

Stewardship: "Well done, good and faithful servant."

"As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace." I Peter 4:10

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I: The Meaning of Stewardship in the Christian life

A steward is a servant entrusted for a time with the goods of the Master. The steward uses but does not own these goods, and must eventually give an account to the Master for the way in which they have been cared for and made fruitful.

Each of us spends a brief time in this life, preparing for our eternal life with God. While we are here, we receive everything from God, even life itself, and are asked to make good use of what God has entrusted to us. We are invited by God to be good stewards of His gifts. It is no wonder that the idea of stewardship plays such a central role in the life of faith.

The Bible frequently refers to the spirit of stewardship, whether or not the actual term is used. In fact, the ideas of servant, disciple, and apostle - so central in the scriptures - all include the idea of stewardship. We are servants of the Lord, stewards who will be called to account when he returns. Each of us wants to hear the Lord say at that moment: "Well done, good and faithful servant." (Matthew 25:21) As a trustworthy steward, the disciple must be faithful in word and action to the teachings received from the Master. The apostles are sent out from Jesus, and must represent him as authentic stewards of His mission and message.

The Bible teaches us that responsibility is inseparable from stewardship. We ultimately will be held accountable for the way in which we use what God gives us. In Luke 12:41-48, Our Lord reminds us that we are like stewards who are placed in charge of the household while the Master is away. "Who, then, is the wise and trustworthy steward whom the master will place over his household to give them at the proper time their allowance of food? Blessed is that servant if his master's arrival finds him doing just that." But if the servant abuses his master's trust, saying "My master is taking his time coming" and sets about beating the men-servants and the servant-girls, and eating and drinking and getting drunk, his master will come on a day he does not expect and at an hour he does not know."

The prospect of the return of the Master should fill Christians with joy: we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ. In New Testament times, and throughout the early centuries of Christianity, the disciples of Jesus had a lively sense of expectation, as they awaited His return. Our liturgy is still filled with references to the coming of the Lord, though we hear of that so often that we may not take it seriously. But Jesus will indeed come at the end of time, whenever that will be. "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again." More to the point, each of us will stand before the Lord at the end of our life to give an account of our stewardship. That can happen at any moment, and we need to be ready. This is one exam for which it is useless to cram. Only the right use of the time, talent, and treasure which have been entrusted to us will allow us to be able serenely and joyfully to await the coming of the Lord. Again and again in the Gospels we hear of the imminent coming of the Master. Life is short. As steward, the disciple lives with a sense of joyful expectation, inseparable from repentant awareness of the need to be purified of those things which make us unready for the Master's return. A few moments before the Lord's coming in the Eucharist, a foreshadowing of His coming at the end of our life on earth, we hear words that express our hope as stewards of Christ: "In your mercy, Lord, keep us free from sin and protect us from all anxiety, as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our savior Jesus Christ."

In the most famous stewardship parable, in Matthew 25: 14-30 (See also Luke 19: 11-27), three servants are entrusted with great sums of money, and are then assessed by the master when he returns, on the basis of how they made use of the "talents" of the money they had received. The ancient sum of money used in the parable, the "talent", has now become for us the term for any human skill or "gift" that we have a responsibility to develop, as did the servants who are praised in the parable. A faithful steward, now as then, needs to make good use of his or her talents. Stewardship calls for creativity and boldness. Each of us has enormous potential, but few things are sadder than to hear at the end of a person's life: "that person had a lot of potential." As good stewards, we are meant to use God's gift fruitfully and creatively, so that with true gratitude for what we have received we may return God's gifts to Him with increase. If we truly have the spirit of stewardship we will not let God's gifts go to waste, and we will not selfishly cling to

