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## SPIRITUALITY OF STEWARDSHIP

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Stewardship is living out a commitment to be Christ-centered rather than self-centered. This conversion is the result of our total focus on God as the Creator and giver of all good gifts. Profound gratitude, justice and love become the fundamental motives for giving back to God.

*Christian stewardship can be identified by several meaningful characteristics, according to Stewardship a national newsletter:*

- ◆ Christian Stewardship provides a spirituality that all can take home from Church, exercise at work, and express through personal involvement in both the community and the Church.
- ◆ Christian Stewardship successfully bridges the material world around us and the world of the Spirit within us.
- ◆ Christian Stewardship gives joy! Those who voluntarily give their time and abilities for work in the parish will always experience joy if they give them for Christ. They are not, however, guaranteed freedom from frustration.
- ◆ Christian Stewardship is not job-oriented or project-minded. It is a way of life.
- ◆ Christian Stewardship takes a positive view of money. It sees money not only as a medium of exchange but also as a symbol of the person who has it. We reveal something of who we are by the way we acquire it, use it, and share it.
- ◆ Christian Stewardship helps us to become aware that God is the ultimate giver of the gifts we have. Our gift to God should be from our *first* fruits, not from what may be left over.
- ◆ Christian Stewardship teaches Christians to be concerned about where and how to share their parish financial surplus. Stewardship is not giving just to meet the needs of the budget. We have a need to give.
- ◆ Jesus Christ is God's greatest gift to us. Stewardship tells us to share a portion of our time, ability, and tithe/alms so that the gift, Jesus Christ, may be given to those who do not know Him.

No doubt, the spiritual benefits outweigh all else. Properly presented, teaching about stewardship will deepen our faith and ultimately change our lives.

*The following theological points serve as a basis for a Christian way of life expressed through stewardship:*

- ◆ Stewardship expresses a basic attitude of gratitude to God for God's many gifts to us and the trust we have in God as the ultimate source of our security.
- ◆ As stewards we use the gifts God has given us to further His creative and redemptive purposes; as stewards we use God's gifts for God's purposes.
- ◆ God's creative and redemptive purposes are most fully revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of God's son, Jesus. The basic pattern of Jesus' work is found in this Paschal mystery. It is a pattern of giving life for the sake of others, and in the giving, finding life more fully realized for ourselves and for those to whom we give.
- ◆ The Church is a gathering of disciples who nurture and encourage one another in discipleship. The practice of discipleship in and through the Church is one of the primary ways we are called to follow Jesus. It is the whole Church, the Body of Christ, which is responsible for carrying on the work of Christ in the world today.
- ◆ Our sharing in the Paschal mystery of Jesus brings us to understand sacrifice as a sign of gratitude, praise, and trust in God. Sacrifice means giving from our substance so our giving changes us.

*An example: The bread and wine we offer at the Eucharist represents the whole of our lives. When they are transformed, the whole of our lives are transformed. So, too, the symbolic offering of a significant proportion of our talent, treasure, and time is a sign of our giving our whole lives to God, and our whole lives are transformed in the action.*

St. Paul reminds us that we are but one body with many parts. For the body to function, those parts are *interdependent*. Christ expects us to work with Him to make the mission of the Church real, vibrant and alive. Stewardship requires participation in the mission of the Church. The challenge of stewardship is to direct our doing. Each of us is here for a purpose. Each of us is here to make a difference. According to the parables of stewardship, God charges us with the building of the Kingdom.

- ◆ When stewardship is introduced in a parish, those who respond generously to the message are often parishioners who have experienced a spiritual renewal through Renew, Marriage Encounter, Cursillo, Christ Renews His Parish, the Charismatic Renewal or similar small faith-sharing groups. Many distinguished leaders in the Church believe that establishing and nurturing small faith-sharing groups is critical for the future vitality and spiritual growth of Catholics. Experience has demonstrated that parishioners who are members of such groups are often leaders as well as generous contributors of their time, talent, and treasure. These parishioners can be key leaders and examples in spreading the stewardship message to all in the parish.