one act of gratitude to God.”

Stewardship has to be one of our main pastoral priorities in the years ahead. It is a way of life, not just a good idea. The wonderful thoughts and ideas in this new Parish Stewardship Primer will only strengthen this.

I am gratefully yours in the Lord,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elden Francis Curtiss". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the left of the typed name below it.

Most Reverend Elden Francis Curtiss  
Archbishop of Omaha

# Theology of Stewardship

This Parish Stewardship Primer is not intended to provide a detailed treatment of the theology of stewardship. It is important, however, that pastors and parishioners who become involved in parish stewardship programs have available to them the essential materials necessary to teach stewardship at the parish level.

The essential reference to stewardship in the Catholic Church in America is the U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Stewardship, "Stewardship: A Disciples Response," published in 1992.

A summary of this pastoral letter is reprinted below.

## **Official Summary of the U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter, "Stewardship: A Disciples Response."**

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 means more. As Christian stewards, we receive God's gifts gratefully, cultivate them responsibly, share them lovingly in justice with others, and return them with increases to the Lord.

### **Disciples as Stewards**

Let us begin with being a disciple – a follower of our Lord Jesus Christ. As members of the church, Jesus calls us to be disciples. This has astonishing implications:

- Mature disciples make a conscious decision to follow Jesus, no matter what the cost.
- Christian disciples experience conversion – life-shaping changes of mind and heart – and commit their very selves to the Lord.
- Christian stewards respond in a particular way to the call to be a disciple. Stewardship has the power to shape and mold our understanding of our lives and the way in which we live.
- Jesus' disciples and Christian stewards recognize God as the origin of life, giver of freedom, and the source of all things. We are grateful for the gifts we have received and are eager to use them to show our love for God and for one another. We look to the life and teaching of Jesus for guidance in living as Christian stewards.

### **Stewards of Creation**

The Bible contains a profound message about the stewardship of material creation: God created the world, but entrusts it to human beings. Caring for and cultivating the world involves the following:

- joyful appreciation for the God-given beauty and wonder of nature;
- protection and preservation of the environment, which would be the stewardship of ecological concern;

- respect for human life – shielding life from threat and assault, doing everything that can be done to enhance this gift and make life flourish; and
- development of this world through noble human effort – physical labor, the trades and professions, the arts and sciences. We call such effort, work.

## **Stewards of Vocation**

Jesus calls us, as His disciples, to a new way of life – the Christian way of life – of which stewardship is part. But Jesus does not call us nameless people in a faceless crowd. He calls us individually, by name. Each one of us – clergy, religious, lay person; married, single, adult, child – has a personal vocation. God intends each one of us to play a unique role in carrying out the divine plan.

The challenge, then, is to understand our role – our vocation – and to tend generously to this call from God. Christian vocation entails the practice of stewardship. In addition, Christ calls each of us to be stewards of our personal vocations, which we receive from God.

## **Stewards of the Church**

Stewards of God's gifts are not passive beneficiaries. We cooperate with God in our own redemption and in the redemption of others. We are also obliged to be stewards of the Church – collaborators and cooperators in continuing the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, which is the Church's essential mission. This mission – proclaiming and teaching, serving and sanctifying – is our task. It is the personal responsibility of each one of us as stewards of the Church. All members of the Church have their own role to play in carrying out its mission:

- parents, who nurture their children in the light of faith;
- parishioners, who work in practical ways to make their parishes true communities of faith and vibrant sources of service to the larger community;
- all Catholics, who give generous support – time, money, prayers, and personal service according to their circumstances – to parish and diocesan programs and to the universal Church.

## **Obstacles to Stewardship**

People who want to live as Christian disciples and Christian stewards face serious obstacles. In the United States and other nations, a dominant secular culture often contradicts religious convictions about the meaning of life. This culture frequently encourages us to focus on ourselves and our pleasures. At times, we can find it far too easy to ignore spiritual realities and to deny religion a role in shaping human and social values.

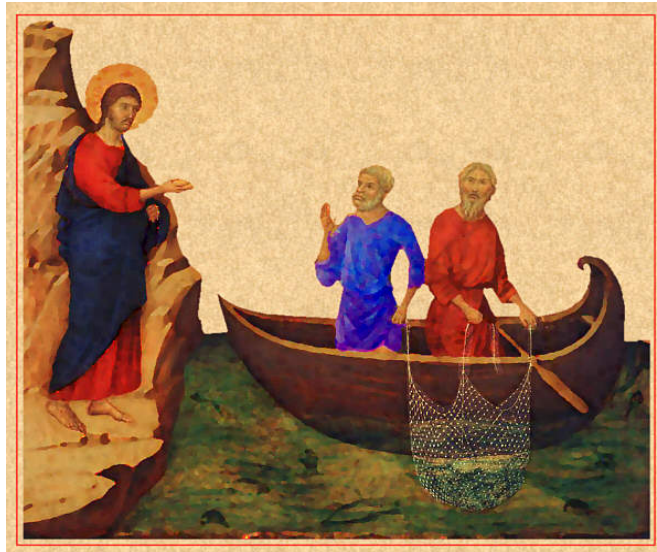
As Catholics who have entered into the mainstream of American society and experienced its advantages, many of us also have been adversely influenced by this secular culture. We know what it is to struggle against selfishness and greed, and we realize that it is harder for many today to accept the challenge of being a

Christian steward. It is essential, therefore, that we make a special effort to understand the true meaning of stewardship and live accordingly.

## **A Steward's Way**

The life of a Christian steward models the life of Jesus. It is challenging and even difficult, in many respects, yet intense joy comes to those who take the risk to live as Christian stewards. Men and women who seek to live as stewards learn that "all things work for good for those who love God" (Rom 8:28). After Jesus, we look to Mary as an ideal steward. As the Mother of Christ, she lived her ministry in a spirit of fidelity and service, she responded generously to the call. We must ask ourselves: Do we also wish to be disciples of Jesus Christ and Christian stewards of our world and our Church?

