

# STEWARDSHIP

## Following Jesus as Good Stewards

What does it mean to follow Jesus? Jesus constantly rooted himself in the Father's love through prayer, was attentive to the needs of the people around him, especially the most poor and vulnerable, and gave completely of himself, desiring that others would know and accept the lavish and undying love of God. As Jesus' followers, we are called to do likewise, so that the choices and decisions we make and our daily actions and interactions with others will reveal God's love in the world. We do this best as stewards, people who recognize the abundance of God's grace in our lives and willingly share it with others.

"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

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life, the giver of freedom, the source of all they have and are and will be. ... 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 U.S. bishops explain in their document "Stewardship: A Disciple's Response."

Stewardship is a special way of following the Lord. It is a disciple's response to the blessings of life, gifts and talents, resources, faith, and so much more. As stewards, we see that every good thing is a blessing, entrusted to us by God. Stewards nurture their gifts and make them fruitful; stewards live generously, knowing that in doing so, we become more like Christ and give glory to God, the giver of the very gifts we are sharing with others.

### A WAY OF LIFE

The stewardship way of life calls us to put Christ at the center of our lives and be attentive to the call of the Lord. Putting the Lord first often calls us to let go of selfishness or self-centeredness and put others first. "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow



me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" (Lk 9:23-24).

If stewardship has "the power to change how we understand and live out our lives," what does this look like in daily life? We may not always think about it, but we make dozens of choices every day, about how we use our time, who receives our attention or care, upon what we spend money, the attitudes we develop, as well as how we behave at home, work, school, and in the world. Making a commitment to follow Jesus and live as a steward impacts all of these decisions.

Good stewards choose to be thankful, generous people who more readily share their time, resources, faith, and gifts with others and find joy in the process. "Following Jesus is the work of a lifetime," "Stewardship: A Disciple's Response" tells us. "At every step forward, one is challenged to go further in accepting and loving God's will. Being a disciple is not just something else to do, alongside many other things suitable for Christians; it is a total way of life and requires continuing conversion."

## GOOD STEWARDS

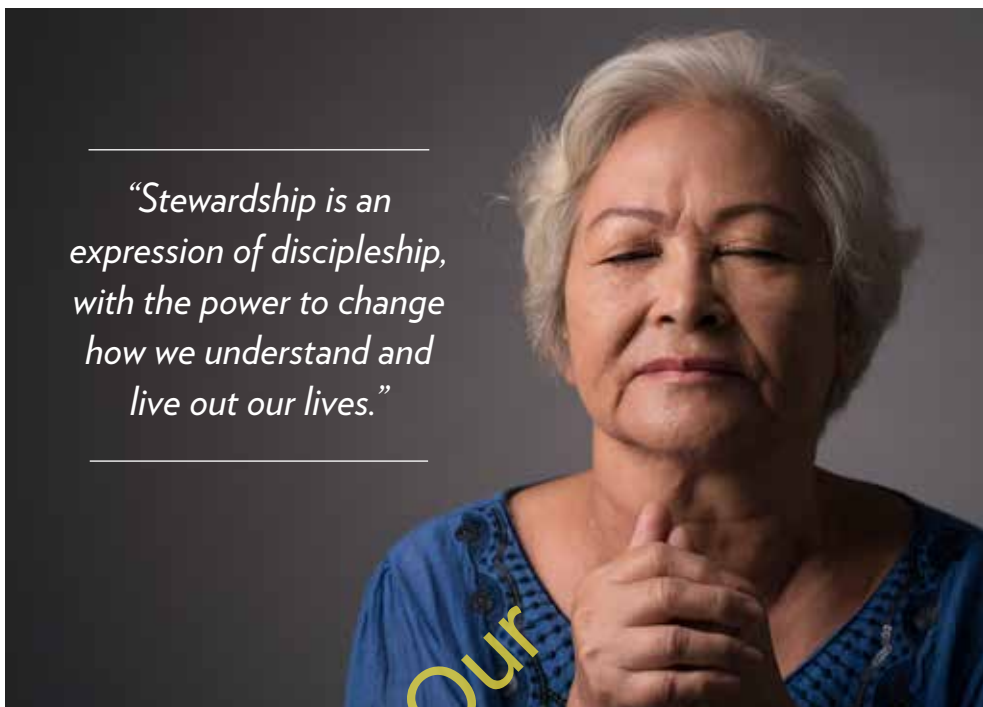
The first step in becoming a good steward is to be attentive to the many gifts you have been given and to grow in gratitude for these abundant blessings. Begin each day with a prayer of thanks giving for your life and the blessing of the new day. Thank God for entrusting you with so many good things, and ask God for the wisdom and willingness to share his goodness with others.

