



Life is Your Gift

Creator God, Life is your gift to me.

Through Baptism, you invite me to share the gift of my life in service to others. Be with me as I choose each day to show Your Presence in our world. Give me the courage and generosity to respond to Your love, to Your call.

I pray especially for those who serve you in ministry throughout our Parish and Archdiocese. May we bear the “Good News” to those in need. Keep us close to you.

Open the minds and hearts of many other men, women and young people that they may accept Your challenge to build the Kingdom in our parish, our community and our world.

*For if not us, who?
If not here, where?
If not now, when?
If not for Your Kingdom, why?*

We make this prayer through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

*Taken from U.S. Bishops’ Pastoral Letter,
“Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response”*





A Disciple's Response

*Excerpts from the United States Conference
of Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Stewardship*

Introduction to the Pastoral Letter

Three convictions in particular underlie what we say in this pastoral letter.

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, nor 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.

The Challenge

In some ways it may be harder to be a Christian steward today than at times in the past. Although religious faith is a strong force in the lives of many Americans, our country's dominant secular culture often contradicts the values of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. This is a culture in which destructive "isms" – materialism, relativism, hedonism, individualism, consumerism – exercise seductive, powerful influences. There is a strong tendency to privatize faith, to push it to the margins of society, confining it to people's hearts or, at best, their homes, while excluding it from the marketplace of ideas where social policy is formed and men and women acquire their view of life and its meaning.



The Call to Stewardship

The Choice

Christians are part of this culture, influenced by it in many ways. In recent decades many Catholics in particular have entered into the mainstream of American society. That has been a remarkable achievement. Often, though, this process also has widened the “split” between faith and life which Vatican II saw as one of “the more serious errors of our age” (*Guadium et Spes*, 43). Thus American Catholicism itself has taken on some of the less attractive values of the secular culture.

For example, although religious people often speak about community, individualism infects the religious experience of many persons. How to use people’s gifts and charisms, how to empower the laity, how to recognize the role of women, how to affirm racial, cultural, and ethnic minorities, how to overcome poverty and oppression -- these and countless other issues remain vexing questions, as well as opportunities.

Also, while many Catholics are generous in giving of themselves and their resources to the Church, others do not respond to the needs in proportion to what they possess. The result now is a lack of resources which seriously hampers the Church’s ability to carry out its mission and obstructs people’s growth as disciples.

The pastoral letter recognizes the importance of church support, including the sharing of time, talent, and treasure. But it situates church support in its broader context – what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

This also is the context of stewardship. Generous sharing of resources, including money, is central to its practice, and church support is a necessary part of this. Essentially, it means helping the Church’s mission with money, time, personal resources of all kinds. This sharing is not an option for Catholics who understand what membership in the Church involves. It is a serious duty. It is a consequence of the faith which Catholics profess and celebrate.

This pastoral letter initiates a long-term, continuing process encouraging people to examine and interiorize stewardship’s implications. At the start of this process it is important to lay out a comprehensive view of stewardship – a vision of a sharing, generous, accountable way of life rooted in Christian discipleship – which people can take to heart and apply to the circumstances of their lives. Concentrating on one specific obligation of stewardship, even one as important as church support, could make it harder – even impossible – for people to grasp the vision. It could imply that when the bishops get serious about stewardship, what they really mean is simply giving money.



The Call to Stewardship

The Vision

Jesus' invitation to follow him is addressed to people of every time and condition. Here and now it is addressed to us – Catholic citizens of a wealthy, powerful nation facing many questions about its identity and role in the waning years of a troubled century, members of a community of faith blessed with many human and material resources yet often uncertain about how to sustain and use them.

As bishops, we wish to present a vision that suits the needs and problems of the Church in our country today and speaks to those who practice Christian stewardship in their particular circumstances.

What we say here is directed to ourselves as much as to you who read these words. As bishops, we recognize our obligation to be models of stewardship in all aspects of our lives. We must be stewards in our prayer and worship, in how we fulfill our pastoral duties, in our custody of the Church's doctrine, spiritual resources, personnel, and funds, in our life-style and use of time, and even in such matters as the attention we give to personal health and recreation.

As we ask you to respond to the challenge of stewardship, we pray that we also will be open to the grace to respond. We pray that the Holy Spirit, whose gracious action conforms us to Jesus Christ and to the Church, will enlighten us all and help us to renew our commitment as the Lord's disciples and as stewards of his bountiful gifts.





Who is a Christian steward?

The Disciple's Vocation

The Christian vocation is essentially a call to be a disciple of Jesus. Stewardship is part of that. Christians are called to be good stewards of the personal vocations they receive. Each of us must discern, accept and live out joyfully and generously the commitments, responsibilities, and roles to which God calls us.

Jesus not only calls each of us to him, but also forms us and sends us out in his service. He knows our personal histories, our strengths and weaknesses, our destinies; he has a purpose in mind for each one of us.

This purpose is individual vocation. "Only in the unfolding of the history of our lives and its events," says Pope John Paul II, "is the eternal plan of God revealed to each of us" (Christifideles Laici, 58). Every human life, every personal vocation, is unique.

And yet the vocations of all Christians do have elements in common. One of these is the call to be a disciple. In fact, we might say that to be disciples – to follow Christ and try to live his life as our own – is the common vocations of Christians; discipleship in this sense is Christian life.

Responding to the Call

Jesus not only calls people to him but also forms them and sends them out in his service. Jesus' call is urgent. He does not tell people to follow him at some time in the future but here and now – at this moment, in these circumstances.

The Call to Stewardship

Becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ leads naturally to the practice of stewardship. These linked realities, discipleship and stewardship, then make up the fabric of a Christian life in which each day is lived in an intimate, personal relationship with the Lord.

*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.*





The Call to Stewardship

The Call to Stewardship (continued)

Following Jesus is the work of a lifetime. At every step forward, one is challenged to go further in accepting and loving God's will. Stewardship plays an important role in the lives of people who seek to follow Christ. Christians must be stewards of their personal vocations. Catholics have a duty, too, to be stewards of their church: that community of disciples, that Body of Christ, of which they, individually and together, are the members, and in which "if one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy" (1Cor 12:26).

The Cost of Discipleship

The way of discipleship is privileged beyond any other. But discipleship is not an easy way. It is costly because it requires a disciple for Jesus' sake to put aside the craving for domination, possession, and control, and grace because it confers true liberation and eternal life. It is costly, finally, because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner.

But all this is very general. To understand and practice this way of life, people need models to imitate. These exist in abundance in the holy women and men who have gone before us in the faith; while our supreme source of guidance is found in the person and teaching of Jesus.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What is my unique personal vocation to which God has called me?
2. What gifts has God given me?
3. How do I/can I recognize the Lord's invitation to share my gift with others?
4. What are the obstacles to my responding freely to the invitation to share my gifts?
5. What responsibilities do I have as a disciple of Jesus?
6. What personal experiences have I had that helped me live my life as a disciple?
7. How is stewardship more radical than just sharing of time, talent and money?
8. If I were to be the ideal Christian steward, what would it cost me in terms of personal sacrifice and hardship?
9. How am I reaching out to invite others to recognize their gifts?
What opportunities do I provide for them to use those gifts in service of others?