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INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL PARISH STEWARDSHIP

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A Stewardship Reflection for November



The eleventh month is now upon us, drawing us closer to the end of the calendar year. It is a transition month, a month between autumn and winter, when the leaves get raked, and the crops have been harvested. We “fall back” from Daylight Savings Time and revert to Standard Time. Most of us prepare for rain, snow and winter storms. It is also a month that reminds us to be grateful which is so fundamental to Christian stewardship.

During the month of November we express our gratitude for the saints, witnesses to the Gospel who challenge us to find our own path to holiness. We are grateful for the lives of all who have gone before us to meet the Lord, especially those we know and hold dear. We thank our veterans who have offered their lives on our behalf. And of course, in the United States, there is Thanksgiving Day, a holiday that is all about gratitude.

The month of November is an ideal time of the year to focus our spiritual lives more intently on being grateful for the blessings of the Lord. Sacred scripture is a good place to start because it is filled with the themes of thanksgiving and gratitude. The psalmist sings: “Give thanks to God, bless his name”

(Psalm 100:4). We can become more aware, too, of gratitude as it is expressed in the rhythm of the Eucharistic celebration. Other spiritual exercises, too, may help us to grow to be more grateful stewards of God’s love.

The month of November is an ideal time of the year to focus our spiritual lives more intently on being grateful for the blessings of the Lord.

Pray with gratitude. Set aside some time for prayer each day. If you are new to the habit of daily prayer, find 10 minutes in your daily schedule. Pray as a family as well. And begin with a prayer of gratitude.

Put gratitude into action. Do something in your parish or neighborhood to share your material blessings with those who might otherwise go hungry. Contribute to a food bank or help deliver food baskets.

Make gratitude a habit. Find ways to thank others for their generosity and kindness toward you every day.

The late Catholic spiritual writer, Thomas Merton, once wrote that to be grateful is to recognize the love of God in everything. Let us use the month of November as an opportunity to grow in stewardship which, simply put, means living a life of gratitude. And as the psalmist encourages us to do: “O give thanks to the Lord for he is good; for his love endures forever” (Psalm 107:1).





Stewardship Expressions

NOVEMBER 2009

Adapted with gratitude from
Suzanne Erpenbach, Stewardship
Director, Diocese of Knoxville

Stewardship unites relationships with actions. Three questions can serve as directive guides to link intentions with expressions as we journey through life. *Who is Jesus of Nazareth for you? Is your faith translated into actions? What do you want to be remembered for?* These questions can inspire us to dedicate and renew our efforts to become true disciples of Christ and good stewards in daily living. Throughout November certain days particularly highlight stewardship as a way of life. Each new day offers us new opportunities to demonstrate our values through words, attitude and actions. This month we can especially focus on expressing gratitude for the gifts God gives, for the relationships we develop, and for the offerings of time, talent and treasure that are shared.

November 1 *All Saints Day/Daylight Savings Time Ends* – Learning about the saints of history can teach us to trust in God and to reflect our love for Him and others. Saints are often ordinary people who give extraordinary witness to their loving relationship with God. We each are called to be holy and giving of the gifts we have received. We might use the gained extra hour, as daylight savings time ends, to think of how the three questions relate to us and to the way we live.

November 2 *All Souls Day* – We remember and pray for the souls of the dead, recalling how those we knew lived. Memories may identify certain practices, efforts and interests that particularly modeled and mentored love and service. Someday we too will be included in All Souls Day thoughts and prayers. How do we want to be remembered? Will the actions of our lifetime reflect a special relationship with God?

November 3 *Election Day* - We can be grateful for the privilege and opportunities to choose and vote for those we wish to lead our communities and nation. With privileges there are also responsibilities. We must carefully consider candidates and voting issues. We also expect elected officials to serve ethically and morally, with care and justice for all.

November 11 *Veterans Day* – Consider the contributions of time, talent and dedicated effort that people in military service provide to the well-being of persons and protection of our nation. Their self-sacrifice, care and generosity are noble. Let us remember them every day in prayer, expressions of gratitude, and in offerings of support.