Once you are aware of your gifts — time or talents, for example — cultivate them by intentionally using them

well and sharing them with others. Be especially attentive to those who are most in need, and be ready to respond through the use of your talents, time, prayer, attention, or resources. When you are tempted by selfishness, consider the needs of those you encounter who need to know God's love through you. Their needs are great, as are the gifts you have been given! Notice the impact of your giving, and seek out additional ways to give, especially in service.

Take a few moments in the evening to reflect on the blessings of the day and to give God thanks for them. Express your gratitude to God for the opportunity to make a difference in someone's life through your caring and sharing. Thank God, too, for the privilege of being entrusted with so many gifts and blessings!

*"Stewardship is an expression of discipleship, with the power to change how we understand and live out our lives."*



## GRATITUDE TO GOD

When we acknowledge that everything we are and have is truly God's, we can enter into stewardship. God gives us everything in trust, as a farmer or vineyard owner trusts the steward to care for the plants, nurturing them to yield with increase. Taking this realization to heart, we grow in gratitude, shaping our lives with a sense of wonder, awe, and responsibility. We have been entrusted with much. As with any gift, the appropriate response is to say, "Thank you."

Just as a child learns to take care of the gifts given him or her on a special occasion, we learn to express gratitude to God for our many gifts by taking care of them, nurturing them, and helping them to grow. We have been entrusted with gifts of time, relationships, special talents and skills, the ability to earn income, and the resources that result from our work. Our response to this trust is to be generous, as God is generous with us. Gratitude leads to generosity. Good stewards live generously, selflessly, lovingly, in every time and season.

## PRAYING AS STEWARDS WITH THE SAINTS

Thanks be to you, my Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits which you have given me; for all the pains and insults which you have borne for me. O most merciful Redeemer, Friend, and Brother, may I know you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen. — Saint Richard of Chichester





# STEWARDSHIP

## The Bible Calls Us to Cultivate and Care

Imagine yourself in Eden, the garden of paradise, where God, humans, and all of creation live in relationship. God called everything into being – birds of the air, plants, animals, fish in the sea – and called it good. The pinnacle of God’s creation is humanity, created “in his image; / in the image of God he created them; / male and female he created them” (Gn 1:27).

In Eden, Adam and Eve are given sacred responsibility for the plants and creatures, to “cultivate and care” (Gn 2:15) for all within the garden. They are not left alone in this sacred charge. God is with them, walking and talking with them, giving them freedom to explore and to grow, desiring that they remain close to him, trusting in his providence.

In Genesis, we encounter the living God and our divine purpose: We are created in God’s image, formed by the Creator in love and for love. As God’s people, we are called into right relationship with God and all of creation, to steward, to “cultivate and care” for all he has created and called good. We are not left alone in this sacred responsibility. God is with us as we steward our lives, faith, gifts, resources, and all of creation.

### MAKING GOD’S LOVE KNOWN

God established a covenant with his people, promising to remain with us always (see Gn 8:20–9:17; Gn 15; Ex 20; 2 Sm 7:4–29). God, who is love, does not

hold back in caring for those in need; God, who is merciful, is always ready to show compassion and forgiveness; God, who is just, desires that justice reigns. We have been created in God’s image, called to mirror that image in the world, so that others may know his incredible love through the way we live. Created in God’s image, we are called to care, to show mercy, work for justice, and more. We do this in the ways we serve and share, each of us differently through the good use, the stewardship, of our talents and gifts, skills and

strengths, material goods, and money.