Central to our human and Christian vocations, as well as to the unique vocation each one of us receives from God, is that we be good stewards of the gifts we possess. God gives us this divine-human workshop, this world and Church of ours. The Spirit shows us the way. Stewardship is a part of the journey.



# Parish Stewardship

Adopting a parish-wide stewardship mentality is a long-term *process*. This is what makes it different from short-term fundraising initiatives. Fundraisers are simply about money; stewardship is about recognizing God's presence in our life and following Jesus. It is a spirituality; a way of life.

The cultivation of good stewardship begins at the parish. This is where people come together to worship and give praise; it is where people share their daily fears and concerns; it is where the Word is preached; and it is where the resurrected Jesus comes to live and dwell among us in the Eucharist.

Stewardship is so much more than money. It is a process of conversion that takes years, not months. It requires year-round education of both the adults and the youth of the parish.

The call to the personal conversion that we have received from Christ is heard in and through the Church – in prayer and the sacraments, in worship and faith formation, in ministry and community life. Our parish is not a place to fulfill our Sunday “obligation.” It is an ongoing source of spiritual strength and a center for learning, teaching, and sharing our faith. Above all, our parish should be a community of faith where what is experienced in the Eucharist transfigures our daily lives.

## Stewardship of Time

*“...time is in the Father's hands; it is in the present that we encounter Him, not yesterday nor tomorrow, but today.” The Catechism of the Catholic Church*

Our time on this earth is one of the most precious gifts God has given us. We don't know how many days each of us will be given to live our earthly lives so we must choose to use our time wisely each day. We cannot save time for the future nor can we relive a day in the past. We are good stewards of the gift of time when we make right priorities in our busy lives, remembering that “time is love.”

Good stewards put spending time with God in prayer and worship on their list of priorities, so God doesn't just get “leftover” time.

Good stewards also make time for family and friends, nurturing relationships and caring for each other as they follow the commandment: “Love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:12)

Making a conscious decision to more wisely steward the time God has bestowed on you requires prayerfully deciding what changes you will make in your life. At the very least, parishioners should make the most of their observance of the Lord's day. He understands, too, that the application of his time need not be confined to use in strict liturgical formality but should be applied to a liturgy of Christian living throughout the day.

## Stewardship of Talent

*"There are different gifts but the same Spirit, there are different ministries but the same Lord, there are different works but the same God who accomplished all of them in everyone." (1 Cor 12:4-5)*

A "talent" is not necessarily something at which we are very skilled. We too often think being talented means extraordinary. Being a good steward of our talents means using whatever God gave us to the best of our ability to build up His Kingdom.

We needn't feel that we don't have enough talents to make a difference. God will make whatever He gave us "enough" to fulfill His plan if we generously share the gifts we do have with others.

God made each of us in His own image and likeness, and yet unique in all the world. We each have a special combination of aptitudes and abilities, interests and passions, skills and experiences that make us who we are and equip us for what God needs us to do.

As Christians we recognize that our gifts of talents are meant to be cultivated and shared with others, beginning with our family and friends, with our parish community and with the world.

Our parish communities invite us to develop and share with others the distinctive gifts and talents we have received from God. If you are already involved in a parish ministry, this may be the time to try a new ministry – to use some of your other gifts and give others the opportunity to develop theirs.

## Stewardship of Treasure

*"For everything is from You and we only give You what we have received from You."*  
(1 Chron. 29:14)

As good stewards we use the talents, contacts, inheritance, education and opportunities God gave us to build up some measure of wealth. With that comes the responsibility to share our abundance with those who have less and respond to God's generosity with a gift that is both planned and proportionate.

Christian stewards reflect gratefully on their unique gifts, and prayerfully decide how to use them in a way pleasing to God. They make a deliberate plan for sharing their gifts with others, putting God first. "Honor the Lord with the first fruits of all you produce." (Proverbs 11:24). This stewardship plan must be renewed each year to reflect changing life circumstances. If we don't make a deliberate plan to return the "first fruits" we receive from God back to Him, after taking care of our needs and selfish "wants," we will only have what is "leftover" for God. This is why making an annual plan is important to the financial giving aspect of our discipleship. Digging into your pocket during the Offertory to see what's left is not planned giving.

Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Mat. 6:21). That is why nearly two dozen of the Lord's parables deal with money and possessions. When it comes to spirituality (things of the heart), money matters. How we use it,

what we think of it, whether we are willing to share it – all make a difference in the way we live our lives.

Catholics are called to give witness to the stewardship of treasure in and through their local parish communities. This means contributing to the support of the parish – and its many ministries. But stewardship of treasure means much more than church support. It means accepting money – and all the material things we possess – as gifts to be cherished and shared, not for their own sake but for the good of others, especially our families, our communities and those whose needs are greater than our own. Catholics are invited to make gifts to the parish that are planned, proportionate, and sacrificial – not simply because “our parish needs the money,” but because each of us has a need to give, as God has given generously to us.



# **Roles and Responsibilities of Parish Leadership**

## **The Pastor**

The pastor is the key to a successful stewardship program. When a pastor is dedicated to, and involved in, the stewardship process, the parish experiences the full benefit of stewardship with significant annual commitments and re-commitments of time, talent and treasure by parishioners.

The pastor must be enthusiastic and involved in planning and implementation. It is vital that the pastor remind the parish community through homilies and letters that stewardship makes the parish vibrant and alive. Individuals' lives will be changed for the better and the parish and the archdiocese will grow spiritually.

How parishioners respond to the stewardship education offered in the parish and what will be asked of them as baptized Catholics may in large part be due to the importance the pastor places on this way of life. Public support of all phases of stewardship education is necessary.

## **The Stewardship Committee**

It is recommended that the parish form a committee whose primary responsibility is to promote parish Stewardship awareness. When recruiting parishioners to serve on a stewardship committee, it is important to look for people who are spiritually motivated.