November 21 *The Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary* – It is an ancient and very trustworthy tradition that the Blessed Virgin was solemnly offered in the Temple to God at the age of three by her parents, Saint Anne and Saint Joachim. Their love and devotion to God reflects the relationship they shared with Him. In what ways do we demonstrate a personal relationship to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

November 26 *Thanksgiving Day (U.S.A.)* – Countries around the world dedicate special days to expressing thanks for blessings. God gifts each person through His loving generosity each day. Be particularly observant and reflective of the blessings you have in life. Pray for those less fortunate. Put your faith into action through caring words and gestures of outreach and service, being especially mindful of the two greatest commandments - to love God, and to love our neighbors.

November 29 *First Sunday of Advent* - Advent provides an opportunity for us to begin again and to prepare ourselves anew for the coming of Jesus Christ. It is a time of waiting and expectation, of anticipation and preparation. We can use the coming weeks for personal prayer, growth and change in the way we live. Anticipating the Nativity of Jesus, we can dedicate special time toward considering our relationship with him. As we recall previous Advents, we remember those who inspire us through their faith and actions. We too can be memorable mentors and models to others through our demonstrations of discipleship and stewardship.



A Thanksgiving Blessing

Good and gracious God,

As we gather together this Thanksgiving, we pause from the normal routines of our daily lives to give thanks and praise for the abundant blessings you have bestowed upon us.

You have entrusted us with the wonders of your creation and given us the freedoms and opportunities to creatively collaborate in your divine plan.

Bless all of us who gather here in your name. Give us the grace to be good stewards of your bounty, the courage to proclaim the Gospel in word and deed; and the wisdom to claim nothing for ourselves, but return all to You with increase.

Bless this food we are about to share and all those who brought it to our table. Bless our loved ones, family and friends who are not with us this day; and on those who travel, that they may reach their destinations safely.

And in a special way, bless those who are less fortunate than we are today. Grant that we who are filled with Your abundance never close our hearts to those most in need of Your mercy, particularly the hungry, the homeless and the poor.

We ask this through our Lord, Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.

Amen.



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Stewardship Saint for November

St. Martin of Tours

St. Martin of Tours was born around 316 in a territory that is now part of Hungary. His father, an officer in the Roman army, conscripted Martin into military service at the age of fifteen.

While Martin was still a soldier, there occurred the famous incident memorialized by many artists. One day while at the gates of the city of Amiens he saw a scantily clad beggar. Martin cut his own military cloak in half and shared it with the beggar. That night Martin dreamed that Jesus was wearing that same half-cloak he had given away. Martin had for some time considered becoming a Christian. He was promptly baptized and made the decision to dedicate his life to Christ.

Martin became a follower of St. Hilary of Poitiers (January 13) who gave him land where the first monastery in Gaul (present-day France) was established. It is the first monastery known to be established north of the Alps. Christianity was largely confined to urban areas, and Martin saw monasteries as rural spiritual centers from which evangelization in the countryside could take place. He was zealous in bringing people to Christ.

In 371, a time when bishops were chosen by the faithful, Martin was tricked into coming to Tours to be elected bishop. He was well-known for his evangelizing, personal

holiness, healing ministry and compassion toward the poor. It was also well-known that Martin would never agree to be a bishop. A man from the city came to Martin and begged him to visit his sick wife. When the kindhearted Martin got to Tours crowds of people came out of hiding and surrounded him. Unable to escape, he was swept into the city and, overwhelmed by the will of the crowds, became their bishop.

Martin maintained his lifestyle as a monk and exercised stewardship of the diocese on foot, horseback and by boat. His profound personal witness met with great success in an area that was largely pagan.

Martin died on November 8, 397, and his feast is November 11, the day he was buried in Tours. He is a patron saint of France.

Should Thanksgiving be Cancelled?