### GIVE GOD FIRST FRUITS

Recognizing that God has entrusted much to us, we grow in gratitude for our many gifts. Yet how can we express our thankfulness to God, who graces us with such abundance? As people who are created in God’s image and who are called to mirror that image in the world, our grateful response must be in giving lavishly as God has given so freely to us. Throughout the Bible, we hear the call to this grateful giving. We

### GROWING AS A GOOD STEWARD

Reflect on your life at this time. How does your faith in Jesus Christ shape your daily living? In what ways do you mirror the image – the love, mercy, and compassion – of God through your caring and sharing, your good stewardship of your life, gifts, and resources? Make a list of ways you will share generously. Ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen your resolve to grow as a good steward.



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must not give God leftovers, but rather express our heartfelt thanks from our first fruits: “They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed, but each with his own gift, in proportion to the blessing which the LORD, your God, has given to you” (Dt 16:16–17). “For everything is from you, and what we give is what we have from you” (1 Chr 29:14).

## THE PERFECT IMAGE OF GOD

Jesus is the perfect image of God, Emmanuel, God-with-us. Jesus shows and shares God’s love perfectly, and in Jesus we more fully grasp our call to be good stewards. Jesus turns away from the human temptations of power and selfishness and turns fully and always toward God’s way of love. Jesus lives in perfect right relationship with God the Father. He desires that God’s will be done and to establish God’s kingdom on earth, so much so that Jesus gives his very life in order to fulfill this mission, God’s mission of undying love.

Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus taught his followers to be responsible and accountable for all they have been given. He told parables to convey this message, and many of his most beloved stories speak of stewards — those who served well, and those who did not. Think, for example, of the Good Samaritan who stops to attend to the wounded traveler, taking him to a place of lodging and providing for his care (see Lk 10:29–37), or of the three servants who were given talents to steward in their master’s absence (Mt 25:14–30). Jesus wants us to understand that gifts and resources are not given to us to be hoarded or coveted, but rather to be used to express God’s generous love.

“Jesus is the supreme teacher of Christian stewardship, as he is of every other aspect of Christian life; and in Jesus’ teaching and life self-emptying is fundamental. Now, it might seem that self-emptying has little to do with stewardship, but in Jesus’ case that is not so,” the U.S. bishops write in “Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response.” Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross does not end in death, but rather in the joy of Easter morning and the establishment of a new and everlasting covenant. Joined with Christ, our stewardship — that is, our sacrifice of time, resources, attention, service, caring, and sharing — helps to make Christ’s presence known in the world.



### PRAYING WITH THE SAINTS

Most high, glorious God enlighten the darkness of my heart and give me, Lord, a correct faith, a certain hope, a perfect charity, sense and knowledge, so that I may carry out your holy and true command. — Saint Francis of Assisi



## THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

“It will be as when a man who was going on a journey called in his servants and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents; to another, two; to a third, one — to each according to his ability. Then he went away. Immediately the one who received five talents went and traded with them, and made another five. Likewise, the one who received two made another two. But the man who received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and buried his master’s money. After a long time the master of those servants came back and settled accounts with them. The one who had received five talents came forward bringing the additional five. He said, ‘Master, you gave me five talents. See, I have made five more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master’s joy.’ [Then] the one who had received two talents also came forward and said, ‘Master, you gave me two talents. See, I have made two more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master’s joy.’ Then the one who had received the one talent came forward and said, ‘Master, I knew you were a demanding person, harvesting where you did not plant and gathering where you did not scatter; so out of fear I went off and buried your talent in the ground. Here it is back.’ His master said to him in reply, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I did not plant and gather where I did not scatter? Should you not then have put my money in the bank so that I could have got it back with interest on my return? Now then! Take the talent from him and give it to the one with ten. For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And throw this useless servant into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.’”

