

LIVING AS A COMMUNITY

Jesus taught us to *love our neighbor* as ourselves. He told us to pray, "Our Father..." He assured us, "Wherever two or three are gathered in My name, I will be with them."

In these and many other ways, God tells us that *we are part of a community*, one body of faith.



If we *use our gifts* only for ourselves, we would not be loving our neighbor as ourselves. God intends that we use our gifts by *sharing them for the good of all*. When we help others advance toward God, we help assure our own salvation.



No one can do everything, and God asks no more of us than our gifts make possible. But when we do use our gifts of time, talent, and treasure to make our families healthy, our parish vibrant, our community a better place to live, then we are *bringing the Kingdom of God* to earth.

As people come to see their faith as something they hold in common, they want to share it with others. Those who are *looking for a spiritual home* will be attracted to this faith.

Christian discipleship is both personal and communal. We grow in grace together. We nourish our hearts while we nourish the hearts of others.



— from Living God's Word: Reflections on the Weekly Gospels

THE STEWARDING PARISH

After the family, the parish is our *faith community*. Stewardship brings a new, stronger life to a parish. People want to be part of a stewardship parish, because it offers them opportunity *to use their gifts* for others and because *it brings the gifts of others* to strengthen their own faith and love.

Pastor and people together build and maintain a stewarding parish. Stewarding parishes have a special "look" and "feel" about them:



- People flock to Sunday Mass, daily Mass, and other devotions, because they want to spend time in prayer.
- People feel welcome in the church, whether they are life-long members or strangers, practicing Catholics or long separated.
- People look for ways to put their talents to work in service to the Lord. This is not just volunteering: it's ministry.
- People share their faith. At Mass, or in prayer groups, they share directly. They also share their faith indirectly by the example they set in the workplace and the community.
- People are generous in sharing their resources to meet the needs of the parish, the Universal Church, and the community. They rarely have to be asked; they give out of gratitude to God for all they have received.
- People and pastor ask regularly: "What does God need us to do, at this time, in this place?" And they act on the answers.



WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME?

JOY: Time and again, people who have embraced stewardship give witness to a deep feeling of *joy*. Their love of the Lord deepens, they become more aware of the spiritual dimension of life, and they free themselves from dependency on material things. They draw closer to family and friends.

BE PART OF GOD'S TEAM: Stewardship is the way to play an active part in bringing to fulfillment God's plan for the salvation of all mankind.

TRUST: Throughout the Scriptures, God tells us: "Trust Me—you will have all you need." Not all you want, perhaps, but all you need. The steward takes God's word to heart, replacing constant worry with peace of mind.

STRUGGLE: Jesus warned His followers would pay a price for their devotion and loyalty to Him. A person who is truly committed to a life of faith will be viewed by some people as backward, strange, even weird. He or she may be rejected by those who serve the false gods of money or power.

SALVATION: Jesus promises eternal salvation to those who answer His call to discipleship. It's not enough to say, "I believe," and go on with life in the same old way. Stewards live for God, and they will earn the final, greatest reward.

The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult, and left untried.

G.K. Chesterton



*The Gifts We Have,
We Are Given To Share*

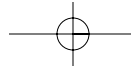
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STEWARDSHIP:

A way of life... ...What does it mean for me?



Diocese of Raleigh



Choice of the heart: God is #1 in my life

WHY STEWARDSHIP?

Jesus told us this story:

Three persons were called to serve their Master. Each was entrusted with a number of "talents." Two of them used their time and abilities to return to the Master double what they had received. The Master rewarded these "good and faithful stewards," not for the size of the increase, but *because they responded to His call with all they had*. The third one buried his "talents." The Master was not pleased.

All of us are called to be disciples of the Master, Christ.

- When we respond by choosing to make God #1 in our lives,
- When we let this choice guide how we live our lives every day,
- When we realize that everything we have is a gift from God,
- When we take responsibility for using those gifts to advance God's plan for salvation,
- When we commit to on-going conversion, striving always for holiness,
- When we take our share of responsibility for the vitality of our faith community,

Then we become stewards, "doers of the Word, not hearers only."

