

# GRATEFUL DISCIPLES

## Your Parish Stewardship Guide

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*Foreword by Bishop Sylvester Ryan*



**CATHOLIC**  
LIFE & FAITH

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I wish to express deep gratitude to the many parish and diocesan leaders who have shared their hopes, dreams, challenges and successes in building engaging communities of grateful disciples who live as stewards over the past ten years. I am thankful for your witness as servant leaders who use your strengths to lead people to Christ through the Christian community. I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Bishop Sylvester Ryan for offering the foreword to this workbook. Bishop Ryan has and continues to inspire many in the stewardship community, as we continue to grow in gratitude and faithful response. I am also especially grateful for the critical reading, review, and contributions to this book by Cindy Bosh, friend and colleague. Her witness to what it means to live as a steward inspires me and urges me to give all I can in grateful response for the many blessings in my life. May all of us continue to learn and grow together.

## **DUPLICATION POLICY AND INFORMATION**

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# **Grateful Disciples: Your Guide to Parish Stewardship**

**Foreword** Bishop Sylvester Ryan, Bishop Emeritus, Diocese of Monterey

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## FROM BISHOP RYAN

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I was ordained an auxiliary Bishop for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles in 1990, May 31st. So I was present at the Conference of American Bishops in November of that year. Before that time, Archbishop Thomas Murphy had spoken to the American Bishops and did so in the form of a challenge: "How do we develop among ourselves and our priests, deacons, seminarians and lay people a spirituality of giving which offers a biblical concept of stewardship?" His words prompted (or so I am told) a spirited discussion among the Bishops and the result came in the form an Ad Hoc Committee on Stewardship. Archbishop Murphy became its first Chairman.

The Archbishop gathered several Bishops and two laymen as the first members of the Ad Hoc Committee and they began working toward writing a pastoral letter on Stewardship. The Committee, under the leadership of Archbishop Murphy, included: Bishops Joseph Immesch, John McRaith, William McManus, and Robert Morneau. The lay committee members were Dan Conway and Vito Napoletano; other lay advisors included Jim Kelley, Fred Hofheinz, and Dutch and Barbara Schultz.

What I learned after I became a member of that Committee is there was a kind of survey of the Bishops as to what they would like to see in such a letter. Two major themes emerged: the first, that the letter should deal with development - the development of financial resources for the Church at large (the US Church); the second, that the primary theme should focus on developing a stewardship model of being a disciple as indicated in the words of Archbishop Murphy that prompted the beginning of the Committee.

What followed was a strong discussion among the members of the original committee as to which way to follow. The Bishops and laymen were definitely leaning on the side of the latter, and despite some continued opposition from a few Bishops, the formation of disciple stewards with its emphasis on a spirituality of giving that would involve a Gospel dimension became the direction. So in 1992, my first year as the Bishop of Monterey, they completed their work and the pastoral letter was printed and approved by the Body of Bishops.

The book became the largest selling publication ever of the American Bishops, and continues today to lead in the numbers of copies people purchase from the Conference. My engagement came after my installation as the Bishop of Monterey. We, in Monterey, had a large deficit of several millions of dollars. I had an idea that perhaps this Ad Hoc Committee might be a place where I could gather some ideas of

how to raise significant funds to assist us in erasing this deficit. With my usual spontaneous response to any idea of mine or others which I liked, I approached Archbishop Murphy and asked if I might be considered a future member of the Committee. With what I remembered later, a twinkle in his eye, and well aware that I did not know what stewardship and the Committee was all about, he kindly said yes, and not later but then and there.

So I joined the Committee and learned from an extraordinary group of true steward Bishops and laymen that stewardship was about the formation of a stewardship spirituality involving time, treasure and talents. I read the Pastoral Letter at the same time that I listened, fascinated and inspired by these men, who lived stewardship as Bishops and leaders of their Dioceses as well as the added modeling from the two laymen. I also became aware and attended at the next gathering of National Catholic Stewardship Council, at their national meeting.

In my Diocese, I began to work on implementing a program of stewardship formation Diocesan-wide and in terms of parishes. My first step involved inviting and covering the costs of several pastors every year to attend the orientation weeks on stewardship held in the winter months, one in Northern California and another in Florida. They were powerful, spiritual and enthusiastic and most of the pastors I sent (and attended with them) came away profoundly changed. We also began an annual Stewardship Day bringing in the best presenters who were available as well as using some of our pastors to share their experiences of implementing stewardship in their parishes. We did these for a full day with lunch provided, and they became the source for real growth in a stewardship spirituality in our parishes and with our people.

Remarkably, the collections on Sunday increased as well as a better response to our annual Bishops' appeal.

Sadly we lost Archbishop Murphy, who died of cancer. We struggled along in the ad hoc committee, and then one day the bishop president of the Conference called me and asked if I would take on being the Chairman of the Committee. I did so and remained for six years. As the tenth anniversary of the Pastoral Letter approached we had some lengthy discussions about writing a ten year anniversary new Pastoral. But at length all of us sensed that the Pastoral Letter itself could not be duplicated. We decided to write an introduction to the tenth anniversary edition. I took the responsibility to be the lead author and talked to many people, bishops (certainly from our Committee) and others, priests, and lay people and then began writing the letter. The Committee served as the editors and when we were satisfied, the Letter became the Introduction to the Tenth Anniversary edition now available.

What has been remarkable is the fact that stewardship has taken on an international flavor. It began with Bishops, priests, and lay people from Australia and Central and South America and has spread widely since. It created the reason for changing the name of the national organization to the International Catholic Stewardship Council (ICSC), its present name. It is interesting also that in our diocese several of our Hispanic priests from Mexico whom I ordained became among our best advocates and examples in their parishes. In all of these ways, it is a blessing that so many people are embracing the spirituality of stewardship in their lives. Stewardship as a way of life has its foundation in the conviction and the attitude of heart that life, and every aspect of life, is a gift. We can then find in ourselves a response of gratitude and self-surrender to the call to discipleship in the Gospel. "Have this mind in you." (Phil 2:5-11)

Most Reverend Sylvester Ryan  
Bishop Emeritus, Diocese of Monterey

# INTRODUCTION

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*“Stewardship is an expression of discipleship, with the power to change how we understand and live out our lives.”<sup>1</sup>*

This simple yet compelling statement from Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response captures the importance of forming people to grow as good and faithful stewards. Those who have been touched by this spirituality of stewardship recognize that everything we are, all that we have, and all that we will ever be is pure gift from God. Through that recognition, we grow in gratitude for our many blessings: our lives, faith, relationships, the capacity to love and show mercy, our talents, the minutes, days and weeks of our lives, our financial and material resources. With this deep and abiding gratitude, we learn to say “thank you” to God by sharing our lives and resources, living as people of service and mission, reaching out with Christ’s love in our lives at home, in our town or city, our parish and the world. We find ourselves consuming less, prioritizing our time and activity based in who we are as God’s blessed people, and we share more with others.

What a blessing such life is! As our bishops note, this way of life is transformative. It helps us to find meaning and purpose in life; we move beyond selfish impulses toward the needs of others; we find abundance everywhere, and share the richness of Christ’s life and love as grateful disciples. This spiritual way of life transforms the lives of individuals and the life of the parish.

Leading our parish and parishioners to embrace stewardship as a way of life is a dynamic process. The truth is, we will never be finished with this endeavor. Yet, the best practices of parishes help us to recognize key steps that are essential to help our parishioners accept the call to live as disciples and to grow as good and faithful stewards. Consider what follows as a plan, with action items for the essential steps on the path of discipleship and stewardship.

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<sup>1</sup> Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response, Introduction (Hereafter, quotes from this pastoral letter will be noted in the text as SDR)

## KEY FEATURES of GRATEFUL DISCIPLES

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Grateful Disciples has been carefully developed to provide stewardship leaders with a foundational understanding of the principles of stewardship and the content, practices, and strategies they need in order to lead their people to embrace stewardship as a way of life. **Grateful Disciples is much more than the guide you are currently reading. This book is only a portion of the story.** A link on page 62 will lead you to multiple web pages, containing resources for your use. **Use these downloadable resources to bring stewardship to life in your parish.** Look for the icons at the end of sections of this guide, indicating resources that will equip you every step of the way:



Reproducible worksheets to guide your discussion



Stewardship articles for use in the parish bulletin or newsletter



A 6-meeting study guide, retreat outline, monthly formation template



A brief introduction to stewardship video



Samples from best practice parishes



## THIS IS HOW TO START

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- ❖ **Read this book in the company of others** – Identify the team that leads or will lead stewardship in your parish and consider the broader implications shared in this workbook. This may be a newly created or long-standing stewardship committee, a sub-group of your Pastoral Council, or a combination of these two groups, along with your pastor and parish staff.
- ❖ **Those who are new to stewardship:** this guide will provide a solid theological and practical foundation as you introduce establish stewardship.
- ❖ **Those who have established stewardship:** this guide will provide additional resources for reflection, skill-building, and timely material to equip you to continue to form your people as disciples and to grow as good stewards.
- ❖ **Take time to pray, read and discuss together** using the **worksheets** indicated. Use the prayer on page 63 as you begin each meeting. Each chapter is no longer than ten pages, making it possible to use the book in the context of parish meetings. This will insure that your study and discussions will bear fruit in your parish community. **Each chapter ends with Live the Vision, an inventory of current parish practices.**
- ❖ **Access the online worksheet materials,** bulletin articles, study guide, guided inventory sheets, samples, and introductory video via the link with login and password information, which is included at the end of this workbook on page 62.

This guide is part of a larger initiative for pastoral leader development, which can be found at [www.CatholicLifeandFaith.net](http://www.CatholicLifeandFaith.net). You may explore resources, access slides and articles, and contact us there for live or virtual events,. Go to the Catholic Life and Faith site often and stay in touch as we learn and grow together as followers of Jesus Christ and as good stewards of our many gifts.

The tone of this guide is intentionally informal, at times conversational. It is hoped that this guide will lead to the development of thought and practice to strengthen your parish, forming a more engaging and evangelizing community of grateful disciples and stewards.

## GUIDING FRAMEWORK

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Throughout *Grateful Disciples*, six key steps of stewardship leadership will be explored, which are illustrated in the diagram below. These steps are reflected in the organization of this guide — each chapter corresponds with one step of the process of leading your community to embrace stewardship as a way of life. Note that the diagram is a circle — the steps are not once-and-for-all activities one can check off when complete. This is an on-going and life-giving process of transformation. The Holy Spirit is at the center of the diagram below. We rely on the Holy Spirit to inspire, guide, and strengthen us as we dedicate ourselves to Jesus Christ as disciples and faithful stewards.



## The Vision: STEWARDS IN COMMUNITY

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If you are reading this guide, it is likely that you are already familiar with this spiritual way of life or someone has told you about the deeper meaning of stewardship. As people who lead others to embrace stewardship as a way of life, it is important for us to clearly articulate what Christian stewardship is about and why it is important. This initial section is simply a brief overview for those who are new to stewardship, and a call to renewed reflection for those who are already familiar with it. In a later section we will focus on many ways to bring the message of stewardship to the parish community.



### Grateful: All We Are and Have Are God's

Our beginning point is really quite simple, and yet profound. We are created in God's image and likeness. Let that sink in for a moment. While we have been taught

"Genesis, telling the story of creation, says God looked upon what had been made and found it good; and seeing the world's goodness, God entrusted it to human beings...Now, as then and always, it is a central part of the human vocation that we be good stewards of what we have received — this garden, this divine human workshop, this world and all that is in it — setting minds and hearts and hands to the task of creating and redeeming in cooperation with our God, Creator and Lord of all." (SDR, 41)

this fundamental truth, few really let this understanding direct the way in which they live. We are created in God's image. This primary recognition of who we are immediately calls for *gratitude*, and for *response*. All we are is a blessing, given to us by God in trust. Our very lives are a gift, breath upon precious breath.

