



Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As we take in the clear blue skies and the changing colors this fall, it's hard not to think about thanksgiving. I don't just mean the holiday on the fourth Thursday of November, but rather the action of giving thanks, of acknowledging the blessings we have been given and expressing gratitude to God, the source of those blessings.

As much as we might labor for the things we enjoy, God is the origin and author of all our blessings—our families and friends, our education, our jobs or retirement, the food on our tables, the roof over our head, and the money we have saved, to say nothing of the new life we have together in Christ. It all goes back to God, God's goodness and providence and grace.

This month we are called to take stock of these blessings and to seek God's guidance for how to use them. For, the gifts God has given us, as much as we enjoy them, have not been given to us for us to enjoy on our own, but were given by God for God's purposes, to share them with others. Like Abraham, we are "blessed to be a blessing."

That is the essence of *stewardship*—to share the blessings, material and spiritual, we have with others. And this is why November is often thought of in the church as "stewardship month": giving thanks for our blessings naturally leads to a discussion of how best to employ those blessings.

This definition—of blessing others with our blessings—is not often what we think of when we think about stewardship. Often we confuse stewardship with efforts to raise money, particularly among colleges and non-profits. But these fund-raising campaigns are not the same as stewardship.

Given this confusion, it's helpful to have a refresher on stewardship, to remind us of what stewardship is and what it is not. What follows is a brief explanation, a "primer" as they would in England, of stewardship.

## **A Primer on Stewardship**

### **WHAT IS STEWARDSHIP?**

Simply stated, stewardship is an expression of gratitude to God. It reminds us that we are the "stewards" (trustees), not the owners, of our assets, and we therefore are responsible for their proper use. It fills a need deep within each of us to worship God, to thank Him for the abundant blessings He has showered upon us, and to use these assets, these gifts, as God would have them be used, according to His will.

### **STEWARDSHIP vs. FUND-RAISING**

We realize that some people in the church will try to equate the idea of stewardship with fund-raising. This is a mistake. Stewardship's true purpose is not to fund a budget, but to promote our "seeking first the kingdom of God." The primary concern is not money, but to speak to the heart of each of us about seeking always the will of God in our day-to-day living. Stewardship does include the careful administration of money, but stewardship is not about "fund raising."

Stewardship is moreover not a once-a-year campaign; it is the Christian way of life. Its principles leap out at us from the very pages of Scripture. Starting with the story of a creation lovingly entrusted to Adam and Eve, straight-through to the life and mission of Christ, who

desired that his mission be consummated in the ultimate act of self-giving, we see a God who is known first and foremost as the Giver. And we too are called to be like God—loving givers. Sacred Scripture teaches that it is only in such sacrificial loving that we find out what it means to be a faithful Christian.

Stewardship is based on the fact that all that we have and all that we are comes from God. We commit ourselves to stewardship as a way of thanking God for all his blessings through the contribution of time, talent (ministry & service), and treasure (income & assets) to the Church and other charities:

- Each week, we choose what will be done with the 168 hours we have available to us. Good **stewardship of time** means we will share some of that time with God in prayer, worship, and service.
- Every person has a flair for something. Good **stewardship of talent** means we identify our talents and use them to glorify God and to serve and minister to other people;
- Although the amounts vary significantly, we all bring some kind of revenue into our households. Good **stewardship of treasure** means we intentionally plan to donate a tithe (“tenth”) of our income to the church. As a final act of stewardship, we should prayerfully consider leaving a portion of our assets to the Church in our wills.

The stewardship vision is an expression of basic discipleship. If the vision is understood as a scheme for simply meeting financial needs, it loses its essence and its power and it is no longer stewardship. Stewardship is not "fund raising."

### **THE SPIRITUAL IMPORTANCE OF STEWARDSHIP**

Christian stewardship can be identified by several meaningful characteristics, the most important is that it strengthens our relationship with God.

- *First fruits, not leftovers.* Christian stewardship helps us to become aware that God is the true source of the gifts we possess. These gifts must be shared and administered from our first fruits and not from what we might have left over.
- *Relying on God.* Embracing stewardship helps Christians to deepen their trust in God to continue to provide for their needs, as He has in the past.
- *Loving God.* Christian stewardship helps individuals and families develop and deepen loving relationships with our Savior, Jesus Christ.
- *Spirituality.* Christian stewardship provides a spirituality (“faith-in-action”) that Christians can express at work and through personal involvement in family and community. It successfully brings our everyday lives into our relationship with God, and God into our everyday lives.
- *“For” Money.* Christian stewardship takes a positive view of money. It sees money not simply as a medium of exchange but as an indicator of the person's values. How we acquire it, use it, and share it reveals who we are.
- *Mission-oriented.* Jesus Christ is God's greatest gift to us. Christian stewardship leads us to share a portion of our time, talent, and treasure so that the Good News of Jesus Christ may be shared with those who do not know Him.

### **STEWARDSHIP OF TIME, TALENT, AND TREASURE**

Christian stewardship is a holy way of life that expresses gratitude to God through the intentional, planned, and proportionate giving of time, talent, and treasure:

*Intentional:* Guided by prayer, each Christian makes a decision to live out the Christian life as a good steward. This decision is an intentional act intended to thank God for all of His blessings by returning to Him a portion of the time, the talent, and the treasure He has given to us.

*Planned:* Once a year, usually during an effort in the parish, each Christian household in the parish should plan how the stewardship of time and talent will be a part of its lifestyle and how the stewardship of treasure will be a part of its budget. This plan is then lived throughout the year in a regular, consistent manner.

*Proportionate:* The stewardship plan includes a commitment to donate a tithe (“tenth”) of one's time, one's talent, and one's income to the Church and other charities.

## **CONCLUSION**

The opportunity dawns for all in our parish to see the call to Christian stewardship as an integral part of our response to the Lord's call to mature discipleship. Our response necessarily entails a vision of sharing, a generous accountability for the gifts we've received, and a rendering of them back as offerings to the church and the community. As you hear from the vestry representatives this month, I invite you to prayerfully consider how you can become a more faithful steward.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "W. Terry Miller".

The Rev. W. Terry Miller

“Your talent is  
God’s gift to you.  
What you  
do with your  
talent is  
your gift  
to God.”

