

Stewardship: Living Christianity [Radically]

*A publication for Chicago Catholics
Archdiocese of Chicago— Department of Stewardship and Development
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Reflections on the Gift of Time

“Christ has no body now on earth but yours, yours are the only hands with which he can do his work, yours are the only feet with which he can go about the world, yours are the only eyes through which his compassion can shine forth upon a troubled world. Christ has no body on earth now but yours.” —St. Teresa of Avila

Stewardship is grounded in gratitude, gratitude for our gifts of time, our talents, and our monetary resources made possible because of the talents with which we have been blessed. During this Leap Year, let’s reflect upon our gift of time and the extra gift of 24 hours, 1440 minutes, 86,400 seconds.

For many of us, time is our most precious commodity. The demands of work, school, family and community can be overwhelming—yet our God asks us to spend time in prayer to refocus, rejuvenate and potentially, to reprioritize.

The following questions posed by Bishop Robert Morneau of Green Bay, WI challenge us to reflect upon our gift of time. Does the way you use your in-

determinate amount of time on this Earth reflect what is most important to you? What changes could be made, particularly during this Lenten season?

For Reflection:

- What time do you give to your relationship with God?
- How do you care for your family, friends and community?
- How do you care for your physical health?
- Do you eat properly, exercise regularly and allow time for leisure?
- Are you an informed citizen?
- Do you assume appropriate responsibility for the common good?
- How well do you tend to the



Taking a leap...and reprioritizing.

- needs of the earth? Do you properly use water, air, soil and other natural resources?
- Do you support the arts? Do you read literature?
- Do you properly use technology, computers and mass media to make the world a healthier and safer place?

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Creating Time to Settle in Space

“You have made us to be toward Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”
Augustine

In Gerald May’s essay, “Entering the Emptiness,” May posits that the emptiness experienced when embracing spaciousness or quiet is actually our never-completely-satisfied “yearning for love”—a yearning which draws us to God. He defines space as freedom—“freedom from confinement, from preoccupation, from oppression, from drivenness, and from all the interior and exterior forces that bind and restrict our spirits.”

Through God’s grace and our willingness to enter into space, “we discover expanding emptiness in which consecration can happen” and love can make its home in us.

May outlines three types of spaciousness: form (fields, water, sky, uncluttered rooms); time (pauses in activity where we are freed from tasks and agenda); and soul (the inner emptiness, the room inside our hearts).

“Spaciousness is always a beginning, a possibility, a potential for birth. Space exists not in order to be filled but to create. In space, to the extent

that we can bear the truth of the way things are, we find the ever-beginning presence of love. Take the time, then; make the space. Seek it wherever you can find it, do it however you can. The manner does not matter and the experience you have there is of secondary importance. Seek the truth, not what is comfortable. Seek the real, not the easy.”

Schut, M. *Simpler Living, Compassionate Life— A Christian Perspective*. Earth Ministry, 1999.



Just Living: Cherishing and Tending God's Gifts

In the pastoral letter *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, the bishops outline three areas in which we are called to be stewards: Creation, Vocation, the Church. They define a Christian steward as 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; and returns God's gifts with increase to the Lord.

The bishops invite us to be collaborators of creation," re-

vering the gift of life and working to preserve and enhance life for all. Included in this is a profound appreciation for nature, all of the gifts of this world, concern for our earth and earth's resources, and a commitment to simpler lifestyles.

The United States is the wealthiest country in the world. Many of us consume much more than our share. "Having" is not the issue; "having" while forgetting those who have none, is.

PBS produced a video on American consumption. Makers of

the video *Affluenza* defined this "epidemic" as **Af-flu-en-za** n.

1. The bloated, sluggish and unfulfilled feeling that results from efforts to keep up with the Joneses. 2. An epidemic of stress, overwork, waste and indebtedness caused by dogged pursuit of the American Dream. 3. An unsustainable addiction to economic growth.

How do we consume? Let's find out by taking *Affluenza's* Consumption Quotient test.

"This is what the Lord asks of you: to live justly, to love tenderly, to walk humbly with your God."
Micah 6:8

1). Which of the following is comparable to the size of a typical three-car garage?

- A. a basketball court
- B. a McDonald's restaurant
- C. an "RV"
- D. The average home in the 1950's.

Answer: D. Many of today's three-car garages occupy 900 square feet, just about the average size of an entire '50's home.

2). The percentage of Americans calling themselves "very

4). True or False? Americans carry \$1 billion in personal debt, not including real estate and mortgages.