them, but use them generously to serve others. That is the point of stewardship. It is significant that immediately after the parable of the talents, we hear of the judgment of the nations (Matthew 25: 31-46), when people are separated, as sheep from the goats, on the basis of how they acted in this life. We can use our time in this life to be selfish, or to be generous to others. The blessed used their time here to care for those in need. That is true stewardship, and we are called to do likewise. At one point (Mark 10:17-22) Jesus encounters a rich man, who seeks to discover what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus tells him to follow the commandments, and then says: "Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." This is good stewardship: not to cling to material goods, but generously to share with those in need. But the man went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. His was possessed by his possessions, as each of us can be. What a shame. Jesus tells of a rich fool, captivated by his possessions, who builds bigger barns to store his grain (Luke 12: 13-21) and says: "'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." The thought of death is spiritually healthy, as it forces each of us to consider our priorities. What is the point of all the energy I spend on gathering treasure, or spending my time and talent on things that are ultimately useless? It is wisely said that no one at the moment of death wishes to have spent more time at the office. We need to think of the moment of death, but not wait until then to realize what is important in life, and how we can each be wise stewards of what we have received for this earthly journey. Jesus tells of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31); only too late did the rich man realize how he should have spent his time on earth. It is better to be like Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) who repented of his greed.

The secret of life is to recognize our state of dependency upon the providence of God. We do not ultimately own or control the time, talent, or treasure with which we are blessed by God during our short sojourn on this earth. Everything is a gift.

Even in the first chapters of the Bible we find the theme of stewardship. Man and woman are entrusted with God's Garden. They may enjoy it, and are given responsibility for it. They do not own it. Sadly, they want to control everything in the Garden, and forget that they are simply stewards of God's creation, and so are banished. They were deceived by the illusion of self-sufficiency. We can as easily be deceived.

It is interesting that we are often called "consumers." What a shame it is that we can be identified as people who are simply consuming the goods of the earth. Inevitably, if that consumption becomes the mark of a greedy life, then we will ourselves be consumed and possessed by the goods that we consume. It is far better to see all such things in proper perspective. The time, talent, and treasure that we briefly enjoy are gifts to be accepted

with gratitude, and used generously. If we do so, then that posture of detachment allows us truly to be free.

As we enter into a conscious effort to develop more fully the spirit of stewardship within our faith community, each of us is invited to examine how we make use of the abundant gifts which we have received. Do we bury them away, or cling to them as if we own them, or do we thank God for them and share them generously?

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II: Shallow and Deep Stewardship

Stewardship can be, and often is, understood in a shallow and limited sense, as no more than a code word for "tithing" or for "fundraising for religious purposes." That is, undeniably, one important but limited dimension of stewardship. If we have a proper spirit of gratitude for all that we have received from God, and are resolved to act as responsible trustees of God's gifts (which is, in fact, the real meaning of stewardship), then we will be disposed to contribute financially as members of our Church community, and this might involve tithing, or participating in raising funds. Even when the Church was young, St. Paul was greatly concerned about organizing a collection (see I Corinthians 16:1-4; II Corinthians 8-9; Galatians 2:10; Romans 15:25-28). We do not live in a dream world, and so the work of the Church must be effectively funded. We have to pay the bills, and care for the practical needs of the poor. It is certainly an act of stewardship to set aside a portion, traditionally one tenth, of one's goods to be given not only to the Church itself, but to the broader community. When we cling to our money, we sink. When we are generous with it, we never are in want.

That, however, is only one aspect of stewardship, and will take care of itself if the deeper reality is emphasized - a profound inner conversion that leads us to live in a spirit of generosity, which is most fully revealed in the sharing of time and talent. It has been noted that even with tithing the key question is not what we do with the ten per cent, but how we use the other ninety per cent. As we seek to enter into the experience of stewardship, it is essential that we avoid being short-circuited by emphasis upon its most obvious but superficial dimension, the sharing of material goods. If we start with the idea of stewardship as fund-raising for apostolic purposes, that will absorb our energies and we will go no further, and stewardship will become just another program. No, we can only be satisfied with deep stewardship, which means a profound inner conversion as individuals and as a community in which we become committed to living generously in every way, as the Gospel calls us to do. If we do that, the financial aspect will follow in its proper place; if we concentrate on the financial aspect, we will end there, and not

