

Stewardship: Living Christianity [Radically]

A publication of the Department of Stewardship and Development prepared for Chicago Catholics

Sharing Christ's Gifts...A Story of Stewardship

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Who is a Christian Steward?

A person who receives God's gifts gratefully,

Cherishes and tends God's gifts responsibly,

Shares God's gifts in love and justice with others

justice with others,

And returns God's gifts with increase.

Stewardship: A Disciple's Response

When I was a child, the pastor of our parish always gave each woman in the Altar & Rosary Society a dollar bill at the last meeting in the spring. They were to do something with it over the summer. My Mother and her friends would have crazy pajama parties, bunco parties and other things to make their dollar into many more dollars. In the fall, all would return and the money would have increased from what Father gave away.

A few years ago, in trying to help the children in our parish understand the concept of stewardship, I used the example from my childhood. We gave each child in our school and religious education program two quarters. One of our parishioners generously matched these so that each child received four quarters. I told each group of children the Scripture story of the talents and explained that these quarters were like those talents. The children could take them home and bury them, or they could spend them or they could try to multiply their talents. On the day the rest of our parish family was bringing back their pledge cards for our campaign, the children were to bring their baggie with their quarters to the altar. A few of the children got some great ideas, one of the junior high boys got his Mom to match his money and bought knee pads to weed neighbors lawns for a donation, another bought pet treats and started a

dog walking service. But my favorite was Allan. He was all of four years old. His family was part of our family program and the day I shared the story his Dad was unable to come because he wasn't feeling well. So, Allan took home the bag of quarters and repeated the story that Mrs. Lois shared that morning. When he finished the story, he opened the bag and said: "Match it Dad!" Later that day his grandparents came over and Allan again quite willingly shared the story from church that morning. At the end of the story, he again opened the baggie and said to his Grandparents, "Match it!" His family then went to a cousin's house for a birthday celebration. Allan took his baggie along to the party and of course, willingly shared his story and continued to open his bag to be matched. By the end of the day, Allan had over \$40 in his baggie. When his Mom shared with me what he had done, I said I wanted him to be the chairperson of our finance council at the parish. Stewardship was easy for him to understand and everyone else was evangelized through his sharing.

Jesus said, "Let the children come to me", we have much to learn from their wisdom and we need to encourage their understanding of stewardship as they are the next people who will fill our pews on Sunday.

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Meditations in a farm truck on the road to Chicago

By Tony Ends
Scotch Hill Farm

People who know how hard my family works, how difficult it's been for us to establish a farm, ask me why I do this.

I give them many reasons, usually related to experiences I've shared with my children. A 4-year-old's laughter at the sight of each Yukon Gold potato as I fork them into his grasp. A newborn dairy goat in the arms of a 10-year-old, who proudly proclaims, "My first delivery." Years of delight and joy at all I've watched my children discover, learn, accomplish in garden and field.

As a thinking human being, I farm because I'm concerned about food security, ecology, reliance of conventional agriculture on non-renewable sources of energy, food safety, water pollution. As a person of faith, I farm because I take very, very seriously the great Genesis creation story commandment to "Till (serve) and keep Adama (the fertile soil)."

If farming could simply be production, I can't imagine more people wouldn't want to do it.

It's physically hard work, burning up pounds we put on in winter. It poses endless questions about Nature and life cycles, challenging the mind in interesting ways. It tests our every ability to keep plants, birds and animals well in all sorts of conditions.

By constant shifts from dry to wet, hot to cold weather, it reminds us of our true place on Earth – not as masters or exploiters, but as servants and stewards. It helps me live my faith.

Yet farming is also financing and marketing, which forces me across great distances several times weekly to sell what my family and I produce. And all too often (for 90 percent of Wisconsin farmers) this means a second, even third job to make ends meet.

Our Scotch Hill Farm, for instance, grossed just under \$100,000 in sales last year. We raise fresh vegetables and herbs, registered dairy goats, sheep and poultry. We make and sell a hand-milled milk soap that's become about a third of our farm income. All this we produced on less than 10 acres, working very hard but keeping our debt load very low.

Yet our margin of return was less than 12 percent, forcing us to work other jobs, too. Of all the many, many farming and business expenses we met last year, transportation to markets like Ravenswood, Crystal Lake and Oak Park totaled

more than 10 percent.

I read once that Americans typically spend 25 percent of every waking hour sitting in their vehicles or making money to pay for them. It shames me to think I'm a typical American.

