



## Stewardship Primer 5

The Identity of the Christian Steward

1 Corinthians 4:2

*“Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.”*

The question “Who am I?” is not to be dismissed lightly or answered in a frivolous way. Knowing who I am is necessary to live as God intends me to live. Unfortunately there are many people who try to establish their ultimate identity on what they do rather than on what God has done for them.

John Westerhoff deals with the identity of the Christian steward in *Building God’s People*. He writes, “Each day the world tells us who we are and how we are to live. Depending upon whom we listen to we are: physical beings who are to make ourselves sexually attractive; intellectual beings who are to accumulate knowledge; consumers who are to acquire material possessions; workers who are to produce products; or pleasure seekers who are to gratify privatized needs. The list could go on. But who are we? From a Christian perspective the answer is simple, though not easily understood. We are baptized! We have been drowned and brought back to life, we have been adopted into a family—the church—we have been given the name Christian, we have been signed with the cross and claimed as Christ’s own forever. We have been re-created in the image of God. We are saints...We are partners with God, stewards of God’s creation, entrusted with the Good News of God’s saving work in Christ” (page 13).

Westerhoff continues, “The church’s understanding of stewardship is rooted in our baptismal covenant, a covenant in which we promise to be...the manifestation of God’s grace, as a grateful response to God’s gift of salvation. At our baptism we are made Christians and incorporated into the body of Christ that we might be led by the Spirit to manifest God’s will. God’s will is that we be fruitful trustees of God’s gifts and graces. Stewardship, properly understood, provides a context for believers in Jesus Christ and members of his church to establish a link between what they believe and how they live” (page 15).

*A steward is  
one who  
manages, or  
cares for, what  
belongs to  
someone else.  
A Christian  
steward is a  
child of God  
who cares for  
that which  
belongs to God.*

We are stewards because God made us stewards. When God created Adam and Eve, He placed them in the Garden of Eden and told them to “work it and take care of it” (Genesis 2:15). Their

## Stewardship Primer: A Guide for the Christian Congregation

stewardship (what they did as God's stewards) was to work the creation God had given them and to care for it so that it prospered as He intended. They understood that God is the owner and we are stewards.

Unfortunately, the whole concept of steward became blurred with the fall into sin. Now human beings no longer consider themselves stewards (one who manages what belongs to another), but want to be owners (one who has complete control and total right of dispersal). One cannot be a steward and an owner at the same time. The two are mutually exclusive by definition. Wanting to be an owner, or acting as an owner, puts one in God's rightful position and the result is idolatry.

A Christian steward is a child of God who realizes his/her role in life as a partner, a trustee, a manager, a caretaker or temporary custodian of gifts that belong to God. The Christian steward *receives* God's precious gifts gratefully, *manages* God's precious gifts carefully and responsibly, *shares* God's precious gifts with others generously, and *returns* God's precious gifts joyfully with increase.

We have been granted the high privilege of being God's stewards. God created us to be stewards and He recreated us in Holy Baptism to be Christian stewards. It is a position that comes to us completely by God's grace in Christ. It is who we are in Christ.

### Reflection:

How do you respond to the assertion that the church has failed to raise up stewards?

How are we forming stewards in our congregation?

Do most Christians think (or act) more like stewards or owners? Explain your answer.

Why is it so important that the Christian understand his/her identity as steward?

R. Scott Rodin says that it is a mistake to focus on what the steward does before and perhaps without ever discussing what it means to be a steward. Tell why you agree or disagree with his statement.

### Digging Deeper:

Read *Stewards in the Kingdom* by R. Scott Rodin.

Read *The Christian Faith* by Robert Kolb.



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