



Stewardship: God's Call and Our Response

What Parish Staffs Need to Know

1. The U.S. Catholic Bishops challenge us to give flesh to our faith and discipleship through being stewards. They write that being a disciple of Jesus leads to the practice of stewardship. These two realities are closely linked, making up the fabric of a Christian life which is grounded in an intimate relationship with the Lord.¹ Fostering stewardship and discipleship is a matter of encouraging people to answer four interrelated calls that characterize the Christian life: holiness, community, maturity in faith, and mission. Answering these calls means cooperating with the Holy Spirit and looking for concrete ways to use the unique gifts God has given us. Everybody has gifts: the young, the elderly, people with disabilities. No parish populations are only on the receiving end of ministries.
2. We can find models of discipleship and stewardship in the gospels, in the lives of the saints who exercised heroic virtues, and in the witness of contemporary men and women of faith. In their pastoral letter, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, the United States Catholic Bishops suggest an important lesson we can learn from the way Jesus called his disciples (and the saints) to follow him: Jesus' call is personal. God does not summon disciples en masse but one by one, as unique persons.² We can use a particular saint's feast day (St. Andrew, St. Francis of Assisi, or the parish patron) to focus on the personal call to discipleship and on the unique, but repeatable, kind of stewardship that this holy person practiced.
3. Stewardship is a way of thanking God for the gifts we have received. It is a biblical concept. A steward is a manager, someone who watches over the resources of a household. It flows from both a sense of gratitude for what we have been given and a sobering realization that our gifts do not originate with us. Fostering stewardship means awakening gratitude and a compassionate desire to share gifts of time, talent, and physical resources with all of our sisters and brothers. In doing so, we grow to appreciate the interplay of all the gifts in the body of Christ. Ministry teams, especially, need to focus first on discovering and calling forth gifts (their own gifts too), and then on filling needs.
4. Stewardship is a way of surrendering to God who challenges us to redefine and prioritize what we need, who and whose we are, and what we are capable of doing, both as a parish and as individuals. It involves an ongoing call to conversion in the ways we use our time, talents, and physical resources. The desire to be a Christian steward reaches into all areas of our lives. It is a way of living that involves setting priorities. Vatican II tells us, "All...according to their own gifts and duties must steadfastly advance along the way of a living faith, which arouses hope and works through love."³
5. Stewardship encompasses a variety of action responses that are tailored to our vocations, the circumstances we face at work and at home, and the personal abilities we bring to a life of discipleship. Our responses are most fruitful when they are concrete, measurable ways of following Jesus in his mercy and compassion for all people. When we invite parishioners to be part of a parish ministry, we are inviting them to respond to God's call together. And again, the activities of the ministry should be concretely described. We should ask for a definite, measurable amount of time. We should offer the support of ongoing training and supervision.

¹ U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1992), p.13

² *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, p. 12.

³ Documents of Vatican Council II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen gentium)*, 41.