More than that, being created in God's image bears with it responsibility. As Scripture scholar Art Zannoni notes, Sacred Scripture helps us to understand this: while the early peoples of the world carved idols and believed that the spirit of the god whom

they carved resided within the idol, the people who believe in the One God were told not to create idols, because we are to be the living image of God in the world. It is as though the Biblical narratives help us to see that “we are called to be the transparency through whom God is seen,” Zannoni explains.<sup>2</sup>

We are called to be the transparency through whom God is seen. This is not really news, is it? We know this through the teaching and example of Jesus Christ. If each of us woke up every morning with the recognition that the day is a gift, through which we may make God’s love seen and felt by those around us, what a different world this would be! How our lives might be changed if we reflected on this call to make God known each evening as we come to the end of the day. Our “examination of conscience” might be the response to a simple question: In what way did I, or did I not, make God’s love seen and felt today?

Let us take this further by thinking about the idols that fill our minds and hearts, diverting our energy, attention, and devotion away from God and God’s ways. The U.S. Bishops, in their pastoral letter on stewardship, call our attention to some of the contemporary idols, the “destructive ‘isms’, that are a part of our secular culture. (SDR, Introduction) Accepting the call to be disciples and stewards provides a means for putting God at the center of our lives and shaping our actions and decisions accordingly. In this way, a spirituality of stewardship provides a practical way to connect faith with our daily lives. When we grow as stewards, we learn to recognize that we have a *need to give* — we are created in the image of God who is the giver of all good things.

“An oikonomos or steward is one to whom the owner of a household turns over the responsibility for caring for the property, managing affairs, making resources yield as much as possible and sharing resources with others. The position involves trust and accountability.” (SDR,

To be a good steward of our lives and possessions means much more than simply “taking care” of them. The steward is one who not only cares for the property or possessions of another; the steward nurtures the other’s possessions and brings them to yield, with increase.

In many ways, growing as a steward is about recognizing the grace of God. The good steward recognizes that all we are, have and will be truly is God’s. We are called to steward it all well, as grateful disciples, leading us to be generous, as a reflection of the generosity of God.

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<sup>2</sup> Zannoni, Art, The Bible Speaks on Stewardship, ThePastoralCenter.com

## Grateful Disciples: Jesus as the Supreme Teacher

Christian stewards are not only people who recognize God as the giver of all good gifts. They are also people who look to Jesus as their Lord, Savior, and Teacher. "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." (SDR, 19)

"Once one chooses to become a disciple of Jesus Christ, stewardship is not an option."

(Bishop John J. McRaith, as quoted in *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, Preface)

As we grow in this awareness that all is gift, and we begin to consider how we are called to share our gifts, it can be easy to delude ourselves into thinking we are just fine. "I give a little of my money to my parish every Sunday," we might think. Or, "I volunteer at my children's school sometimes; surely that is enough," we may say to a friend. Yet, when we consider the life and example of Jesus, we recognize we are called to more. More gratitude, and more giving. In fact, through Jesus we see the true image of the living God and realize that God is love, lavishly given, beyond understanding. Fr. Michael Himes says this very powerfully: "And who, finally, are you? You are the image and likeness of God. If God is pure self-gift, then self-gift is the image in which we are made, the blueprint on which we are built. Therefore, to give ourselves away is what we most deeply desire."<sup>3</sup>

Through baptism, we become members of the Body of Christ. We are called to follow Jesus with our lives, into a life of discipleship, and to do so in community. A disciple is a student, one who learns the ways of a master teacher. Jesus is our Master Teacher. When we grow in relationship with Jesus, we are called to act as members of his body in our day-to-day lives and in the community of believers, the Church. Jesus shows us that God is One who gives completely for the sake of the other. Grateful disciples witness to Christ's life and self-giving love through the stewardship of our many blessings.

Our primary "text" for our reflections on stewardship are taken from the U.S. Bishops' pastoral letter, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*. In it we hear this: "Mature disciples make a conscious firm decision carried out in action to be followers of Jesus Christ no matter the cost to themselves. Beginning in conversion, change of mind and

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<sup>3</sup> Himes, Michael, *Doing the Truth in Love*, 1995, New York, Paulist Press, 56

heart, this commitment is expressed not in a single action, nor even in a number of actions over a period of time, but in an entire way of life. It means committing one's very self to the Lord. Stewardship is an expression of discipleship with the power to change how we understand and live out our lives." (SDR, Introduction)



Grateful Disciples as Stewards reflection

### Grateful Disciples Pray

In his book "Paths to Prayer," Bishop Robert Morneau fittingly captures the essential connection between a life of prayer and one of stewardship: "To attempt to be stewards on our own or even with the help of the community will ultimately be futile. We need the power of the Holy Spirit to rise above our pettiness and self-centeredness in order to be for and with others as Jesus was. Without prayer, a life of stewardship will not last." <sup>4</sup>

"Following Jesus is the work of a lifetime. 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." (SDR, 15)

Living and growing as stewards is a lifetime of conversion. In many ways, the "change of mind and heart" (SDR, 1) that is essential for a life of stewardship goes against the grain of human nature and our contemporary secular culture, which is often self-centered, self-reliant, and selfish. To become a good steward is to place one's life in the hands of God, to recognize God's grace in the midst of daily life, and to respond by sharing our lives, faith and resources with others. Prayer is necessary for this conversion — in fact, it is the lifeline through which we discern the ways in which we are called to steward our many gifts.

When we bring our hearts to God in prayer, we risk being changed for the better, perhaps in ways of which we would never conceive on our own. This openness to transformation requires humility and trust, which we learn from Jesus whose own life of prayer exemplified these qualities: "Jesus' prayer before the events of salvation that

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<sup>4</sup> Morneau, Robert F., Paths to Prayer, Cincinnati, Ohio, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1998, 120

the Father has asked him to fulfill is a humble and trusting commitment of his human will to the loving will of the Father.” (CCC, 2600)

### **Stewardship is Profoundly Eucharistic**

The very heart and center of our lives as Catholic Christians is the Eucharist. Through it, we are formed as disciples and nourished to live Christ’s mission of love, service, compassion, forgiveness and mercy in the world. Our communal prayer in the Mass shapes our living, and challenges us to grow as Christian people in communion with one another for the life of the world. As we experience Christ’s presence in the Word proclaimed, in the the priest “in persona Christi” (in the person of Christ), in the presence of one another as members of Christ’s body, and most especially in the bread and wine which are transformed into Christ’s body and blood, we are led to conversion in Christ and are strengthened to live as Jesus’ disciples. Jesus, the very image of God, and his way of sacrificial, self-giving love is the ultimate expression of stewardship. In this way we can say that the Mass forms us as disciples to live as good stewards, as people who willingly give what we have been given, in fulfillment of God’s loving will. Bishop Sylvester Ryan eloquently captures this: “The heart of the spirituality of a steward is how we live out what we celebrate, offer and receive in the Eucharist. The Eucharist propels us into the world, towards the needy and the afflicted, the orphan and the alien.<sup>5</sup>”

Take a moment to reflect upon the many moments during the Mass in which we are called and strengthened as good stewards:

**The very meaning of the word “Eucharist” is “thanksgiving.”** We gather in thanksgiving for God’s love and providence;

**The liturgical calendar of Sundays, feasts and seasons** opens up for us the entire Paschal Mystery of God’s love for us in Christ. With each season and its particular focus and character, we are led to reflect on and shape our living as God’s people. By celebrating the seasons well, our lives take on the rhythm of the Paschal Mystery;

**In song**, particularly the psalms, acclamations, and songs of praise, which we raise our hearts and minds to God, who is the giver of all good gifts;

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<sup>5</sup> Presentation at the International Catholic Stewardship Council’s annual conference, 2016

**In prayer**, we bring our needs, ask for forgiveness, profess our faith, recall Christ's passion, death, and resurrection;

**In the word of God**, through which we are immersed in salvation history, hear the story of our ancestors in faith, walk with Jesus and the early community of believers, and are urged to live as faithful followers of Christ;

**In the Eucharistic prayer and reception of Holy Communion**, through which we are drawn deeply into Christ's sacrifice of love, receive his very body and blood, and are called into communion with Christ and one another;

**From the Mass**, we are sent forth in mission, to live as the bearers of Christ's merciful love in the world.

In this simple walk through the Mass, we realize that it forms us as the Christian people we are called to be. Chapter Four explores the ways in which we may shape stewardship formation through the celebration of the Eucharist and the liturgical calendar.

### **A Steward's Prayerful Reflection**

Throughout this guide, you will see the ways in which prayer underpins growth in stewardship, every step of the way. The web resource page includes seasonal prayers as well as prayers for the various stages of the process of forming people as grateful disciples. With this in mind, a path of prayer unfolds for all who are committed to grow as good stewards:

**Gratitude:** For what are you grateful today? Offer a prayer of praise and thanksgiving for the many blessings you have been given.

**Gifts:** What gifts (faith, talents, friendships, time, resources, blessings of circumstances) do you perceive in your life at this time? Thank God for these gifts.

**Response:** Ask the Lord, "What should I do with all I have been given?" How will you respond by giving of yourself or your resources? Who or what will benefit from your service, sharing, caring, and sacrifice of time, talent or treasure? Make a prayerful commitment to share yourself and your resources as a reflection of your commitment to follow Christ as a grateful disciple.

**Trust:** In what ways are you called to trust in God in order to respond faithfully? Your sharing may include giving of your time, talents, or faith in ways that feel



uncomfortable; you may be tempted to hold on to your money, or your time and need to trust that God will be with you as you share as a grateful disciple. Pray to hold firm to your commitment, and recognize God's presence with you as you carry it out.

**Gratitude:** The reflection turns full-circle, as you reflect on the service, caring or sharing you have offered. In what ways have you recognized the grace of God as you have carried out that which you committed yourself?

### **The Three T's, and More**

It is common for parishes to talk about the "Three T's" as they introduce their parishioners to stewardship: Time, Talent, and Treasure. This categorization is helpful, in that it provides a way to draw people's attention to the fact that stewardship is not only about money. However, we fall short if a spiritual foundation is not laid, or if the stewardship message is communicated in such a manner, unintentional though it might be, that we can check these three things off like boxes on our to-do list. Time, check. Talent, check. Treasure, check. Our call to grow in gratitude and to respond by sharing goes far beyond these three aspects of our lives. We are called to recognize that all is blessing and to be good stewards of all of it. This is one of the greatest challenges of stewardship leadership. It is difficult to "get our arms around" all that being a good steward entails. It would not be an overstatement to say that people will grow as stewards in direct proportion to the ways in which we continually invite them to grow in gratitude and respond as good stewards.

### **What Does This "Look Like" in Real Life? The Steward's Personal Response**

When we take the stewardship message to heart, there is a meaningful difference in the way in which we live our daily lives. Think of all of the moments in a typical day and how a commitment to live as a disciple and steward makes an impact. How do you begin your day? What decisions are effected? What attitudes, behaviors or actions change as a result? While each of us lives in relationship to our age and stage of life and faith, personal circumstances, and vocation, in general, **grateful disciples and stewards:**

**Pray:** Growth as a steward is influenced by a life of prayer. Because the situations in our lives require us to make decisions daily, prayer is a crucial aspect of this

spiritual life. Through prayer, we grow as followers of Jesus Christ; reflect on Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Church to discern Christ's call; are inspired to apply our faith as we navigate the moments of our days and years; and find the strength to share and serve in challenging and yet meaningful ways. Stewards begin each day by giving thanks, offering the day to God, and asking for the Holy Spirit's guidance and inspiration as we face whatever the day may bring. We end the day giving thanks, examining the ways in which we have or have not responded to God's grace and call, and ask that we grow in the ways in which we will live our faith as good stewards in the future.

**Give thanks:** Living a life that is filled with gratitude is a deeply profound way of living. Rather than focusing on what we want and being consumed by what we do or do not have, rooting our lives in "an attitude of gratitude" changes everything. We find meaning and purpose previously unknown as we recognize everything in our lives, including our very life, as a gift from God and sign of God's grace.

