

GUIDELINES *for* Christian Stewards

For discussion, dialogue and instruction
in biblical, Christian stewardship



Revised, updated, renewed edition • June 2011
by Dr. David S. Belasic





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“I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God,
to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God,
which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed
by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God,
what is good and acceptable and perfect.”
Rom. 12:1–2 (RSV)

“As each has received a gift, employ it for one another,
as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”
1 Peter 4:10 (RSV)

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This newly revised edition of *Guidelines for Christian Stewards* is gratefully dedicated to Belasic’s family, parents, teachers and colleagues in ministry—and especially to the members, friends and leaders of Redeemer Lutheran Church, Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, and Redeemer Lutheran Church in Spokane, Wash. Their encouragement, partnership and example in living as Christian stewards—living to let their lives be a contribution to others in the Name of Christ—is a continuing blessing!

FOREWORD

Stewardship education is a challenge! In the Church it has often been associated chiefly, or only, with money! No wonder it is often “put off until later!” The result is often a very narrow understanding of what it means to be a believing, trusting, serving follower of Christ!

The material that follows is designed to expand the understanding of individuals and groups about both personal and corporate stewardship matters. It does matter! Because of that, the material is heavily biblical in its orientation . . . but it has very practical applications and challenges. It is designed for group discussion and aims at personal and corporate growth, maturity and transformation in values and practice for daily living. It helps Christians, both new and not so new(!), grow in their discipleship (Matthew 28, Romans 12), being Christ’s agents of blessing to the people whose lives they can touch.

Some people have used these materials for weekly 60 to 90 minutes discussion groups for four to 10 weeks. Others have found them useful for leadership retreats, new members orientation classes, family life discussion groups, etc. May our Lord bless your use of these newly updated *Guidelines for Christian Stewards* in every possible way!



SOME INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

Growing in the biblical understanding of being Christ’s steward, agent, administrator, manager and trustee is a continuing process. We do not all grow in life with God, or in the development of God-given abilities, at the same rate. However, these are times when people are more open to learning, sharing and growing as disciples, stewards, of Christ and His Gospel . . . and its implications for daily living!

When using these materials, please provide a comfortable setting where open discussion can take place. Building relationships, friendships and sharing common goals—discovered in the Scriptures together—can make a huge difference in the spiritual life of God’s people in the Body of Christ and in the local congregation as well. Open discussion of the biblical sources of the material is a key ingredient for promoting a holistic concept of stewardship that involves all of life, not merely the “religious” or “institutionalized” portions of life. As followers of Christ and members of God’s Church, our purpose is to be God’s stewards in all of life—living to let our lives be a contribution to others in the Name of Jesus!

These materials are assembled to help us all be what God, in Christ, has declared and enabled us to be: precious, forgiven, loved, sent stewards! May God bless our journey!

■ David Belasic



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GUIDELINES *for* Christian Stewards



PART ONE

1 *The Church*, the “body of Christ,” the “people of the Covenant,” disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, is also a “family of stewards”—individually and collectively.

A steward is a manager, a caretaker, a trustee, or distributor of all that God gives into one’s care. A definition of stewardship is “living all of life for God’s purposes,” seeing all of life as a sacred trust from God!

The original New Testament word for “stewardship” has its roots in the word *oikos*, meaning house, and *nemein* meaning “manage.” Stewardship has its foundation in managing or administering a house or a household in such a way as to distribute or dispense the resources owned by another and doing it according to the owner’s plan and desire. A steward, an *oikonomos*, is a person who is involved in the action and responsibility of managing, administering or implementing the plans of the Owner. According to the Scriptures, God is the Owner and people are managers.

The word *oikonomia* is often translated “stewardship,” as in Luke 16:2–4, but is also translated as “job.” In 1 Cor. 9:17 the words “commission, task, trust” are used. In Eph. 1:10 the English versions use the words, “God’s plan, the plan.” In Eph. 3:2 and 9 the words “administration, work to do, stewardship, secret plan, and fellowship” are used. In Col. 1:25 the word is translated as “divine office, commission, task.” In 1 Tim. 1:4 some of the ancient manuscripts use the words, “God’s plan, God’s work, divine training or edifying.” To be sure, being a steward, or carrying out our stewardship responsibilities as members of “the body of Christ,” involves the use of money, but much more. According to the Bible, stewardship involves all of life. It’s lifelong discipleship!

God is Owner.

We are the stewards.

2 *Our mission in life, as followers of Christ, is to be stewards.* It has to do with being and becoming what God, in Christ, has made us and redeemed us to be and to become! Living, learning, teaching, sharing this truth, this reality, is a vital part of being a steward. It is closely tied to the meaning of our baptism in the Name of the Triune God. It is a relational concept that is lived out with our LORD, other people and all creation. Since this is true, what changes do I/we need to make as Christians, as denominations?

Being a Christian steward, a Christ-follower, involves the way we view life—all of life, our whole human vocation, the ordering of our life, our discipleship, the making of decisions, the deployment of all of God’s blessings. Please consider 1 Peter 4:7–11, especially v. 10.

The way we look at our being, how we understand being created “in the image of God,” and our purpose for living, are all tied into the concept of being a steward in all of life in the Name of God. Our purpose is to let our life be a contribution to others in the name of Christ! Please consider Gen. 1:26–28; 1 Cor. 12:7; and Rom. 12:1-2.