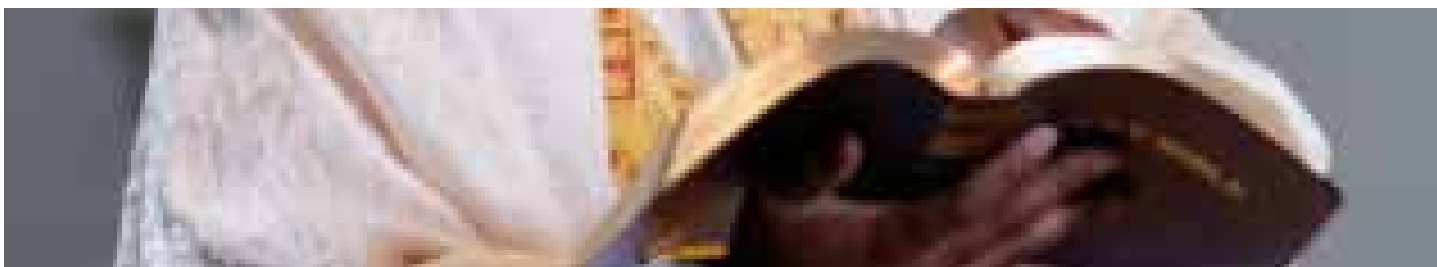
By Jim Lamm, Director of Stewardship, St. Louis King of France Church, Austin

The economy is still not improving very rapidly. Our pensions, retirement funds, or other investments have seen a 40-60% loss this year. Many have lost their jobs, fear they will lose them, or are having their hours or pay cut. With all this bad news we might ask, what do we have to be thankful for this Thanksgiving Day? How can we possibly celebrate a holiday where we give thanks for our prosperity given this past year?

If we think of our lives only in terms of money, wealth, possessions, and earthly success, we should just skip Thanksgiving this year and every year. Thanksgiving is not a secular holiday to celebrate all the money we have made and the things we possess. Nor is it about turkey, football, stuffing, or pumpkin pie. From the very first Thanksgiving in 1621 at the Plymouth Plantation, thanksgiving has been observed as a religious holiday. It is a day set aside to thank God for the many blessings we have received from God. Yes, sometimes these blessings can come in the form of a good harvest or good health but our gratitude to God should go beyond our mere superficial measurements of success.

Instead of looking at our lives through human eyes, we need to look at our lives with the eyes of Christ. If we look at our lives with Christ's eyes, we would see that our money, possessions, jobs, prestige, and place in society mean absolutely nothing. None of these draw us closer to God and, unfortunately, often keep us from God as we place them ahead of our relationship with God. Christ's eyes would see God's love and blessings everywhere, even in difficult economic, physical, or emotional times. We would see the fullness of God's love in the Mass where we are invited to partake in the actual body and blood of Jesus in the form of bread and wine. We would see God's love and blessings in the everyday and in those with whom we live and work.

This Thanksgiving Day, let us not celebrate the superficial things that do not bring us closer to God. Let us see and thank God for all the blessings we receive every day and especially for the gift of Christ in the Eucharist, a term derived from an original Greek expression which means "thanksgiving."



A STEWARDSHIP MOMENT

For the weekend of October 31 / November 1, 2009 **The Solemnity of All Saints**

In today's Gospel Jesus begins the "Sermon on the Mount," with the "Beatitudes." Many Christian commentators believe these short messages of comfort and hope address the essence of living a life in Christ. But what does it mean for the Christian steward to be poor in spirit, to hunger for justice, to be meek, clean of heart, or be a peacemaker? To embrace Christian stewardship is to live the Beatitudes, and to turn society's expectations upside down, to live by different values, a different set of standards. What can we do today to be good stewards of the Beatitudes?

For the weekend of November 7/8, 2009 **Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Times**

Jesus points out to his disciples the poor widow who has just dropped two simple copper coins into the temple treasury. He then delivers a teaching on stewardship. Despite her poverty, the poor widow in today's Gospel does not refuse God her generosity. Out of her desperately impoverished life she contributes to an earthly institution to give God glory and praise. It is not the monetary value of the gift that was important, but the love, trust and gratitude expressed through the gift. The Gospel asks us similarly compelling stewardship questions: What do we value? In what or whom do we place our trust? How do our own contributions to our community of faith reflect our generosity toward God?