experience the profound spiritual conversion that is the real heart of stewardship. Deep stewardship begins with gratitude and ends with responsibility. Stewardship is sometimes called "the attitude of gratitude." We recognize gratefully that everything in life is a gift of God. We do not ultimately own anything, but are entrusted with time, talent, and treasure for use during our passage through this life. And at the end of life, we take nothing with us, except the life which arises out of generous love. If each of us is profoundly aware that all is gift, then we are freed from possessiveness, and can be good stewards of what has been entrusted to us in life, sharing generously and so at the end of life returning all to the Lord with increase. Stewardship ends with responsibility and accountability. Like the servants in the parable, we will be called to account for the way in which we have used what has been entrusted to us.

True stewardship means having our priorities straight. As disciples of Jesus we must be clear about what really matters in our brief life. St. Ignatius of Loyola wisely invites those who take his "Spiritual Exercises" to ask themselves who their Master is. That determines everything. Every spiritual tradition in Christianity insists that we do this.

In religious orders, sisters, brothers, and priests vow to follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Most disciples do not commit themselves in so formal a way to living by these counsels, and yet they speak to us all, by emphasizing that we are not masters of our own lives, but are to use what we have for the service of others. All three counsels come down basically to poverty - to trusting in the Lord, being at the disposal of others, not claiming our own mastery of the situation. We are only stewards, and are not in control. That awareness is liberating. There are two sure ways of discovering what is really important in my life - of discovering who my Master is. The first is to look at how I spend my money, at how I am steward of material possessions. I spend my money on what I consider to be important. Jesus says: "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Luke 12:34) It is also true that where your heart is, there will your treasure be. Look at the financial statement of any organization, or family, or individual, to find out what is really considered important. Whatever you think your priorities are, look at last month's credit card bill to discover what your actual priorities are. It has wisely been observed that it is the mission of the leadership in any organization or community to make sure that the financial statement reflects the vision statement, which for us Christians is found in the Gospel, especially the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus says: "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." (Matthew 6:24) An even more revealing way to discover my priorities is to examine how I spend my time. Our lives are woven out of time, and my stewardship of the scarce resource of time truly reveals what I really consider to be important. Every day has 24 hours, and time once past will never come again. I must constantly choose how to spend my time, for once this moment is past it is not my time any more. A profound spiritual theme is the "Sacrament of the Present Moment": my life is found in each passing

moment, and I need simply to offer that moment to God in obedience to His will. "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done." If I do so, I will never regret the past or fear the future. Such is the stewardship of time. Time, talent, and treasure: these are the gifts that each of us has freely received, and which we need to use responsibly in a spirit of gratitude. If we do that, day by day until the day when we are called to account, then we will experience the joyful serenity of deep stewardship.

Over the past 40 years a whole spirituality and theology of stewardship has been developed in parishes and dioceses in the United States and Canada, and has led to a deep transformation of the life of discipleship within them. In 1992, the American bishops issued a pastoral letter which summarizes the key elements of the vision of stewardship which is found within the scriptures and the living faith of the Church: "Stewardship: a Disciple's Response." This letter has been invaluable in providing a focus for thought and discussion to those involved in deepening a sense of stewardship. It defines a Christian steward as: "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." As communities begin more consciously to adopt the model of stewardship, I recommend that they study and discuss this letter. Stewardship is a way of life, or as the American bishops put it in their letter, it is a disciple's response to God's gifts.

