

Stewardship – A Way of Life Diocese of Rockford - 2008

Stewardship is a way of living out our faith as individuals, as a faith community, indeed in the actions of our daily lives.

First, as individuals, we strive to become Christian Stewards as defined in the U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter "*Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*." The Bishops state: "A Christian steward is one who receives God's gifts gratefully, cherishes and tends them in a responsible and accountable manner, shares them in justice and love with others and returns them with increase to the Lord." Or, in other words, stewardship is making a choice to live a Christ-centered life. It means realizing that all we have and all that we are able to do are gifts from God, and that everything that we choose to do with those gifts is in a sense our gift back to God in gratitude. This is the way we fulfill our baptismal promise to love and serve the Lord. Stewardship is our way of responding to God's call with a life of gratitude.

Second, all baptized members of the Church seek to understand and embrace the three convictions which the U.S. Bishops say are foundational for stewardship:

1. Mature disciples make a conscious, firm decision, carried out in action, to be followers of Jesus Christ no matter the cost to themselves.
2. Beginning in conversion, change of mind and heart, this commitment is expressed not in a single action, not even in a number of actions over a period of time, but in an entire way of life. It means committing one's very self to the Lord.
3. Stewardship is an expression of discipleship, with the power to change how we understand and live out our lives. Disciples who practice stewardship recognize God as the origin of life, the giver of freedom, the source of all they have and are and will be. They are deeply aware of the truth that "The Lord's are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it." (Ps 24:1). They know themselves to be recipients and caretakers of God's many gifts. They are grateful for what they have received and eager to cultivate their gifts out of love for God and one another. (*Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*)

Third, Christian stewards live out their discipleship through tangible practices of sharing their resources of time, talent, and treasure. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

Time – All of our time should be God-centered, which means using our time to honor God. We should set aside a portion of our week to focus on strengthening our relationship with God through prayer, Mass, Scripture reading, and serving others.

Talent – We should assess our strengths and determine how they might be used to help build the kingdom of God. These strengths could be an overt talent like sewing or painting or an internal skill such as organizing or listening. Each of us is gifted and can perform some action to help others.

Treasure – Planning to return the first portion of our earnings to God is a way of showing our gratitude and commitment to stewardship. Tithing, giving the first 10% of what we receive, is the traditional (Biblical) guideline of how to give to God. Stewardship calls us to give in proportion to our blessings by sharing a percentage of our gifts. However, it also means being responsible stewards of the other 90% or what is left, and using it in a way befitting a Christ-centered person if we are truly committed to embracing stewardship as a way of life.

Five Principles for Giving Modern Interpretation of the Biblical Tithe

As a symbol of my total commitment to Christ, I give back to God:

- 1) In thanksgiving and gratitude for all that God has given to me

- 2) As a sacrifice – both meanings of the word
 - to make something holy
 - to do without something – to reorder my priorities

- 3) In a planned way – my gift comes from my first fruits – off the top

- 4) In proportion to what I have received – a tithe of my time, talent, treasure and assets
 - 5% to my parish
 - 1% to my diocese
 - 4% to other worthy charities, i.e., Universal Church ministries, United Way, college, community and/or international charities.

- 5) Wrapped in my Sunday envelope
 - I unconditionally give my gift – no strings attached
 - For my Sunday offering, I use the envelope provided to wrap my gift as an example to others of my commitment.
 - For other charities, as I send it, I dedicate my gift to God for His use through these groups.