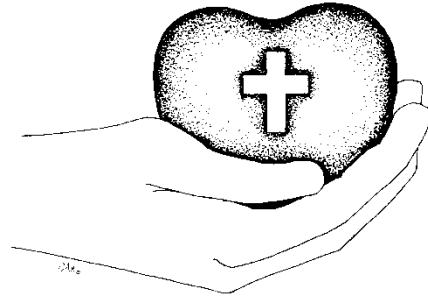


# Principles of Stewardship Giving

## Principle #1: GRATITUDE

The starting point for giving as a Christian Steward is the basic principle of Christian Stewardship: that everything we have is a gift from God. In gratitude for God's generosity, we dedicate a portion of these God-given-gifts – our time, talent, and treasure – to furthering God's Kingdom. If we truly believe that God gives us all that we have, gratitude is our first response. The Christian Steward maintains an "attitude of gratitude".



## Principle #2: TRUST

When we realize that God has provided for us and will continue to do so, we recognize that our real security lies in God. When we truly believe that God gives us all that we have, trust is our second response. We trust that our God, who has given us everything in the past, will take care of our future.

## Principle #3: GIFT

No gift is truly a gift unless it is given freely, without reservation or condition. The gifts of God are given to us in just such an unconditional manner, and we are called to model our giving after God's own example.

Stewardship Giving does not buy anything. It does not buy happiness, or love, or a tenfold return on our investment. The motive for giving a sacrificial gift is not the expectation of getting something back.

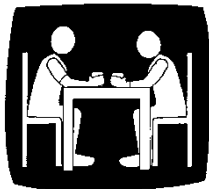
Stewardship Giving is really a response to the generosity of God. We are able to give only because God has first given to us. When we give to our parish or other charities, we acknowledge that we are not the starting point for the gift, but we are simply passing on a portion of what we have received.

The way we give our gift is as important as the gift itself. A stewardship gift has no strings attached. It is given freely as God has given to us, because the motive for the giving is grateful response rather than expected return.

## Principle #4 PLANNED

The decision to give is just that – a decision. It requires thought and time, so that it is integrated with other financial decisions as part of a careful, intentional response to God's generosity.

The degree of planning that goes into our Stewardship Giving reflects the importance of our commitment to give. For most of us, unless we plan something, it doesn't happen. Unless we consciously incorporate the amount of our giving into our regular budget, it remains an optional expense that may be easily lost in the financial shuffle.



Planning our giving enables us to give of the first fruits rather than some amount left over after "more important" obligations have been satisfied. The planning process itself can be a spiritual exercise, focusing our attention on our values and priorities. Planning can also become an occasion for dialogue among family members about the commitment to give. This dialogue may foster a sense of ownership about the decision to give; in the absence of planning, giving can become a source of tension in the family.

The option of establishing a separate giving account facilitates the planning and implementation of Stewardship Giving. The weekly or monthly amount of your gift is deposited into this account and out of it you make your contributions to your parish and other charities. A separate account gives your planning a concrete form and clarifies exactly how much you are giving away as part of your commitment.

## **Principle #5: PROPORTIONATE**

Stewardship Giving is proportionate to what God has given us; the gift is a proportion of our resources.

How much should you give? Start with an assessment of your level of giving now. (Most of us are dismayed to discover how little that is.) It most certainly is a proportion of your resources, but is it a proportion which adequately reflects your gratitude for God's generosity?

There is no magic number that represents the "right" amount. The proportion you choose should be sacrificial and truly commensurate to what God has given you. Most people use the biblical concept of the tithe, a tenth (10%), as a guide, giving 5% of their income to their parish and another 5% to other charities. In many instances, when Stewardship Giving is based on the biblical tithe, the amount needs to be seen as a goal we are working toward, recognizing that it takes time to re-orient our priorities.

There is no "right" answer to the calculation of income upon which the proportion is figured. It is easy to get caught up in playing games with *net* vs. *gross* income or looking for loopholes which will exempt that unexpected windfall. Calculating your parish stewardship pledge is not comparable to figuring your taxes. It is your return to God, a proportion of the gifts God has given you, which you choose to share with your parish and other charities. Your decision about your level of giving will be one which makes sense and truly reflects your gratefulness to God for the gifts you have received.

## **Principle #6: SACRIFICIAL**

The proportion of our gift becomes sacrificial when it comes from our substance rather than our abundance. When we give out of our substance, we are changed in the process.

Perhaps the most important outcome of Stewardship Giving is the impact it has on the giver. If you can give your gift and not notice it, it is not a sacrificial gift. The element of sacrifice is present when something about your life has to change in order for you to be able to give the gift. You re-order your priorities, you reconsider your values. And every time you give the gift, you are reminded of the reasons why you have chosen to give.

Giving as a steward is one way we have of walking in the footsteps of our Lord, who sacrificed everything so that we might have life. We give up something of ourselves so that life can flourish. When we give sacrificially, we are changed.

When giving becomes Stewardship Giving, it focuses our attention on the true source of our security. When we give away something we think we need to survive, we are saying "money will not take care of us, possessions will not save us". Giving in a Stewardship way bears witness to the reality that God alone will make us safe. Recognizing that reality and living it out constitutes a tremendous change in our lives.

Our sacrificial giving can make an equally tremendous difference in the lives of others as well. The sacrifice we make by doing without some portion of our substance is just that: doing without so that life for others may flourish. Like the bumper sticker slogan says: Live simply so that others can simply live.



## **Principle #7: THANKSGIVING**

Our Stewardship Giving is most appropriate to be presented at the Offertory of the Mass. The celebration of Christ's sacrifice is a fitting context for our own sacrificial offering which is a grateful response to the unfathomable love God has shown for us.

Too often, we want to separate the issue of giving, particularly the giving of money, from those more "spiritual" aspects of our faith life. Yet, the commitment to Stewardship Giving is one of the most important expressions of what our faith means to us. Offering our gifts at Mass places them in an appropriate context of prayer and response to God.

In the offering, we can express our joy in having received and in being able to give. We are able to say, "Thanks be to God!" We can give back some portion of the tremendous gifts that have been given to us, the most important of which we celebrate at the Eucharist. There is no better time to fulfill our commitment to giving as stewards than in the atmosphere of prayer and thanksgiving.

We remember, too, that this commitment is one of personal as well as communal prayer and part of a lifelong process of turning toward God. Our giving is woven into the struggles and joys we experience on our personal faith journey.