**Are attentive to their blessings and gifts:**

The more grateful we are, the more likely it will be that we will recognize the blessings and gifts in our lives. Stuck in traffic? Notice the sound of the birds or recall a precious moment with a friend. A colleague is late for a meeting? Take the time to consider the gifts and talents you have been given that you may apply to the tasks at hand. Starting with gratitude, see the face of God in your daily circumstances and respond, knowing that this is precisely what Jesus asks us to do.

"This pastoral letter initiates a long-term, continuing process encouraging people to examine and interiorize stewardship's implications. (SDR, Introduction)

**Commit to growth in living faith:** Faith is not meant to be static, having little impact in our lives. If we pay attention to the Gospel and the witness of the saints, we understand that discipleship requires lifelong change as we take Jesus' call to heart. Embracing stewardship helps us to reflect on the ways in which we are, or are not, putting God first in our lives.

**Appreciate and use their talents, resources, and time wisely and well:** One of the most compelling aspects of the life of stewardship is recognizing that all we are and have comes from God. This realization helps us to see the grace of God in our lives. With this recognition, we are more deeply aware of the responsibility to use all we have been given, and to do so through the lens of our faith in God as a Christian in the

world. Talents recognized are not left dormant; we see the good that can be accomplished through the use of financial and material resources; we are less likely to waste time and more likely to use it in ways that will give glory to God, the giver of all good gifts.

**Share themselves, their faith, and their resources willingly and with a generous spirit:** Our grateful response to all that God has given us is to share our gifts with others in caring, compassionate service. Stewards gladly give of themselves and their resources as a reflection of their growing relationship with Jesus, who gave his very life for the salvation of the world. United in mission with Christ, disciples and stewards give willingly and grow in their capacity to share Christ's forgiveness and mercy in the daily circumstances of their lives. They use their talents and time to advocate for justice and to seek peace. They know that faith, too, is a gift from God, and share appropriately and readily when the door to do so is open.

**Separate wants from needs, embracing a simpler lifestyle that is focused on what truly matters:** When we take the stewardship message to heart, we see that we are influenced by our consumer culture and grow in willingness to examine our possessions in light of our faith. We begin to separate our wants from our needs and focus on what really matters in life: life itself; faith; relationships; the joy that comes from living a faith-filled and fruitful life. We find that holding on to possessions possesses us. We recognize that what St. Basil the Great said still holds true today: "The bread which you do not use is the bread of the hungry; the garment hanging in your wardrobe is the garment of him who is naked; the shoes that you do not wear are the shoes of the one who is barefoot; the money that you keep locked away is the money of the poor; the acts of charity that you do not perform are so many injustices that you commit."

**Continually examine their lives, asking God to inspire them to live faithfully:** The change of mind, heart, and life that is brought about by embracing stewardship does not happen overnight. Because the circumstances of our lives change daily, growth as a disciple and good steward is a continual process of conversion.

**Are accountable to God and the faith community:** Stewards know that they are accountable to God for the ways in which they care for all they have been given. This accountability is supported by and through the commitment we make to one another in our parish communities.

## The Parish is Transformed into a Community of Disciples who Live as Stewards

Not only are people's lives changed when parishes form parishioners as disciples and stewards, the parish itself is transformed. As individuals grow in their commitment to Christ and to living as good stewards, the parish becomes a community that worships, evangelizes, forms members, and serves through the sharing of parishioners.

Pastors and other leaders are no doubt wondering if leading people to grow as stewards will positively impact the ways in which they give of themselves in ministry and their financial resources to the parish. The testimony of hundreds of parishes is that this is absolutely the case, and more. Forming our parishioners as disciples and stewards encourages them to open their minds and hearts to God and to make a firm commitment to live as Christ's people in their world. As they grow as grateful disciples, they become much more willing to share their time, prayer, talents, attention, resources and faith with others.

Chapter Two will focus on the role of leadership in starting and sustaining stewardship in the parish.



Impact of Stewardship reflection



Grateful Disciples Introduction to Stewardship video.

## Live the Vision

### Stewards in Community

Reflect on your initial thoughts and observations in reading Chapter 1, *Stewards in Community*, using the chart below to guide your discussion. Refer back to the major points of each section as you share together. Retain this worksheet for use in your later planning and implementation.

The vision of stewards in community in your own experience and in your parish	1= a new concept 2 = very rarely have considered 3= have experienced occasionally 4= is a guiding principle	Why you rated as you did Note specific examples as much as possible
Grateful: All we are and have are God's		
Grateful disciples: Jesus as the supreme teacher		
Grateful disciples pray		
Stewardship is profoundly Eucharistic		
The Three T's and more		
What does this "look like" in real life? The steward's personal response		
The parish is transformed into a community of disciples who live as stewards		

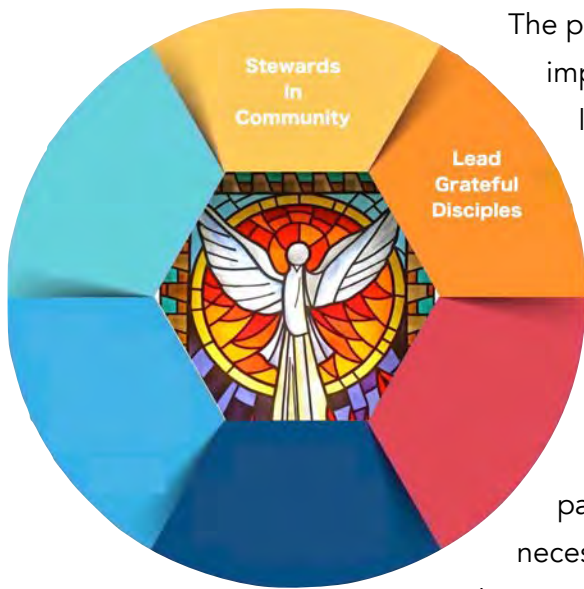


Following your Live the Vision discussion, summarize your conversation below. A planning process, including the identification of immediate next steps, is provided at the end of this guide. For now, if potential action items or strategies were identified in your discussions, record them here for later reference.

Upon what do you have to build? What opportunities for development or growth emerged in your discussions?

# LEAD GRATEFUL DISCIPLES

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The previous chapter reflected on stewardship and the impact this spirituality has on the life of discipleship. As leaders, we must keep the vision of stewardship in people’s hearts and minds. Discern what to communicate, when and how, including invitations to deepen commitment to Christ and to living and growing as stewards. Stewardship operates on two levels: individual and communal. While leaders focus much of their attention on communicating the stewardship message to parishioners on a very personal level, it is also necessary to be attentive to the ways in which the parish is living and growing as a faith community of grateful disciples.

Stewardship is ultimately about growing in gratitude and sharing our many blessings with others. “Stewardship is an expression of discipleship, with the power to change how we understand and live out our lives.” (SDR, 2) While stewardship formation encourages people to take stock of the ways in which they are living as disciples and stewarding their many gifts and blessings, leaders must also be attentive to how well the parish is stewarding resources. This personal and communal journey of discipleship lived out as stewards has the potential to transform hearts and minds, and to make lasting change in the life of the parish, for the better. When referring to “the parish,” it is important to recognize that the people are the parish! “The parish” often denotes the direction, strategies and practices that are incorporated into parish life, guided by parish leaders.

“The parish” also refers to the entire faith community, and recognizes the tremendous impact this community has on the way in which each person lives and grows in faith. This chapter explores the role of leaders in calling the community to embrace stewardship, and the impact of dedicated servant leaders in forming their communities as grateful disciples.

“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.” (SDR, Introduction)

## **Growing as Stewards Throughout the Year**

Often, especially as parishes begin their stewardship journey, the focus is on a single point in the year in which to focus on stewardship. While every parish must discern the way in which stewardship ministry will be managed alongside other facets of parish life, the approach that is reflected in this workbook, based on the best practices of parishes that have sustained stewardship for many years, is to teach stewardship year-round. This year-round approach insures that stewardship is not reduced to a focus solely on the impact within the parish community, but is also taught as a spiritual way of life.

People will respond to the message of stewardship differently at various stages of life and faith. Therefore, communicate the message in every way possible, using examples that speak to the many circumstances of life which parishioners experience. Chapter Four includes an exploration of the many means of communicating the stewardship message. The web resource page contains many helpful articles and postings, which present insights into stewardship throughout the liturgical year, in seasonally sensitive and appropriate ways.

## **Leading Stewardship in the Parish**

When parishes first begin to explore stewardship, there is often a specific need the parish faces. At times, the initial reason for exploring stewardship is that the parish is in financial need; at other times, parish ministries and programs are suffering due to lack of involvement on the part of parishioners. While both of these situations will be addressed through an on-going process to form parishioners as good stewards, there is much more to this way of life. There will be lasting impact on the parish community as well as the parishioners and all who are touched by their selfless sharing of their gifts and blessings.

Growing as a steward is part of a lifelong process of transformation in Christ, it is necessary to begin this process with the wider view. Just as parishioners are asked to continually discern how they will stretch and grow as disciples and stewards, parishes must be prepared to “be in this for the long haul” as well, understanding that it, like all facets of our faith, will take root over time. Keeping the vision of stewardship as a way of life is essential, and all who lead their parish to embrace stewardship must be actively



living as stewards themselves. This does not imply that we who lead are “finished products.” Stewardship is a spiritual way of life that requires on-going conversion. We will naturally experience ups and downs on this journey, as in every aspect of discipleship. Yet we who accept the call to lead our communities to live and grow as stewards must be committed to do so ourselves. We witness to the transformative nature of this spirituality, and help to articulate it for others.

### **The Role of the Pastor**

It is not uncommon for the pastor to be introduced to stewardship through the witness of another priest, a lay person who has already been touched by this spirituality, or in the context of a conference or diocesan workshop day. Often, pastors recognize the potential for stewardship to positively impact the parish and its parishioners, yet are reticent to undertake the many facets of commencing stewardship initiatives. This hesitation may come from a desire to not overburden already-busy staff or parishioner leaders, not knowing where or how to begin, or being uncertain about where stewardship fits alongside all of the other aspects of parish life. This guide and the web resources should alleviate many of the qualms that cause pastors to be reluctant to begin or sustain stewardship by providing the resources necessary to make parish stewardship a life-giving process within the parish.

While it is common and appropriate for the pastor to place stewardship leadership in the hands of a team of parishioner ministers under his authority, sometimes with the coordination of a staff person who acts as a liaison, the pastor’s commitment is particularly crucial to the way in which the stewardship message will be heard and lived:

“A bishop’s or pastor’s prayerful meditations on Christian stewardship should precede the start of a diocesan or parish stewardship program. Prayer becomes a potent and precious resource for the process because the primary objective in stewardship education is always a renewal of commitment to Christian discipleship. To be successful, stewardship education requires the bishop or pastor to make a complete, constant, personal, and official commitment to stewardship as a constitutive element of Christian discipleship. A bishop or pastor who does not have a solid conviction about the importance of stewardship will give only halfhearted

support to the stewardship programs of his diocese or parish. The results will reflect this lack of total commitment.” (SDR, 51)

This does not mean that the pastor is expected to know all there is to know prior to beginning stewardship at the parish. In fact, many priests speak of the way in which

growing as a steward is a practical and profoundly

“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 intimate, personal relationship with the Lord.” (SDR, 14)

Eucharistic way of life, providing a means for bringing faith to life in a deeply meaningful way for himself personally as well as for the parish. Ideally, as the quote from the bishops’ pastoral letter above states, the pastor will have an appreciation for stewardship as a particularly poignant way to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

There are distinct ways in which the pastor and other clergy lead the parish in embracing stewardship as a way of life. See chapter three for

more on each of the following:

- Witnessing to the ways in which stewardship is transforming your life;
- On-going references to stewardship in homilies, bulletin letters, parish meetings, and conversation with parishioners;
- Attentiveness to the ways in which parish practices are, or are not, reflective of stewardship principles;
- Insuring the allocation of time and people or material resources to ensure that stewardship receives the attention it needs in order to permeate parish and parishioner life;
- Personal invitation to parishioners whom you discern are ready to become involved or increase their involvement by tying participation to stewardship.