3 *The time and place for being a steward is the present, the here and now. We serve God in serving other human beings and in taking care of the silent creation God gave us to oversee. We do not have a religion of escapism (some have distorted it to be so) nor passivity in the face of life's realities. We live in a faith relationship with our Creator God who loved us so much He gave His Son for us and now sends His Spirit to dwell within us. This faith sets us into a relationship not only with our Creator, but also affects our relationship with all God's creatures and with the material world God created. Christianity is the most "physical" of the world religions. In the Incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ (God with us) we learn to understand the preciousness of life, of this world and our privileged positions as stewards in the Name of God (John 1).*

4 *A steward's view of life broadens the vision, pushes back the horizon! Life is more than a single cell. It is a "body concept" involving ALL people, all of the earth and the universe. We are stewards of fellow human beings, the fragile planet, the voiceless creatures and the whole of God's creation.*

Being a steward means more than having one brand of economics, sociology or politics. Each steward is a part of God's community of stewards. We are Easter people, people of "the Way" with a worldwide view. We grow to follow Christ who is the way, the truth and the life.

We believe Jesus Christ is the "Chief Steward." Because He cared for us to the fullest and made us "Children of God" in a unique sense, He has called and enabled us by His Spirit to be stewards. Please consider 1 Cor. 12-14; Romans 12; Rom. 8:14; and Genesis 1-2.



CHRISTIAN



5 A steward IS (has)

- privileged (Rom. 12:1-2)
- a chosen servant (Matt. 20:1-16)
- important (Gen. 42:6; 43:16, 19; Esther 1:8)
- responsible (Luke 12:48)
- accountable (Is. 22:15-21; Heb. 13:17; 1 Kings 4:6, 16:9)
- called to responsive faith/trust/obedience (Luke 16:10; 1 Cor. 4:2)
- a sense of dignity (Gen. 1:26-28; Is. 36:3, 22; 37:2)
- a sense of belonging (1 Cor. 3:21-23)
- a manager of another's belongings (Genesis 1; Ps. 24:1; Ps. 89:11; Rom. 16:23)
- a close identification with the Master (Luke 8:3)
- a caretaker, custodian, trustee (Eph. 3:2)
- a sense of "watchfulness," alert (1 Cor. 4:1; Heb. 13:17)
- a servant-steward (1 Peter 4:10)
- a unique place and position in God's plans (Luke 16:1-2)

A steward IS NOT

- the Owner, Lord, Master (Ps. 24:1; 50:10-12)
- an "ordinary servant" (Luke 8:3)
- just "one of the others" (Matt. 16:8)
- to pursue power (Luke 16:1-2)
- irresponsible (Luke 12:42-48)
- lazy, greedy (1 Peter 4:10; 1 Cor. 12:7)
- a puppet on a string (Gen. 1:28; Matt. 5:13-16)
- the same as the silent creation/creatures (Ps. 19:1-4 and 8:4-9)!

**Some Biblical examples . . .
references for discussion**

- Genesis 1–2 • created in the image of God 1:26–28
- Genesis 42–44 • Joseph, overseer, governor, steward
- 1 Chronicles 27–29 • an account of various types of stewards
- Dan. 1:11, 16 • stewards of people; abilities
- Gen. 15:2 • an acquired one; heir, member of household
- Is. 22:15–21 • a steward can be replaced for unfaithfulness
- Luke 12:42–48 • a steward’s responsibility increases with blessings given
- Matt. 20:8 • a steward oversees workers
- John 2:8 • a steward oversees, helps, a wedding party
- Luke 8:3 • a wife of a chief steward/overseer
- 1 Cor. 4:1–2 • being stewards of the “mysteries of God”
- Eph. 3:1–10 • believers are stewards of God’s grace
- Eph. 2:19ff • stewards and participants, not just observers
- 1 Cor. 12:4–11 • stewards are given abilities “for the common good”
- 1 Peter 4:7–11 (esp. v. 10) • stewards cannot merely live for themselves
- Rom. 16:23 • Erastus, city treasurer

6 *Stewardship is not merely a means!* The Bible indicates that our mission, purpose, aim, goal, objective, for all of life is to be stewards! The “deeds” of stewardship come from our being stewards. Our aim is not merely to give money, time or ability; to build buildings, acquire property, manage budgets, etc. Our mission is to be stewards! Stewards seek to serve, enable, take care of, preserve, reconcile, relieve, bring life, hope and help to all (Gal. 6:1–10; 1 Peter 4:7–11; Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12).

Stewards continue to re-examine our understanding of what it means to be a steward. The Church, historically, has made mistakes and suffers from many cultural influences that color our thinking (e.g. power/establishment/nationalism/politics/finances, etc.). Christian stewards must beware of the problems created by wanting to be “boss” or to “control” others. Stewards

grow in taking on the “mind of Christ” our Servant–Savior (Phil. 2:5–11).

Stewardship dare not be a limited concept in our thinking and living. We ask ourselves: How can we rediscover it, expand it? What does the Bible teach? What does our Lord say?

7 *Being a steward is a relational concept.* We are not living in isolation.

It means being related to our Creator. Consider Genesis 1, Psalm 8, John 1 and Colossians 1.

We remember our kinship to the dust ... our frailty, our weakness. Acts 17:28ff; Eccl. 3:1–14.

We remember we are unique. “... a little less than the angels” ... having dignity, honor and a special responsive relationship to our Creator!

We remember we are loved and called by God, in Christ, to newness of life! 1 John 4:10–11; Col. 3:12–17; 1 Peter 2:1–10; 2 Cor. 5:14–6:2.

8 *Being a steward means being related to other human beings.* Gen. 1:26–31

We remember our maleness and femaleness. Gen. 2:7, 22.

We remember our being part of a larger “body.” 1 Cor. 12:27.

