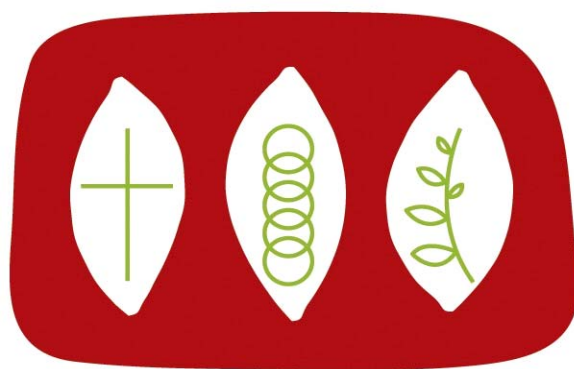


HOMILY HELPS

BY
BISHOP ROBERT F. MORNEAU



ADVANCING
THE MISSION

Five Week Inspiration Phase

Stewardship Campaign
Diocese of Green Bay

STEWARDSHIP CAMPAIGN HOMILY GUIDELINES

This collection of homily helps, provided by Bishop Morneau, are organized to follow the themes of the five week Inspiration Phase of your parish's stewardship campaign.

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| Week One: | Stewardship as a Way of Life |
| Week Two: | Prayer |
| Week Three: | Service |
| Week Four: | Sharing |
| Week Five: | Commitment/Pledging |

The greatest influence on what happens to parishioners spiritually and how they respond throughout the stewardship campaign will be the homilies preached during the Inspirational Phase. Consider the following when preparing:

Be inspirational. Trust that God will lead people to participate and respond.

Do not apologize. Too often we diminish the impact of what we say by apologetically explaining God's expectations in prayer, service, and sharing. Expect great things, challenge parishioners to new levels of personal commitment to stewardship as a way of life.

Emphasize and encourage commitment to all three aspects of stewardship: prayer, service, and sharing.

Share creative "stewardship as a way of life" examples you have personally witnessed.

Refrain from using homilies to answer campaign questions and address criticisms. Let your homilies be positive, inspirational, and motivational but never manipulative.

Develop each homily in continuity with the others. Allow them to build upon each other and move toward a fitting conclusion and climax by your parish's Commitment Weekend.



WEEK ONE
STEWARDSHIP - A WAY OF LIFE

In 1997, Robert Ellsberg wrote All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses For Our Time (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company), a book describing 365 individuals, one for each day of the year, who lived lives of stewardship. That is, these women and men received God's gifts gratefully, nurtured God's gifts responsibly, share those gifts justly and sacrificially, and returned those gifts to the Lord in abundance. Some were more successful than others; some have been acclaimed by history while others remain unappreciated.

What does stewardship look like? Is there a portrait that we might contemplate and attempt to emulate? I am convinced there is.

Gratitude! A steward, a caretaker of God's gift, is grateful – grateful for the gift of time, the gift of family and friends, the gift of faith and freedom, the gift of wind and rain. Nothing is taken for granted; all is recognized as a blessing, indeed, a benediction. Thus, a steward is a Eucharistic person, giving thanks always and everywhere for divine blessings.

Generosity! A steward is generous, sharing the blessings received. Generous with time, generous with talents, generous with treasure. Stewards pray, serve, and share. Thus they imitate the life of Christ. This generosity flows from gratitude and is motivated by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Joy! A case can be made that joy is impossible without stewardship. Joy is the byproduct of love and love is a life of generosity. We might ask whether or not depression and melancholy, so rampant in our times, might sometimes be rooted in a lack of stewardship. As the German poet Goethe so powerfully stated: "What is not used is but a load to bear." Unused gifts weigh us down; indeed, unused gifts can cause depression.

Faith/Trust! There is a single paragraph in the USCCB pastoral letter, Stewardship: A Disciple's Response, that grounds stewardship in faith. It is worth our meditation:

The idea and the practice of stewardship have the power to change our self-understanding and our understanding of the meaning of our lives. Steward-disciples recognize God as the origin of life, the giver of freedom, the source of all they have and all they are. They see themselves as caretakers of God's gifts. They are grateful for what they have received and are eager to cultivate their gifts out of love for God and one another."

There is another option to stewardship; there is another way of life. It is one of continual acquisition with no sharing of what has been given. In the end, our estates may be large, our time apparently preserved, our talents not "wasted" on others. In the end, our souls will be empty. We were not created to fill our barns until they are full. We were created to receive and give what God offers. We were created to be good stewards of God's many gifts and thereby to give glory to the Lord.

