



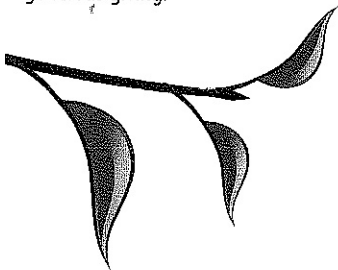
## Gratitude

"Thank you!" This is the response when someone gives us something, is it not? And the greater the gift, the more we seek ways to express our gratitude. We may express our thankfulness in words, through a handwritten card, or by doing something special as a sign of our gratitude.

"Thank you!" For what are you most grateful? Your life? The people you love and who love you? The blessing of work and ability to provide for your family, even if you are currently underemployed? How can you say "thank you" to God for gifts such as these? How might you recognize the generosity of friends, family members, and the community if you are out of work or face unemployment?

This desire to say "thank you!" to God for all we are, have, and will be, is the beginning point of stewardship.

When we take to heart the realization that everything we have and are is pure gift from God, we look at life differently. We see through the eyes of one who understands that the source of life, time, talents, relationships, material and financial resources is the One who blesses us with all good gifts. And, we see that the response that is due is more than going through the motions with a perfunctory "thank you." Rather, the response that is due to the Giver of all good gifts is substantial and generous giving!



# Characteristics of stewardship

## Generosity

Gratitude leads us to generosity. That is the next step toward a life of stewardship. Even if we know in our minds and hearts that our worth is not measured by how much money or material possessions we have accumulated, there is much that surrounds us that says that such things do determine "worth." Success in the world is measured by how much we have. Growing as a steward calls us to think differently about the most important things in life. "Success" as a friend and follower of Jesus is measured by the ways in which we give of ourselves and our possessions. "Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your belongings and give alms. Provide money bags for yourselves that do not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven that no thief can reach nor moth destroy. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be" (Lk



12:32-34). When we take to heart that Jesus' way is the way of thankfulness and giving, the urge to hoard and hold close gives way to generosity, and we find freedom in giving! We realize that real "worth" is measured by eternal standards!

So, how do we find the grace to become generous? Those who have begun to intentionally live as stewards tell us the movement toward generosity is taken one step of faith after another, in trust that all will be well, and that God will be with us in every moment. The more we take

little opportunities to give of our time, our personal presence, our talents and skills and our material or financial resources, the more generous we find ourselves becoming. Generosity leads to generosity. Perhaps living with open hands is simply more fulfilling than holding onto all that stuff! And giving is a meaningful way of living.

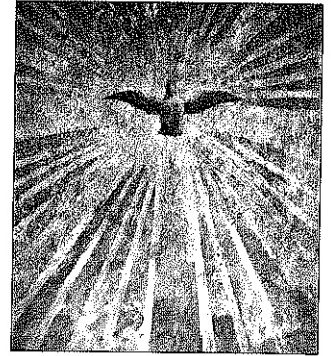
## Trust

Have you ever taken a "trust walk?" One person is blindfolded, simulating loss of sight. The "blind" person is dependent upon a companion who acts as guide in order to reach his or her destination. At times, the "blind" person holds onto the guide for direction. At other times the guide calls the person, providing insight into the moment's situation and giving essential instruction. As long as the "blind" person follows her or his guide, all is well. Trust provides the bond that allows both to journey together in love.

If we really think about it, each of

us is on a "trust walk" with God, every moment and every step of our lives. When we follow Christ and learn to make decisions based on Jesus' instruction, our lives are filled with depth and fullness.

Guided by the Holy Spirit, we come to trust that God, who has given us our very lives, who we are, and what we have, will continue to provide all we need. As long as we follow our guide, all will be well. Trust will provide the bond that allows us to journey with God in love, and this trusting love is vital to our growth as stewards.



