



WHY STEWARDSHIP

A Summary of the U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Stewardship



"It was sixteen years ago, but it seems like only yesterday. I was suddenly confronted with serious surgery, which I never thought would happen to me. It always happened to others. The memory is still there, and I recall vividly the days before the surgery. I really received the grace to ask myself, "What do I own, and what owns me?" When you are wheeled into a surgery room, it really doesn't matter who you are or what you possess. What counts is the confidence in a competent surgical staff and a good and gracious God. I know that my whole understanding and appreciation of the gifts and resources I possess took on new meaning." (the late Most Rev. Thomas J. Murphy, Archbishop of Seattle)

Archbishop Murphy died in 1997, but clearly, these words reflect the truth that our material possessions are far less important than an intimate relationship with the Lord. In the early 1990s, the United States Catholic bishops collectively prayed and reflected on the hallmarks of Christian discipleship. With many solid biblical foundations, the bishops concluded that a disciple of Jesus is truly a thankful, responsible and generous caretaker of God's many blessings. In short, Jesus' disciples practice authentic stewardship.

While the New Testament does not provide a total portrait of the Christian steward all in one place, elements of this image abound in its pages. Based on several parables, and many apostolic instructions, Jesus' disciples understood they were to share their gifts with others.

Guided by Scripture, we believe that the Christian steward is a person whose prayer leads to a constant awareness that God is the creator of all blessings in life—spiritual and material.

Jesus presented the ultimate gift to God—the gift of his life—and we, too, are called to follow in Jesus' footsteps by:

- Receiving God's gifts gratefully
- Cultivating them responsibly
- Sharing them lovingly in justice with others and
- Returning them with increase to the Lord.

God has entrusted to Catholics the gifts of material creation, individual vocation, and the Church. Gratefully caring for these gifts leads to these tangible examples of stewardship in our daily lives:

- **Stewardship of Creation:** Respecting life, protecting the environment and developing our world through noble human labor.
- **Stewardship of Vocation:** Faithfully carrying out our unique individual roles in God's plan.
- **Stewardship of the Church:** Prayerfully sharing gifts of our time, talent and treasure to fulfill the mission of the parish, archdiocesan and universal Church.

Stewardship as a way of life has astonishing implications for our relationships and daily lives. We can experience life-shaping changes of mind and heart as we commit ourselves to the Lord. Recognizing God as the origin of life, we are grateful for the gifts we have received and are eager to use them to show our love for God and one another.

The journey of discipleship is one of intense joy, fulfillment and peace. As Mary the mother of Jesus lived her ministry in a spirit of fidelity and service, we can find the same favor with God by living as authentic stewards of our world, our vocation and our Church.

Stewardship



THE SIGNS OF A STEWARDSHIP PARISH

By Most Rev. Robert F. Morneau, Auxiliary Bishop, Diocese of Green Bay



Prayer

The authentic steward must be rooted in the sanctifying presence of Christ through prayer and sacraments that give spiritual nourishment and a bond of unity. The steward needs to be sustained, above all, with prayer and constant contact with the Christian community.

Hospitality

Parishes need to warmly welcome all members. Everyone has something to contribute. Everyone is needed. Communities known for their hospitality to all members, for the vitality of their faith, and for the depth of their service to people in need invariably inspire others to participate in ministry and to be generous in financial support.

Stewardship Committee

Parishes need a systematic way of infusing the theology and practice of stewardship into the life of the parish—identifying opportunities for members of the parish to share their time, talent, treasure, and prayer and to establish an ongoing process to recruit, recognize and thank volunteers in all parish ministries.

Recommitment

Stewardship is expressed not in a single program, but in a constant reminder and invitation to commit one's very self to the Lord. Annual recommitments help to transform individual lives and the life of the parish.

Outreach

The parish as a whole needs to set aside a portion of its resources to serve persons in need in the parish, the community, the archdiocese, and the universal Church. Ideally, parish outreach programs involve parishioners by creating opportunities for human interaction.

Accountability

Constant accountability is fundamental to good stewardship. Parish stewardship efforts require a visible commitment to accountability for the full range of parish activities—from the way decisions are made and carried out by parish personnel to the way resources are collected, managed and used to change lives.

Goal Setting

Vibrant parishes have a shared vision and goals that support the vision. Goals should be set for all ministries. They should be challenging yet realistic and, when possible, measurable. It is important to note that goals should be communicated clearly to the parish. The parish also needs to report on the progress made toward reaching their goal.

Lay Witnesses

A key ingredient is the personal witness of lay individuals who have experienced a change of heart as a result of their commitment to stewardship. Personal witness is essential to building a solid foundation for parish stewardship.



Stewardship