We remember ALL people are the concern of the Lord. Ps. 24:1.

We remember the two great commandments: LOVE God and neighbor. Matt. 22:36–39.

It means being related to creation. Genesis 1–2; Eccl. 12:1–7; Colossians 1; Ephesians 1.



We cannot misuse the “dominion” concept in our attitude toward the earth, the seas, the air, or the expanding universe. Does “subdue” mean to “pillage” or to “take care of, use properly/enhance?” Can we keep borrowing from the future? How do we use God’s non-renewable gifts? Energy? Water? Air? The earth does not belong to people, but people belong to the earth, and the earth and everything in it belongs to the Lord! (Psalm 24).

How do we care for the earth/planet, universe? Are there more ultimate questions and concerns than “my/our happiness?” Can we just “go along with the tide of the times?” What does the new dimension of the nuclear age say to us as stewards? How are we involved? What are the blessings? Dangers? Is a human being “above nature?” “In nature?” “With nature?”

From the biblical perspective, especially because of the meaning of God’s Covenant, the blessings of Holy Baptism, and Christ’s call of discipleship, life that is centered in God (theo-centric) is of necessity centered in human beings (anthropocentric) and the earth on which we live and the silent creation we enjoy (geo-centric). Stewards see life from the perspective of faith in Christ, relationship with other human beings and nature.

Stewards who are loved by God can have positive influences on others. The continuing need for stewards is to be FOR, not merely against; to be actively and positively oriented to this world, as well as the world to come; to be contributors to life, not just preservers; to be people of hope in God (1 John 4:19; John 13:34–35; Matt. 25:31–46; Is. 41:17–20), living in the power of the resurrection!

9 *Stewards are aware that we live in a “fallen world.”* We struggle to do right and yet are faced with doing wrong (Rom. 7:15–25; Gal. 5:13–25). We take the power of sin, greed and evil seriously. We do not minimize it. Sin affects everyone. As Christians we reject the version of historical progress and consumerism that makes history itself progressive and redemptive. We believe God is the Owner of this universe and has given us the privilege of being stewards. We believe that God has provided the remedy for sin in the blood of Christ shed for the forgiveness of sins. Christian stewards are people who live in repentance and faith, for the Church lives only by the forgiveness of sins in Christ.

Christian stewards do not believe that the material world as such is sinful, evil or owned by demons (Eph. 6:12ff). We do not believe, as some do, that only the “spiritual” is good and the physical/material world is evil. Stewards of the Christian persuasion dare not abandon this world prematurely! In Christ, God chose to come to this planet in human form (for us, in our likeness!) and because of Him we serve God and others, and the creation, here and now (1 Peter; John 3:16; 1 John 4; James 4:14–26).

In an age of isolation, individualism, despondency, fear, loss of vision, purpose and meaning stewards have a lot to offer all people in the name of God. Stewards are empowered to be creative, peace-bringing, children of God. Secure in the grace of God in Jesus Christ we can fulfill our calling to be God’s stewards—gratefully living all of life for God’s purposes (Romans 12)!





GUIDELINES for Christian Stewards

PART TWO

The Fruit of the Spirit, God-given Abilities, Roles and Spiritual Gifts

The Church, the “body of Christ,” the “people of the Covenant,” disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, is also a “family of stewards” managing, developing and dispensing all of God’s gifts in a life designed to serve God and all God’s people.

“...you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Cor. 12:27).

The stewardship of God’s gifts: Some major biblical references. Please read and discuss:

- 1 Corinthians 12
- Romans 12
- 1 Peter 4
- Ephesians 3 and 4
- Galatians 5

“... as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ” (Rom. 12:4–5).

1 Why we function as a body ... *our corporate and individual stewardship* (Rom. 12:1–2).

“I appeal to you ... by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service!”

The growing, maturing, pattern of a steward: Living a new life in union with Jesus Christ!

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good, acceptable and perfect.”

There are developing, changing commitments, priorities, beliefs for and among God’s stewards. How does this happen? When? Why? Who is affected? Please share some of your journey!

Consider Titus 2:11–14

“The grace of God has appeared ... training us to live ... as we wait for... our Savior who gave himself for us and redeemed us ... to make for himself a people of his own who are eager to do good.”

Christian stewards are people:

1. Belonging to Christ—adopted, claimed, named as God’s own in Holy Baptism;
2. Desiring to mature in faith and life with Christ (2 Peter 3:18);
3. Believing God has given gifts and abilities to develop/use/manage; and
4. Prayerfully seeking God’s guidance for the life of discipleship through the fellowship of the Church, for the sake of the whole world.

2 God’s stewards are blessed with “the fruit of the Spirit” in a life-long maturing process (Gal. 5:22–23).

“The fruit of the Spirit is:

- love,
- joy,
- peace,
- patience,
- kindness,
- goodness,
- faithfulness,
- gentleness and
- self-control,”

The Spirit of God uses the “tools” of God, the “Means of Grace,” the Gospel and the Sacraments in the fellowship of God’s people to enable the fruit to grow, blossom, mature and re-produce.

Consider:

- John 3:16
- 1 John 4:19
- Matt. 22:36–40
- Gal. 5:13–14

There are tensions and struggles faced by growing, maturing Christian stewards.

Consider:

- Gal. 5:16–26
- Col. 3:9–10
- Rom. 7:19, 24–25

The “old” and the “new” continue to struggle. Vigilance is needed. Simple solutions are seldom found. Growth is a process. God blesses His stewards with His grace, help and encouragement!