It is not uncommon for parishioners to express their gratitude for their pastor’s role in many aspects of parish life and spiritual leadership. This is particularly true when the pastor takes stewardship to heart and is committed to forming the parish as disciples and stewards.

## The Blessing and Responsibility of Lay Stewardship Leaders

“Are you a leader?” The Catholic Life and Faith team has asked this question of hundreds of people who serve in their parishes. It was initially surprising to find that many who share their talents and time as council or committee members, coordinators or participants in ministries and organizations, or who guide special projects and events have never thought of themselves as leaders. And yet, each person who is involved in the parish is leading, influencing others to take part, sharing his or her passion for Christ, living as a disciple, and making the parish a true community of faith. This leadership is often quiet, unassuming, and is carried out in the spirit of service, following Christ who is the ultimate servant leader and who commands us to share God’s love in every possible way.

A presumption has been made in the development of this guide that those who read and use it are likely leaders in some formal (pastor and/or staff) or informal (parishioner) capacity. Most parishes have many leaders in varying roles, who share responsibility for shaping and implementing all of the aspects of parish life. The pastor (or parish administrator where applicable) is the leader, but is not the only person who bears responsibility for insuring that the parish fulfills its mission. Many parishes have staff members. Some are part-time; some full-time. Many are responsible for overseeing specific areas of parish ministry, including worship, the faith formation of children, teens, and adults, sacramental preparation, pastoral care, mission and outreach, community life, and temporal matters such as business administration and/or finance. Parishes also rely on members to assume particular roles within the parish. All who embrace leadership in whatever capacity and role do so in response to their baptismal call to serve others as members of Christ’s body.

Forming parishioners and the parish to live and grow as grateful disciples who are good stewards requires intentional, consistent leadership. Unlike most other facets of parish life, stewardship is often coordinated through the dedication of a team of leaders — sometimes including a staff member, sometimes parishioner-leaders acting under the authority of the pastor. Stewardship sometimes falls under the parish pastoral council; at times, under the direction or coordination of the community life coordinator, business manager, or faith formation director. Regardless of where stewardship falls organizationally, it is crucial that it is carried out in the spirit of servant leadership, as an expression of discipleship. Reflect on the ways in which your service and leadership within the parish is a response to your baptismal call to live as a member of Christ’s body.



Reflection servant leadership

## Forming Your Stewardship Team

While not every parish that is committed to stewardship has a committee, most find such a team beneficial. Gathering a group of committed stewards to lead the parish's stewardship efforts is in itself a process of discernment, knowing that those who accept the invitation will discern the direction of stewardship formation for the parish. If your parish is new to stewardship, the initial team will likely be comprised of people who are already familiar and who serve in some capacity in the parish. Invite people whom you know to already be living as good stewards, even if they would not use the word about themselves. A team of eight to ten people is ideal, however smaller teams often begin this process, and add people as the parish becomes more familiar with stewardship and the importance of it for the parish and its people. If your parish already has a stewardship committee or team, read what follows with your current and future members in mind.

Stewardship committees are typically both advisory and active in ministry. In other words, like a council, stewardship committees advise the pastor or his designee on the elements and practices that are appropriate in a specific period of time or as the parish plans for the future. We will consider this advisory, discernment, role in a later section of this chapter. Stewardship committees are also active, in that they carry out many of the aspects of stewardship formation, commitment and accountability themselves, animating the service of other parishioners. For this reason, some committees may be relatively small in number, perhaps as few as five or six, with members calling on the gifts and talents of parishioners to carry out specific tasks throughout the year. As the committee is first convened, it will be important to clarify the expectations, roles and responsibilities of members.



Sample committee structure document that provides a beginning point for the development of a team description.

## **Be Formed as Stewards as You Prepare to Form Others**

Structure your meetings in such a manner that you study the Bishops' pastoral letter on stewardship over a five or six month period of time, using the month-by-month study process that is posted on the web resource page. Fight the temptation to skip this important step through a desire to "get busy." This period of formation in prayer, the principles of stewardship, and team formation is essential. If you are part of an already-existing stewardship team, take time to continue your formation at your meetings. Your continued commitment to growth as a disciple and steward insures that your parish will be on an on-going journey of transformation. Make a commitment to be honest with one another, and to hold each other's sharing in confidence. Your conversations and sharing will give you insight into the joys and challenges of embracing stewardship as a way of life, and as a result, you will have greater sensitivity to the ways in which the stewardship message may be conveyed to parishioners.

## **As You Are Formed, Form Other Leaders**

Once your stewardship team has dedicated time to being formed in a deep understanding of stewardship, it is time to form the other leaders in your parish, including the parish pastoral council, parish staff, other councils, commissions, or committees, ministry coordinators and their teams, catechists, and school faculty, where applicable. Often, such leadership formation is accomplished through an annual retreat or day of reflection. In larger parishes, the coordinators of each group gather with the expectation that they will convene their groups at a later date. No matter how leadership formation is accomplished in your parish, it is crucial that this step is not overlooked, and important to do this at least annually, so that all who lead so do in the spirit of servant leadership, building a community of grateful disciples.

## **Draw Upon the Talents and Strengths of Members**

As important as it is to learn about and reflect on stewardship together, it will also be beneficial to become familiar with one another and each other's talents and strengths as you begin or continue to serve in your parish. At an early meeting, invite members to share the things they most feel called to do, activities and tasks they enjoy, and the talents they perceive, so that team members may be invited to fulfill roles and responsibilities that reflect their particular talents. If you are familiar with

StrengthsFinder®, and your parish is already using strengths development in helping people discover their talents, this is an excellent process for your team. If not, consider exploring strengths in the future (this is considered briefly in the following chapter, in a section on stewardship of talent in the parish). Workbook 3 of the Bridges Leadership Series, “Building Bridges to the Heart of Your People,” is an excellent beginning point if you are new to this process. Information on this workbook is linked on the web resource page.

### **Discern the Shape of Stewardship in the Parish**

Stewardship leaders must constantly listen and watch the ways in which parishioners’ lives are being changed as they embrace stewardship when we interact with parishioners at the parish and in other aspects of our lives. One of the primary roles of the stewardship team is to discern how to communicate the message and the ways in which parishioners may be invited to reflect upon their lives, grow as a disciple, and deepen their commitment to living as a good and faithful steward. The following chapter will explore the many facets of stewardship education and formation. A suggested format for stewardship team meetings, with sample meeting outlines, is available on the web resource page. Keep in mind each time you gather, that your humble listening and attentiveness is vital to the ways in which your parishioners accept the call to live as followers of Jesus Christ and stewards of their many blessings.

### **Leading Change**

When we think about the conversion in Christ that is at the heart of living as a good steward, we recognize that much of our ministry is about leading people to change. The same can be said for the parish. As you begin or continue to introduce parishioners to stewardship and examine parish practices in light of our call to live and grow as stewards, you will no doubt discover aspects of parish life that need to be changed in order to more faithfully fulfill this call. Explore principles of change management in order to carry out this responsibility well. What follows is drawn from the change leadership framework of Dr. John Kotter. whose work is found at the website linked in the footnote below. <sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Kotter International: <http://www.kotterinternational.com/the-8-step-process-for-leading-change/>

The image<sup>7</sup> below captures the process of change leadership and management which Dr. Kotter has discovered in effective teams over the course of many years. Consider the benefits of this framework in calling parishioners and the parish to make the changes necessary in order to more faithfully live as disciples and good stewards. While these steps are presented in sequential, linear fashion, they best operate simultaneously and organically once we are aware of the overall process and its benefits.



**Step 1. Create a sense of urgency.** Why is it important that we embrace stewardship? What difference will it make in the lives of individuals and the life of the parish? Establish the call to live as disciples and grow as good stewards. Witness to the impact living as a steward has on your life; share the ways in which this way of life is a powerful way to live as a follower of Jesus Christ.

**Step 2. Build a guiding coalition.** This is your stewardship team, who, along with the pastor, pastoral council, staff members, and other parishioner ministers, commit to forming the parish and its people as disciples and stewards. You will keep the vision of discipleship and stewardship in people's minds and hearts, and insure that parish practices provide many opportunities for them to make a commitment and to fulfill it.

**Step 3. Form strategic vision and initiatives.** The importance of keeping the vision of a life of prayerful stewardship in people's minds and hearts has been established. We will look at the many strategies that may be employed in order to do this in the chapters that follow.

**Step 4. Enlist a volunteer "army."** Stewardship leaders do not speak of parishioners who give of themselves and their resources as "volunteers," and we certainly are not forming an "army!" However, the spirit of this step is essential. As we form parishioners to live as good stewards in all of the aspects of their lives, including the parish, we invite them to serve with us. These parishioner ministers, including your team, live as Christ's body, the Church, and in doing so, you carry out the mission of Christ and of your parish.

<sup>7</sup> Kotter International, 8 Steps to Accelerate Change, ebook, 2015, 11

**Step 5. Enable action by removing barriers.** This step will be explored in detail in chapter four, as we make a commitment to welcoming and engaging everyone, inviting their meaningful participation in the life of the parish.

**Step 6. Generate short-term wins.** Discern how to bring stewardship to the parish incrementally. This is not only a practical exercise in discerning what to do first. It also applies to people's spiritual lives and practice. Giving them concrete, specific actions they may carry out for a period of time, perhaps a liturgical season, helps them to understand that stewardship is a meaningful, do-able way of life.

**Step 7. Sustain acceleration.** It is so easy to start the process of teaching stewardship and then get lost in the many other aspects of parish spiritual life! The need to keep the vision in people's minds and hearts is very real. This is the reason we will examine the importance of having a plan in the chapter that follows. But sustaining acceleration is not only about staying the course. We must also consistently discern how we invite parishioners to increase their commitment to Christ and to the steward's way of life.

**Step 8. Institute change.** Our goal as stewardship leaders is to bring about change, which ultimately leads people to live their faith as stewards of all they are, have, and will be, and to form the parish as a community of disciples and stewards. It is about transformation, change, continuing conversion in Christ, and is a profoundly meaningful way of life, worth every minute of time and every moment of effort we put into it.




Stewardship team chart and plan



A monthly stewardship study module





## Live the Vision

### Lead Grateful Disciples

Reflect on your initial thoughts and observations in reading Chapter 2, Lead Grateful Disciples, using the chart below to guide your discussion. Refer back to the major points of each section as you share together. Retain this worksheet for use in your later planning and implementation.

Stewardship leadership in your parish	1= not current practice 2= describes practice somewhat 3= have room to grow 4= is reflective of parish practice	Why you rated as you did Note specific examples as much as possible
Growing as stewards throughout the year		
The role of the pastor and lay leaders		
Forming your stewardship team		
Be formed as you prepare and form others		
Draw on the talents and strengths of members		
Discern the shape of stewardship in the parish		
Leading change		



Following your Live the Vision discussion, summarize your conversation below. A planning process, including the identification of immediate next steps, is provided at the end of this guide. For now, if potential action items or strategies were identified in your discussions, record them here for later reference.

Upon what do you have to build? What opportunities for development or growth emerged in your discussions?

# FORM DISCIPLES AS STEWARDS

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You have explored the vision of disciples who live as prayerful stewards, and have considered your role as leaders in keeping the stewardship message in people's minds and hearts throughout the year, inviting them to commit their very lives to the Lord. This chapter will focus on how this is accomplished through a process of faith formation. Through many parish practices, carried out throughout the year, we lead parishioners to take to heart the call to follow Jesus with their lives and to grow as grateful, prayerful stewards.



## Christian Stewardship is Always Tied to Discipleship

It has been noted that many people volunteer in their local communities and give of their time and resources to many causes, positively impacting their city and

“Jesus’ call is urgent. He does not tell people to follow him at some time in the future but here and now — at *this moment, in these circumstances*. There can be no delay.” (SDR, 14)

world, and that not all of these people do so out of a faith response to God’s love. The distinction in embracing Christian stewardship is two-fold: first, it is a spiritual way of life that has as its foundation the recognition that all in life is a blessing, which calls for a response in the way one lives one’s life; secondly, Christian stewards are followers of Jesus Christ who have made a commitment to live and grow as disciples. As one familiar saying goes, “Stewardship is what we do after we say we

believe.” [do we know the origin of this quote?] Following Christ with our lives calls us to give of ourselves lavishly, in response to the lavish love of God. Christian stewards grow in a strong sense of mission and find fulfillment in bringing God’s love to the world.