WEEK TWO PRAYER

Our diocesan stewardship prayer captures well the essence of what stewardship is all about. Personal and communal transformation happens when we put it to memory and live it:

Generous and loving God,
You call us to be disciples of your Son Jesus and good stewards of all your many gifts.
Open our minds and hearts to a greater awareness and deeper appreciation of your countless blessings.
Transform us through the power of your Spirit to nurture a Stewardship way of life marked by faith-filled prayer, service to our neighbor, and generous sharing.
Teach us to be faithful servants of your gifts.
With Mary's help, may we return ten-fold the gifts entrusted to us.
Bless our capital stewardship campaign with a deepening devotion to prayer, a growing commitment for service, and increasing levels of generosity as we work to advance the mission of both our parish and diocese
We pray through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The cornerstone of a stewardship way of life is our relationship with God and our relationship with God is grounded in communication: prayer!

Prayer is many things:

- a lifting of one's mind and heart to God
- tender, loving dialogue between God and the soul (community)
- a listening and responding to God's word
- loving attention (contemplation)
- praise, thanksgiving, petition, sorrow

Personal prayer – be it morning or evening prayer, centering prayer, the rosary or a novena, stations of the cross – deepens our friendship with God. Indeed, as William James once stated: “We and God have business with each other; and in opening ourselves to His influence our deepest destiny is fulfilled.” On a daily basis we need to “stay in touch” with a God who loves and sustains us. As caretakers and trustees of the gift of time, we make a return to the Lord by devoting a segment of our day to our gracious Creator.

Liturgical prayer (worship) – the prayer of the community – culminates in the Eucharist. Here we encounter *the* Steward, Jesus. He models for us a life of gratitude and generosity, of joy and trust in the Father. The Eucharist is all about obedience (liturgy of the word) and self-giving (offertory, consecration, communion). The Eucharist is all about a stewardship way of life.

We begin the Mass with the penitential rite. As flawed stewards we ask forgiveness for our stinginess, our injustices, and our lack of trust. The Lord in His mercy forgives us, nourishes us through the Eucharist, and sends us forth to share justly and sacrificially all that we have received.

WEEK THREE SERVICE

Jesus came to serve, not to be served. Here again is our model for stewardship, a servant God, a shepherd caring for His sheep, a Lord who is at the disposal of His subjects.

Stewardship is based upon the assumption that everyone is gifted. Whether our talent is one or many, we have been entrusted with blessings that are to be nurtured, cherished, and offered to others for the common good and the building of the Kingdom. A favorite image that we do well to remember is that each one of us is to add our brick to the cathedral of life.

How do we serve? How do we exercise stewardship? In a thousand different ways: changing diapers, plowing the back forty, emptying bedpans, performing surgery, teaching our youths and adults, making and enforcing laws, employing people, cooking a meal, inventing a new brand of sauerkraut, patrolling our highways and city streets. Service comes in all shapes and sizes. Service means we are “for others” as Jesus was for us. It is Gospel caring.

One of the key principles of stewardship: “Don’t stay out of your gifted area too long.” Be it the classroom or kitchen, the halls of congress or the sacristy, we must follow the passion God has implanted in our soul and do that for the sake of the Kingdom. A disciple is necessarily a steward, one who furthers the mission of the Master. And Jesus came to inaugurate and build the Kingdom. When we are agents of truth, charity, freedom, and justice, we are participating in the building of God’s reign.

There is a deeper dimension in the call to serve. The servant becomes a friend. Jesus told His apostles that, since they know what the Father’s will is, they are no longer servants but friends. In the end, stewardship is about love – the reception and transmitting of that grace. Stewardship and friendship go hand in hand: we serve out of love, we serve in love. And the consequence is joy.

The Hindu, Mohandas Gandhi, offers this insight: “Service which is rendered without joy helps neither the servant nor the served. But all other pleasures and possessions pale into nothingness before service which is rendered in a spirit of joy.”

Jesus came to serve. We are invited to join Him in this noble adventure. If we do, then one day we may hear those glorious words: “Well done, good and faithful steward.” And a surprise might await us, namely, that our service will not be at an end when we die. Rather, like St. Thérèse of Lisieux, we might say: “I will spend my heaven in doing good on earth.” Once a steward, always a steward.