Answer: False. Americans carry \$1 trillion in personal debt, approximately \$4,000 for every man, woman and child, not including real estate and mortgages. On average, Americans save 4% of their income; in contrast, the Japanese save 16%.

happy" reached its highest point in:

- A. 1957
- B. 1967
- C. 1977
- D. 1987

Answer: A. Even though we consume twice as much as the 1950's, people were just as happy when they had less.

5). In the industrialized world, where is the US ranked in terms of its income equality between the rich and the poor?

- A. 1st
- B. 5th
- C. 12th
- D. 22nd

Answer: D. The income disparity between the rich and the poor is greatest in the United States.

3). How much of an average American's lifetime will be spent (on average) watching television commercials?

- A. 6 months
- B. 3 months
- C. 1 year
- D. 1.5 years

Answer: C. In contrast, Americans on average spend 40 minutes a week playing with their children, and members of working couples talk with one another on average 12 minutes a day.

6). Since 1950, Americans alone have used more resources than:

- A. Everyone who ever lived before them.
- B. the combined Third World populations.
- C. the Romans at the height of the Roman Empire.
- D. all of the above.

Answer: D. Since 1950, Americans alone have used more resources than everyone who ever lived before them. Each American individual uses up to 20 tons of basic raw material annually. Americans throw away 7 million cars a year, 2 million plastic bottles an hour and enough aluminum cans annually to make 6,000 DC-10 airplanes.



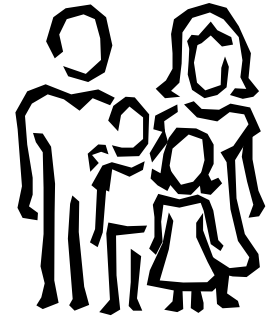
Stewardship—making a difference in your corner of the world.

Children and Stewardship: A Ladder of Motivation for Living as Stewards

Encouraging children to reflect upon their God-given gifts and personal responsibility to share of these gifts with others offers youth an early introduction to stewardship as a way of life. Stewardship education for young people is important because it builds

self-esteem, it offers strategies to embrace the Gospel message—very often counter-cultural to the self-absorption of our materialistic, individualistic society, and it teaches that stewardship is not an activity, but an attitude that can lead to personal fulfillment, happiness

and salvation. The Stewardship Ladder below shows how youth can grow into stewardship, living gratefully and sharing their gifts in love.



1. DISSATISFACTION.

Our economy breeds dissatisfaction and ever-increasing expectations. As a result, young people might become preoccupied with what they do not have (status, economic level, etc.) rather than what they have. Dissatisfaction leads to rebellious behavior, discontent and a preoccupation with material goods.

2. FUN.

Young people may become preoccupied with having a good time. This is a more positive response to life than rebellion, but often does not entail any sense of responsibility or accountability. This is a lifestyle acted out by the abuse of drugs, sex, money or power. Parents can unwittingly encourage this stunted level of development when they say “you’re only young once.”

3. STATUS.

Status is a preoccupation with peer expectations. This is actually a step up in terms of responsibility because a concern with status at least takes other people into account. “Peer

Pressure” become the basis for judging the rightness or wrongness of an action, rather than the goodness of the action itself. The common response, “everyone is doing it,” is not a solid moral foundation.

4. SYMPATHY.

This response is the first positive step toward a life of stewardship. Young people are especially attuned to respond when someone is hurting. Operating on the level of sympathy, however, does not always lead to right choices, however. Stewardship is not merely about meeting the needs of others and being sympathetic; it is also about sharing blessings for the right reasons.

5. OBLIGATION.

Obligation is a stronger foundation for ethics than sympathy because it depends less on emotion. With a sense of obligation, young people begin to see life as a challenge. Something is demanded of them. A sense of obligation is essential to learning responsibility, but obligation for its own sake leads to legalism, which can be detrimental. For instance, if a child

feels obligated to get straight-A’s, the consequence may be frustration and low self-esteem. But if a student feels obligated to do the best he or she can do, this attitude will lead to a sense of self-worth and satisfaction. A sense of obligation does not mean having the best talents, but using the talents we have to the best of our ability.

6. GRATITUDE.

Life is more than meeting one’s obligations. Life is ultimately a gift. Gratitude is the most mature response to life, and it is a response that takes a lifetime to learn. For young people, the goal of stewardship is to realize and appreciate the gifts they have been given and cultivate those gifts in service to others. If children are encouraged to be grateful, they will naturally want to give back.

“Gratitude is the most mature response to life, and it is a response that takes a lifetime to learn.”