3 Stewards use their God-given abilities and skills to honor God and serve all God’s people. God continues to create and preserve through His people. Each one, created “in the image of God,” redeemed in Jesus Christ, has a unique personality, a significant family and personal heritage and yet is a part of the “body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12).



Consider the record of some talented, skillful stewards:

- Dorcas.....Acts 9:36, 39..... a skillful seamstress
- Paul.....Acts 18:3..... a tentmaker
- Bezalel.....Ex. 35:3 a craftsman, intelligent, knowledgeable
- Oholiab.....Ex. 36:1 a craftsman, capable, gifted
- CorneliusActs 10:1, 22..... military leader
- Peter, James and John.....Luke 5:1–11 fishermen
- JosephGen. 41:46, 42:6 governor, administrator
- Seven deaconsActs 6:1–5..... administrators, enablers
- Erastus.....Rom. 16:23..... city treasurer
- LydiaActs 16..... businesswoman
- PhoebeRom. 16:1–2..... deaconess
- DeborahJudges 4:4 leader
- PriscillaActs 18:1–4..... tentmaker, leader

What interests, skills, abilities or talents has God given you to use/develop in your role as a part of the body of Christ in the congregation and community?

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| visiting/informing fellow believers | sponsoring new believers |
| child care | listening, encouraging others |
| singing/choir | play musical instrument |
| help provide food | help provide clothing |
| plumbing, electronics | cleaning, painting |
| making posters/signs, web sites | finances, accounting |
| sculpture | photography, movie making |
| yard, land care | publicity/writing/media work |
| helping the young/old | teaching God’s Word |
| assist a teacher | organize gatherings of people |
| inviting people to your home | visit the sick |
| electrical work | carpentry |
| greeting and welcoming others | praying for others |

What other ideas do you have about your role as God’s steward in the church and community?



4 Practicing the life of a disciple ... Remember the grace of God in Jesus Christ! (Rom. 12:1–2)

Consider Romans 12. Read it aloud.

- v 1–2 start with the mercy of God.
- v 3–4 develop the practice of good self-judgment.
- v 4–5 remember you are part of the body of Christ. There is both an individual and a corporate nature to the church and to faith.
- v 6–8 Reconsider the previous listing of specific spiritual gifts.
- v 9–21 Developing personally, spiritually, ethically, morally in relation to Christ.

- love genuinely ... hate evil ... hold to the good
- show affection ... honor one another
- be aglow with the Spirit ... serve the Lord
- rejoice in your hope ... be patient in tribulation ... be prayerful always
- contribute to the needy ... practice hospitality
- bless others ... do not curse them ... rejoice ... and ... weep with others
- live in harmony with others ... associate with the lowly
- repay no one evil for evil ... consider what is noble
- live peaceably with all you can
- never avenge yourself ... God repays vengeance
- feed the hungry, thirsty, enemy ... overcome evil with good.

Read Romans 12 again and again!

Discuss this:

“The fruit of the Spirit guides the use/development of the gifts of the Spirit in the life of the disciples of Jesus Christ.”

How does it happen? Who is involved? When?

5 “Concerning spiritual gifts ...” (1 Cor. 12:1). Stewards of God’s gifts are accountable ... “It is required of stewards that they be found faithful” (1 Cor. 4:2). “To whom much is given, much is required” (Luke 12:48).

A definition: “A spiritual gift is a particular ability given by the Spirit of God to each member of the body of Christ, according to God’s own will and design, for the common good of all, to fulfill God’s purposes.”

Bible references for spiritual gifts:

Romans 12:6
prophecy/proclaiming, inspiring speech
service/ministering to others
teaching
exhortation/encouragement, urging
contributing
giving aid
acts of mercy

1 Cor. 12:7 “... to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” “... as He [God] wills” (v. 11).

wisdom
knowledge
faith
healing
miracles
proclamation
discerning spirits
speaking in tongues
interpretation of tongues

1 Cor. 12:28 “God has appointed ...”

apostles
prophets
teachers
workers of miracles
healers
helpers
administrators
speakers in tongues

Eph. 4:11–16 “and his [God’s] gifts were that some should be ...”

apostles
prophets
evangelists
pastors (pastor-teachers)
teachers

... and all of this “to equip God’s people for the work of ministry ...

to build up the body of Christ ...
to attain to the unity of faith
to mature to the stature of Christ
to make bodily growth possible and be built up in love.”

6 “**Make love your aim ...**” (1 Cor. 14:1). Read 1 Corinthians 13 and then prayerfully consider the spiritual gifts God has given you for your life as a steward.

As you read the Scriptures, pray and talk with other Christians:

1. Think about God’s gifts given to you; examine the options in using them.
2. Try on some of the gifts “for size.” Do they “fit” you?
3. Do you enjoy using/sharing the gift? How does that make you feel?
4. Does the gift appear to be useful in the lives of others?
5. Do other Christians in the congregation affirm your use of your God-given gifts?

Some choices in discovering/developing the spiritual gifts God has given include:

1. Regular reading and study of God’s Word.
2. Regular prayer for God’s guidance.
3. Asking Christian friends for guidance, counsel and observation of growth.
4. Practice memorizing significant Scripture verses.
5. Practice regular receiving of the Lord’s Supper.
6. Renew your baptism as God’s child each day by repentance of sin and faith in Christ’s promise of forgiveness.
7. Participate regularly in the work of your congregation aiming to develop/discover your gifts.