The International Catholic Stewardship Council helps dioceses put into practice the principles of stewardship. It provides expertise and advice, and numerous publications and programs which can assist communities which are entering into stewardship. Those who have participated in the annual conventions of the International Catholic Stewardship Council have been impressed by the deep understanding of stewardship which they have observed in the testimonies of individuals and communities who have been transformed by stewardship. It is that deep spiritual transformation which we want to foster in all of our parishes, and in the whole community of our diocese. That is why we are trying to approach stewardship in a deliberate and thorough manner, learning from the experience of others, and adapting their insights to our situation, being careful to stress the full engagement of the members of the community in the whole of their life of discipleship. That is vital, for we will be trapped in a dead end if we become distracted by a shallow and limited vision of stewardship. We must be satisfied with nothing less than deep stewardship, in which each of us resolves to make generous use of the time, talent, and treasure which God has entrusted to us.

Deep stewardship means individual and communal conversion, and calls us to live as disciples of Jesus in a spirit of generosity and total engagement, as we are commissioned to do through our Baptism and Confirmation. In the Chapter entitled "The Universal Call to Holiness in the Church", Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church states: "Every person must walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in

the path of living faith, which arouses hope and works through charity." Life is too short for us to waste it as half-hearted disciples. The attitude of joyful engagement which is stewardship for the individual needs to be reflected as well in the way in which we operate as a community.

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III: Reasons to Become Involved with Stewardship

Here are some reasons why I believe that an effort systematically to develop and deepen the spirit of stewardship will be valuable for our diocese.

1. Stewardship is clearly a central theme in the Bible and in our living Christian faith. I have already pointed out its scriptural foundations.
2. Stewardship is undeniably fruitful. Where, over time, more and more parishioners become engaged in committing their time, talent, and treasure to the work of the Gospel, the Church flourishes. Parishes report an upsurge in volunteer engagement, a greater fervour in the prayer life of the community, a more effective outreach to those in need, an increase in religious and priestly vocations, and so on. We need humbly to learn from others, especially when it comes to what has proven to be apostolically effective.
3. Stewardship is realistic. On a video which presents examples of excellent stewardship parishes, the pastor of one parish says that they have been working on stewardship for thirty years. That makes sense. What is important in life takes time, and a steady growth of commitment in the community. The most important things in life are not like machines that we build, but like plants that grow over time.
4. Stewardship is not a new program, but is Continuous and Permanent. Stewardship is a way of life, not a program. We regularly experience spiritual programs and movements that come, flourish, diminish, and disappear, only to be replaced by others. These programs and movements do great good, and we will always have them, but there is a problematic instability in going from program to program, a kind of a boom and bust pattern. Stewardship, however, is so deeply rooted in the foundational themes of the Gospel that it involves a permanent and continuous reorientation of our approach to discipleship, and so provides a stable base for the life of faith in our communities. Stewardship calls for nothing less than both individual and communal conversion, rooted in faith and fruitful in action.
5. Stewardship addresses the Engagement Dilemma. Stewardship leads to a fairer sharing of the responsibilities of parish membership. Sometimes a few parishioners carry a disproportionate share in the work of the parish. They can become overworked and can then, discouraged, simply drop out of all involvement. Or the leadership of a parish can become concentrated in a few dedicated people, and others can feel left out. Neither of these situations is healthy. Many hands make light work, and as more parishioners are engaged in sharing their talents, each can experience the joy of giving without

being threatened with the danger of burning out. We do not want to have a community in which a few parishioners are active and most are passive, the religious equivalent of couch potatoes. One key effect of stewardship is more actively to engage all of the parishioners in sharing their time, talent, and treasure in generous service, so that the full richness of the parish community can be experienced, and its energy be focused outward in making Christ more present in our world. The witness of an engaged parish can lead those who have drifted away to rediscover the gift of faith, and come home to a vibrant community, the way the Church should be.

6. Stewardship is Comprehensive, and enhances already existing activity. Because stewardship is set on the very foundations of discipleship, it is harmonious with all of our other apostolic endeavours and organizations. It does not duplicate, replace, or interfere with them, but enhances them. It is something like the image of holiness found in St. Francis de Sales, who says that when diamonds and rubies and emeralds are dropped in honey they remain themselves, but simply shine more brightly. His point is that our own personalities are not obliterated when we live by the spirit of charity which is holiness. We simply become our true selves more radiantly. The same is true for our various apostolic initiatives and groups when we all enter more fully into the spirit of stewardship: each remains itself, but shines more radiantly if all are enhanced by a deepened spirit of gratitude for God's gifts, with the resulting flourishing of a spirit of generosity in the use of time, talent, and treasure.