Initially how parishioners respond to stewardship is a personal matter. Eventually action must be taken in response to hearing God's call to stewardship. This is where the Stewardship Committee comes in. Its leaders can ensure that stewardship as a Lifestyle is repeatedly emphasized so as to nurture understanding and belief. In short the work of the Stewardship Committee is to provide education about God's word regarding the truth of stewardship; assessing the needs of the parish and directing the gifts of time and talent that God has placed within the community; encouraging and supporting a steward's lifestyle.

A person whose primary concern is raising more money for the church or getting more volunteers for the church is not necessarily an appropriate candidate for the Stewardship Committee. Look for people who are "Eucharistic," who have a deep relationship with Jesus, who are grateful for that relationship and who act on that gratitude.

## Selecting a Stewardship Committee

Members of the Stewardship Committee should be carefully chosen and selected by the pastor. They should also represent a large cross-section of the community. They should possess the following characteristics:

- they should be Eucharistic people
- they should embrace a life of Beatitudes
- they should have enthusiasm and energy
- they should have practical skills in dealing with people
- their lifestyle should reflect one of stewardship

Most importantly if stewardship flows from their love of Jesus and their relationship with Him, they will be less likely, when in a leadership position, to attempt to motivate parishioners through shame or guilt.

*The key to motivation is belief*

## Role of the Stewardship Committee

The committee should include the pastor and between 4 to 8 members of the community depending on the size of the parish. Together they will provide leadership and

- meet regularly to educate themselves on the meaning of stewardship;
- create a vision for the " perfect parish" in consultation with the community;
- establish goals to achieve that vision;
- communicate the progress and activities to the parish community;
- educate the parish community about stewardship;
- keep the ball rolling through annually renewing and celebrating stewardship, and continued education;
- understand and promote the biblical concept of stewardship to all parishioners and parish groups;
- oversee the efforts of stewardship education in the parish including the annual commitment or recommitment of parishioner's gifts;
- recruit individual and/or couples to share their personal testimonies about stewardship through lay witnessing;
- prepare a time and talent list of parish committees/ministries and be responsible for keeping the list current;
- ensure that all who come forth to offer their gifts are contacted, recorded and thanked;
- develop a welcoming program that helps new parishioners feel embraced by the parish, provides materials that highlight parish life and invites participation by all;
- educate parishioners about stewardship through various parish communication vehicles and publications, i.e., bulletin, parish/school newsletters, monthly statements, brochures, and general intercessions;

- conduct a parish census;
- evaluate the stewardship educational effort and awareness on an annual basis;
- produce comprehensive reports that reflect the generosity of the parish community;
- collaborate with parish religious education and day school staff to assure that the children/youth component of stewardship is represented in all stewardship efforts;
- provide in-service and continuing education opportunities for your Stewardship Committee;
- oversee the implementation of various stewardship efforts, which may include home visits, phone-a-thons, capital campaigns, planned giving, ministry fairs, annual stewardship days, and small group prayer opportunities;
- encourage pastor to incorporate comments about stewardship in Sunday homilies, general intercessions and pulpit announcements;
- organize volunteers to make phone calls to households that did not return a time and talent and/or treasure commitment card;

It is important that the members of the team delegate responsibilities, they are not expected to do everything themselves. After all, being a good steward involves sharing one's time and talent. When others embrace stewardship they will enjoy sharing the various gifts God has given them.

*"These differences belong to God's plan, who wills that each receive what he needs from others, and that those endowed with particular talents share the benefits with those who need them. These differences encourage and often oblige persons to practice generosity, kindness and sharing of goods; they foster mutual enrichment of cultures."*

*cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church #1937*

## **Giving people the opportunity to serve as Stewardship Team members**

Approach the selected candidates personally. It may be advisable to send a letter first and then follow-up with a phone call or a visit. Those candidates that respond positively should then be invited to a group meeting or workshop and from this meeting your team can be formed.

*Note: An announcement in the bulletin or request from the pulpit will probably call forward people already heavily involved. Remember that Jesus invited personally those who He wanted to serve with Him.*

## **Pastoral Staff**

Parish ministries and parish staff are intrinsically linked. The staff has a leading role in providing a hospitable climate in the parish, helping to ensure all parishioners feel welcomed to share their gifts. Staff are key to helping parishioners discern their gifts to make the best match of their talents and the needs of the parish. When

parishioners are invited to use their gifts, they are more likely to have a positive experience when they share them.

**Ideas for parish staff to help promote Stewardship as a lifestyle:**

Liturgist – Integrate stewardship concepts into the Liturgy, i.e., intercessions, music, commissionings and blessings.

Directors of Religious Education, Youth Ministry, and Day-School Teachers – Integrate stewardship education for children and youth into the standard curriculum; provide opportunities for children and youth to share their time and talents with the parish community. Promote outreach activities which allow parishioners to share their gifts with the greater community.

Business Manager/Bookkeeper – Communicate to parishioners the various ministries their gifts are supporting. Create and maintain the technologies that enable a parish to track gifts.

Parish Secretary – Create hospitable atmosphere in parish offices.

## **Parish Council**

The Parish Council, as the visioning body, has a leading role in stewardship education. When stewardship is the vision of the Parish Council, the deeds of all committees and ministries will flow from that vision.

**Ideas for Parish Council to promote Stewardship as a lifestyle:**

- take the time to understand the theology of stewardship
- endorse an annual time, talent and treasure initiative
- create a Stewardship Committee to develop stewardship initiatives in the parish
- commit the parish to carry out stewardship awareness efforts throughout the year
- ensure the parish is accountable for all gifts received – financial and gifts of time
- encourage the parish to set an example by allotting a portion of its offertory to those most in need
- work to ensure that stewardship is not a one-time activity, but continues as an ongoing part of parish life
- evaluate “faithfulness” not success

# The Parish Self-Assessment

As with almost any other type of program, an effective stewardship education program must begin with an objective assessment of the parish. This assessment is important for two reasons. First, it provides a benchmark against which future progress can be measured. Second, it helps in determining exactly what type of program and program intensity can be measured.