“**Make love your aim ...**” (1 Cor. 14:1)

7 Some words of caution:

1. Beware of self-deception ... insisting you have a gift you don’t.
2. Beware of rationalizing your gift(s) ... and excusing yourself from other areas of loving service when needed.
3. Beware of confusion ... assuming you must have one or more particular gifts that you desire most strongly.
4. Beware of self-righteousness ... comparing oneself with others who cannot do, or do as easily, what you can do.
5. Beware of depression, despondency, despair, thinking that your gifts are not as important, visible or needed as much as others ... or that you might not even be a believer in Christ because your growth is slow.



8 Consider using a helpful “tool” for discovery or development of your God-given gifts.

You may want to use a “spiritual gifts inventory” ... in a prayerful and meditative setting. Discuss your findings and feelings with some Christian friends and / or with the pastor.

REMEMBER: The development and deployment of God’s gifts is a life-long process!

9 Summary and Review: Being aware of one’s own humanity/frailty and “old nature” helps all Christians live by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. In spiritual growth we are not perfectionists! We live by the grace of God (2 Cor. 12:9)! We marvel at God’s grace and respond because of the mercy shown to us (Rom. 12:1–2).

We learn from Peter who denied and was restored (Luke 22 and 24), from Thomas who doubted and then worshipped (John 20), from Paul who persecuted the Church (Acts 9) and then proclaimed the Christ! We learn from fishermen, common folks (Acts 4:13) and martyrs (Acts 7). Mostly we learn from our Lord, but always we learn with one another in the family of God’s stewards in the fellowship of the Church!

We are “earthen vessels” (2 Cor. 4:7–5:21) but we are privileged to make known the marvelous grace of God in Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:9–10) by word and deed! We are among the “walking wounded” of the world, yet privileged to be “wounded healers” bringing the love and help of God to many!

Belonging to Christ we are stewards of life ... stewards of the variety of gifts God gives for our good and the good of the world in which we live! Our privilege and purpose is to be God’s stewards ... individually and collectively!



GUIDELINES for Christian Stewards

PART THREE

The Witness of Life: The Stance of a Christian Steward

Stewardship is what we do in the Name of Christ after we say, “I believe in Jesus.” It is our continuing response to the grace of God in Jesus Christ affecting daily decisions in all areas of life. It is our “stance,” our view of life, style, purpose, direction and calling (Rom. 12:1–2).

“Christ died for all, that we who live might live no longer for ourselves, but for Christ who died and for our sakes was raised” (2 Cor. 5:14).

Believing that our Creator has also redeemed us and named us “disciples” in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism our entire life is a witness. “We were buried with Christ by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4).

*“... lead a life worthy of your calling...”
(Eph. 4:1)*

1 The stance of remembering whose we are: gratefully being and becoming what God desires us to be and do. We are:

1. Created in the image of God, reflecting our Creator (Gen. 1:27; Ps. 8:5; 2 Cor. 3:18).
2. Redeemed by God, in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8–10).
3. Named as God’s own in Holy Baptism (Matt. 28:18–20).
4. Sent on God’s mission in this world (Gen. 1:28–30; John 20:21; Eph. 3:8–12).
5. Empowered as God’s stewards, caregivers, managers, trustees (1 Corinthians 12–14; Romans 12).

Our Christian calling for life, our vocation, is to be God’s steward. Our occupation is one of the ways we live out our calling, our stewardship. It’s not a matter of “have to” but of “we get to!” The Christian steward is a totally free person and at the same time is servant of all (Luther).

2 The stance of knowing what is important: the witness in daily life.

A. Relationships:

- Our relationship with God (Is. 40:31; 43:1–3; 55:1–3; 1 John 4:19).
- Our relationship with self (Rom. 12:3; Phil. 2:3–5; 1 Peter 2:9–10).
- Our relationship with others (Rom. 12:18; Gal. 5:13–14; Eph. 4:15–32).
- Our relationship with creation (Psalm 8 and 24:1; Gen. 1:26–31; Apostles’ Creed).

B. Attitudes:

- An attitude of gratitude (Rom. 1:14–16; Col. 3:15–17; Psalm 103 and 118).
- An attitude of giving (Acts 20:35; Rom. 12:1–2; Gal. 6:1–10).
- An attitude of serving (Mark 10:42–45; 1 John 3:16; Gal. 5:13; Matt. 16:24–26).

C. Growing in knowledge and developing skills to seek justice and show kindness and mercy.

- Micah 6:8: what the LORD requires...
- Is. 58:5–7: the true good...
- James 2:14–17: a living faith vs. a dead faith...
- Eph. 4:31–32: be kind, tenderhearted ...
- Deut. 15:1–11: care for the poor ...
- Gal. 6:1–10: bearing burdens...
- Acts 2:43–47 and 6:1–7: caring for each other ... while not depriving others of opportunity or responsibility.

3 The stance of the Christian steward in money management: *the witness of life.*

In modern society money is power. In the Christian faith power is a servant.

Money is owned by God, managed by the Christian steward, as a servant for the *honor of God and the common good.* (Genesis 12 ... “blessed to be a blessing!”)

Financial contributions given directly to the ministry of the Church are one part of the stance of the Christian steward. They witness to eternal values and commitments, reflecting an attitude of thanksgiving for



the gift of God's eternal love in Jesus Christ. Tithes, offerings, sharing gifts (food, water, a bowl of rice, coconuts, clothing, medicine, etc) enable others to bear witness to Christ and meet many needs among all of the people of God.

Biblical Principles for Christian Giving

1. GIVE TO GOD THE FIRST PORTION.

"Honor the LORD with your substance, whatever you have, and with the first portion of all your returns" (Prov. 3:9).