~ Matthew 25:14–30



# STEWARDSHIP

## It's About More than Money!

What first comes to mind when you hear the word “stewardship”? If you immediately thought “money,” you’re not alone. Even though we have been taught that stewardship is about more than this, many people still think stewardship is just another way to ask for money. Let us be clear about what stewardship is so that we can begin to understand that it is about much more than money. Stewardship can be a way to put our faith into practice in our daily lives.

### WHAT IS A STEWARD?

A steward is one who cares for something that belongs to another. The steward of the vineyard, for example, cares for the vines, cultivates them, and prunes them when necessary in order to bring about a fruitful harvest. The steward is entrusted with the vineyard and is responsible for it. “An ‘oikonomos’ or steward is one to whom the owner of a household turns over responsibility for caring for the property, managing affairs, making resources yield as much as possible and sharing the resources with others. The position involves trust and accountability” (“Stewardship. A Disciple’s Response,” U.S. bishops).

When we apply this meaning of the word steward to our lives, we come in touch with a powerful realization: All we are, have, and will be is God’s. Every good gift and blessing — our life, talents and abilities, relationships, faith, resources — belongs to God. “The earth is the Lord’s and all it holds, / the world and those who dwell in it” (Ps 24:1). We are called to steward it well. Not to simply care for it, but to nurture it and make it fruitful.

With the deeper meaning of stewardship in our minds and hearts, we can think again about stewardship of money. Why is money included in the

*“The earth is the Lord’s and all it holds, / the world and those who dwell in it” (Ps 24:1).*

call to give as good stewards? Don’t we earn the money ourselves through our effort and hard work? Surely this is true, but we do so through the use of the gifts that are entrusted to us by God.

We could not earn money without the time, talents and skills, education, and opportunities that have been given us.

Jesus sometimes spoke about the proper use of money, recognizing how difficult it

is for people to keep financial resources in the proper perspective. Jesus’ parables and responses about money show us he understands that the way we use money is a sign of our priorities: “No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be



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devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Mt 6:24); “For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be” (Lk 12:34).

### SEEING GOD’S GRACE

Let’s be honest with ourselves. It is easy to go about the days and months and years of life without paying much attention to the many ways in which we are blessed. We can easily take it all for granted: our lives; the beauty and preciousness of creation; the gifts



## GROWING AS A GOOD STEWARD

Reflect on the ways you currently spend and share money. In what ways is your use of money a statement of your faith and your priorities? Do you give to your parish and charities as a sign of gratitude to God for your many blessings? Do you give of your first fruits, making a prayerful, proportional gift to God? Make a commitment to take a step in financial giving to your parish and a local, national, or global charity as a sign of thanksgiving.

of talents, skills, and abilities; relationships with family and friends; our faith. All of it is a gift. Yet we do not always see the gift because we aren't looking for it. We rise in the morning, perhaps grumbling because we have to get the children to school and ourselves to work, without recognizing the gift in rising, or the blessing of family or employment. Perhaps we are experiencing unemployment or underemployment, illness, or the death of a loved one. How can we think about blessings at this time of life?

Stewardship begins with awareness of the blessings that surround us, even in the most challenging of moments in our lives. This is not to make light of difficulties, but actually to put them into perspective in light of our faith in Jesus Christ. Understanding ourselves

as stewards helps us to put our trust in God, who entrusts us with much. This attitude of gratitude makes a tremendous difference in our lives. In fact, many studies show a connection between gratitude and happiness. Perhaps this is not surprising, since the word gratitude comes from the root word "grace." To be thankful is to recognize God's grace in our lives!

With the foundation of gratitude in our minds and hearts, we can now see that stewardship is not only about money, but so much more. Our giving is a sign of our thanksgiving, our gratitude to God for bountiful blessings received. Attentive to the abundance of God's grace in our midst, we are sure to find opportunities to be good stewards every day. This truly is a way to bring faith to our daily lives!



## AN ACT OF LOVE

Catholic stewardship calls us to act not so much out of responsibility or duty but out of love. Love provides the ultimate motivation. And yet love, at times, demands sacrifice on one level or another. As Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, liked to say, "Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing."

