



Daniel Conway is President and CEO of Mission Advancement Services for O'Meara, Ferguson, Whelan, and Conway, Inc. Dan has been writing on stewardship themes for twenty years. Dan's reflections on stewardship are available in several publications. For more information, call toll-free 888-544-8674 or consult the web site for [Saint Catherine of Siena Press](http://www.saintcatherineofsienna.com).

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The Good Steward

by Dan Conway

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STEWARDS OF THE FUTURE

We have hope for the future because the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ makes things happen and is life-changing. Through Him, the dark door of time, of the future, has been thrown open. We have been saved in hope.

- Pope Benedict XVI

In his Encyclical *Spes Salvi* (Saved in Hope), Pope Benedict XVI expresses the Christian conviction that past-present-future are all united in Christ. The certainty of His coming again at the end of time influences the present. As a result, the decisions that we make about the future, if they are truly based in faith, can have a powerful impact on that future. "It is not the elemental spirits of the universe, the laws of matter, which ultimately govern the world and man-kind," the Holy Father says, "but a personal God governs the stars, that is, the universe ... we are not slaves of the universe and its laws, we are free."

Disciples of Jesus Christ are called to be stewards of the future, a future that is full of hope. The future appears hope-less when we cannot imagine anything beyond the present, when we have no vision, no way of affecting change. The future is full of hope when people of faith join together to imagine, and then begin to build, a better world, trusting in the providence of God but not hesitating to act decisively and take risks for the sake of the Kingdom.

As Pope Benedict teaches, we can survive an "arduous present" if we have worthwhile goals, if we have hope. And miracles actually happen when we place faith before prag-matism and confident hope before a fatalistic sense of resignation that leads only to despair.

This is not blind optimism or a naïve form of self-delusion. It is Christian realism. Our faith in Christ's resurrection — his ultimate victory over sin and death and our firm belief in His coming again in glory at the end of time — have convinced us that our actions in the present can impact the future. We are not prisoners of a cruel fate. We are stewards (guardians or custodians) of the bright future that has been promised us by our Lord. And we are also stewards (agents or managers) entrusted with the responsibility to help build that future, with the help of God's grace, in the confident hope that our efforts really can make a difference.

What are some of the practical implications of this "stewardship of the future?" At the most basic and personal level, it means that we have the power to change our own lives, to undergo the kind of continuing conversion of life that disciples of Jesus Christ are challenged to embrace. We are not slaves of our own sinfulness; we can change and grow with God's help. We can be responsible stewards of our own destiny.

Stewardship of the future also means that we can make a difference in our world. "We are not slaves of the universe and its laws," the pope tells us, "we are free." That means that we can have some impact on the politi-cal, economic and cultural forces that exercise so much influence over our daily lives. As individuals and as communities of faith, we can make a difference. We can work to provide our children and grandchildren with a future that is filled with hope — and with justice, peace and

charity. Certainly, we will face many obstacles, but the powerful gift of Christian hope is the knowledge it provides us that although we won't win every battle, the war has already been won! As stewards of a future that is full of hope, we can imagine the Kingdom that is coming, and we can work to make it happen — here and now.

The Gospel "makes things happen and is life-changing," Pope Benedict tell us. Can there be any greater hope than this? May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ help us to be faithful stewards of the future he has promised us. And may the Holy Spirit fill our hearts with courage, empowered by hope, to imagine and then begin to build the coming Kingdom of God.