2. GIVE REGULARLY.

"On the first day of the week, each one of you, set aside some money for the offering in proportion to what you have earned" (1 Cor. 16:2).

3. GIVE A PERCENTAGE.

"... set aside some money for the offering in proportion to what you have earned" (2 Cor. 16:2).

4. GIVE THANKFULLY.

"Always and for everything give thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father" (Eph. 5:20).
"The LORD loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7).

Ultimately Christian stewards are privileged to manage all of God's gifts and resources. How we do it, when, and from what posture or stance makes a lot of difference. It's not that "we have to" but "we get to!" We give, as we love—because He first loved us (John 3:16 and 1 John 4:19)!

Decisions about finances have strong motivations in the life of a steward:

- St. Paul says, "... show that your love is genuine. You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:8–9).
- "I appeal to you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1).

Giving the tithe (10 percent) and more was the common way of life in Old Testament times. It was a sign of faith, trust and responding to God's covenant promises. It still is today!

Consider:

- Gen. 14:20: Abram's unique gift
- Lev. 27:30–33: instructions about the tithe
- Deut. 14:22–29; 12:6; 26:12ff: divine guidance
- Ex. 19:23: putting God first
- Mal. 3:10: some abused the standard

Growing in life with God, stewards also grow in the grace of giving. Examine 2 Corinthians 8–9.

The New Testament moves stewards beyond rules and laws!

Take a moment to say in your own words what these passages mean for a steward.

- John 13:34–35: Love
- Romans 12:1–2: Mercy
- James 2:14–17: Faith and deeds

Reciprocity in one's stewardship; "God blesses our giving so that we often receive back more than what we give."

- Luke 6:38: give and it shall be given to you...
- Gal. 6:7–8: reaping follows sowing...
- 2 Cor. 8:13–14: "... others should not be eased, and you burdened ... but your abundance should supply their want, so that their abundance may supply your want, and there may be equality."
- Matt. 7:12: whatever you wish men would do to you, do so to them.

Generosity blossoms as confidence in God grows.

Discuss Matt. 6:25–34.

"God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8).

Some examples:

- 2 Cor. 8:1–5: they gave ... but first ...
- Acts 2:41–47: an uncommon kind of care ...
- Luke 21:1–4: a trusting widow ...
- Luke 19:1–10: a man who really changed ...
- 1 Chron. 29:1–13: an exemplary leader ...
- Eph. 4:27: takers become givers ...
- Acts 20:35: the blessed way ...



The way we function as stewards affects the larger community. “As we have opportunity let us do good for all people especially those of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10).

Which of these will do/we support? Why? How? When?

- Clothing banks
- Medical research
- Libraries
- Hospitals
- Food banks
- Scientific projects
- Family or children’s agencies
- Boarding schools
- Community agencies
- Educational institutions
- Prisoners
- Shelters for the homeless/abused
- Homes for the aging
- Groups influencing government policy
- Projects for the poor
- Nursing homes, etc.

The way we function as stewards affects the Church locally and worldwide. We are “the body of Christ” together. We do not function in isolation. We share a “partnership in the Gospel” (Phil. 1:3–11). How, when, where have you/we see this in action?

Our offerings are a part of our worship of God (Rom. 12:1–2). Our offerings are not limited by “rules and regulations.” Neither Old Testament laws (Lev. 27:30) nor modern tax regulations determine our response to God! We are set free to serve (Gal. 5:1; Col. 2; 1 Peter 2:16) and to follow our Lord in trust and in loving compassion (John 13:34–35), without limits! (Matt. 5:21–34).

Jesus says, “Give and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap” (Luke 6:38). As God is gracious and generous, so are God’s stewards (Luke 12:48). Consider 2 Corinthians 8–9.

Our offerings and financial planning enables us to “be the church!” Together we:
share the Gospel
help teach the Word of God
care for children
assist the elderly

- offer guidance to families
- provide missionaries, pastors, teachers
- help the homeless
- witness to the love of Christ
- clothe the naked
- feed the hungry
- train the young
- visit the prisoner
- celebrate the Sacraments
- assist the persecuted
- visit the lonely
- honor our Lord ... serve people!
- plan our estates ...
- ... and this is only a start!

4. The stance of the steward: thinking GLOBALLY, acting LOCALLY.

Christian stewards share some common concerns for humanity and creation with others who may or may not share our Faith commitments. We can find ourselves working side by side with other people of good will who may have a different motivation for living and serving as they do, but also share our concern for all God’s people and the inarticulate creation too.

Being involved in community, national, international groups with common concerns for God’s world—environment, justice, nuclear, food banks, Red Cross, World Relief issues—is a way stewards say “This is *our* Father’s world ...” (Ps. 24:1; Jer. 29:7; Acts 17:24–31).

5. The stance of a steward in a material world and consumer society: the witness of daily life.

“Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” Jesus (Luke 12:15).

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” Jesus (Matt. 6:19–21).

The false gods of plenty, position, power and prestige are always with us. Maturing stewards live in an increasing awareness of the dangers of playing Owner when God made us “managers.” We are creatures, not the Creator.

Being a steward is not merely having a list of duties to perform or fulfill. It is a continuing, daily response to living with God in Jesus Christ. For some people there is no easy way to lead a “simple life,” or “simplify their style of life.” For others, life is lived on a simple level of trust in God each day. Being a steward is an adventure in discipleship. It involves a joyful discipline, a decision-making process that seeks divine direction ... and blessing! ... and follows it!



As a steward, consider the following areas of daily decision-making.