Perhaps that's because we humans find ourselves incapable of the perfect, unconditional love of God. Still, we're called to perfect our love, day by day. We're called to open our hearts again and again, to proclaim our love and also to act upon it.

What sacrifices do you make for love?

## PRAYING WITH THE SAINTS AS STEWARDS

Lord Jesus, teach me to be generous;  
teach me to serve you as you deserve,  
to give and not to count the cost,  
to fight and not to heed the wounds,  
to toil and not to seek for rest,  
to labor and not to seek reward,  
save that of knowing that I do your holy will.  
Amen. – Attributed to Saint Ignatius Loyola





# STEWARDSHIP

## The Three T's and More



We sometimes use the phrase “time, talent, and treasure” to describe the ways in which we are called to give as stewards. The phrase is helpful in broadening our understanding so that we do not always equate stewardship with the plea to give financial resources. Yet, even as we think of the three t’s, we can easily find ourselves immersed in a fourth “t,” temptation. We become tempted to say to ourselves, “I gave an afternoon to help with the parish coat drive last year,” or “I put a few dollars in the collection basket,” and then consider ourselves finished with stewardship. Yielding to this temptation not only shortchanges the service, ministry, and care that would benefit from our giving; it prevents us from more closely following Jesus Christ and expressing our faith more readily in our daily lives. Let us think about the call to be good stewards of our time, talent, and treasure, and from that find meaning, purpose, and spiritual growth.

**Time:** Imagine for a moment that today was your final day of life on

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earth. What would you do? With whom would you spend time, talk, linger? Where would you go? What would you most treasure? We never know when our final day of earthly life might be. We should not take for granted the seconds, minutes, and hours we are given. Time is a precious gift.

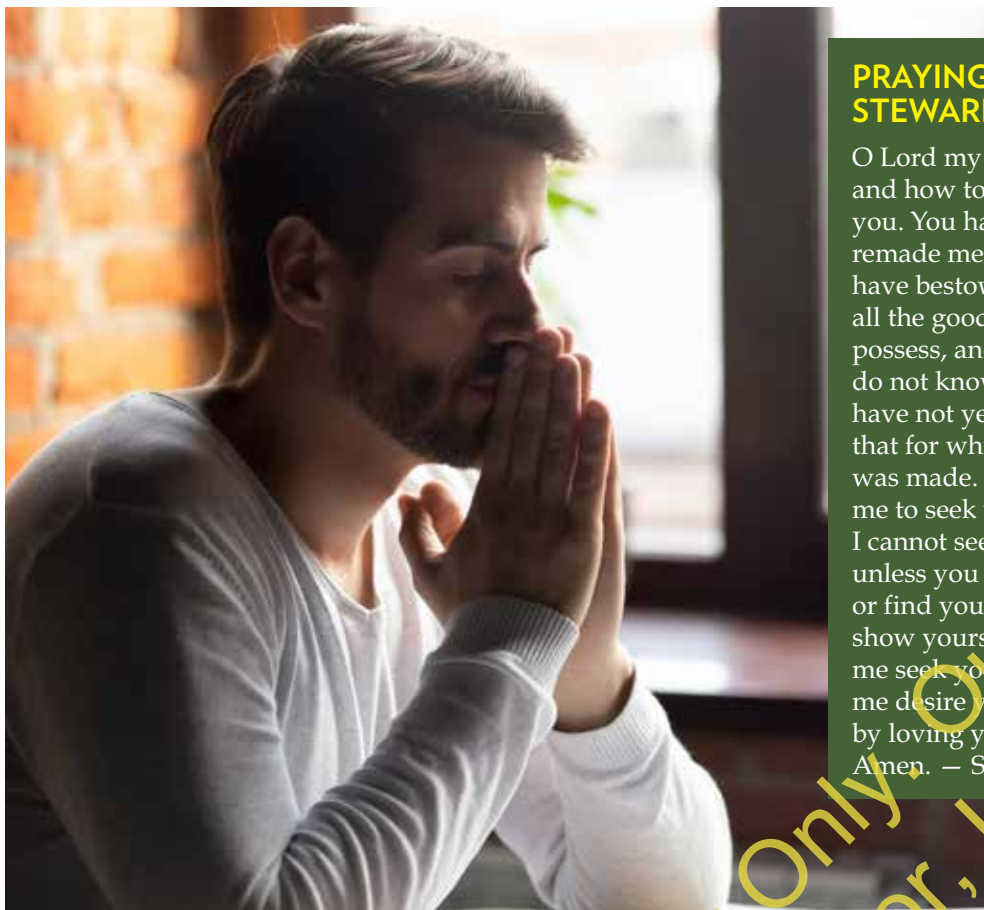
**Talent:** What do you do best? What comes naturally easy to you? These qualities, which have been part of you since the day of your birth, are your talents. You might think of your talents as the way you naturally interact with the world. Each of us has particular