Many parishes already have youth and adult faith formation, which has as its goal the growth of discipleship among members. The catechetical documents of the

Church emphasize that adult faith formation is normative. However, some parishes have little to encourage the adults of the parish to encounter Christ, make a commitment to live as disciples, and encourage their formation beyond sacramental preparation.

Teaching our parishioners about stewardship gives them a distinct way to connect their faith with their daily lives. Embracing stewardship influences our daily decisions, as we learn to separate our wants from our needs, prayerfully discern our use of time, resources, and talents, consider the value we place on possessions and the acquisition of material goods; care for creation, and so much more. In this way, stewardship education is deeply connected to faith formation, and as such, stewardship and faith formation leaders may find many fruitful opportunities to collaborate in ministry.

Stewardship provides a specific lens through which the parish may begin or continue adult faith formation in the spirit of that which is described in the U.S. Bishops' pastoral letter, *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*: "We seek to form *parishes* that are vitally alive in faith. These communities will provide a parish climate and an array of activities and resources designed to help adults more fully understand and live their faith. We seek to form *adults* who actively cultivate a lively baptismal and eucharistic spirituality with a powerful sense of mission and apostolate. Nourished by word, sacrament, and communal life, they will witness and share the Gospel in their homes, neighborhoods, places of work, and centers of culture."<sup>8</sup>

Form parishioners when they are young, understanding that they will grow in relationship with Christ throughout their formative years and into adulthood. Providing children and teens with age-appropriate ways to experience and understand stewardship as an expression of their love for Jesus insures that this will become a meaningful way of life for them.

### **Communicating the Stewardship Message**

Forming people as disciples and stewards requires on-going communication, using every means possible to lead people to on-going reflection and commitment. Ideas, suggestions, and articles for each of the bullet points below are offered on the stewardship formation web page:

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<sup>8</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, 2000, 17

**The homily** is an important element of an on-going, strategic stewardship plan. People take the message to heart when the priest or deacon connects stewardship to the Gospel, particularly when he shares his own experience in living as a steward in his daily life. While it is important to use the word “stewardship” frequently enough that people are exposed to the many ways in which this way of life influences daily decisions and living, other themes of the spirituality of stewardship may also be highlighted, such as gratitude, gift, discipleship, self-giving, and service. As one pastor who leads his parishioners to embrace stewardship is fond of saying, “I speak of stewardship almost every Sunday. I simply don’t always use the word.”

**The Universal Prayer** (often referred to as the Prayers of the Faithful) always includes a prayer for the Church, and as a result, is an ideal means for inviting all who are gathered to pray for the open mind, heart and spirit to live as good stewards in the world.

**The parish bulletin** is a key vehicle for written communication in the parish. Experienced stewardship leaders recognize the vital role the bulletin plays in spreading the stewardship message. Whether through brief, weekly articles, monthly bulletin inserts, or seasonal pieces, the bulletin is used to invite reflection, offer opportunities for parishioners to respond through service, and report the impact of parishioner giving to all in the parish. It is important to insure that all stewardship communication is theologically consistent and appropriate and is conveyed in an engaging manner. Some parishes also have **monthly or quarterly newsletters**, which provide an opportunity for extended articles and examples of the ways parishioners are living as stewards in their daily lives at home, in the parish, workplace, and world.

“Jesus’ invitation to follow him is addressed to people of every time and condition. Here and now it is addressed to us — Catholic citizens of a wealthy, powerful nation facing many questions about its identity and role...members of a community of faith blessed with many human and material resources yet often uncertain about how to sustain and use them.”  
(SDR, Introduction)

**The parish website** is essential, as more parishioners and visitors look to the web for their information. An up-to-date, engaging web presence, including **social media** is necessary if we are to demonstrate that faith is a viable way to live life in today’s world. Not only this, we are able to communicate differently online, using vibrant images, live links, and inviting responses through blog and social media

postings. As you plan stewardship education, engage a parishioner who is very comfortable with online communication to manage this aspect for you.

**Email blasts** provide a means for sending timely information, such as invitations and/or registration for special events, reminders of holy day liturgy times, and brief prayers or reflections, including ones on themes of a spirituality of stewardship. **Postal mail** may also be used occasionally, and as we rely more heavily on email to reach our parishioners, communication that is sent via postal mail may carry more weight due to its relative rarity. Many parishes only send postal mail for annual stewardship renewal and commitment or as they prepare for their annual covenant commitment time. These practices are the topic of chapter five.

**Lay witnesses** who speak just before or at the end of Mass help all who are present to hear how embracing stewardship is a meaningful way of life. Those who are invited to provide a witness talk must be well-prepared and succinctly communicate their stewardship journey in a manner that will capture the attention and promote reflection by parishioners.

**Faith formation** gatherings, such as small groups, retreats, speakers, or parish missions, provide unique opportunities for people to be formed in a more extensive manner. While processes and programs such as these last only through a distinct period of time, they have lasting and cumulative impact on individuals and in the life of the parish.



Seasonal bulletin articles, an outline for preparing lay witness talks, stewardship study process and retreat outline are provided on the Grateful Disciples web pages.

### **Follow the Liturgical Cycle of Sundays, Feasts and Seasons**

The Eucharist and the liturgical cycle of Sundays, feasts and seasons shape us as Christian people and immerse us in the Paschal Mystery of Christ's life and love. Following the liturgical cycle with stewardship formation insures that we will make essential connections that help people to express their faith as good stewards in their daily lives. Naturally, the homily and prayers of the faithful will reflect the liturgical season and will connect with the readings which are specified for the day. Be attentive to the other ways in which we may connect stewardship education to the Mass and

liturgical cycle. For example, faith formation, community life and outreach may all take on the particular character of the liturgical cycle. Advent will look and feel differently than Lent; Pentecost will not be like a Sunday in Ordinary Time. This is especially important in planning stewardship communication and practices.

It is important to be mindful of the intersection between the liturgical cycle and the yearly calendar with its civic and seasonal holidays. Thanksgiving, for example, is a civic holiday that has great stewardship formation potential. Not only does the day encourage people to call to mind all for which they have to be grateful, often, Thanksgiving includes family celebrations and prayer that provide a special opportunity to help people make connections between their faith, living as a steward, and the rest of their lives.

### Key Themes in Stewardship Communication

Read and study *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response* and notice many key themes in communicating the stewardship message: gift, gratitude, response, blessing, talent, sharing, call, discipleship, accountability, and so much more. A special handout has been created that captures key themes, passages of Sacred Scripture, and excerpts from the bishops' pastoral letter in order to help you as you plan and implement stewardship communication.



Unifying language in stewardship formation handout

### Forming People to Make a Commitment and Be Accountable

It is important to note here that stewardship formation is about more than simply helping people recognize their blessings and their call to respond in gratitude, important as that is. Grateful disciples pray, learn, and make a commitment to take all of this to heart. Without a clear and compelling appeal to commit, people easily put off the change of heart, mind and action to which they are called as disciples and

“Mature disciples make a conscious, firm decision, carried out in action, to be followers of Jesus Christ no matter the cost to themselves. Beginning in conversion, change of mind and heart, this commitment is expressed not in a single action, nor even in a number of actions over a period of time, but in an entire way of life. It means committing one’s very self to the Lord.” (SDR, 1, 2)

stewards. Stewardship education, therefore, focuses on what stewardship is, the impact it has on the way in which we live our lives, the call to live, grow, and commit to Christ and to living as a steward, and encouragement to respond to our blessings through service, giving, and sharing.

### **A Year-long Plan for Establishing and Sustaining Stewardship in the Parish**

In order to establish and sustain stewardship in the parish, it is necessary to have a plan for stewardship formation. Not only will the plan be sensitive to the liturgical cycle, Sunday and feast day readings, and annual calendar, it will be attentive to the many themes of a spirituality of stewardship, include a time of renewal and commitment (chapter five) and will be mindful of the time, resources, and attention that will be necessary for implementation. The best practices of parishes and dioceses that are effectively forming their people to live as stewards take all of these factors into account as they map out the elements of their stewardship plan. Three variations have emerged in such a year-long plan, primarily in the time of year in which an annual renewal and commitment period is held: autumn renewal and commitment of time, talent and treasure; Pentecost renewal and commitment; autumn treasure commitment with a focus on time and talent during the spring. (Adjust your plan for the annual calendar of seasons if you live in the Southern Hemisphere.)

In addition to the renewal and commitment period, the plan also includes faith formation processes, communication highlights, Sundays for lay witness talks (perhaps quarterly, or twice per year in addition to the renewal/commitment time), and stewardship reporting and accountability strategies (more on that in chapter six). Be sure to designate who will do what, how, and in what timeframe; indicate how you will measure or know that you have accomplished what you have set out to do. The web resource page includes templates for developing your plan.


The chart below illustrates how each of the three commitment and renewal periods previously mentioned can be mapped out with other themes of stewardship, using the liturgical cycle as the primary framework



<b>Month/Season</b>	<b>Autumn Renewal/ Commitment</b>	<b>Pentecost Renewal/ Commitment</b>	<b>Autumn Treasure Spring Time/Talent</b>
September	Discipleship and Stewardship, including gifts discernment	Discipleship and Stewardship, including gifts discernment	Discipleship and Stewardship, including gifts discernment
October	Annual Renewal/ Commitment	Meaning and Purpose and our need to give	Commitment of Treasure
November	Gratitude, Family	Gratitude, Family	Gratitude, Family
Advent/Christmas	Generosity, Welcome (many visitors coming soon!)	Generosity, Welcome (many visitors coming soon!)	Generosity, Welcome
January	Making things new (pastoral letter reflection at all parish meetings and in open gatherings)	Making things new (pastoral letter reflection at all parish meetings and in open gatherings)	Making things new (pastoral letter reflection at all parish meetings and in open gatherings)
Lent	Sacrifice, Call-Response	Sacrifice, Call-Response	Time and Talent commitment
Easter	Joy of giving, evangelization and mission	Joy of giving, evangelization, mission	Joy of giving, evangelization, mission
Pentecost	The Holy Spirit strengthens us to embrace stewardship (meaning and purpose and our need to give)	Annual Renewal/ Commitment	The Holy Spirit strengthens us to embrace stewardship (meaning and purpose and our need to give)



Year-long plan development worksheet



## Live the Vision

### Form Disciples as Stewards

Reflect on your initial thoughts and observations in reading Chapter 3, Form Disciples as Stewards, using the chart below to guide your discussion. Refer back to the major points of each section as you share together. Retain this worksheet for use in your later planning and implementation.

Discipleship and Stewardship formation in your parish	1= not current practice 2= describes practice somewhat 3= have room to grow 4= is reflective of parish practice	Why you rated as you did Note specific examples as much as possible
Christian stewardship is always tied to discipleship		
Communicating the stewardship message		
Follow the liturgical cycle		
Forming people to make a commitment and be accountable		
A year-long plan for establishing and sustaining stewardship		



Following your Live the Vision discussion, summarize your conversation below. A planning process, including the identification of immediate next steps, is provided at the end of this guide. For now, if potential action items or strategies were identified in your discussions, record them here for later reference.

Upon what do you have to build? What opportunities for development or growth emerged in your discussions?

# WELCOME AND ENGAGE EVERYONE

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Keep the vision in mind: a community of grateful disciples who are good stewards of all they are, have, and will be. Leadership is essential to keep this vision alive in the parish and in people's minds and hearts. Faith formation and stewardship education will be multifaceted. It will be aimed at people of all ages and stages of life and faith. A plan is necessary to insure that the vision of stewardship formation flows from the liturgical year and encourages on-going conversion.