1. Stewardship of body and soul
 - regular prayer, meditation
 - regular worship, Bible study
 - proper diet, eating habits
 - proper exercise and rest
 - What habits need to be changed?
 - What stance needs to be developed?

“... your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which you have from God” (1 Cor. 6:19).

3. Stewardship of possessions/position:
 - Do we need what we can afford?
 - What do we have that will last?
 - What do we do that will last?
 - What is the purpose of our possessions?
 - Can we live more with less?
 - How do we serve?
 - What do we buy? Why?

2. Stewardship of people: (by)
 - reducing worry, stress, anxiety
 - assisting children, elderly, ill
 - developing skills, abilities
 - encouraging support groups
 - promoting peace/justice/care
 - strengthening families.

“... you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Cor. 12:2).

4. Stewardship of nature:
 - How are we using the land, water, air?
 - What are we leaving for our children?
 - What does technology help / harm?
 - How much energy do we consume?
 - What can we recycle, use again?

“The earth is the LORD’S ...” (Ps. 24:1)

A suggestion:

Review your records from purchases, contributions, and payments for the last two years. What do they reveal about our attitudes, values, stewardship, priorities and commitments?

COUNSEL FOR STEWARDS

“Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its mold, but let God remold your minds from within” (Rom. 12:2 Phillips).

6 ♦ **The stance of a steward:** *living more meaningfully, joyfully, with satisfaction!*

Stewards are motivated by the love of Christ to fulfill God’s purposes in life. Our Creator and Redeemer is Owner of all! We belong to God and are instruments in the hands of God for the good of all! As managers for God we have opportunities and responsibilities in many areas of life.

Adopting and practicing the stance of a steward in daily life is challenging! The pressures of daily life, living, surviving, serving, caring for family and friends, the poor, the needy or the sick seldom relax. Sometimes the pressures can overwhelm us!

However, in the light of God’s Word and promises (Rom. 12:1–2) we grow to take a stance that is reflective of Jesus, the Chief Steward.

- We celebrate life with others and value it!
- We seek a fairer use of the world’s resources!
- We share with others the gifts of God!
- We consider the long-term effects of poverty, injustice, pollution, alienation.
- We try to supply resources and services that will meet human and social need.
- We try to think corporately, remembering our human and planetary frailty.
- We examine our priorities in the light of the Word of God, repent where needed and receive the forgiveness Christ gives.
- We are people of hope and confidence in God.

The stance we take and the style we use to share our understanding of the meaning of life with God, in Jesus Christ, can have a significant effect on those around us. Our world is shrinking as our universe expands. However, we continue to be God’s stewards!

Counsel for stewards:

As a result of the biblical insights we have shared, the reflections we have made on the world in which we live, the prayers we continue to pray and the discussions in which we engage, will we do anything differently in our lives in the days and years ahead? It is a meaningful question!

How will we go about it, individually and corporately as human beings, as members of the Church, “the body of Christ”? Please share your thoughts together now!

- Pray about these things.
- Think on these things.
- Act on these things!

Being a steward is living all of life for God’s purposes! “Rejoice in the Lord!” (Phil. 4:4)





GUIDELINES *for* Christian Stewards

APPENDIX

Notes for Stewards . . . Individually and Corporately

A steward is a manager of another's belongings; a caretaker, custodian, trustee; a chosen servant; an important person in a privileged, responsible position. "... it is required of stewards that they be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2)." The steward, Shebna, was the manager of the household (Is. 22:15). An irresponsible steward can lose the privilege and position (Luke 16:2).

A steward has a sense of accountability, belonging, dignity, identification, and a close relationship with the Master (Rom. 12:1–2). Stewards also have that relationship *with one another* as part of the larger "body of Christ," *His Church . . . on His mission* (Rom. 12; 1 Corinthians 12; 2 Corinthians 8–9).

A steward cannot forget her/his "place," position, in the relationship with the Master, the Owner. Stewards follow the instruction of the Master (Gen. 43:16). As a governor Joseph was a steward (Gen. 41:41; 42:6) and had a steward who was responsible to him (Gen. 43:19). Stewards are called to responsive faith, to a living trust, and to a great honor . . . personally *and collectively!*

A steward cannot forget his/her position and **relationship with others** in the body of Christ—because of our common relationship with/thru the Lord. "They had everything in common" (Acts 2:44).

A steward is NOT the Owner (Ps. 24:1), the ruler, the director, nor is the steward merely "one of the others" or like the "hired help." A steward is **NOT an unthinking puppet**, nor a robot-like slave! In Romans 16:23 the city treasurer is called "steward of the city." Stewards are on **God's** mission.

A steward is NOT irresponsible, slothful, lazy, nor merely looking out for her/himself. "As each person has received a gift from God, *employ it for one another*, as good stewards of God's varied gifts" (1 Peter 4:10). As "the body of Christ" (Romans 12) we do this *together!*

A steward is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–31), redeemed by the grace of God, forgiven by Jesus Christ and given the position of overseer of God's gifts of life, relationships, time, ability, creation and even the Gospel (Eph. 3:2–10)! The steward's blessings and responsibilities increase. ". . . to whomever much is given, much is required" (Luke 12:48) ... *individually and corporately* (John 20:21).

God's stewards see all of life as the time and place for serving the Savior, not just part of life or some of the time of life. Stewards live in relationship with the rest of the people, property and potential owned by the Creator. Stewards are instrument of blessing for the sake of the Ultimate Owner of everything and everyone ... *individually and corporately* (Ps. 24:1; 1 Cor. 12:4–27).