Our archdiocese is richly blessed with apostolic organizations and movements, and I believe that each will benefit as our whole community of faith moves more intentionally into an attitude of stewardship. If as an archdiocese and parish we are all seeking to be more faithful trustees of God's gifts, then each person can become a more engaged and effective member of the Catholic Women's League, or Knights of Columbus, or other apostolic organization. Similarly, a spirit of apostolic stewardship will enhance our commitment to prayer and Eucharistic adoration (so essential if our apostolic action is to be fruitful), to the flourishing of lay engagement in the mission of evangelization, to an increase in the response to the call to the priesthood and religious life, to a courageous and effective dedication to social justice, and so on.

A conscious, engaged, and intentional orientation to stewardship will help all of our apostolic organizations and initiatives to flourish, and will cause new ones to be created, to the glory of God and to the service of His people.

I ask every apostolic group or movement within the archdiocese prayerfully to reflect upon the themes of stewardship, and to participate actively in the development of stewardship within our community.

7. Stewardship is Proactive. We often look too much at the problems in the world and in the Church, and then become immobilized by the immensity of the task that faces us as disciples. Jesus tells us, as he told Peter: "Put out into deep water, and lower your nets for a catch." (Luke 5:5) Confident not in our own strength but in the providence of God, we

need to concentrate on building up the kingdom of God, as did the Apostles and the great saints of the Church, and then the problems we face will be dealt with in due time. We cannot get into a state of mind in which we are simply reacting. If we look to the Acts of the Apostles, we see how the early Christian community, with all of its own evident weaknesses, confidently moved outward into the pagan Empire. In stewardship we concentrate on developing a deep sense of gratitude for God's gifts, and on inviting all disciples to become engaged in the Gospel mission received at baptism. That positive and energizing approach is the only way forward.

What a benefit it would be for our whole society if more and more of the generous energy of all of the members of our archdiocese were activated, to bring the life of the Gospel to a world so desperately in need of it. Stewardship is a conscious and careful effort to activate that energy, and to focus it effectively in the service of God and neighbour.

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IV: The Way Forward

The spirit of stewardship is already present in our parishes. As I travel around in my mission as bishop, I am impressed by the generosity with which our priests, religious, and parishioners devote their time, talent, and treasure to the service of God and neighbour. We do not need to import the spirit of stewardship from somewhere else, as if it were lacking among us. Not at all. It would, after all, be odd if something so central to the Gospel were absent from our community. But we can more intentionally and systematically seek to foster stewardship in each of our parishes, so that all of us live fully as generous stewards of God's many gifts. There are proven ways of doing this, and we can benefit from them.

As our Archdiocese prepares to enter more fully into the spirit of Stewardship, an Archdiocesan Stewardship Committee has been formed to work with our Director of Stewardship. Their mission is to implement the development of stewardship within our parishes and within our whole archdiocese. The Council of Priests and the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council have been involved from the start in our stewardship initiative, and as we move forward both councils will help to guide our progress. One of our annual assemblies of priests was devoted to stewardship. The leadership of the priests is essential if stewardship is to flourish.

Each year we hold a Stewardship Assembly, attended by several hundred parishioners and priests from throughout the diocese. The purpose of these large assemblies is to provide a common source of information and ideas for our community, so that we share a coherent vision of stewardship, and can work together. An important element of these assemblies is a presentation by a speaker, but they also allow us to pray together, to

discuss our experiences, to learn from one another of fruitful stewardship approaches, and to chart the course for the future. The annual Stewardship Assembly also serves to encourage us, as we launch into the coming year with renewed enthusiasm.