## Eucharistic

Stewardship is a guiding principle for our lives that is deeply Eucharistic. Every time we celebrate the Eucharist, we are formed and transformed as people of Christ who are willing to give of ourselves in Christ's name. "And what do Christians bring to the Eucharistic celebration and join there with Jesus' offering? Their lives as Christian disciples; their personal vocations and the stewardship they have exercised regarding them; their individual contributions to the great work of restoring all things in Christ. Disciples give thanks to God for gifts received and strive to share them with others. ... More than that, the Eucharist is the sign and agent of that heavenly communion in which we shall together share, enjoying the fruits of stewardship 'freed of stain, burnished and transfigured' (*Gaudium et Spes*, No. 39). It is not only the promise but the commencement of the heavenly banquet where human lives are perfectly fulfilled" (SDR, Pages 34-35).

"We must ask ourselves: Do we also wish to be disciples of Jesus Christ and Christian stewards of our world and our Church? Central to our human and Christian vocations, as well as to the unique vocation each one of us receives from God, is that we be good stewards of the gifts we possess. God gives us this divine-human workshop. ... The Spirit shows us the way. Stewardship is part of that journey" (SDR, Page 44).



"Success" as a disciple is measured by the ways in which we give.

## RESOURCES

"Best Practices in Parish Stewardship," by Charles Zech (OSV, \$24.95)

"Forming Generous Hearts: Stewardship Planning for Lifelong Faith Formation," by Leisa Anslinger and Victoria Shepp (Twenty-Third Publications, \$14.95)

Grace in Action: Parish bulletin insert on how to live Catholic stewardship (<http://osv.org/SpV/m>)

"Stewardship: Disciples Respond" (International Catholic Stewardship Council, \$15)

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will also tell us, if we are willing to think about it, that the talents and abilities used to do the work involved are given to us by our lavishly generous God. And then, reason will also tell us that it makes sense to share with others in the manner with which we have been given from the beginning.

That is the essence of stewardship. All we have and are and will be is God's. We are caretakers of all of this, and being a caretaker of so much means that we have been given great responsibility. Amazingly, we are given complete freedom to decide how we will care for our lives, our relationship with God and others, our vocation, our possessions.

Not only this, we have been shown what true stewardship



How do you serve the needs of those in your local community? The latest photo

"looks like," in the person of Jesus Christ. Living the life of a disciple of Christ inevitably leads to reflection about what is important in life.

Jesus did not hesitate to respond to the needs of those whom he encountered. How will we use the gifts we have been given to continue Christ's response to the needs of the people Christ encounters today? The Christian steward grows in willingness to give life, love and care as a continuation of the work of the Master, and finds true joy in the giving.

## Combining strengths

We are not left alone to do this good work, either. We have the presence of the Holy Spirit within and among us to guide and strengthen our decisions and action. We also have one another, as members of Christ's body united in the Spirit.

As we grow as stewards, we come to appreciate that each of us has been given specific talents and abilities, special combinations of traits that uniquely equip us to contribute to Christ's mission. Since each of us is particularly gifted, it is essential that each person does

## PASTORAL APPROACH

"Stewardship: A Disciple's Response," the U.S. bishops' pastoral letter on stewardship, was first published in 1992 and is now available in a 10th anniversary edition that includes appendices for parish and diocesan leaders. The letter introduces the Catholic theology of stewardship and includes passages of Scripture, quotes from Christian writers and questions for discussion at the end of each chapter.

Examples of the works, services and ministries of the good steward include the following:

- ▶ Evangelization and witness to the Gospel
- ▶ Catechesis and faith formation
- ▶ Parent stewardship of the domestic church
- ▶ Stewardship of simplicity of life
- ▶ Stewardship for ecology of the globe
- ▶ Lay witness in the marketplace and institutions
- ▶ Financial accountability in personal and parochial affairs
- ▶ Stewardship of collegiality and collaboration in parish life and ministries
- ▶ Stewardship of social justice and the work for peace

his or her part. Alone, each of us can do only what one person can do; together, we can transform our world.

Discovering how to combine our strengths in ministry benefits those who are served and simultaneously builds up

the community of faith, drawing people more deeply into Christ's life with a sense of purpose and love.

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