

Fostering Stewardship as a Way of Life

Guide for Comprehensive Parish Stewardship in the Diocese of Davenport, Iowa

September 2004

*For all in heaven and on earth is yours;
yours, O Lord, is the sovereignty; you are exalted as head over all.
Riches and honor are from you and you have dominion over all.*

Chronicles 29:11-12

INTRODUCTION

Stewardship is certainly not a new concept in our Judeo-Christian tradition. Some of God's earliest commands in the Old Testament expect us to live as caretakers of all that has been bestowed on us. (Gn 1:26-31). Caretakers are accountable to the Creator for the use of the gifts given. The New Testament gives us the greatest example of stewardship – Jesus, Himself. In His parables and in His own personal example, Jesus gives constant reminders of our obligation to live as stewards. (Mt 25:14-36).

The Catholic Church has placed renewed emphasis on the theology and practice of stewardship during the past decade. The continued growth and vitality of this institution depends upon it. Stewardship provides an appropriate scriptural basis for responding to the Church's growing need for human, physical and financial resources. It helps people to live as disciples in the real world with a better understanding of what it means to follow Jesus in an affluent, consumer-oriented culture. Stewardship sanctifies the good works already being done and strengthens the parish as an agent of salvation. Both spiritual and temporal fruits result when individuals, parish and diocesan leaders are committed to authentic stewardship.

OVERVIEW OF STEWARDSHIP

(Please read the 1992 U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter – "Stewardship: A Disciple's Response" – for a complete description of the theology and the vision of stewardship as a way of life.)

All that we have and all that we are is a gift from a loving and generous God. This includes our time, our talent, and our treasure; plus the gifts of the earth and all it holds, our faith, our personal vocation, and our very lives. Stewardship is a way of life based upon gratitude for these gifts.

We are stewards not owners of these gifts. Our gifts are not to be ignored or used solely for ourselves, but are made available to build up the Kingdom of God. We are to freely choose to use our gifts out of motives of love, thankfulness and justice, not guilt and fear. This may require a conversion of mind and heart.

Stewardship is a holistic approach to faith. It addresses our inherent need to give back to God. Stewardship relates to developing (formation) and sharing the gift of faith (evangelization); using our time and unique talents to do God's will in our own families (family life) and in service to others (church life and social action); plus sharing our financial resources to address the needs and concerns of the people of God throughout the world (charitable giving).

Stewardship is not about raising money or recruiting volunteers to fill ministry needs. It is about spiritual development. It is about responding to the call to be a disciple of Christ. Stewardship applies to every aspect of our individual lives and to the life of the parish community. Stewardship is best understood by living it. For this reason the Bishops' Pastoral Letter avoids a specific definition of the term, but it does describe a Christian steward as:

“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.”

SIGNS OF A STEWARDSHIP PARISH

Stewardship Vision Statement

We seek to instill stewardship as a significant element of diocesan culture that bonds people to gospel values and builds up the Kingdom of God.

To facilitate the opportunity for individuals to live the stewardship way of life and to provide a means for parishes to carry out their mission, faith communities are encouraged to design and implement a comprehensive stewardship process. This process should assure that the parish is meeting the needs of the parish family and responding to the wider community using the generous gifts of its people.

The following are key components of a successful parish stewardship effort in the Diocese of Davenport.

Prayer

Prayer is central to who we are and what we do as Christians. An effective parish stewardship effort is firmly grounded in prayer. Meetings are saturated with prayer, decisions are made in the context of prayer, and multiple opportunities for individual and community prayer are offered throughout the week.

Public Commitment by Parish Leaders

The pastor, parish staff, parish/pastoral council, finance council, board of education and other leaders or groups commit to a continuous stewardship process that is reflected in the parish mission statement and long-range plan.

Active Stewardship Committee/Commission

Each parish or cluster of parishes establishes a committee to direct and monitor the total stewardship endeavor. The committee should be formed by the teachings of the 1992 U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter.

Year-Round Spiritual Formation and Educational Activities

The stewardship conversion process is nurtured and developed with multi-generational, year-round formation activities that remind people of their call to discipleship and the sharing of gifts as a grateful response.

Hospitality Program

A vibrant hospitality program exists for creating parish ownership; welcoming newcomers and visitors; and acknowledging and thanking parishioners for contributing their God-given gifts of time, talent and treasure.