Either the parish self-assessment or the organization of the parish Stewardship Committee can take place first. However, because the self-assessment is fairly easy to complete, it may be useful for the pastor and/or Pastoral Council to complete this assessment before forming the Stewardship Committee. The results can then be used to clearly show the need for a parish stewardship program and as a tool to "sell" parishioners on the need to volunteer to help the parish Stewardship program.

## Some Indications of Parish "Stewardship Temperature."

The following information is intended to provide a parish with enough information about specific stewardship indicators that may surface during the self-assessment to assist the pastor and Stewardship Committee in evaluating the situation in a parish. This information is not intended to be any more than a tool to assist in evaluating parishes. Some of the conclusions are admittedly subjective. The following information is also presented as somewhat of a "reality check," because very few parishes have valid benchmarks with which to measure the success of a stewardship program. All-too-often a parish claims to be a "Stewardship Parish." Whether or not this is true depends on how one defines the term "Stewardship Parish." Moreover, it is probably not possible to measure the spiritual temperature of a parish. However, a "Stewardship Parish" should be able to answer, or have a working knowledge of, the following

- recent trends in parishioner gifts of time and talent;
- number of tithers or those giving 5% or more of gross income to the parish;
- percent of families using envelopes, and the trend;
- trends in the Annual Appeal (amounts given, participation, etc.);
- trends in Annual Ordinary Income for the parish, both gross and on a per family and per envelope basis

## Determining Parish Income Potential

Using a "tithe" as one goal, that is parishioners giving 5% of gross income to the parish, 1% to the Annual Appeal, and 4% to other charities, it is possible to determine the financial potential of any parish.

### Formula

(# of Families in a Parish - Error Factor) x (Per Family Income) x (.05) = Gross Parish Income Potential.

**Note 1:** The error factor is used to compensate for census errors (died, moved, etc.). The error factor is used as follows to reduce the gross number of parish families:

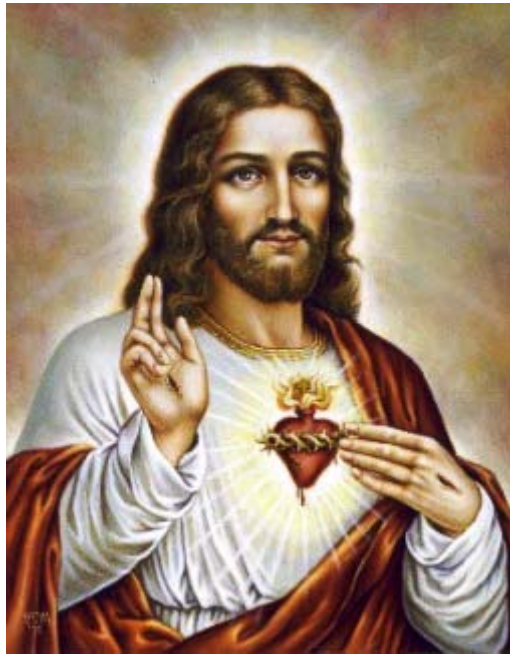
0 - 500 Families -- Reduced by 5% error factor  
500 - 1000 Families -- Reduced by 10% error factor  
1000 - 2000 families -- Reduced by 15-20% error factor

**Note 2:** Available in Census Bureau data

**Example:** St. ABC Parish in Omaha, NE  
St. ABC has 400 families on their rolls and the county has a per capita income of \$30,000.

**Formula for St. ABC**

$(400-20) \times (\$30,000) \times (.05) = \text{Parish Income Potential}$   
 $(380) \times (\$30,000) \times (.05) = \$570,000 \text{ Annual Parish Income Potential}$   
 $\$570,000 / 52 = \$10,962 \text{ Weekly Income Potential}$



# Stewardship: A Way of Life

## Is your parish ready for stewardship?

### Assessment A

The following questions will help you determine how prepared your parish is for a successful stewardship effort. Most parishes will not be able to answer “yes” to every question; however, the more “yes” answers you have the more successful your stewardship effort will be. As the parish moves into the stewardship process, the long-range goal should be to answer every one of these evaluation questions with a firm “YES!”

#### Is your parish spiritually strong?

- Are you pleased with Mass attendance?
- Do a fair number of parishioners participate in spiritual enrichment activities – small faith communities, adult faith formation, etc.?
- Do parishioners show a willingness to spend time with God through Eucharistic Adoration, weekday Mass, parish missions, personal prayer, etc.?
- Do parishioners feel a sense of belonging to the parish?
- Are there parish activities available for everyone including the elderly, the handicapped, the single, those without children and the young adults?
- Do parishioners make all newcomers feel welcomed and do they encourage new ideas?
- Are welcoming activities and processes in place, including a warm and convenient registration process, welcoming packets and invitations to events?
- Are parish leaders willing to ask, invite and challenge different people to get involved rather than always relying on the same people all the time?
- Are attempts made to reach out to those who are not actively involved?
- Our parish fosters an environment where we are encouraged to make the decisions to live a spiritual life – there is a systematic plan for spiritual growth for our parishioners.
- Our pastor and parish leadership encourage and challenge us to live a spiritual life.
- There is a welcoming presence throughout our parish – at liturgies, throughout ministries, through meeting one another...
- It is easy for people to get involved.
- Our staff and parishioners can be described as friendly, helpful and welcoming.
- People join for the sense of belonging and community.
- Prayer is held up as a focal point in our lives.
- When new members join, parishioners, along with parish leadership, welcome and take the time to orient them to our parish, and describe the importance of stewardship both in the parish and their own lives, and encourage them to share their gifts.
- Our liturgy is the source (gives life to and nourishes our vision) and summit (celebrates who we are becoming).

- The homilies break open the Scriptures and challenge us to live our baptismal call.
- Participation in our liturgies from those in the pews is overflowing.
- Our music is varied, diverse and reflects the culture of our parish.
- We recognize that not everyone at our liturgies are registered parishioners, and therefore create an atmosphere of welcoming and inclusiveness for our guests.

