

Stewardship: A Disciple's Response in a Nutshell

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Stewardship: A Disciple's Response

The US Bishops' pastoral letter was published in 1992 as a challenge to embrace a way of life with the "power to change how we understand and live out our lives."

It contains 3 Primary Convictions

- 1| CHALLENGE** – Mature discipleship requires a decision to follow Jesus Christ no matter the cost.
- 2| CHOICE** – This commitment leads to a way of life, not just a series of actions.
- 3| VISION** – Then, with the first two being true, stewardship is transformational.

The letter is organized in 5 sections that reflect on the reality and source of the above convictions:

- 1| The Call:** a) the call to stewardship is personal and with a purpose in mind for each individual; b) the call is never made in isolation, with the community assisting in the discernment process. We are asked to respond to the call, knowing the cost may not be small.
- 2| Jesus' Way:** Jesus himself is the primary teacher of stewardship. His parables especially show us a true image of a good steward. This way of life is not followed because of reward, although it is a source of great joy. Our activity as stewards is valuable because it is bringing about a Kingdom of God that exists here and now as well in the hereafter.
- 3| Living as a Steward:** We are called to collaborate with God in the work of creation, redemption, and sanctification. This is a stewardship in a profound way. In this manner, human productivity on any scale is seen as God's work.
- 4| Stewards of the Church:** Each member of the Body of Christ has an obligation due to baptism to build up that Body. A stewardship way of life leads the member to evangelization, human solidarity, social justice, ecumenism, and the Eucharist. The members are called to bring these fruits into all spheres that they work in: the diocese, the parish, the domestic church, and the world.
- 5| The Christian Steward:** Good stewards see the evidence of God in all things, small and large. This leads to fruits of love, trust, accountability, and generosity. Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary serve as their examples. They give without measure.

Four years after the 1992 publication, an appendix was added to future printings. This was an attempt to deal with criticisms from the traditional development side of the Church who felt that finances were too de-emphasized, and also to offer further clarification of key terms and concepts. Several characteristics of stewardship are discussed in the initial two sections.

Stewardship **1)** is collaborative **2)** involves trust in God **3)** calls for a commitment to formation and resources **4)** is a lifelong process **5)** needs a comprehensive approach on all levels of the Church **6)** is for all ages.

The third section focuses on development and finance. It focuses on key elements of the stewardship of treasure, including capital campaigns, planned giving, and endowment funds. The fourth section includes a basic outline of seven key steps for overall stewardship success in promoting all forms of gifts.

Those 7 key steps are:

- 1| Personal witnessing
- 2| Commitment of leadership
- 3| Hospitality, Evangelization & Outreach
- 4| Communication & Education
- 5| Recruiting, training & recognizing gifts of time and talent
- 6| Encouragement of gifts of treasure
- 7| Accountability

This appendix ends with a glossary of key stewardship terms. An additional appendix was also added of stewardship resources. At this time, many of the resources listed are out of print or outdated. Also, not all the resources are of a Catholic nature. Still, the list offers the reader a chance to find further discussion materials and practical resources for stewardship.

Christian stewardship did not begin in 1992 with the US Bishops' Pastoral Letter, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*. It did not start with the formation of the International Catholic Stewardship Council in 1962. It is not a current trend in the Catholic Church or the latest pop theology. Real stewardship has its origins in holy Scripture, from David's longing to repay his God for all his blessings in Psalm 116 to Jesus' command to love God with all one's heart, mind, and soul. God has entrusted us with so many gifts and talents, the breath of life, and the means by which we can sustain our existence. As disciples of Jesus we are called to use these things to build the Kingdom of God; to make the Body of Christ strong; to change the world. Stewardship is an extremely difficult reality to sustain. However, the concepts and processes we use do not need to be complicated. Simple principles can be the seeds for tremendous growth. This is the mission of Everyday Stewardship.