WEEK FOUR SHARING

Stewardship involves two haunting questions. One is found in Psalm 116, verse 12: “What return can I make to the Lord for all that the Lord has done for me?” Everything we are and have comes from the Lord; a return is expected of our time, talent, and treasure.

The other haunting question comes from a poem written by Antonio Machado: “What have you done with the garden entrusted to you?” The image of a garden is most fitting in looking at the stewardship way of life. Our God has entrusted to us not just one but many gardens: the garden of our body, of our mind, of our soul; a social garden, a political garden, a cultural garden; a garden of technology, a garden of our conscience, an intellectual garden. And there is one more: our economic garden. What have we done, what are we doing, what will we do with all these gardens?

Unfortunately, when thinking of what stewardship is all about many individuals limit stewardship to the last garden: the garden of finances and money. Let it be said that this is a crucial dimension of stewardship but it is one of many responsibilities. What makes it so important is that it gives great specificity to one’s stewardship way of life. It is indicative of other levels of accountability. Come the end of the year, our checkbook has it in black and white. How generous or stingy was I in terms of sharing material resources?

Economic stewardship in action: a single mom with three children gives a witness talk and tells how she gives three percent of her income to charities. Though she cannot afford to do that, she states that God has been so good to her that she must share in this manner.

Economic stewardship in action: the widow in the Gospel gives her mite. Again, she is not in a financial situation that this type of generosity makes sense. Yet her desire to make a return to the Lord, even from her need, deeply impresses Jesus.

Economic stewardship in action: a parish council decides that 10% of the total parish budget will be used for the charities outside the parish boundaries; an elderly farmer dies and leaves his estate to the Salvation Army for their ministry; a lawyer offers half-a-day a week to the poor who cannot afford legal fees.

It’s all about giving and not counting the cost. It’s all about generosity. The social activist, Jim Wallis, maintains that our budget is a moral document. One of the great saints of the Church, Basil the Great, offers this challenging opinion: “The money in your vaults belongs to the destitute. You do injustice to every man you could help but did not.”

A closing story. A mother was trying to teach her ten-year-old about financial stewardship. In the little girl’s bedroom were three jars: God’s jar, the college jar, and Kathy’s jar. Every week when Kathy received her allowance of ten dimes she and her mother would march into the bedroom and deposit one dime into God’s jar, one into the college jar, and then eight into Kathy’s jar. After about a month, Kathy informed her mother that she didn’t think God really wanted her dime and, secondly, she had decided she would not be going to college. Kathy wanted to retain all ten dimes. Sound familiar?

The first and last lie we tell ourselves: “It’s mine.”

WEEK FIVE
COMMITMENT/PLEDGING

Having a rule of life is not common. Yet, to live intentionally, that is, with a sense of purpose and direction, a set of guidelines or a rule of life can be most helpful. The precepts in a rule of life give us a standard to assess how we are living as stewards and whether or not we are making progress. Stewardship as a way of life needs guidelines. Here is one possible model.

1. Take nothing for granted: all is gift.
A sense of entitlement is deadly for stewards. Until we see all as gift, we will make demands on life that will lead to great frustration.
2. All belongs to the Lord. (Leviticus 27: 26, 30)
We are not absolute owners of anything. Ultimately, all belongs to the Lord and we are caretakers and trustees of God's many gifts.
3. "Tomorrow may be too late." (St. Peter Julian Eymard)
There is urgency in a stewardship way of life. We are not to procrastinate in receiving, nurturing and sharing God's gifts.
4. The manner and time of giving is of great importance.
The manner of giving is graciously; the time of giving is now.
5. "Take only what ye need." (George Eliot)
The distinction between need and want has become blurred. Great honesty is needed to make decisive choices of what is necessary and what is extraneous on this pilgrim journey.
6. Name your gift.
When are you happiest and most alive? Identifying these times is to identify your gifted area. Do not leave your gifted area for any length of time.
7. Ask daily for the grace of generosity.
Stewardship is primarily the work of the Holy Spirit who empowers us to be grateful and generous. It is not primarily something we do.
8. Find an accountability partner.
"Don't travel alone" is good advice. Find someone who will challenge you to give an accounting of your prayer, service, and sharing.
9. Log your time; log your treasure.
Have a special book in which you record the number of hours you devote to stewardship; keep track of your financial giving as well.
10. Pray daily Psalm 116:12.
Once again that haunting question of how we can make a return to the Lord for all that God has done and is doing for us.



Additional Stewardship Resources available at:

www.gbdioc.org

Department of Stewardship & Pastoral Services

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