

Linking Discipleship and Stewardship

This exploration of the link between discipleship and stewardship begins by referencing excerpts from various documents of the Church. First on the list are those from the Church herself (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, etc.), followed by writings of nationally known individuals and organizations. The two major documents of the USCCB on discipleship and stewardship were approved at the very same meeting on November 18, 1992 - coincidence (?) or divine providence (!). When I first created this document in 2002, we found ourselves in both the tenth anniversary year of these publications and the third and final year of *Disciples in Mission* evangelization process. Looking forward, we begin to search for the “kindling” that will keep the fire of discipleship burning brightly in the hearts of the believers throughout their earthly journeys. As we acquire a deeper understanding of discipleship and stewardship through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the natural connection joining the two becomes evident.

Go and Make Disciples

A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States (USCCB, 1992)

Evangelization is the essential mission of the Church.

Evangelizing means bringing the Good News of Jesus into every human situation and seeking to convert individuals and society by the divine power of the Gospel itself. Its essence is the proclamation of salvation of Jesus Christ and the response of a person in faith, both being the work of the Spirit of God.

We do not view life’s purpose as the gathering of power or riches, but as the gracious invitation to live for God and others in love.

The fruit of evangelization is changed lives and a changed world – holiness and justice, spirituality and peace.

The gifts God has given to us are not gifts for ourselves. Like the large catch of fish or the overflowing measure of flour, our faith makes our hearts abound with a love-filled desire to bring all people to Jesus' Gospel and to the table of the Eucharist.

Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response

A Pastoral Letter on Stewardship (USCCB, 1992)

This 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 sharing is not an option for Catholics who understand what membership in the Church involves.

This pastoral letter initiates a long-term, continuing process of encouraging people to examine and [internalize] **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.

Who is a Christian disciple? One who responds to Christ's call, follows Jesus, and shapes his or her life in imitation of Christ's.

Who is a Christian steward? 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 Christian vocation is essentially a call to be a **disciple** of Jesus. **Stewardship** is part of that. Even more to the point, however, 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 of which God calls him or her.

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 vocation of Christians; **discipleship** in this sense *is* Christian life.

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.

Being a **disciple** is not just something else we do, alongside many other things suitable for Christians, it a total way of life and requires continuing conversion.

Stewardship plays an important role in the lives of people who seek to follow Christ.

To be a Christian **disciple** is a rewarding way of life, a way of companionship with Jesus, and the **practice of stewardship** as a part of it is itself a source of deep joy. Those who live this way are happy people who have found the meaning and purpose of living.

The **stewardship of disciples** ... involves embracing, cultivating, enjoying, and sharing - and sometimes giving up the goods of human life.

Every member of the Church is called to evangelize, and the practice of authentic Christian **stewardship** inevitably leads to evangelization.

Familiarity with the Church's growing body of social doctrine is necessary in order to grasp and respond to the practical requirements of **discipleship** and **stewardship** in light of the complex realities of today's national and international socioeconomic life.

After Jesus, it is the Blessed Virgin Mary who by her example most perfectly teaches the meaning of **discipleship** and **stewardship** in their fullest sense. All of their essential elements

are found in her life: she was called and gifted by God; she responded generously, creatively, and prudently; she understood her divinely assigned role as “handmaid” in terms of service and fidelity (see Lk 1:26-56).

As members of the Church, Jesus calls us to be **disciples**. This has astonishing implications:

- Mature **disciples** make a conscious decision to follow Jesus, no matter what the cost.
- Christian **disciples** experience conversion - life-shaping changes of mind and heart - and commit their very selves to the Lord.
- Christian **stewards** respond in a particular way to the call to be a disciple. **Stewardship** has the power to shape and mold our understanding of our lives and the way in which we live.

Do we wish to be **disciples** of Jesus Christ? The Spirit is ready to show us the way - a way of which **stewardship** is a part.

Everyday Christianity: To Hunger and Thirst for Justice

A Pastoral Reflection on Lay Discipleship for Justice in a New Millennium (USCCB, 1998)

Christian **discipleship** means practicing what Jesus preached. **Discipleship** is found in a relationship with Christ and a commitment to his mission of bringing “glad tidings to the poor. / ...liberty to captive / and recovery of sight to the blind, / to let the oppressed go free.”

Followers of the Lord Jesus live their **discipleship** as spouses and parents, single adults and youth, employers and employees, consumers and investors, citizens and neighbors. ... By our baptism and confirmation, every member of our community is called to live his or her faith in the world.

All human beings have unique talents, gifts from God that we are called to develop and share. We should celebrate this diversity. People who use their skills and expertise for the common good, the service of others, and the protection of creation are **good stewards** of the gifts they have been given.

Everyday **discipleship** for justice and the Church’s organized social ministry can reinforce one another and help shape a more just society and a more peaceful world.

Parishes are essential sources of support and encouragement for Christian **discipleship**. At their best, parishes help believers prepare and go forth to live the Gospel in everything we do. ... We encourage our pastors and preachers to listen to their parishioners on the challenges of their daily lives and help bring the insight of the Gospel and the principles of Catholic teaching to these experiences.

Economic Justice for All

Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy (USCCB, 1986)

As Jesus called the first **disciples** in the midst of their everyday occupations of fishing and tax collecting; so he again calls people in every age in the home, in the workplace, and in the marketplace.

