

# Stewardship in America: A Countercultural Way of Life

by Daniel Conway



*Imagine what it must have been like to see Jesus face to face, to listen to his words, and to experience his healing power. The Gospels are filled with stories of men and women from every walk of life whose lives are touched, and radically changed, by a personal encounter with Jesus. Each one of us is invited to have this same kind of life-changing experience. It's a frightening thought. We will be challenged to change our ways and live differently. It is also a profoundly hopeful thought. Our deepest longings will be fulfilled, and we will no longer be lonely or afraid. When we meet Jesus – in the Scriptures, in the sacraments, in prayer and in serving others – we will no longer have to cling to the false promises of our culture. We can let go of the obsessive desire for possessions (wealth, fame and security) that we are told will make us happy, successful and forever young. A personal encounter with Jesus Christ will invite and challenge us to find true happiness and lasting joy by following him without counting the cost.*

A Christian vocation is the personal invitation or call that each baptized person receives from the Lord. Every Christian is called to be a good steward of the personal vocation he or she has been given. Each of us must discern, accept and live out joyfully and generously the commitments, responsibilities and roles to which God calls us. This call is personal. As the bishops say in their pastoral letter on stewardship, "Christ does not summon disciples as a faceless crowd, but as unique individuals . . . He knows people's personal histories, their strengths and weaknesses, their destinies; he has a purpose in mind for each one.

Jesus knows each of us by name. He invites us to follow him, live with him and be his disciple. If we have accepted the Lord's personal invitation, if we have been baptized and confirmed in this Christian way of life, then our first responsibility is to nurture, develop and share this precious gift: our personal vocation as disciples of Jesus Christ. This means we are called to be faithful stewards of the identity and mission we have been given as Christians. It also means that we are challenged to share our personal vocation with others—both within the community of disciples, the Church, and among those who have not yet encountered the Lord Jesus or heard his personal call.

The call to discipleship is personal, but it is not received in isolation. Other disciples help mediate our vocations to us, and we in turn are meant to mediate the Lord's call to others. My vocation is personal and unique, but it is formed and lived out within a community of faith, the Church. I discern, accept and live out my individual vocation with the help of God's grace and with the guidance, support and encouragement of other Christians.

The Church leads us to Christ through the prayerful reading of sacred Scripture, the reception of the Sacraments (especially the

Eucharist), and the daily living out of Christian principles and virtues in solidarity with other Christian disciples. These very basic expressions of Christian life flow from the personal encounter with Christ, which is the source of every Christian vocation. The Church mediates the Lord's call by constantly returning us to the Lord himself whom we encounter in the Gospel, in the Eucharist and in the mission of the Church, which the stewardship pastoral describes as "announcing the good news and serving others as Jesus did."

To be a good steward of my vocation as a disciple of Jesus Christ, I must continually seek his face. I must listen to his voice, and I must open my heart to receive him in intimate communion. Although my relationship to Jesus Christ is deeply personal, it is not private. Why? Because I cannot encounter him in isolation from others or from the world in which I live day-in and day-out. I discern, accept and live my vocation in communion with others. I exercise responsible stewardship of my unique and particular calling by acknowledging my solidarity with others and by sharing all my gifts, spiritual and material, with my brothers and sisters in the one family of God.

Jesus Christ is the definitive answer to the question of the meaning of life. He is also the answer to those fundamental questions that still trouble so many men and women in America today. Our vocation as disciples of Jesus Christ compels us to reject the status quo and to question seriously life as we find it in America today so that we can commit ourselves to the transformation of the world as we know it into a genuine "civilization of love."

The pastoral letter on stewardship tells us that "becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ leads naturally to the practice of stewardship." Faith unites us with other Christians and leads us to live as disciples. In a similar way, communion with Christ gives rise to a sense of solidarity and common cause among all who are sisters and brothers in the one family of God.

Conversion, communion and solidarity. This is what the personal encounter with Jesus Christ demands of us as stewards of the particular vocations we have received from the Lord. This is my identity and mission, my personal vocation: to do God's will and to live life to the full as Jesus did. It is a vocation that I share with everyone who seeks to follow the Lord and be his disciple, but only I can respond to the particular call that is mine. With the help of God's grace, and the loving support of my family, friends and the entire community of faith, I must constantly seek the face of Christ and respond to him with an unqualified and unhesitating "yes" to his personal invitation.

*The above reflection is an excerpt from Dan Conway's new publication, Stewardship in America: A Countercultural Way of Life, which will be available in the Spring of 2006.*

*Daniel Conway, President of RSI Catholic Services Group, has been writing on stewardship themes for 15 years. Dan's reflections on stewardship are now available in several publications. For more information, call toll-free 888-544-8674 or consult the website for Saint Catherine of Siena Press ([www.saintcatherineofsienapress.com](http://www.saintcatherineofsienapress.com)).*