**Do parishioners have a sense of ownership in the parish?**

- Is there a Parish Vision that has been formulated through broad-based input?
- Is there a Parish Strategic Plan making your parish proactive rather than reactive? Are all parishioners aware of the goals that are a part of this plan?
- Are all parishioners included in or advised of parish needs assessments?
- Is there an open accounting of parish activities and plans including a comprehensive annual report and regular comments in the bulletin about parish business and management?
- Do parishioners feel invited to share their thoughts, comments and suggestions?
- Are the accomplishments of the parish adequately promoted thus encouraging a sense of pride in the parish?
- Do parishioners really feel that the parish belongs to all of them?

**Do parishioners believe that the parish is doing God's work?**

- Is there an active social ministry with adequate opportunities for all interested parishioners to participate?
- Is the "mission" work of the parish adequately publicized so parishioners do see that they are investing in God's work and not just in the maintenance of a private club for the parishioners?
- Do parishioners understand that a parish exists to help them serve God or do they think the parish exists to serve them? Do the parish leaders also understand this?
- Many parishioners participate in our liturgical ministries and a diversity of our parish membership is involved in our liturgies.
- Our ministries flow from our parish mission statement and rely on the gifts of our members.
- Our ministries respond to the needs of our parish.
- When people come forward to offer their gifts in service, their gifts are honored, they are responded to quickly and a place for their gifts is found.
- People are genuinely thanked and affirmed for sharing their time and talents.
- When we ask for participation, the responsibilities and activities are clearly outlined.
- Invitations are made in a variety of ways, with personal invitation always remaining in the forefront.
- There is an atmosphere in which everyone's gifts are welcome.
- Formation, education and training are important components in helping others succeed in using their gifts.

**Do parishioners feel appreciated?**

- Are the gifts people give adequately acknowledged, recognized and appreciated? Is there – at the very least – an annual note of appreciation sent to every donor and volunteer?
- Does your parish bulletin include regular notes of appreciation and recognition?

- Is there an annual appreciation event?
- Are parish leaders sensitive to the fact that sometimes the smaller gift may actually be the more generous gift?
- Do parishioners see that their gifts are really needed and used?

**Are parishioners familiar with the scriptural concept of stewardship?**

- Does your parish use weekly bulletin stewardship reflections?
- Does the pastor and other celebrants talk about stewardship whenever this concept is included in the Gospel readings?
- Understanding that stewardship is how we live as Christ's disciples, are your parishioners prepared to pray for successful stewardship – through Prayers of the Faithful, parish prayer groups or prayer chains, and/or parish stewardship prayer?
- Are stewardship-related Scripture quotes used on parish bulletin boards, web sites, annual reports, etc.?
- Are the gifts that parishioners give symbolically tied to the Eucharist through good offertory practices?

**Is a strong committee or commission in place to lead the stewardship effort?**

- Is the committee representative of all the various types of parishioners in the parish?
- Are committee people Eucharistic people with a strong spiritual relationship with God?
- Are committee members good stewards themselves?
- Are the committee chairs well-received by the parish community?
- Do committee members recognize that stewardship is about so much more than money? Stewardship is about every choice we make as Christians, including how we choose to spend our time and our treasure.
- Does your committee include both new and seasoned parishioners?
- Does your committee include individuals who understand good marketing, communications and motivation processes since educating about stewardship in our commercial and consumer society is a marketing challenge?



# **Stewardship: A Way of Life**

## **Is your parish ready for stewardship?**

### **Assessment B**

As parishes begin the process of adopting a stewardship perspective it is very important for them to model for their parishioners what they expect of them. If the parish wishes to promote and encourage good stewardship in their individual parishioners, then they need to demonstrate for them how they expect disciples of Jesus Christ to live. The parish must be the first model of stewardship. How can the parish do that?

#### **1. Inventory of Gratitude: A Christian Steward is one Who Receives God's Gifts**

##### **Gratefully . . .**

Stewardship focuses our attention on gratitude. All is gift given from God. We encourage individuals to be aware of all that God has given them, creating an inventory of gratitude. What is it in my life for which I am grateful? The parish must then do the same. Create a list of all the gifts of your parish, becoming more aware of all the people, time, talent, treasure that are given to make your parish what it is.

The parish may ask itself:

##### **Who are all of our parishioners?**

(This may call for a census on a regular basis.)

##### **Who are all the people that assist the work of the parish?**

(This includes everyone: staff, catechists, teachers, youth ministers, committee people, those providing luncheons for funerals, those taking care of altar linens, those visiting the sick and homebound, office help, liturgical ministers, teacher's aides, playground helpers, those cleaning the church, homebound willing to pray for parish, and the list can go on.)

##### **How much time do all these people put into the work of the parish?**

How much time do we spend in worship, prayer and formation of all parishioners (adults, youth and children)?

##### **What are the various ministries and forms of outreach that we have?**

**What are our resources of treasure (money, buildings, property, tangible gifts other than money)?**

The first step in stewardship is to sit in awe of God's generosity. This listing of gratitude can be used on a yearly basis for an annual report that parishes often times do. Many parishes will be quite surprised at how much God has blessed them. Parishes can also take this inventory and create a liturgical opportunity for the community to publicly and collectively give thanks to God. Essentially, this is what we do each Sunday with the Eucharist, but sometimes we need to formally bring forth our inventory of gratitude.

**2. Survey How Well The Parish Is A Good Steward Of Its Many Gifts: Cherishes And Tends Them (Gifts) In A Responsible And Accountable Manner . . .**

It is good to be aware of the many gifts from God, but then we have to care for them in a responsible and accountable manner. Looking at its inventory of gratitude the parish asks itself:

**How well do we take care of all these gifts?**

**How do we show our appreciation to all, for all they have given in time/talent/treasure?**

**Do we manage our people (paid/unpaid), time, money, and buildings well?**

**Is our attitude that of abundance or scarcity?**

**Do we appreciate what we have or do we complain because it isn't enough?** (If we appreciate what we have, we trust that it will be enough. If we complain it isn't enough, it will never be enough! We will never have enough people helping or enough money to do what we think we need to do.)