## The Parish as Community of Grateful Disciples

The parish is more than simply the place where people come to Mass or participate in sacramental preparation. The parish is a community of believers who are committed to Christ and to living as disciples. Through participation in the Eucharist and in the life of the parish, we grow in communion with Christ and each other. We are formed as people of mission, who share God's love through service within the community and are sent forth from it as Christ's people in the world. It is time to develop structure and practices that support the parish as a community of grateful disciples.

## Bring Out the Welcome Mat

Many gifts have been given to the Church through stewardship formation in dioceses and parishes since the publication of *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*. One of these gifts is the recognition of the importance of hospitality and a genuine, heartfelt welcome in our parishes. This appreciation of hospitality and welcome makes perfect sense. If we hope people will open their hearts and minds to God's love in new and renewed ways, they must feel at home at the parish. It must be their family of faith.

Offering a genuine welcome and sincere invitation to become part of the community conveys Christ's love. Hospitality opens the door to an encounter with Jesus, for the person greeted and for the parishioners who welcome them. In the words of St. Benedict, "Let all guests who arrive be received like Christ, for He is going to say, 'I came as a guest, and you received Me.'(Matt 25:35)" Hospitality of this sort is as much about who we are as what we do. We are forming the parish to live as Christ's people in community.

Put yourself in the place of visitors or new parishioners as you think about the ways your parish welcomes them:

**At Mass:** Often, when considering hospitality or welcome, the first people who come to mind are the dedicated parishioners who greet all who come to Mass. Ministers of hospitality or ushers are often the first people to welcome guests or newcomers to your parish. They greet in the name of the community; help those who need assistance; answer questions about events, ministries, and community life; and introduce newcomers to others. Through their stewardship, people begin to feel at home at the parish. When helped to do so, other parishioners learn to be attentive to guests and newcomers, greeting them when as they come into church, or introducing themselves at the end of Mass. It is up to each of us to make our parish a welcoming place;

**At the parish office:** Those who answer the phone or the door are the face and voice of the parish for many. When they offer a smile, find an answer, or listen as a guest or newcomer shares his or her story, this person witnesses to the value the parish places on each person. This is also true of those who interact with **parents of children** in the religious education program or school. Program registration is the first experience of the parish beyond Mass for many parents, and they quickly develop an impression of the parish based on the way they and their child are welcomed;

**At moments of transition in life:** Sacramental preparation, funeral and bereavement ministry, outreach to the homebound, sick, recently separated or widowed, and those who are in need of care benefit from the stewardship of parishioners who understand themselves to be bearers of Christ's love;

**At special sacramental celebrations:** Funerals, Baptisms, weddings, celebrations of First Holy Communion or Confirmation: each offers a special opportunity to warmly welcome guests and to share God's love;

**At parish social gatherings:** For many, there is little as uncomfortable as arriving at a social gathering. The presence of specially-designated greeters and the sincere invitation to join in conversations by parishioners conveys the genuine hope that the newcomer will feel at home;

**With new parishioners:** Parish leaders have a special opportunity to welcome and engage people when they arrive as new parishioners. A welcoming gathering, visit to the home, or reception after Sunday Mass helps newcomers to become acquainted, find out about parish ministries in which they may become involved, and be introduced to stewardship as a way of life. Effective new parishioner welcome is a key way to say, “We are so grateful you are with us. You belong here!”

### Engage People in the Parish and in Faith

Much has been written about the Gallup research on parishioner engagement, which helps us appreciate the crucial role the parish community plays in leading people to living faith.<sup>9</sup> Other studies report the reasons given for leaving among the increasing number of people who are unaffiliated with any church and those who move from one church to another, seeking a faith home.<sup>10</sup> These all point to the importance of a welcoming parish in which people truly belong, through which they grow spiritually. The belonging described in the Gallup studies is more than “I go to St. XYZ parish.” It is much more like, “St. XYZ parish is my home.” The result of such deep belonging on individuals and the parish community are striking: people are spiritually committed, live their faith, share themselves and their resources, and invite others to the parish.

**Belonging is essential.** Engaging people in the parish, and through the parish to a life of discipleship, requires a culture in which every person matters. We have to truly *want* people to belong; we must be sincere in our desire that people feel at home with us, because when they do, they are more likely to fall in love with God and share with others in the parish and beyond.

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, *Growing an Engaged Church*, *Forming Generous Hearts*, and *Building Bridges to the Heart of Discipleship*, all listed in the bibliography at the end of this book.

<sup>10</sup> See selected articles list with live links here: <http://www.bridge2faith.net/sample/>

## Grateful Disciples Are Good Stewards of Talents

There is a direct relationship between the degree to which people are given the opportunity to give of their talents and parish engagement.<sup>11</sup> The more people know what their talents are and share them in ministry, the more engaged the parish will be. Yet, when we invite people to share their time, talent, and treasure as stewards, many quietly wonder what their talents are. Our talents are so natural to us that they are often undetected or under-appreciated. Without this essential aspect of self-understanding, we cannot grow as good stewards of our lives and gifts. It is for this reason that hundreds of parishes are using the Clifton StrengthsFinder® to equip parishioners to have a clear understanding of their God-given talents. Strengths development is beneficial to individuals and to the faith community. Helping people to discover their talents within a retreat, small group, or one-on-one in-depth conversation encourages participants to build on their talents, develop strengths, and grow as good stewards of their unique gifts. These processes enliven the faith of participants as they see God's grace, alive and active; the process is also an integral aspect of the process of increasing engagement within the parish.<sup>12</sup>

Once people discover their talents, they are eager to share their talents in service, in the parish and beyond it. In most parishes, however, people's talents are not taken into consideration as they are asked to join service or ministry groups. In fact, parish leaders often speak of "slots to fill" as they recruit new members, "We need three new catechists this year," for example. There is a dramatic shift when we invite people to reflect on their gifts and to offer those gifts in ministry: "It seems you have a real love of learning about our faith. Would you be willing to share what you have learned with our youth?"

Moving from "slots to fill" to strengths-based ministry requires a process through which people discern *how* they are called to serve and *what talents* they may apply in doing so. This can be accomplished through a parishioner-led discernment ministry. The discernment process may be offered at key points during the year, one-on-one as people are ready, or both. A discernment process is only a portion of what is needed, however. As people who are not currently involved discover their talents, grow

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<sup>11</sup> Winseman, Albert L., *Growing an Engaged Church*, New York, Gallup Press, 2006, 87-90

<sup>12</sup> More information is available on the Grateful Disciples website, including a link to *Building Bridges to the Heart of Your People*, which offers an exploration of strengths development in the parish and processes to help leaders begin.

in willingness to offer themselves in service, and discern a good ministry fit, they must also be warmly welcomed by those who are already active.



## Finding a Good Fit Ministry Discernment Process

### Developing Participative Culture

It is not uncommon for parish leaders to talk about how much they need to get more people involved. Leaders understand that involvement often leads to engagement — once people are involved, they become acquainted with other parishioners; they learn about all the ministries that are part of the life of the parish; and they begin to connect this involvement with a deepening understanding of stewardship. Their belonging leads them to grow spiritually and to respond as good stewards. Yet, as regularly as parish leaders speak about the need for greater involvement, it is just as common to hear people in many parishes say, “I signed up but no one called me,” or, “I came, but no one really spoke to me and I didn’t feel welcome.” Not only must we *hope* to involve people in service, we must actually *put practices into place* so that they will be warmly and sincerely welcomed. We must develop **culture in the parish** in which the contributions of every single person are valued.

“...Participation takes different forms according to people’s different gifts and offices, but there is a fundamental obligation arising from the sacrament of Baptism: that people place their gifts, their resources — their selves — at God’s service in and through the Church.” (SDR, 31)

**How do we create such participative culture?** Begin by forming all leaders. They must recognize themselves as leaders, and understand how important it is to invite and welcome new members to their ministries. Next, ask the leaders to talk with their teams, to insure that newcomers will be welcomed and their contributions will be appreciated. It is sometimes difficult for those who have been involved for a long time to welcome newcomers. Some have had experiences in the past, in which the new person did not follow through, or in which the tasks were completed in an unfamiliar way. Some groups have longstanding members who rely on each other for support. In many ways, they have become small faith communities. Therefore, they resist the



inclusion of new members. All of this must be resolved in order for people to have opportunities to act on the desire to serve that is part of the life of the steward.<sup>13</sup>

### **Personal Invitation is Always Best**

One of the integral elements of an on-going process to form people as stewards is a regular, often annual, invitation to make a stewardship commitment within the parish. Stewardship commitment will be explored in depth in chapter five. Personal invitation is fundamentally important. People will feel welcomed, and valued, when an active parishioner personally invites them. The parishioner who invites is able to make the connection between the person, his or her talents, and the way in which the person may make a unique contribution to the ministry. The parishioner who is being invited will feel comfortable in joining, knowing a familiar person who will help as the new member begins. The one inviting will pave the way, by introducing the newcomer and helping him or her to get started.

### **Ministry Formation and Support**

Most parishes have dozens of parish groups that serve within the parish and reach out to those in need in the local community. These parish ministries are vital for the life and mission of the parish. The more effectively we form people as stewards, the more parish ministries will thrive. Stewardship leaders insure that the parishioner-ministers who participate in these groups are formed for their service. Often, such formation happens through an annual retreat or workshop day, with continuing formation during ministry meetings, printed materials, and occasional visits by the pastor, staff liaison, or a guest speaker or visitor. When parishioners are formed through prayer, with a theological foundation for their service, reflections on their call as disciples and stewards, and skill-building that is appropriate for their ministry, their service is enhanced and their lives are transformed. Their commitment to live the vision of prayerful stewardship shapes and changes their lives.

Stewardship leaders guide the formation of ministry participants by providing a formation outline with prayer, brief content from a Church document or spiritual writer, and discussion questions for monthly parish meetings. Such formation shapes parish practices through communal reflection and sharing. Having simple, well-prepared

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<sup>13</sup> See the Bridges Leadership Series for more: [www.Bridge2Faith.net](http://www.Bridge2Faith.net)

materials to use also encourages ministry leaders to regularly take time for formation by equipping them to do so.



### Monthly formation sample and template

Stewardship leadership teams often take responsibility for insuring that parishioner-ministers have what they need in order to serve as they are called. In some parishes, the stewardship committee members personally check in with ministry coordinators quarterly. Other parishes have a dedicated team of parishioners who provide support, mentor new coordinators, invite participation in ministry fair or other events, and express gratitude for the service of the parishioner-ministers. At times, the stewardship leadership team leads or is involved in discernment about the formation of new or renewed ministries within the parish. All of these tasks insure that ministry is carried out in a spirit of servant leadership, and that the vision of prayerful stewardship is alive in the parish.

#### A Brief Re-cap

**Extend a genuine welcome** in order for people to feel at home at the parish

**Engage** them by helping them know they belong

**Give** people opportunities to discover their talents share them as good stewards

**Create parish culture** in which every person is invited to fully participate

**Personally invite** people to offer their talents in ministry and service

**Form and support** parish ministries as expressions of stewardship

Such a welcoming, engaging community will lead people to live as people who share in the mission of Christ as good stewards of their many gifts. It will be, in the words of Pope Francis, an evangelizing community: "The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a center of constant missionary outreach." (EG, 28)

## Live the Vision

# Welcome and Engage Everyone



Reflect on your initial thoughts and observations in reading Chapter 4, Welcome and Engage Everyone, using the chart below to guide your discussion. Refer back to the major points of each section as you share together. Retain this worksheet for use in your later planning and implementation.

Your parish as a welcoming and engaging community	1= not current practice 2= describes practice somewhat 3= have room to grow 4= is reflective of parish practice	Why you rated as you did Note specific examples as much as possible
The parish as a community of grateful disciples		
Welcoming practices		
Engaging people through deep belonging		
Stewardship of talents		
Participative culture		
Personal invitation		
Ministry formation and support		



## Remember the Vision

Following your Live the Vision discussion, summarize your conversation below. A planning process, including the identification of immediate next steps, is provided at the end of this guide. For now, if potential action items or strategies were identified in your discussions, record them here for later reference.

Upon what do you have to build? What opportunities for development or growth emerged in your discussions?