A Child’s Offering

As Christian stewards, we are asked to responsibly care for our gifts and share them with others. Included in this is sharing a portion of our treasure—a commitment to giving that will ideally be learned in childhood and continued throughout life. Invite the child in your life to create their

own offertory envelope. Have him/her decorate an ordinary envelope with crayons or markers, and also include his/her name and a kind deed done that week for a family member or friend. When at Mass, invite the child to place his/her gift in the offertory collection. Regardless

of the amount enclosed, the idea of sharing of self and one’s talents is most important. Remember the widow’s mite? She gave little and yet she gave everything.

JUST FOR FUN:

A little child in church for the first time watched as the ushers passed the offertory baskets. When they neared the pew where he sat, the youngster piped up so everyone could hear: “Don’t pay for me Daddy, I’m under five.”

Archdiocese of Chicago
Department of Stewardship and Development
721 North LaSalle
Chicago, IL 60610
www.archchicago.org/departments/stewardship_dev

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A STEWARDSHIP PRAYER

O Lord, giver of life and source of freedom, I know that all I have received is from your hand. Gracious and loving God, You call me to be a steward of Your abundance, a caretakers of all you have entrusted to us. Help me to always use Your gifts wisely and teach me to share them generously. Send the Holy Spirit to work through me, bringing Your message to those I serve. May my faithful stewardship bear witness to the love of Jesus Christ in our lives. We pray with grateful hearts, in Jesus' name. Amen.

A STEWARD SAINT REMEMBERED

MARCH 19— JOSEPH, HUSBAND OF MARY

For some of us, the first barrier to stewardship is understanding that all of what we think we own, really belongs to God. That was not a problem for St. Joseph. From the very beginning, the words of an angel made clear that those special people who shared his life—Mary and Jesus, were “on loan” to him by the Lord and entrusted to his care. A man of great faith, he accepted the responsibility without hesitation. “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife,” the angel said. “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt,” the angel directed...and every time, St. Joseph obeyed without question. The carpenter of Nazareth taught Jesus to practice his Jewish faith, passed on its laws and customs, and helped him to learn his trade. And he did it well, for Scripture tells us that “Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man” (Lk 2:52). It must have been difficult to not know how it would all turn out, for St. Joseph died before Jesus began his public ministry. But this just man of faith proved to be a conscientious steward of all that had been given him—his traditions, his vocation, his relationships. “Whatever you do,” Scripture says, “do from the heart, as for the Lord and not for others,” knowing that you will receive from the Lord the due payment (Col 3:23-24). St. Joseph unfailingly did exactly that. May his example inspire us to do the same.

Hueckel, S. *Steward Saints for Everyday*, 1999.

Stewardship, Lent and Fasting

Living a stewardship way of life requires conversion. It is an ongoing process rooted in one's relationship with God. Through prayer and profound gratitude, we are moved to share of ourselves with others as God has so generously shared with us.

Through the symbolism of ashes, Ash Wednesday reminds us to convert, to change from our old ways and embrace God's hope for us. Receiving ashes ritualizes our response to hearing the gospel: response in humility (remembering who we are) and response in living (turning to God). The Easter message teaches us that by renouncing our selfishness, we will be led to a new and greater

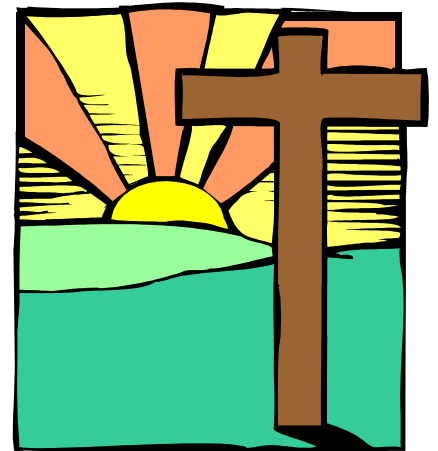
life.

During Lent, many people elect to give up a favorite food or drink, to volunteer, or to incorporate something new and healthy into their life. Whatever we choose to do to remember Jesus' sacrifice, we are opening ourselves up to God's presence. By emptying ourselves (of food, selfishness, poor habits, etc.), we are creating the space to hunger for God. Our Lenten practices open ourselves up to God's presence. By emptying ourselves of that which interferes with our relationship with God and God's wish for us, we are able to fill ourselves with nourishment that lasts much longer than chocolate, cheese

puffs or chianti; we will be nourished for life through the one who grants us Eternal Life.

“...whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

St. Paul



By emptying ourselves in remembrance of and gratitude for Jesus' sacrifice, we find life.