God has blessed each one of our parishes with many good things. It is our responsibility to care for them well, to use them well, appreciating all their goodness. It is also our responsibility to be accountable for them and to them. We need to let our parishioners know our list of gratitude and let them know how well we tend to them. An annual report should include all of the parish resources and how well they have been used.

**3. Evaluate How Outward Looking Our Parish Is: A Good Steward Shares In Justice And Love With Others**

Stewardship reminds us of all the wonderful gifts given by God and the challenge to tend to them well, but then we are to also share everything we have in justice and love with others. In our inventory of gratitude we can say that we care in a responsible manner for that which is given, but do we look at stewardship as

something that serves only our parish or does it include making our gifts available to the larger community. Questions to consider:

**What is the charism of our parish for the larger community?**

**How do we, as a parish, serve those in the larger Church and wider community?**

**How do we, as a parish, use our gifts of time/talent/treasure for the larger Church and the world?**

**If we ask our parishioners to tithe, then does the parish tithe its resources?**

If the expectation is for the individual parishioner to share their gifts of time, talent and treasure then we, as parish, must model by sharing our gifts of the parish of time, talent and treasure. One of the purposes of the parish is to care for, support, nurture the people of the parish not for the sake of being self-serving, but to encourage and prepare them for going out to bring Christ into the world. The mission of the parish is the same as Christ's mission, to bring the good news of salvation to the whole world.

#### **4. Creating an Environment of Overwhelming Hospitality and Evangelization**

Another way in which a parish can be the first model of stewardship is by being a place of true hospitality and welcome. Jesus dined with tax collectors, talked with prostitutes, and welcomed the marginalized. If we model our parish's life after Jesus, then we, too, must be overwhelmingly welcoming and hospitable. All are welcome and all have something to share in response to their gratitude. Our spiritual home must be a place of refuge or care for all, but especially for the stranger and the marginalized. Assess the parish's hospitality by asking these questions:

**Do we treat those coming to our parish as if we would welcome them to our homes?**

**When new people come to our parish do we notice them, greet them, invite them to be a part of our community?**

**Are all people invited to use their gifts of time, talent and treasure?**

**Do we welcome diversity of people, cultures, and traditions in our community?**

**Do we take advantage of being hospitable to fallen away Catholics or ecumenical families during obvious connecting points such as sacraments, funerals and other family celebrations?**

Hospitality and welcome seem like such simple or ordinary things, but it is many times these make all the difference. Ask people from your parish, "Do you invite people to your home and then never make eye contact with them?" This will usually

get many laughs, but then ask, "Why then do we do this in our churches?" We walk by all these people and even share a pew with them, but refuse to make eye contact or greet the people around us. Our hospitality must be that of Jesus Christ.

Hospitality goes hand in hand with evangelization. Evangelization is the extension of our hospitality to those within our parish and to the larger community. It is the constant invitation within a safe and comfortable environment to have a personal and communal relationship with Christ. How we receive people, meet people, treat people, invite people, and challenge people in our everyday life speaks to people of our own personal and communal relationship with God. Evangelization is the responsibility of the baptized, the faithful in other words, all the members of the parish.

# Parish Stewardship Committees: Roles and Responsibilities

## How do parishes get started with implementing stewardship as a way of life?

The main objective of parish stewardship is to permeate parish life and activity so that the faithful recognize the call to be Christian stewards.

"A Christian steward is one who

- receives God's gifts gratefully,
- cherishes and tends them in a responsible and accountable manner,
- shares them in justice and love with others, and
- returns them with increase to the Lord."

The following steps can be used in parishes to assist them in promoting a way of life.

## Step 1: Gather People – A Stewardship Committee

The first step for a parish to begin its implementation of stewardship as a way of life is for it to gather a group of people. No one model for a stewardship committee is required as long as the objective noted above is being realized. Some parishes may not be ready for a formal committee and would prefer to establish a "study group" to begin the stewardship journey. This "study group" would concentrate on the areas of responsibility of prayer and education. Other parishes may be ready to establish a formal committee. The committee could consist of 5-8 members in most parishes.

The following criteria can be used to find people who will help with stewardship efforts in your parish.

### **Desired Qualities of Parish Leadership for Promoting Stewardship**

Are spiritually motivated — It is important that members be people of prayer who are concerned about parishioners' relationship with God, not solely about the needs of the church. A person whose primary concern is raising more money for the church or getting more volunteers for the church is not necessarily an appropriate candidate for the stewardship committee. Look also for people who are "Eucharistic," who have a deep relationship with Jesus, who are grateful for that relationship and who act out of that gratitude.

Exemplify and live out stewardship — Look for members who are already personally committed to stewardship as a way of life. They may not call it stewardship but they live it. Those committed to stewardship volunteer their time in various parish and community activities. Those committed to stewardship will also be committed, regular and generous givers to the offertory collection.

Envision where stewardship can take the parish. It is important that all members of a stewardship committee have a good understanding of parish and its purpose as well as what it means to be a Christian. They also have an ability to dream of possibilities of what could be in a parish.

Are willing and able to talk about time, talent and treasure and their relationship to our faith.

Are willing to implement accountability in reporting back to parishioners on all aspects of the stewardship effort.

Have personal qualities that contribute toward success — People who are: accountable, who do what they say they are going to do when they say they are going to do it

***persistent***

***optimistic***

***organized***

***patient***

***creative***

***willing to share their faith with others.***

## **Step 2: Steep Your People In The True Meaning Of Stewardship**

Each person gathered for study or as a formal committee comes with a different definition of stewardship. The meaning of stewardship as a way of life is more complex than asking people to give more money or to volunteer in the parish. It is a way of life; it is all encompassing and inclusive of all the ministries in our parish. It is an expression of discipleship and a framework or context in which we put the mission of the Church around. Stewardship is about the need for people to give thanks to God for their many blessings and gifts. It is not about the Church's need to receive.