Stewardship is a way of life, rooted in Scripture. God wants nothing less: "You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart... And your neighbor as yourself." Stewardship is active faith.

Stewardship is a choice of the heart. Many people do good works every day. But until they do them as a way of showing they love God above all, they have not found stewardship as a way of life.

Stewardship is a spiritual partnership with God, rich in prayer and grace. It is also a practical partnership, choosing to place in God's service the three fundamental gifts of time, talent, and treasure. Stewardship is discipleship in action.



STEWARDSHIP OF TIME

I'll be coming home, son, I don't know when, But we'll get together then, son, we're gonna have a good time then.

In this poignant verse, Harry Chapin captured the price children pay when their parents can't find time for them. How does Jesus feel when we can't find time for him?

Time is the universal gift. Everyone gets the same amount every day. We cannot add to it. We can't slow it down. But we can choose how we use it.

Time comes in two varieties: *Clock time*, measured by watches and calendars; and *God's time*, measured by the good we do with it.

We choose God's time when we devote ourselves to prayer:

community prayer in the Mass and other devotions, private prayer, and spiritual reading. Even when we are limited by illness or infirmity, we can pray for the intentions of others.

We choose God's time when, out of love for God, we give ourselves to those who count on us and need our love—spouse, children, parents, and others who are close to us.

We choose God's time when, out of love for God, we invest time in working for the church and for the community.

We choose God's time when we make wholesome use of leisure time to refresh our minds and renew our souls. The Lord knows we need re-creation.



STEWARDSHIP OF TALENT

Most of us don't have the visible gifts that lead to fame and fortune. But everyone has one or more talents, that is, special gifts from God. Every talent is valuable in carrying out God's plan.

The list of talents is endless—so is their use in the service of God. Here are but a few examples:

- *Speaking*
- *Cooking*
- *Listening*
- *Patience*
- *Cheerfulness*
- *Organization*



Stewardship calls us to *identify* our special gifts, *accept* them gratefully, without pride or false humility, and *use* them well, as God prompts us.

A good steward also *looks for talents in others* and encourages them to put these gifts to work.

Stewardship of talent benefits the parish, but it is not limited to the parish. *The workplace is fertile ground* for growing one's own gifts and cultivating the talents of others. Stewards make great team members.

The good steward also may look for ways to make his/her community better than he/she found it. When offered to the Lord, community service is made holy and pleasing to God.



STEWARDSHIP OF TREASURE

"Here it comes. I just knew this stewardship thing is really all about asking for money."



No, it's not. Stewardship is about our *attitude towards money and material things*.

God calls a few people to a vow of poverty. Most of us, however, live in a world where money and possessions are necessary. The question is: are *we owned by our possessions*, or do we see them as God sees them?

Jesus knows how easy it is to be trapped by possessions. He warned us: "You cannot serve God and money... *Where your treasure is, there will your heart be.*"

Many people measure their lives by the *goods they acquire*. They are owned by their possessions. Stewards measure their lives by the *good they do*. Stewards know that whatever we have, we merely *hold in trust* from God. The day will come when God asks, "What you have done with all I have given you?" *How will you respond?*

The steward responds by recognizing he or she has a *need to give* that has nothing to do with the need of the Church (or anyone else) to receive. Sharing a reasonable portion of one's income, assets, and possessions is the best way to show gratitude to God. Giving also detaches us from our possessions, so we can be *"poor in spirit."* The Good Samaritan had the right attitude: "Whatever I have is yours, if you need it."

Some people equate stewardship with tithing, i.e., giving 10% of income to the Church and community. Our view is one size does not fit all. Jesus said, "*Give not just from your surplus but from your need.*" A low-income person might do that by giving 1%, while a high-income person might have to go well beyond 10%. The steward gives what in prayer feels right with God. The Lord expects no more—and *no less*.