# COMMIT TO ANNUAL RENEWAL

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You have shared the vision of stewardship as a meaningful way of life. You have encouraged parishioners to reflect on their many blessings, and to think about the ways in which they are responding to God's grace. Now it is time to ask them to make a commitment.

## Commitment to Christ and the Church

Asking people to make a stewardship commitment has lasting impact on the parish and parishioners. Inviting parishioners to make a commitment, encourages them to act on their faith. Stewardship commitment provides a way for them to put



their faith in Christ into action. They reflect on what faith in Christ and belonging within the Church means to them. They become good stewards.

“But how is the Church built up? In a sense there are as many answers to that question as there are individual members with individual vocations. But the overarching answer for all is this: through personal participation in and support of the Church’s mission of proclaiming and teaching, serving, and sanctifying.” (SDR, 31)

Stewardship parishes establish an annual time of renewal and commitment, during which parishioners are asked to reflect on their lives, their current level of giving, and their intended sharing of their lives and resources in the coming year. This intentional time of reflection and commitment simultaneously functions in multiple ways:

### Personal reflection on discipleship and

**stewardship:** An annual time for commitment helps parishioners understand stewardship as a way to connect their Christian faith with their daily lives. They are encouraged to acknowledge all for which they have to be grateful, and to discern the ways in which they will act on their growing sense of gratitude. For many in the parish, this may be the first time they have personally reflected on their commitment to Christ. When the commitment period takes place within an on-going

effort to form people as disciples and stewards, it creates an annual rhythm of reflection and spiritual growth.

**Communal impact:** The commitment period provides a specific point in which the attention of parishioners and parish groups are focused together on stewardship as a faith response. This shared time of reflection and commitment results in communal spiritual growth; increased participation in ministry; enhanced financial giving; and a deeper sense of the parish as a family of faith.

**Opportunity to showcase ministries and participation:** Parishes often hold a ministry or service fair in conjunction with their renewal and commitment period. The fair showcases the many ministries and organizations within the parish, highlights the effect of parishioner involvement, and provides a specific time in which parishioners are invited to make an intentional commitment to give of themselves within the parish.

**Enhance engagement:** The Gallup research demonstrates that having clear expectations within the parish is foundational to parish engagement.<sup>14</sup> Asking parishioners to make a commitment to Christ and one another annually is a particularly appropriate way to clarify what it means to belong to the parish. The renewal period becomes a catalyst for enhancing engagement and inviting greater participation in the Christian life.

### **Covenant or Commitment?**

One of the principle decisions your stewardship leadership team will make is the form your commitment process will take. Many parishes focus on stewardship commitment, through which people are invited to reflect on their blessings, grow in gratitude, the call to discipleship, and commitment to service, ministry and financial giving. Often, the renewal and commitment process spans a month, in which parishioners are invited to reflect on their lives and their commitment to Christ through the homily, lay witnesses, a ministry or service fair, and printed materials. At the end of the month, parishioners are invited to bring their completed commitment form to Sunday Mass, and to bring it forward or place it in the collection basket during the Preparation of the Gifts. Ministry commitment and financial pledges are usually part of the commitment form.

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<sup>14</sup> Growing an Engaged Church, 84-85

Some parishes ask their parishioners to make a covenant commitment, as a reflection of our covenant relationship with God. The covenant process typically begins with discussions among parish leaders about what is offered at the parish in the form of worship, community life, pastoral care, ministry, and faith formation, while clarifying

“The New Covenant in and through Christ — the reconciliation he effects between humankind and God — forms a community: the new People of God, the Body of Christ, the Church. The unity of this people is itself a precious good, to be cherished, preserved, and built up by lives of love.” (SDR, 31)

expectations for parishioner-giving. In the words of the engagement research, people want to know “What do I get?” and “What do I give?” as they become engaged in the parish. The covenant process clarifies these questions, asking parishioners to make a commitment to give, often outlining specific areas in which parishioners should be involved, and suggesting a minimum level of giving. The covenant may include ministry sign-up and a financial pledge to the parish. Some parishes invite parishioners to complete their covenant commitment, which is presented during Mass in a sealed envelope, signifying that the commitment is between the individual/family and God.<sup>15</sup>

It is important to ask parishioners to make a commitment, hopefully annually, in whatever form of commitment process you discern is best for your parish. Establishing such a period is a crucial element in the stewardship formation process.



### Discerning the Form of Stewardship Commitment

### Timing is Everything

The previous section on planning in Chapter 3 pointed out that parish leaders discern when their stewardship commitment will take place. There is good reasoning behind the three options illustrated in the chart on page 31. Your team may look at the liturgical calendar in light of other factors in the life of your parish and discern one of these three options, or a different option entirely.

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<sup>15</sup> Building Bridges to the Heart of the Community presents the covenant process for use in establishing a parish covenant

What is important is that you take the time to consider how the stewardship commitment period will fit liturgically and practically, keeping in mind the rhythm of your parishioners' lives. If you belong to a parish with many snowbirds, consider their presence as you discern your commitment period. If your parishioners include many young families, keep school calendars in mind. Read the Sunday readings for the period of time you are planning, so that the stewardship materials you create will resonate with the readings people will hear.

While Lent-Easter-Pentecost and Advent-Christmas are certainly high moments in our annual liturgical life, the stewardship renewal and commitment period may also serve as an annual high point in the spiritual life of the parish and parishioners. Therefore, discerning when this period will take place is of great importance for the life of your parish and its people.

### **Inviting Participation in Ministry**

Parishes approach invitation to ministry commitment in a variety of ways. Some highlight ministries monthly or seasonally throughout the year; others focus on a ministry fair during the commitment period. Most parishes publish some sort of ministry and organization directory that contains brief descriptions of the ministry's purpose and activities. Groups that are seeking new members often place notices in the parish bulletin and announcements are made at the end of Mass. These, along with the personal invitation that we discussed previously, insure that parishioners will know when particular help is needed as they discern their commitment to participate.

One of the most effective means for inviting participation in ministry is when the priest or deacon witnesses to the impact of parishioner participation during his homily, in comments at the end of Mass, or in parish meetings. Another is the witness of lay parishioners who speak before or at the end of Mass, through a bulletin or newsletter article, or during a special gathering in conjunction within the period of commitment and renewal.

### **Follow-Up is Essential**

The downfall of many parish stewardship efforts is lack of follow-up once commitment has been made. There are spiritual and practical reasons for acknowledging people's willingness to serve in ministry or to give financially:



**Spiritual:** When people have reflected on their lives and made a commitment to grow as disciples and stewards, it is important to acknowledge this commitment in a timely manner. This reinforces their grateful response to their blessings, and encourages further commitment over time.

**Practical:** Once people have made a commitment to serve and give, they are anxious to follow-through. If follow-up is not timely, an unintentional message is sent that the person is not really valued and/or his or her sharing is not truly needed.

It is best to have a follow-up strategy planned before entering into the commitment period, so that all acknowledgements will be conveyed in a timely manner. Therefore, follow-up is an important element of your stewardship plan.

### Renewing Our Commitment

Designating a specific period of time each year for stewardship commitment serves as an annual point of spiritual renewal for the entire parish community. The components described in this chapter and illustrated through the samples provided on the Grateful Disciples website illustrate the reflective and spiritually enriching nature of stewardship commitment. The parish is renewed through the participation of parishioners in ministry, enhanced financial giving, and the spiritual commitment of members. Parishioners are renewed in spirit as they re-dedicate themselves to Christ and to Christian living as good and faithful stewards.



Sample Stewardship Commitment Forms and Timelines

## Live the Vision

### Commit to Annual Renewal



Reflect on your initial thoughts and observations in reading Chapter 5, Commit to Annual Renewal, using the chart below to guide your discussion. Refer back to the major points of each section as you share together. Retain this worksheet for use in your later planning and implementation.

Annual stewardship renewal and commitment at your parish	1= not current practice 2= describes practice somewhat 3= have room to grow 4= is reflective of parish practice	Why you rated as you did Note specific examples as much as possible
Commitment to Christ and the Church		
Commitment or Covenant period and process		
Timing your commitment period		
Invitation to participation in ministry		
Commitment follow-up		
Spiritual renewal as disciples and stewards		



Following your Live the Vision discussion, summarize your conversation below. A planning process, including the identification of immediate next steps, is provided at the end of this guide. For now, if potential action items or strategies were identified in your discussions, record them here for later reference.

Upon what do you have to build? What opportunities for development or growth emerged in your discussions?

## GIVE THANKS. BE ACCOUNTABLE.

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Gratitude is the heart of stewardship. A spirituality of stewardship focuses our attention on God's living presence within us and among us. In becoming attentive to and grateful for the many ways in which we are blessed with life, faith, talents, relationships, and resources, we grow in our desire to give thanks to God, the giver of all these many gifts. Stewardship becomes our disciple's response.

In the parish, stewardship leaders help parishioners to adopt discipleship and stewardship as a way of life. Leaders also insure that the parish is responsible for the gifts shared by parishioners. Disciples and stewards are grateful and accountable to God, and to one another as a reflection of our unity in Christ.

### Give Thanks

From the time we are very young, we are taught to say, "thank you." Showing gratitude is a way of expressing that the giver and the gift have a meaningful impact in the person's life. In asking parishioners to make a stewardship commitment, they are invited to express their gratitude to God through the ways in which they share their time, resources, prayer, talents, and presence with others. Caring and sharing is a concrete way to say "thank you" to God.

In the parish, it is important to recognize the sharing of members and thank them for their stewardship. Saying "thank you" to parishioners for their faithful stewardship helps them to see the impact of their sharing. Parish leaders

"Christian stewards are conscientious and faithful. After all, the first requirement of a steward is to be 'found trustworthy' (1 Cor 4:2)...In this light, stewards are fully conscious of their accountability. They neither live or die as their own masters; rather, 'if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord; so then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.' (Rom 14:8)." (SDR, 40)

sometimes question whether it is appropriate to thank parishioners for their service and giving. After all, they wonder, is not the parishioner simply doing what disciples are called to do? Expressing gratitude is necessary in order for people to know that their sharing matters. When the parish recognizes the stewardship offered by parishioners, the community grows in awareness of the impact of such sharing and all who are reached through it. In expressing gratitude for parishioners' stewardship, attention is drawn to God, who is the source of the gifts received and given. The community witnesses to the power of faith in people's lives. Thanking parishioners for their giving reinforces that the parish is committed to living and growing as faithful disciples and stewards.

There is a correlation between parishioners receiving "recognition or praise" for their sharing and parishioner engagement.<sup>16</sup> Yet the research shows that most parishioners are not thanked for their contributions. It is not uncommon for parishioner leaders to indicate that they are rarely thanked for their service, by one another or formally by the parish. It seems parishes and parishioners may take the giving of members for granted, even while recognizing that increased participation is needed. Not only is it crucial to create parish culture in which people are invited to fully participate, such culture is only sustained when parishioners and the parish express gratitude for the contributions of members. Remember that engaging people is about helping them to know that they belong and are of value within the parish community. Recognizing someone for their contribution to the parish helps the parishioner to know that his or her sharing matters. Parishes express gratitude in a variety of ways:

**Informal:** Say thank you in the parish, just as you would at home or in the workplace. As your stewardship team communicates with other parish groups, thank them for their service; connect what they are doing with stewardship by saying things like, "thank you for sharing your time with our parish," or "we are grateful for your stewardship of talent." Such informal expressions of gratitude positively impact the people who are thanked, and encourage parishioners to recognize each other as they share and serve.

**In the homily:** Occasionally, a homilist may use a parish ministry as an example during the homily. When such an example is used, it is appropriate to pause and briefly thank the parishioners who serve in that ministry, or all who participate in parish ministries. Something may be said like, "I am very grateful to all who serve in XYZ

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<sup>16</sup> Growing an Engaged Church, 90

ministry. Your sharing makes a difference for all who receive your care,” or, “our parish would not be what it is without the service of the many parishioners who share their time and talent. I am grateful for all you do, and hope others will join you in service in the coming year.”