Since we need to learn from the wider world, we will always send a strong delegation to national and international stewardship meetings. As we proceed, we will try continually to deepen our understanding of the basic principles of stewardship, and the practical ways in which it can be fruitfully introduced into parish communities, taking advantage of what we learn from the experience of others. We can then design an approach to stewardship that is adapted to our own particular situation, keeping in mind the importance of building upon a solid foundation of understanding and reflection. To use another image, it is wise to follow the carpenter's maxim: measure twice and cut once.

As parishes enter more fully into stewardship, it is important that the Pastor and Parish Pastoral Council enhance their understanding of stewardship, by sending representatives to the various stewardship assemblies, by working with the Archdiocesan Stewardship Office, and by studying prayerfully sources such as the American bishops' document, and material from the International Stewardship Council. They will then be able more effectively to apply these insights to the particular situation of the parish. They should establish a Parish Stewardship Committee which can work on fostering stewardship within the parish. Note that this committee reports to the Pastor and the Parish Pastoral Council, not to the Parish Finance Committee, as stewardship involves far more than financial issues. As stewardship advances, each year the parish can be introduced to the witness of people whose lives have been transformed by stewardship, and offered practical ways in which every parishioner can have opportunities to become more involved in generous sharing of time, talent, and treasure.

The pastoral plan for our archdiocese is found in the Acts of the Apostles. There we see a community of disciples who are energized by the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and who are moving outward into their society to share their experience of Jesus. They are not a perfect community, and neither are we: we are all sinners, in need of the mercy of God. After all, Jesus gave us the Sacrament of Reconciliation because we need it. But the disciples in the Acts of the Apostles do seek to be faithful witnesses to the Lord, and stewards of the mysteries of faith, as best they can. The community itself struggles at times, but is strengthened in its mission by a profound trust in the providence of God. It does not fall back upon itself and its problems, but reaches out to evangelize the Roman world, a society indifferent or hostile to the Gospel. That is the spirit of the Acts of the Apostles, and of every community in the history of the Church that has been fruitful in its apostolic witness.

We can learn from that, since we also face numerous problems in our mission of discipleship, and our society is often not receptive to the Gospel. We need to be honestly

attentive to the problems we face, and spend perhaps about twenty per cent of our time and energy responding to them. But we need to devote at least eighty percent of our attention to deepening our experience of the life-giving presence of the Holy Spirit, and of the call of Jesus in the Gospel, so that we can reach out to our society, confident in the providence of God.

Individual conversion is the starting point. After all, Jesus did begin His mission by saying: "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand." Our Lord will purify us of the sins that trap us in selfishness, which is the opposite of the generous attitude of stewardship. But this conversion is not so that we can become focused on ourselves, but rather so that together we can build up the community of faith, the Body of Christ in this world, and effectively make present the kingdom of God.

This happens when each baptized disciple becomes more rooted in the experience of Christ in the sacraments and in the written word of God, and in the living faith of the Church, especially the chapter "The Universal Call to Holiness" in Vatican II's document on the Church. In recent years I have often thought of those who have drifted away from the practice of the faith, or who are tepid in their practice. How can a person not be in awe of the Eucharist, and Reconciliation, and the other sacraments? If only people would realize what a gift Jesus has given us in the sacraments and in the whole of our faith, they would be beating down the doors of our churches. But even the most precious gifts can be taken for granted, or hidden by the sludge of routine, and the vibrant reality of our faith can be obscured by our sinfulness, and lack of engagement.

A great attraction of stewardship, as I have seen it in action, is that it leads Catholic Christians to become more fully engaged in the whole of their life of faith, and so to become more able to fulfil their mission to the world. Each of us needs to realize, with wonder and gratitude, the precious gifts of God that we have received, beginning with the gift of life itself, so cheaply valued in our world of terrorism, abortion, and social injustice. We all are given a small portion of time in this brief life, and are variously endowed with talents and treasure. We are given the supernatural blessings of word and sacrament, and the whole reality of the faith that comes to us from the apostles. Truly to realize that is to be impelled to share those gifts generously, and in giving to be even more richly blessed.