gifts and talents, unique combinations of these qualities. Your talents are your “special something.”

**Treasure:** We all know that when we hear the word treasure as part of the three t’s, we mean money. Money enables us to purchase things that are necessary for our daily living. Notice that the word can also mean something that is valuable, a treasure. Using the word in this way invites us to be mindful of the value we place on money and the acquisition of it in our lives.

### STEWARDSHIP AS A SPIRITUALITY

When we recognize that all good things are gifts from God and grow in our desire to use the gifts well, we begin to understand the spiritual side of stewardship. The call to share our time, talent, and treasure with others is not just a request from our pastor or parish to give, it is an invitation to see God working in our lives. When we make a commitment to give, our commitment is to Christ, our giving is to God.



## PRAYING WITH THE SAINTS AS STEWARDS

O Lord my God, teach my heart this day where and how to see you, where and how to find you. You have made me and remade me, and you have bestowed on me all the good things I possess, and still I do not know you. I have not yet done that for which I was made. Teach me to seek you, for I cannot seek you unless you teach me, or find you unless you show yourself to me. Let me seek you in my desire, let me desire you in my seeking. Let me find you by loving you. Let me love you when I find you. Amen. — Saint Anselm



## GROWING AS GOOD STEWARDS

Spend time in prayer, asking the Lord to show you how your time, talent, treasure, and other gifts might be of benefit to others, especially those most in need. Be mindful of the ways you do or do not steward your gifts well at this time in your life. Challenge yourself to not waste time or money, to turn away from selfishness, and to be more willing to share in service of God and others. Make a commitment to grow as a good steward; share your commitment with another and ask him or her to kindly hold you accountable in fulfilling this commitment.

Stewardship then becomes a privilege rather than a burden; we see abundance all around us, rather than viewing life through the perspective of scarcity; we recognize that we are free to co-create with God through the use of our gifts and freely give in grateful response.

“Consider this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each must do as already determined, without sadness or compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. Moreover, God is able to make every grace abundant for you, so that in all things, always having all you need, you may have an abundance for every good

work” (2 Cor 9:6-8).

We are stewards of all we are, have, and will be. We are already stewards, even if we are not aware of it, or do not intentionally consider the call to stewardship in our lives. We can always grow in the ways we steward our gifts so that our use of time, talent, and treasure becomes a statement of our faith and trust in God.

Stewards use time wisely and give time in service and ministry; stewards share their talents, understanding that if we do not do what we can in the world, something is missing; stewards give of their material and financial resources and in doing so contribute to the mis-

## OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

It's important to share our gifts from God generously with our Church. But stewardship is much more. Stewardship entails a commitment to care for our time, talent, and treasure, as well as care for our life and our vocation, our family, our natural resources, our environment. Giving time, talent, and treasure to the Church is not a complete practice of stewardship.

Stewardship is about our relationship with God. Yes, an important part of that relationship is helping our Church and those it helps, but it also is important how we take care of every other aspect of our life.

sion of Christ to show and share God's love. The U.S. bishops explain in “Stewardship: A Disciple's Response” that a Christian steward “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.”