**The parish bulletin, website, newsletter:** Articles that highlight parish ministries are effective ways to share the impact of parishioner involvement, leadership and service. These are particularly powerful when the story is told through the experience of a person or small group of people. The parishioner(s) share the impact of their stewardship on those who receive service as well as on those who are ministry participants. Include a brief editor’s note or concluding note from the pastor, thanking the group whose service is highlighted.

**Through an annual postcard:** A simple and extremely effective way to thank all who serve in the parish is through the practice of an annual thank you card. Include a brief note from the pastor and mail to all who participate in ministry in any capacity. Cards are often mailed just before Thanksgiving, or during the Christmas season.

**In a parish gratitude dinner or reception:** An annual gathering of all who serve in ministry may include shared prayer, a brief address by the pastor, and food. Some parishes include announcements (verbal or written), so that all who attend are up-to-date with any details for the coming months. Parishes sometimes extend the time allotted and include formation or reflection for all who participate.

## Be Accountable

Taking the stewardship message to heart leads us to recognize that we are accountable to God for the ways in which we have used the many gifts and blessings of our lives. Jesus’ parable of the talents illustrates this accountability. “The silver pieces of this story stand for a great deal besides money. All temporal and spiritual goods are created by and come from God. That is true of everything human beings have: spiritual gifts like faith, hope, and love; talents of body and brain; cherished relationships with family and friends; material goods; the achievements of human genius and skill; the world itself. One day God will require an accounting of the use each person has made of the particular portion of these goods entrusted to him or her.” (SDR, 20)

Stewardship leaders help parishioners to regularly reflect on their stewardship. The annual commitment period, combined with on-going stewardship education and

formation, keep the call to live as stewards in people’s hearts and minds. Periodically, stewardship communication in the bulletin may include a message to prompt reflection on one’s accountability to fulfill stewardship commitments made and to discern the call to share in the future. Many parishes also mail letters to parishioners quarterly, with a

“For disciples of Christ — everyone who responds to Jesus’ invitation, ‘Come, follow me’ — Christian stewardship is an obligation, not an option. Correctly and fully understood, Christian stewardship holds every individual accountable to God for personal care of the universe. At the time of judgment, God will have the right to ask, ‘What did you do with my world?’”  
(SDR, 48)

brief note of gratitude for the ways in which parishioners give of themselves and their resources, and an update on the parishioner’s giving (ministerial and/or financial) for the year. Communication such as this serves to remind the parishioner of his or her commitment, and reinforces that stewardship is a way of life.

Parishes must also be accountable for the gifts and resources that are shared by parishioners. Financial and ministerial transparency is of extreme importance. Most parishes provide monthly financial reports in the bulletin, indicating parishioner giving in relationship to the annual budget. If the parish carries any debt, payments made toward debt reduction are also reported. An annual report that includes high-level budgetary expenses, income through parishioner giving, grants received, and will or trust disbursement is essential. This annual report may also include hours given by parishioners in ministry and highlight the impact of parishioner service and sharing. Often, the report is provided at the beginning of the fiscal year, or it coincides with the stewardship commitment period.



Sample annual stewardship report

## Live the Vision

### Give Thanks. Be Accountable.



Reflect on your initial thoughts and observations in reading Chapter 6, Give Thanks. Be Accountable., using the chart below to guide your discussion. Refer back to the major points of each section as you share together. Retain this worksheet for use in your later planning and implementation.

Expressions of gratitude and accountability for individuals and the parish	1= not current practice 2= describes practice somewhat 3= have room to grow 4= is reflective of parish practice	Why you rated as you did Note specific examples as much as possible
Parishioner-to-parishioner gratitude for service and sharing		
Parish-to-parishioner gratitude for service and sharing		
Parishioners are reminded of their accountability as stewards		
The parish is accountable through regular reporting		





Following your Live the Vision discussion, summarize your conversation below. A planning process, including the identification of immediate next steps, is provided at the end of this guide. For now, if potential action items or strategies were identified in your discussions, record them here for later reference.

Upon what do you have to build? What opportunities for development or growth emerged in your discussions?

# LOOKING AHEAD: STEWARDSHIP IS A WAY OF LIFE

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“As Christian stewards, we receive God’s gifts gratefully, cultivate them responsibly, share them lovingly in justice with others, and return them with increase to the Lord.” (SDR, 42)



Leading your parish to establish and sustain stewardship is fulfilling and meaningful. It is dependent upon the faithful stewardship of all who participate in the stewardship leadership team, the pastor, staff, pastoral council and all who share their talents and time as servant leaders in the parish. Just as parishioners are invited to take to heart the call to live and grow as stewards, the parish must be committed to stewardship as a way of life. Remember that this is a process of on-going transformation, inspired by the Holy Spirit, guided by your stewardship team of servant leaders.

Use the worksheet below to synthesize your insights and identify your next steps in beginning and sustaining stewardship in your parish. Return to this guide and the resources on the web pages often as you form your people to be grateful disciples.



## An Appreciative Process

### Grateful Disciples

Use your end-of-chapter notes and insights from your sharing in the worksheet below. In column one, list aspects of your parish's life that contribute to the steps indicated. In column two, articulate your dream for each step in the future. Carry these notes into the planning process, which is detailed on the web resource page.

The Vision for Stewardship Leadership	Discover "What is working?" Be attentive	Dream "What could be?" Be intelligent
The vision: Stewards in Community		
Lead Grateful Disciples		
Form Disciples as Stewards		
Welcome and Engage Everyone		
Commit to Annual Renewal		
Give Thanks. Be Accountable.		

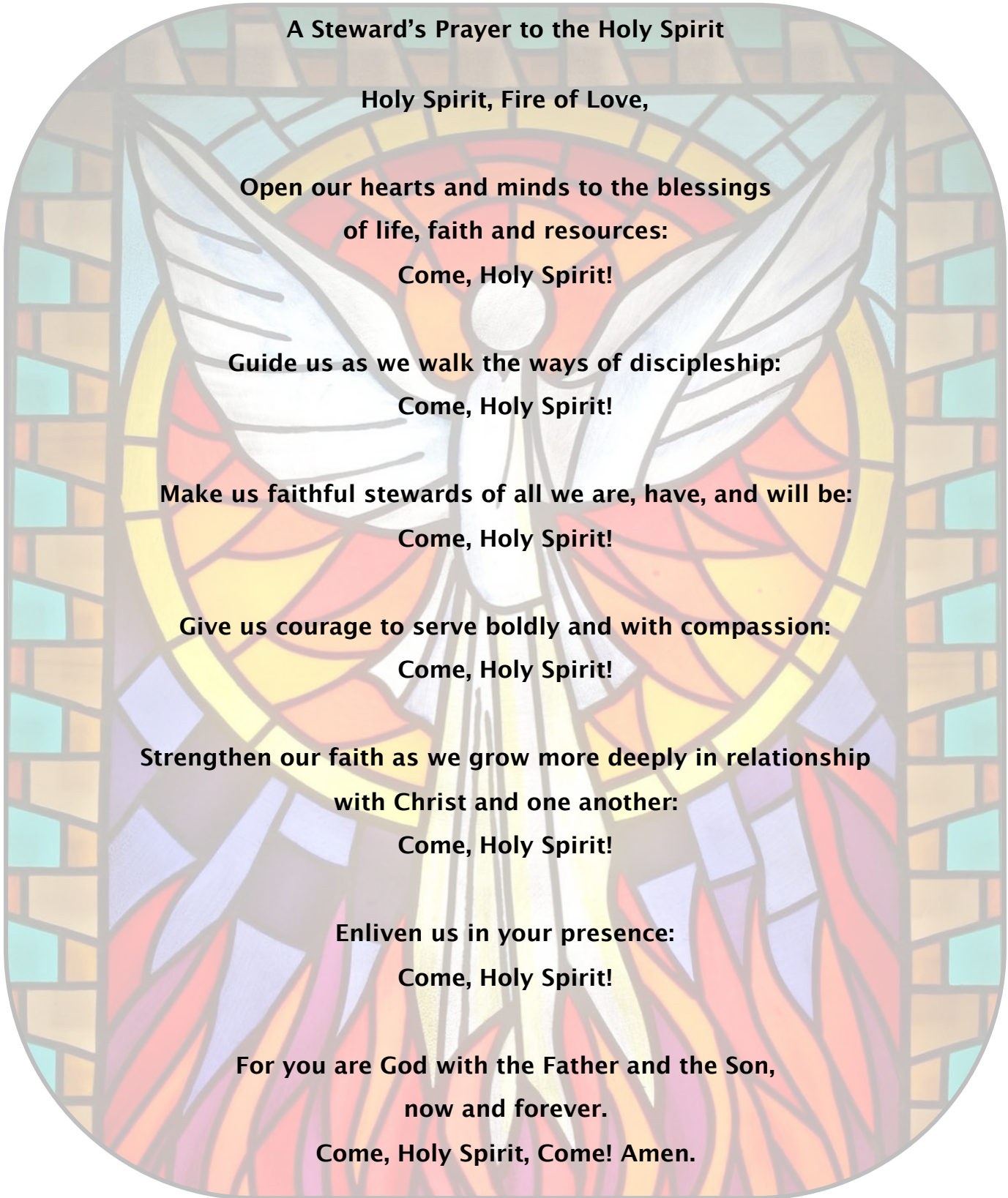
## GRATEFUL DISCIPLES on the WEB

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Use the link below to access the many resources listed in this Grateful Disciples guide:

[resources.gratefuldisciples.net](https://resources.gratefuldisciples.net) The resource page found at this address includes a link for each chapter. Your password for each chapter page is: prayerfulstewards

Return to the site often. The worksheets and resources listed in this guide are located on pages identified by the chapter title. Bulletin articles will be shared in seasonal postings. Sign up for the Grateful Disciples e-news to be notified when new content is posted. Explore the Grateful Disciples Mentoring Partnership and live events through the Contact tab on the Grateful Disciples site.



**A Steward's Prayer to the Holy Spirit**

**Holy Spirit, Fire of Love,**

**Open our hearts and minds to the blessings  
of life, faith and resources:**

**Come, Holy Spirit!**

**Guide us as we walk the ways of discipleship:**

**Come, Holy Spirit!**

**Make us faithful stewards of all we are, have, and will be:**

**Come, Holy Spirit!**

**Give us courage to serve boldly and with compassion:**

**Come, Holy Spirit!**

**Strengthen our faith as we grow more deeply in relationship  
with Christ and one another:**

**Come, Holy Spirit!**

**Enliven us in your presence:**

**Come, Holy Spirit!**

**For you are God with the Father and the Son,  
now and forever.**

**Come, Holy Spirit, Come! Amen.**

## HELPFUL RESOURCES

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The following books, websites, and resources are noted in Grateful Disciples:

**Stewardship: A Disciple's Response**, the U.S. Bishops' pastoral letter on stewardship

Available at <http://store.usccb.org/stewardship-a-disciples-response-p/5-465.htm>

Also available online as a PDF

**The Bridges Leadership Series** includes:

More information and links to acquire the books are found at [bridge2faith.net](http://bridge2faith.net)

### **Building Bridges to the Heart of Discipleship**

Building an engaging and evangelizing community of disciples and stewards

### **Building Bridges to the Heart of the Community**

Deepening commitment through a parish covenant

### **Building Bridges to the Heart of Your People**

Creating participative culture through the use of StrengthsFinder© talent identification instrument

Find additional stewardship samples, slides, and articles, evangelization, leadership, strengths and engagement presentation information at [CatholicLifeandFaith.net](http://CatholicLifeandFaith.net)

**Growing an Engaged Church**, the book that details Gallup's engagement research

Available at [gallup.com](http://gallup.com) (search book title for quick link) or at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)

**StrengthsFinder** codes and books are available at [gallupstrengthscenter.com](http://gallupstrengthscenter.com)

**Previous books by author Leisa Anslinger** include Forming Generous Hearts: Stewardship Planning for Lifelong Faith Formation and Turning Hearts to Christ: Engaging People for a Lifetime of Faith. All are available at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)