



—WHAT IS IT?

The Diocese of Charlotte has developed an explanation of stewardship to provide an overall perspective, context and direction for this important area of the Church. It is impossible to explain all there is to stewardship, for stewardship is also part of each individual's personal conversion process.

- Stewardship is based on the spiritual principles of the Old Testament and the teachings of Jesus; and where it has been implemented, both givers' and receivers' lives have been changed.
- Stewardship is a way of life, a way of thanking God for all His blessings by returning a portion of the time, talent and treasure allotted to us.
- Stewardship engenders a spirituality that deepens our relationship with the Lord. Stewardship involves intentional, planned and proportionate giving of our time, talent and treasure.
- Stewardship addresses both individual parishioners as well as parishes themselves.

Stewardship has been a high priority in our diocese since 1988 when the Diocesan Synod sited stewardship of time, talent and treasure as a major focus. The bishops' pastoral letter of 1992, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, reinforces our commitment to work toward educating and assisting parishes and individuals in adopting this way of life.

In the Introduction to the Pastoral Letter, the bishops explain three convictions that are at the heart of 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*)

The Pastoral Letter defines stewardship in the following way:

“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.”

“Each member of the Church shares in responsibility for its mission; each is called to practice Stewardship of the church. Christians are also called to look outward and to place themselves at the service of the entire human community, especially those who are most in need.”

The International Catholic Stewardship Council reiterates the above:

“To practice Christian stewardship, we must share with others, both people and institutions, by giving them our God-given time, talent and treasure as an act of thanks to God for all His gifts to us. Our parish—our local Christian community—provides one focal point where we can express our faith in worship and through acts of charity. The parish is more than just a church building or a geographic boundary. It is a community of faith and action, where we can see the face of Jesus in the face of a neighbor. That neighbor might be a toddler or a senior citizen, an immigrant or a fifth-generation American, a pre-schooler learning to count or an adult learning to read.” Regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, financial status, or education we are called as members of one Body of Christ to share what the Father has given us with those in need.

Just as the Apostles dropped their fishermen’s nets and followed Jesus 2000 years ago, so we are called to follow His example in today’s ever-changing world. Jesus was a person of faith and action and, as He indicates in Matthew 7:21, He expects the same of us:

“None of those who cry out, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of God, but only the one who does the will of My Father in heaven.”

Jesus made it clear in the Scriptures that being stewards of our time, talent and treasure is part of the will of His Father. By addressing stewardship directly, He made it clear how He wants us to live. Stewardship is based on God’s Word, not on the fundraising needs of the Church.

Stewardship is based on an individual’s need to give back out of gratitude, not on the Church’s need to receive. Stewardship is based on the premise that all that we have and all that we are comes from God and, as a way to thank Him for all His blessings, we are called to return a portion of the time, talent and treasure allotted to us.

Giving of time, talent and treasure is not limited to the Church. Many people will give of their time and talent as volunteers to community agencies in addition to volunteering in their parish, and they will give money to other community, national, and international agencies in addition to supporting their parish.

So, as one can readily see, stewardship is not a fundraising gimmick. It is a way of life based on spiritual principles.



Characteristics of Stewardship

Christian stewardship can be identified by several meaningful characteristics, according to *Stewardship*, a national newsletter written by Parish Publishing:

- Christian stewardship provides spirituality that the lay person can take home from church, exercise at work and express through personal involvement in the community and church.
- Christian stewardship successfully bridges the material world around us and the world of the Spirit within us.
- Stewardship enables Christians to measure the extent of their faith in and love of Jesus by the kind and quality of the stewardship they perform.
- Stewardship gives joy! Those who voluntarily give their time and abilities for work in the parish and community will always experience joy if they give them for Christ. They are not, however, guaranteed freedom from frustration.
- Stewardship is not job-oriented or project-minded. It is a way of life for a lifetime.
- Christian stewardship takes a positive view of money. It sees money not only as a medium of exchange but as a symbol of the person who has it. The way we acquire it, use it, and share it, we are revealed in those actions.
- Christian stewardship helps us to become aware that God is the ultimate giver of the gifts we have. To give to God should be from the top—not from what may be left over.
- Stewardship teaches Christians to be concerned about where and how to share their parish financial overflow. Stewardship is not giving just to meet the budget needs.

Jesus Christ is God's greatest gift to us. Stewardship tells us to share a portion of our time, talent and treasure so that the Gift, Jesus Christ, may be given to those who do not know Him.

Stewardship– Not a matter of chance

Stewardship involves intentional, planned and proportionate giving of our time, talent and treasure. The following further explains this concept:

- **Intentional** - A deliberate decision is made to live out the Christian life in a certain way. That way is to thank God for all His blessings by returning to Him a portion of our time, talent and treasure.
- **Planned** - At the beginning of every year, each Catholic household in the diocese plans and makes stewardship of time and talent a part of its lifestyle and stewardship of treasure a part of its budget.
- **Proportionate** - A decision is made to give a certain percentage of one's time and one's income to the church and other charities.

Giving of time involves being with God in prayer and worship, sharing our love with family and friends, and volunteering our time in church and community activities that help others and promote justice.

Sharing our talents arises from the fact that God has given each of us the ability and gifts to do certain things well and we are to develop those talents for the good of others. Many individuals commit a certain number of hours each week to prayer and charitable activities.

Giving of our treasure is equally as important as giving of our time and talent. Since God does not hold back on any area of His giving, so we are not to hold back on any area of our giving, especially in the crucial area of supporting our parish, diocese, Catholic schools and community organizations.