For the weekend of November 14/15, 2009 **Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time**

How would you spend your day if you knew it was the last day you would spend on earth? Undoubtedly, it would not be a normal day. The point of today's Gospel reading is that

the end-time is always imminent. The good steward remains prayerfully alert, ready to give an accounting; and living each day in the awareness of the coming judgment and salvation. How do we exercise stewardship over our daily lives? Are we prepared to give an accounting? How will we allow Christ to work in and through us to prepare for the reconciliation of the heavens and the earth?

For the weekend of November 21/22, 2009 **Solemnity of Christ the King**

Today's Gospel reading records, arguably, the most important exchange in all of literature, the one between Jesus and Pilate. While Pilate presumes the conversation is about an earthly, political "king," Jesus, by contrast, suggests to Pilate that he is that "faithful witness" of a wholly transcendent kingship, one that is envisioned by Daniel and the reading from the Book of Revelations. As we approach the Advent season, this week would be a good time to reflect on how we understand our role as stewards of this transcendent kingship and how we can better serve Christ to bring about this new kingdom.

For the weekend of November 28/29 **First Sunday of Advent**

A profound stewardship blessing is offered by St. Paul to the Thessalonians in today's second reading. He encourages the community to continue to show loving concern for its members and to care for the needs of others. We witness for the first time the spirituality of stewardship at work in a New Testament community that is putting the Eucharist into action. An Advent spirit prevails that is transforming and filled with hope for the coming of the Lord Jesus. What are we doing to promote this spirit of stewardship in our personal lives and in our community of faith?

INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

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We encourage you to check out the ICSC Forum at www.catholicstewardship.org under 'members' where members can share ideas and questions. The Parish Stewardship section is reviewed every day by members of the Parish Stewardship Education and Services Committee.

THE CHRISTIAN STEWARD

This page is based on the United States bishops' pastoral letter, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response* (1992). It is compiled, edited and written by Scott Bader, Director of Parish Stewardship for the Archdiocese of Seattle.



In the lives of disciples, something else must come before the practice of stewardship. They need a flash of insight – a certain way of seeing – by which they view the world and their relationship to it in a fresh, new light. “The world is charged with the grandeur of God,” Gerald Manley Hopkins exclaims; more than anything else, it may be the grandeur in all that is that sets people on the path of Christian stewardship.

Stewardship: A Disciple's Response,
a Pastoral Letter on Stewardship

Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. (*1 Corinthians 10:31*)

Serve one another through love, bear one another's burdens, and so you will fulfill the law of Christ. (*Galatians 5:13, 6:2*).

What is it that makes people grateful for Gods' gifts – able to see life in a whole new way? For some it is a recovery from illness. For others, the birth of a baby, or the death of a loved one. Still others see God's generous gifts in the beauty of the world that surrounds us, from the smallest flowers to the grandest vistas.

For me it is the amazing vastness of the universe – big almost beyond human comprehension. The power in the stars, the emptiness of the black void, the almost eternalness of the past and future of the universe.

I, with my life span (if I'm lucky) of 75 years, fade into insignificance in the face of all of this. But God's love for me, in creating me and all the universe, gives significance – and purpose – to my life.

Christian Stewardship helps me connect my gratitude for what God has created with my question about why I'm here: to be the good steward of God's gifts, cultivate them for the Kingdom, and share them with others.



QUESTION:

- Do we also wish to be disciples of Jesus Christ?
Then how will you become more aware that God has given you all you have?
Then how will you use the gifts God has given you to build up the Kingdom?
Then how will you share the gifts that God has given you?

My own experience with a long hospitalization made me aware – in way that I never dreamed possible – that God is the origin of life, the giver of freedom, the source of all we have and are and will be. I am not the independent person without the need of others. I do not have all the resources the resources that enable me to have a quality experience of life.

-Archbishop Thomas Murphy