A steward considers the long-range plan of the Master as well as the immediate needs of the Masters friends. "His steward was overseeing the laborers . . ." (Matt. 20:8). Stewards do not make decisions by themselves. Stewards consult the Lord. God has chosen us and given us all of life to manage in service to all people. It is an honor to be God's stewards . . . *individually and collectively.*

Our mission as stewards is to be *personal and corporate agents of blessing*; equipping, giving, encouraging, reconciling, preserving, relieving, bringing hope and help from the Owner to all whose lives we can touch (1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4; Galatians 6). Stewardship involves all of life lived for God's purposes in response to the present and eternal mercies of God—given through Jesus, our Savior! (Romans 12).



GUIDELINES *for* Christian Stewards

APPENDIX

The Seven T's of Christian Stewardship

“Christian stewardship is the free and joyous activity of the child of God, and God’s family the Church, in managing all of life and life’s resources for God’s purposes.” It’s more than “time, talent and treasure!” Being *God’s steward* in all of life involves **seven “T’s.”** Please give your prayerful attention to each of these biblical realities for life with God.

TIME: It’s a gift from God! ... each second, minute, hour, day! ... How we use them reflects our stewardship of God’s gift of life! See Psalm 31:15; Ecclesiastes 3 and 8; Esther 4:14.

TALENT: It’s a gift from God. Everyone has some! God gives talent in great variety! Read Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. Discovering, developing and deploying those talents is a matter of our stewardship . . . individually and collectively!

TREASURE: Money is a gift from God. God owns it. God lets us earn and use it! Christians are God’s stewards! We are managers. We did not make our own brain! ... and we’ve never seen a moving van pulled behind a hearse! It all goes back to God! See Luke 12:13–21; Matt. 25:14–46; 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Corinthians 8–9.

TESTIMONY: It’s a privilege to share the love Christ has given us! We are “stewards” of the Gospel and we have HIS story to tell! Stewards “testify” about HIS life-giving forgiveness, peace and hope! See John 10; Acts 1:8; 1 Peter 3:15; Rom. 1:16–17.

TOUCH: The amazing truth is: GOD works thru people with His grace . . . and as God’s stewards (instruments, agents, managers), Jesus’ followers touch the lives of others with HIS compassion, care and love. Relationships matter! Consider Luke 15; Matt. 25:31–45; Matt. 19:13–15.

TISSUE: Being the steward, a caretaker of one’s body is a matter of Christian stewardship. See 1 Cor. 3:16 and 6:19 about being God’s “temple!” ... being an organ or blood donor, giving of one’s God-given body parts for the benefit of another of God’s children is being a steward.

TRASH: The care of God’s creation, GOD’S earth, is a matter of stewardship (Genesis 1–2; Ps. 24:1–2; etc.) and what and how we discard things reflects on our awareness of GOD’S ownership and our management as stewards!

Being God’s steward is a daily, life-long privilege!
In our congregations we can help one another persevere in this holy calling!
May our Lord bless and multiply His stewards!



GUIDELINES *for* Christian Stewards

APPENDIX

What Helps a Congregation in the Continuing Education of Christian Stewards

- A growing awareness that the very purpose of life is to be God's steward, disciple, manager and agent.
 - Keeping the meaning and the message of the Cross of Christ in the center of everything!
 - Prayers with "stewardship–discipleship" vocabulary (e.g. offering prayers, requests, etc.).
 - Hymns for stewards about living as God's stewards: motivations, ministry, serving, loving, blessing.
 - Bulletin/screen items that highlight the ongoing service of stewards; who is doing what, where, why it is done, what happens because of this, etc.
 - Saying "thank you" often, regularly, in a variety of ways.
 - Helping people see the good that is being done in the name of Christ as one of God's stewards, as a group of God's stewards.
 - Monthly/quarterly statements showing financial support, participation in areas of service, worship, communion participation—and its impact on peoples lives in the community and church.
 - Testimonials and personal examples of lay leaders telling of the blessings that come from being God's steward in a variety of areas of life.
 - Regular "education" and personal testimony items in the newsletters, web sites, bulletins, etc., with a solid biblical base.
 - Resources, materials, inserts, screen notes, etc., that help "raise the sights" of the members of the congregation to look beyond themselves and the property lines. Ask: "To whom is God calling us?"
 - Praying for the blessing of the Holy Spirit to open the lives of God's stewards to fulfill His purposes!
 - Bible study that examines the familiar, and the not-so-familiar, portions of Scripture that illustrate the life of the steward in action.
 - Sunday school and Bible class and VBS teachers who regularly apply the meaning of being God's steward to a variety of lessons they teach.
 - Regularly publishing information about the ministry of the congregation that interprets and applies what we are doing together and why!
 - Biblical stewardship training in all new member classes and in periodic orientation classes for long-time members of the congregation.
 - Periodic (spring and fall) education emphasis on "the stewardship of all believers."
 - An emphasis on outreach to the lost, the searching, the drifting people—people loved by God!
 - A variety of ways to tell the story of the ministry of the Church in other places so that the view of our common mission does not stop with "our church." We are partners with others in locally and beyond!
 - The use of attractive biblical materials, mailings, DVDs, videos, etc., in teaching God's stewards.
 - Including leaflets, tracts, stories about being God's stewards in periodic mailings, website updates, etc.
 - Every member visits that ask other members for suggestions and advice about the ministry and programs of the parish (visit #1) and then a visit (#2) to enlist financial and talent support to carry out the ideas.
 - Regular prayer for the leaders of congregation, so they can be good stewards of the positions entrusted to them.
 - Asking other congregations and regional leaders for suggestions.
- What do you think helps?

■ David Belasic

Amazing
LOVE!