It is important for the parish stewardship committee to have a common understanding of stewardship. This is only done with significant prayer, study, and faith sharing in the committee. A good place to begin is to have the committee read, study and discuss the USCCB document, "Stewardship: A Disciple's Response." This document is easy to read and comes with discussion questions after each chapter.

Many times this is the most difficult place for the committee. In our American culture we need to prove ourselves by what we "do." Before moving into action the committee needs to have self-knowledge. "Who are we and who do we want to become?" It is important for committees to establish a foundation in prayer and education in stewardship.

## Step 3: Identify the Responsibilities of the Committee

**A. Organization** in its relationship to the parish structure may vary given the size and configuration of the parish (single or clustered). The stewardship committee should not be under the finance committee. Some sample structures offered:

- Subcommittee of the parish council
- The committee reports to the parish council

**Option A** One council member is a liaison along with the pastor. Care should be given to identify a diverse group that is intergenerational .

**Option B** Each parish council committee could select a member to be part of a subcommittee with the possibility of some at-large members.

- Separate Standing Committee

The committee would be accountable to the pastor and give regular reports to the parish council.

**Note:** In parish clusters, individual parishes might form an inter-parish Stewardship Committee building on the recommendations above.

This is also the time to give a formal structure to the committee by creating membership terms and reporting. A term for membership should be established locally which provides for rejuvenation of the stewardship committee in a timely fashion without all members completing term at the same time.

**B. Mission Statement:** Once the committee has spent a significant time in prayer and formation, they are ready to begin by creating a statement of who they are and what they are about. The stewardship mission statement should be simple and connected to the parish mission statement.

**C. Visioning:** The mission statement is the beginning of the overall visioning for the committee. During the visioning phase the stewardship committee gets a better understanding of who they are and their purpose as well as where they want to go as a parish in light of stewardship.

- Who do we want to become? What does a parish fully embracing stewardship as a way of life look like? What could be?

This is the brainstorming and dreaming time of the committee. The vision sets the direction of the committee and gives consistency to the work and plans of the committee.

**D. Planning:** Once the stewardship committee has a vision of where they want to go it makes it easier to create the plan in getting there. The planning phase creates the goals and strategies of how it hopes to reach the vision. The goals and strategies from a vision give a sense of movement in one consistent direction vs. random good acts.

In the planning efforts of stewardship the committee concentrates on three (3) areas of responsibility to balance activity and a continual understanding of stewardship and of where God may be calling your parish.

### **Prayer/Education/Organization**

**Prayer** is central to who we are and what we do in parish stewardship.

- saturate our committees with prayer
- make all our parish decisions in the context of prayer
- encourage all committees, groups, families and individuals to center themselves in prayer

**Education** is keeping our parish aware of the vastness and the possibilities of stewardship.

- update ourselves and learn the many facets of stewardship
- inform parish leadership/committees in the light of stewardship
- form the parish at large of the goodness of stewardship in their lives

**Organization** is the programmatic efforts of parish stewardship

- time/talent/treasure surveys and renewals
- discernment of gifts of individuals and of the community
- people resource management, calling people to share in the mission of the Church/parish

Where your parish is in the development of your stewardship committee will indicate the amount of time and energy you use in these three different areas of responsibility. Newly formed committees will need to focus more on prayer and education.

- Longer standing committees will find themselves working more in the organizational arena

No matter how far along your committee is, each of these areas is important and needs to be kept in perspective at all times.

**E. Evaluation:** Yearly the stewardship committee needs to evaluate its efforts. It is an opportunity to see:

- What worked?
- What didn't?
- What should be kept?
- What should be eliminated?
- What could be improved?
- Are we in a rut doing the same old thing? How can we keep this fresh?
- Does it stay in line with our vision and the parish's vision?

# 10 CHARACTERISTICS OF A TOTAL STEWARDSHIP PARISH

1. **PUBLIC COMMITMENT BY PARISH LEADERS** (pastor, parish staff, parish council, finance committee, etc.) to a continuous stewardship conversion process which is reflected in the parish mission statement and/or long-range plan.
2. Active, dynamic **STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE** which directs and monitors the parish stewardship endeavors.
3. Year round **SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES** that remind all parishioners of their responsibility to be Christ's disciples in their homes, workplaces and communities, and expose them – womb to tomb – to the Church's teachings about stewardship.
4. **ANNUAL TIME, TALENT AND TREASURE RENEWALS** which compel parishioners to share their gifts primarily as a faith response, but also as a way to help meet the needs of the parish, the local community, and the world.
5. **TOTAL STEWARDSHIP FINANCIAL PLAN** which includes these elements:
  - parishioners – including children – use envelopes supplied by the parish for their church offerings;
  - tithing or proportional giving is promoted as the norms for stewardship of treasure;
  - incremental movement toward eliminating second collections, special envelopes and supplementary fund-raisers for ordinary parish operating expenses;
  - parish campaigns for capital projects or debt reduction are conducted according to the Church's teachings and practices of stewardship;
  - long-term financial security of the parish is being insured through planned gifts and endowments;
  - no school tuition (when applicable);
  - parish publishes an annual accountability report for its stewardship of treasure; also publishes frequent updates of its budget;
6. **CONTRIBUTES A PORTION OF ITS WEEKLY OFFERTORY COLLECTION** to other parishes, social ministries and/or worthy community, regional, national or international programs; encourages parishioners' time and talent contributions outside the parish.
7. **COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNICATION PLAN** whereby all parishioners are kept up-to-date regarding every aspect of parish life.
8. **AGGRESSIVE HOSPITALITY PROGRAM** for:
  - creating parish ownership;
  - welcoming members, newcomers and visitors;
  - acknowledging and thanking parishioners for gratefully returning to God a portion of their God-given time, talent and treasure

9. **TOTAL PRAYER LIFE** including:
- intentional planning for, and evaluation of, all Eucharistic and other liturgical celebrations;
  - time set aside for prayer at all parish/school events, games, celebrations;
  - multiple prayer and spiritual growth opportunities throughout the week such as public recitation of the rosary, exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, prayer chains, scripture study groups, family prayer in the home, etc.
10. **VALUE-ADDED SERVICE PHILOSOPHY**, based on the parish as an extension of the nuclear family, whose members work, play and pray together; help one another in good times and bad, etc.; includes periodic, structured feedback opportunities regarding needs that are, and are not, being met, status of programs and services, quality liturgies, etc.