Annual Time, Talent and Treasure Renewals

Pastoral leaders help the laity discern and contribute their variety of gifts. Time and talent renewals encourage people to share their gifts as a way to meet the ministry needs of the parish and greater community. A stewardship of treasure renewal encompasses a theology that promotes planned, proportionate and grateful giving.

Stewardship-Based Financial Plan

The total financial plan includes:

- Parishioners (adults and children) using envelopes or electronic giving methods supplied by the parish.
- Publication of an annual budget and an accountability report of parish income, expenses and other outflows.
- Incremental movement toward eliminating second collections, special envelopes, and supplementary fund raisers for ordinary parish operating expenses.
- Campaigns for extraordinary projects or capital improvements are presented within the context of the Church's teaching and practices of stewardship.
- The long-term financial security of the parish, diocese and universal church is ensured through planned giving programs and careful management of endowments.

A Portion of the Weekly Offertory Collection is Shared with Others

A stewardship parish moves toward contributing a portion of its regular offertory to those in need; our own diocesan social ministries; and worthy community, regional, national and international programs. This practice provides a vivid example of the type of proportionate giving that the leadership is encouraging its members to assume.

SUPPORT FOR THE MINISTRY

Mission Statement

The Diocesan Office of Stewardship
leads and serves the Catholic people of southeastern Iowa
on their lifelong journey toward a total stewardship way of life.

Stewardship is a priority of the Roman Catholic Church. It requires the full commitment and support of bishops, pastors, diocesan personnel and the parish community. The Stewardship Office of the Diocese of Davenport strives to provide servant leadership by offering support, assistance, resources, materials and formation opportunities to communities and pastoral leaders. Our aim is to inspire stewardship as a way of life.

The Stewardship Office fulfills its mission through short and long term strategies that affirm and call forth the gifts of time, talent and treasure of the members of this diocese.

We promote stewardship as a significant priority of the Diocese and cultivate an environment where stewardship is understood, accepted and practiced by:

- Identifying and mentoring stewardship leaders to serve as Stewardship Contact Persons for their local faith communities. Stewardship Contacts act as liaison between the diocesan office and the local community.
- Maintaining a diocesan membership with the International Catholic Stewardship Council (ICSC) on behalf of all diocesan entities and serving as intermediary between this organization and the diocesan communities. We relay ICSC communications, advocate for diocesan and parish concerns, and facilitate member benefits for interested parties.

- Researching available stewardship materials and providing current resources as requested. We maintain a lending library of current resources and display them on appropriate occasions.
- Making full use of all diocesan communication vehicles to publicize stewardship materials or events and relaying pertinent information. We utilize direct mail, email, the diocesan website, *The Catholic Messenger*, and the *Mini-Messenger*.
- Posting current and relevant stewardship resources on the diocesan website.

We sponsor educational opportunities for diocesan and parish leaders to encourage effective efforts for nurturing and sustaining stewardship by:

- Conducting inservices and workshops in deaneries or through the Iowa Communications Network.
- Sponsoring an annual Diocesan Stewardship Training Day.
- Hearty promotion of the annual International Catholic Stewardship Conference as a tool for enrichment and education.
- Enthusiastic participation in Region IX stewardship planning and promotion of regional events.
- Bi-monthly circulation of the *Stewardship Update* as a formational publication.

We have established a leadership structure that is committed to holistic stewardship and dedicated to promoting its practice through the Diocese. We:

- Convene the diocesan Stewardship Advisory Board quarterly.
- Coordinate a lay witness speakers' bureau and respond to parish requests for presenters as needed.
- Visibly collaborate with parish, deanery and diocesan leaders to present a gospel-based vision of stewardship and demonstrate how stewardship partners with the six ministry areas.
- Devise and distribute support materials for local stewardship efforts.

Put simply, stewardship is a series of steps taken toward God as we become ever more the people we were created to be. The steps involve love, faith, action and service to the people who share our circle of life. Prayerful solidarity is needed to inspire and sustain stewardship as a way of life in the Diocese of Davenport.

For assistance with this ministry please contact:

Dan R. Ebener, Director of Stewardship and Parish Planning
 Diocese of Davenport • 780 West Central Park Ave. • Davenport, Iowa 52804-1901
 Phone: 563-888-4251 • Email: ebener@davenportdiocese.org

As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace. Whoever preaches, let it be with the words of God, whoever serves, let it be with the strength that God supplies, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong glory and dominion forever and ever.

1 Peter 4:10-11