Several times this year on the expressway into Chicago, I've realized I was in a mass of four lanes of vehicles traveling 65 to 70 miles an hour, almost bumper to bumper as far as the eye could see.

It made me very nervous to think how easily a mishap would grind hundreds of thousands of people to a halt. Several times (a vehicle underneath a semi tractor trailer and a flight-for-life chopper landing on the Interstate, a flatbed truck with a load of steel that came all the way through the cab and driver), I've slowed to a crawl with all those people and longed for a mass transit system for farmers.

I've pictured coalitions of growers cooperatively shipping products on rail cars, pulled to sidings in each of the 60 communities that ring Chicago. There to receive the fresh goods, dry goods, canned goods, leather and woolen goods each week would be whole communities of people and core groups for every farm, cooperatively assisting distribution, sales and financing.

Realities often have a way of spoiling great dreams.

More than once recently – stopped on another much more remote highway in rural Illinois – I've waited for long, long freight trains and read the harsh reality passing before me, "China Freight, China Freight, China Freight, China Freight."

Headed to Wal-Mart stores, where 80 percent of all goods are imported from China and where almost overnight one third of all food sales have gone nationwide?

On the radio a scientist tells me China will soon surpass the United States in fossil fuel consumption and harmful emissions to the atmosphere. Whether we contribute to global warming ourselves or do it through other people, we do it.

Whatever you do for a living, whether you farm or not, you can steward and serve Creation.

Tony Ends worked formerly for daily newspapers and at a school for sustainable agriculture research and education before slowly turning to farming with his family over 12 years. He and Dela raise vegetable crops and tend goats, sheep and poultry with their children in southern Wisconsin. Tony also directs Churches' Center for Land and People, an ecumenical advocacy program helping Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin farming people.

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Christmas Season Stress Relief

For many Americans, the Christmas season is a frenetic time of overeating, overdoing and overspending. Listed below are some suggestions for keeping the true spirit of the season.

1. **Being not buying.** Give gifts of personal presence. Examples include promising to pray for someone, committing to a date-night with your spouse, or making a coupon book of services such as babysitting, cooking and helping with housework.
2. **Know what is important.** Focus on the birth of Christ and spend time with your family.
3. **Alternative Gifts.** Contribute to a charitable organization in the name of the gift recipient. Buy items that have been obtained using fair trade practices, that support local artisans, or encourage environmental conservation.
4. **Celebrate with those who are waiting.** Look to see who is living the Advent experience today: parents waiting for a child, the elderly and infirm waiting to die, those waiting for healing, the unemployed waiting for a job, and the anxious waiting for news.
5. **Plan ahead.** Buy all your gifts early. Spend December doing activities with those you love such as skating, baking, decorating, attending Christmas concerts, and church services.
6. **Keep in mind the true meaning of Advent and Christmas.**
7. **Silence.** Give yourself even just five minutes in a peaceful environment. Turn off the television, the stereo, and the lights and sit in the glow of the Christmas tree and creche displayed in your home.
8. **Sing!** It makes us feel good and proclaims the saving message of Jesus' coming.
9. **Don't overdo it.** Don't overprepare. Don't overcook. Don't overeat. Don't overbook. You'll feel better all around.
10. **Ask for help.** Instead of taking on a whole Christmas dinner, make it a potluck or divide up the work among different people.
11. **Be Grateful.** Receive and open gifts mindfully, appreciating what they are and what they represent. Say thank-you to the giver. And most of all, thank God for sending his Word into the world as the Child Jesus.

*Gratitude unlocks
the fullness of life.
It turns what we
have into enough,
and more. It turns
denial into
acceptance, chaos to
order, confusion to
clarity. It can turn
a meal into a feast,
a house into a
home, a stranger
into a friend.
Gratitude makes
sense of our past,
brings peace for
today, and creates a
vision for
tomorrow.*

Melody Beattie

Discipleship: Rooted in Prayer

A key aspect of living a life of a Christian steward is listening, oftentimes through prayer and contemplation, what God asks of us. But life is busy and oftentimes it's easier to live on autopilot rather than savoring the beauty in our midst and responding to it. The prayers below are offered to create pause in your day and to encourage reflection upon how your priorities are aligning with God's hopes for you and our world.

December 11, 2005 3rd Sunday of Advent

"The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted..." (Isaiah 61:1)

God has anointed all of us through Baptism and God has sent each of us on a mission. Each of us has been given unique gifts and talents so that we can help fulfill God's mission here on earth. Are you doing the things Jesus sent you here to do?