# Stewardship and Planned Giving

Stewardship is grounded in the belief that God gives us everything we have and are and calls us to use those gifts for the building of the Kingdom.

We have a responsibility to pass on to future generations the blessings we have received in this life. Our first concern should be taking care of our loved ones but leaving a portion of our estate to our parish, or the Archdiocese should receive careful consideration.

In order to raise the consciousness of Catholics about the possibility of making a major gift to the Church or charity, many (arch)dioceses conduct ongoing wills and estate planning seminars. Given the fact that today's older generation will pass eleven trillion dollars to their heirs, it is clear that the Church stands to benefit enormously if Catholics are made aware of the opportunities to leave a portion to the Church.

Seminars should include the following:

- **Handouts** describing why attendees should have a will or trust
- An **Attorney** who can speak to the importance of a health care surrogate, and a durable power of attorney as well as information about living wills. The time spent by the attorney answering questions from participants will be time well spent

Estate planning seminars are often designed for more affluent people and

- involve the archdiocesan planned giving officer.
- demonstrate the benefit of Charitable Remainder Trusts, Charitable Gift Annuities, and other gift vehicles to the donor as well as the church or charity.
- are attended by special invitation from the pastor. The meeting should also be advertised in the bulletin and open to all parishioners. Large gifts often come from the person you least expect.

In order for the efforts of wills or estate planning seminars to be fully realized, every participant needs to be followed up with a phone call and letter by the pastor, archdiocesan planned giving officer or member of the Parish Stewardship Committee.

# Some Conclusions Regarding Stewardship

The purpose here is not to share the latest studies about Catholic stewardship, but to provide a realistic background that will allow parishes to accurately assess their own development of stewardship and show the potential that exists within every parish through the use of sound stewardship education initiatives.

This is a call to parishioners to listen to the voice of the Spirit speaking of **gratitude and responsibility**. This is an invitation to Catholic stewardship.

Stewardship is a way of life made up of four parts:

- Receiving the gifts of God with **gratitude**
- Cultivating them **responsibly**
- **Sharing** them lovingly in justice with others
- Standing before the Lord in a spirit of **accountability**

It is up to you determine how you want to live out this stewardship way of life.

Our Catholic tradition teaches us that with so many blessings come great challenges. At all times in our lives, we have an opportunity – and a **responsibility** – to share what we have been given.

Stewardship begins with remembering our Baptism, when we became followers of Jesus Christ. From this call flows the commitment to Christ that makes stewardship possible – and deeply rewarding. However, this is a commitment to a lifetime of action, and it requires sacrifice.

Through following Christ, we have the benefit of the role model of sacrifice for the greater good, a model of self-giving and loving service.

It is an incredible challenge to live in imitation of the life of Christ. We all face obstacles, opportunities, and challenges, living in a fast-paced environment with many responsibilities. Our spiritual hunger does not always get a chance to be nourished through prayer and action.

Some broad conclusions exist that can be used as general guideposts in developing parish stewardship efforts. Similarly, there are several myths that have not stood the test of time.

## Myths

- Catholics are generally less affluent than other major denominations.
- Parents with children attending a parochial school tend to give less.
- Catholics are better at giving outside the church than other denominations.
- Parishioners of large parishes give much less than parishioners of small parishes.
- The size of the gift determines the sacrifice of the gift.

- A well-planned capital campaign tends to reduce weekly giving (the opposite tends to be true).
- Parishioners cannot give more time, talent or treasure...we are a "poor" parish.
- Stewardship is all about raising money.

### The Conclusions

- Stewardship does not mean having to focus on increased giving (but part of it can).
- For any stewardship effort to succeed over an extended period of time, it must increase parishioner involvement in parish life.
- Stewardship must involve evangelizing non-Catholics and fallen-away, non-practicing Catholics.
- Face-to-face invitations to anything (ministry, stewardship, sacrificial giving) are always better than letters, announcements, or bulletins.
- Stewardship parishes have inclusive pastoral leadership, a Pastoral Council, and a Stewardship Committee.
- Parishioners must enjoy participation in parish life.
- Lay persons speak far more effectively than clergy when conveying the message of stewardship.
- Stewardship parishes tithe at least 10% of their ordinary income directly to the underprivileged.
- Catholics welcome clear teaching on their financial responsibility to the Church.
- Tables and charts showing specific dollar figures as guidelines for giving are useful, as long as we remember that the Lord asks us to give sacrificially.
- As parish stewardship gets traction, community pressure in the parish for others to participate will build.
- Stewardship should be developed in cycles, and it never ends.
- Consider asking those not already doing so to give at least \$20.00 per week. That amount is only 5% of the 2006 poverty-level income of \$20,000. Still, it is quite an increase for those giving \$1.00 a week.
- All parishes with a successful stewardship program have a vibrant hospitality ministry.
- Most parishes having successful stewardship programs publish annually a ministry directory listing parish ministries and activities, the leader of each, and contact information.
- We must reach out to parishioners and ask what the parish can do for them. All too often parishioners hear from the parish when the parish is doing the asking.
- We can never, ever, thank our parishioners enough.

A clear sense of purpose – nourished by the Eucharist and our rich Catholic tradition – opens the door for us to actively commit to a life of **gratitude** and **responsibility**, to thank God for His endless gifts, and then decide what you can do to help your parish and the world.