Discipleship involves imitating the pattern of Jesus' life by openness to God's will in the service to others (Mk 10:42-45).

Stewardship and Development in Catholic Dioceses and Parishes

(USCCB Ad Hoc Committee on Stewardship; 1996)

Every diocese and parish should make education and formation for stewardship a major priority. This is vitally important today because (1) it helps individuals, families, and communities **better understand what it means to follow Jesus** in an affluent, consumer culture, and (2) it establishes an appropriate, scriptural basis for responding to the Church's growing need for human, physical, and financial resources.

To make stewardship a way of life for individuals, families, parishes, and dioceses requires a change of heart and a new understanding of what it means to follow Jesus without counting the cost. This conversion of mind and heart will not happen overnight, but, as always, the Holy Spirit is at work in the Church today.

The emphasis in the bishops' pastoral, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, is not on "tithing" (giving a fixed percent of income), but on giving according to our means. In many ways, this is a far more challenging norm. It challenges us to be good stewards not only in how much we give away, but in what we do with all our resources.

Called & Gifted for the Third Millennium

(USCCB; 2001)

We consider lay participation in the church life at all levels a gift of the Holy Spirit, given for the common good. Laity can and should exercise responsible participation both individually and in groups, not only at the invitation of church leadership but by their own initiative.

We call on all pastoral leaders to strengthen the structures of participation in church life, so that we might listen to one another, grow in understanding, and deepen our experience of dialogue.

Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections of the Social Mission of the Parish (USCCB; 1994)

We believe that the Catholic community needs to be, more than ever, a source of clear moral vision and effective action. We are called to be the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world” in the words of the Scriptures (Mt 5:13-16). This task belongs to every believer and every parish. It cannot be assigned to a few or simply delegated to diocesan or national structures. The pursuit of justice and peace is an essential part of what makes a parish Catholic.

Our parishes need to encourage, support, and sustain lay people in living their faith in the family, neighborhood, marketplace, and public arena. It is lay women and men, **placing their gifts at the service of others** (1 Pt 4:10), who will be God’s primary instruments in renewing the earth by their leadership and faithfulness in the community.

The Church in America (Ecclesia in America)

(Pope John Paul II; 1999)

Conversion fosters a new life, in which there is no separation between faith and works in our daily response to the universal call to holiness.

Conversion, to which every person is called, leads to an acceptance and appropriation of the new vision which the Gospel proposes. This requires leaving behind our worldly way of thinking and acting, which so often heavily conditions our behavior.

Linking Evangelization and Stewardship

(*Today’s Disciples in Mission*, Spring 2001 issue; PNCEA; Kenneth Boyack, CSP)

Disciples in Mission fosters evangelization and stewardship.

Growth in **discipleship leads to stewardship** as parishioners give their time, talent, and treasure to foster the evangelizing mission of the parish.

When, through *Disciples in Mission*, parish leaders reallocate parish resources - time, talent, treasure - to reach out in new ways to new people within the community they exercise stewardship to evangelize.

When a *Disciples in Mission* parish decides to help staff a homeless shelter or to begin a Bible study series, they are serving Christ as both stewards and disciples.

Stewardship: Responding as a Disciple

(Share The Word; Jan. 14 – Feb. 12, 2002; PNCEA; Rev. Kenneth Boyack, CSP)

If stewardship is a response to living as a disciple of Jesus, what is the *purpose* of stewardship? Why do we give our time, talent, and treasure each day to Jesus? The purpose is to bring about God's plan of salvation so that all people, indeed all creation, can achieve union with God. The process for bringing about union with God is called evangelization.

As a way of applying Pope Paul VI's teaching to the people of the United States, the U.S. bishops in 1992 issued *Go and Make Disciples*. In this plan, the bishops set forth three goals which help us understand the purpose of stewardship. These goals for Catholic evangelization depict a broad Catholic agenda and provide a way of helping show that **the purpose of stewardship is to foster evangelization.**

Without stewardship, evangelization is not possible. We can look at each one of these three goals and see that without proper stewardship of time, talent, and treasure, we could not possibly achieve any of them.

Our decisions to evangelize and to exercise good stewardship are both responses to following Christ as his disciple.

Stewardship – Disciples Respond: A Practical Guide for Pastoral Leaders

(International Catholic Stewardship Council; 1993)

Bishops at the Second Vatican Council proclaimed the right and responsibility of lay people to use their gifts to build up the Church and the world. They also taught us that Christians bear a duty and an honor to give back to God a portion of the gifts they have received from their Creator.

Stewardship, in its simplest terms, asks us to put God's priorities before our own. Good stewards give the first portion of their gifts of time, talent, and treasure to the Lord's work in gratitude for His many blessings. This giving of our "first fruits" incorporates the aspect of sacrificial giving.

God does not judge us by how much we give, but by how faithful we are in making the gift. The extent to which we give our time, talent and treasure in faith to help others will be the measure by which we are judged.

Stewardship is more than a program: it is a life-long process.

Stewards as disciples of Jesus Christ see themselves as caretakers of all God's gifts. Gratitude for these gifts is expressed in prayer, worship, offering, and action by eagerly sharing these gifts out of love of God and one another.

-- END --