December 18, 2005 4th Sunday of Advent

"Do not be afraid, Mary." (Luke 1:30)

It can be a little scary to do as God asks – to give Him the first fruits of our time, talent and treasure. But the comforting words the angel spoke to Mary can comfort us, too, when we dedicate ourselves to being good Christian stewards – *"Do not be afraid."*

December 25, 2005 Christmas

"For a child is born to us, a son is given us." (Isaiah 9:5)

Gazing upon the nativity scene we see one of our most compelling reasons to live as good stewards. God not only gave us everything we have; God gave us everything He had – He gave us Jesus, who in turn gave us His life. How do we say "thank you" for a gift like that? Realizing the tremendous depth of God's generosity to us is a pivotal insight that should change the entire way we live our life. It calls us to make stewardship a way of life.

January 1, 2006 Mary Mother of God

"The shepherds went back glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen." (Luke 2:20)

The shepherds proclaimed the good news of the Messiah's birth. What miracles have you seen this Christmas season? How can you proclaim the good news?

January 8, 2006 Epiphany

"Arise, shine out, for your light has come, the glory of the Lord is rising on you." (Isaiah 60)

The glory of God has been manifest to us in the birth of a Savior. How can you discipleship spread the light of Christ upon the dark places of the world?

The parish stewardship office of the Archdiocese of Chicago's Stewardship and Development Department exists to support and educate our priests and people to enable them to realize the joy that is theirs by: boldly reclaiming their role as baptized disciples of Jesus Christ, recognizing and embracing God as the Source of all, and gratefully responding to God's abundance by sharing our gifts.

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Upcoming Events

Wednesday, January 11, 2006 11 a.m.— 2p.m. Ministry of Money Seminar at St. John Brebeuf

Spend a few hours considering your relationship with money. Ministry of Money is a prophetic Christian ministry that encourages persons to become free from their attachment to cultural values regarding money and to live out joyfully God's call for their lives and resources. Lunch included. Sponsored by ParishPay.

RSVP to Janis Lutkus at 312/655-7614 or jlutkus@archchicago.org by January 3.

January 13 and 14, 2006 Catherine of Siena Institute Called and Gifted Workshop

"Equipping Catholics to be lay apostles for their mission to the world."

This workshop focuses on discovering God's call for your life by discerning your charisms. It also includes Church teaching on the laity and lay apostleship, the nature of spiritual gifts, call and vocation; and how to undertake the process of discernment. Free will donation.

Sponsored by St. Joseph Parish, Libertyville.
Contact Sue Lehocky at 847/362-2073 or Slehocky@StJoseph-Libertyville.org to register.

Temptations of Consumerism and their Antidote

10 Temptations of Consumerism are to believe:

1. Appearance, affluence, and marketable achievement are—and ought to be—the central organizing principles of our lives.
2. Being compulsively busy, even to the point of exhaustion, is a sign of healthy and productive living.
3. Having a successful career is more important than being a good parent, a good spouse, a good neighbor, a kind and loving person, or taking a walk in the woods.
4. Good work is reducible to making money; and unpaid work—particularly in the home—is not really working.
5. The appropriate goal in life is to enjoy prosperity in the suburbs with a perfectly manicured lawn.
6. Depression can and should be cured by shopping.
7. The most important thing in life is to have my needs met.
8. We are consumers who participate in the global marketplace by acquiring as many new goods as we can.
9. The universe is a collection of objects, not a communion of subjects. Other living beings are mere commodities for human use.
10. We are all on our own because there is no grace—no ultimate mercy—within the depths of things. Our task is to "look out for number one."

10 Healing Alternatives are to know:

1. Wisdom, compassion, and inner freedom are much more important than appearance, affluence and marketable achievement.
2. Healthy living requires not only creativity and hard work, but also rest and relaxation so that our work can be productive rather than compulsive.
3. It is much more important to be a good parent, a good spouse, a good neighbor, and a good person than to have a successful career, particularly if "success" is defined in purely monetary terms.
4. Some of the most beautiful work in the world has nothing to do with money, but lies in living lightly on the earth and gently with others, day by day and moment by moment.
5. The goal of life is to have a prosperous heart, not a prosperous home.
6. Compulsive shopping is a symptom of disease, not a cure for depression.
7. Sometimes one's own needs are less important than the needs of others and the common good of the world.
8. We are made in God's image, which means that our deepest calling is not to acquire new possessions but to love.
9. The universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects. Other living beings are subjects of their own lives, deserving our respect and compassion.
10. We are not on our own because the universe is enfolded within an ultimate grace, which renders questions of success and failure irrelevant.