Stewardship basically is a conscious effort to help each of us to realize deeply that God has blessed us with many gifts (often classified according to the categories of "time, talent, and treasure"), that we should be willing generously to share them, and that as a community we should devise ways of giving opportunities for everyone to do so.

Stewardship is intended to increase the active engagement of us all in the life of our parishes, as we are invited to become more involved in the numerous ways of serving

others. Through our Baptism and Confirmation, we are called to be active participants in the life of the Church, not just passive observers. So much in life can be modeled on the aimlessly flicking of the channel changer, but that leads nowhere. A parish in which all are actively engaged is an exciting and rewarding community, not just a supplier of spiritual services, where we pull in to tank up with what is offered. We are all members of the family of faith, and if there are problems in it, we are all called to do something about that, and not simply complain. It is a lively faith family that challenges us as disciples to do great things for Jesus, in the spirit of the Acts of the Apostles. The flourishing of such engaged parish communities is a great benefit of stewardship, a benefit for each individual and for our whole community.

At a personal level, we can all become caught in routine. Because they are so freely offered by Jesus, even the great gifts of Word and Sacrament can be taken for granted, and each of us can become dull in our devotion to the Master. We go to Mass Sunday after Sunday, but slip into passivity, and so lose our sense of wonder at the marvels of our faith. The word of God goes in one ear and out the other, and even the Eucharist itself can become routine as we are blinded to the awesome encounter with our Risen Saviour, and are no longer shaken by the startling challenge of the final words of Mass: "Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord!" Truly put that into practice, and the life of each of us will be made new.

We often hear the wise saying "Faith is caught, and not taught." People first became attracted to Christian discipleship because they noticed the witness of the disciples, not so much their words but the vibrancy of their lives, and the profound joy that radiated from them. That is what attracted me to stewardship: the obvious effect on the lives of those who had experienced it. It really is more blessed to give than to receive, and as we live generously we always receive far, far more than we give. Stewardship is not a new program, or some magic solution to the challenges we face. It means a change of heart for each of us, a spirit of gratitude that permeates the whole of our life as disciples. That is its greatest benefit.

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Reflection Questions

A steward is a servant entrusted for a time with the goods of the Master. The steward uses but does not own these goods, and must eventually give an account to the Master for the way in which they have been cared for and made fruitful. (Luke 12:41-48)

- What gifts has God entrusted to me?
- How have I cared for these gifts and made them more fruitful?
- What does "all is gift" mean? How does it compare with self-sufficiency?

Stewards have a spirit of gratitude for all they have received from God, and are resolved to act as responsible trustees of Gods gifts. (Luke 19:11-27 Matthew 25: 14-30)

- What do I do to thank God for the gifts I have received and how do I share them generously with others?
- How have I been a faithful steward of my talent?
- How have I been a good steward of my time? What do I spend my time on? What do I really consider to be important?
- Have I been generous or selfish with the use of my time?

Deep stewardship is a profound inner conversion in which we become committed to living generously in every way, as the Gospel calls us to do. (Luke 12:34 Matthew 6:24)

- Who is my Master? If I consider the abundant gifts that I have been given, how have I used them for the service of others or how have I clung to them for myself only?
- How have I been a good steward of my material possessions? What do I spend my money on?
- How have I been actively involved in the life of the Church? How have I been just a passive observer?

Stewardship calls for nothing less than both individual and communal conversion, rooted in faith and fruitful in action. (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Vatican II)

- How do I share in the responsibilities of parish membership?
- How have I shared in the financial responsibilities of my Church community?
- How have I been personally involved in the liturgical worship of the Church?
- What have I done with the great gifts of the Word and the Eucharist?" How have I made my devotion to God a priority?

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