

# GRATEFUL DISCIPLES

Your Parish Stewardship Guide

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*Foreword by Bishop Sylvester Ryan*



CATHOLIC  
LIFE & FAITH

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I wish to express deep gratitude to the many parish and diocesan leaders who have shared their hopes, dreams, challenges and successes in building engaging communities of grateful disciples who live as stewards over the past ten years. I am thankful for your witness as servant leaders who use your strengths to lead people to Christ through the Christian community. I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Bishop Sylvester Ryan for offering the foreword to this workbook. Bishop Ryan has and continues to inspire many in the stewardship community, as we continue to grow in gratitude and faithful response. I am also especially grateful for the critical reading, review, and contributions to this book by Cindy Bosh, friend and colleague. Her witness to what it means to live as a steward inspires me and urges me to give all I can in grateful response for the many blessings in my life. May all of us continue to learn and grow together.

## **DUPLICATION POLICY AND INFORMATION**

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# **Grateful Disciples: Your Guide to Parish Stewardship**

**Foreword** Bishop Sylvester Ryan, Bishop Emeritus, Diocese of Monterey

## **Introduction**

**1. The Vision: Stewards in Community**

**2. *Lead Grateful Disciples***

**3. *Form Disciples as Stewards***

**4. *Welcome and Engage Everyone***

**5. *Commit to Annual Renewal***

**6. *Give Thanks. Be Accountable.***

**Looking Ahead: Stewardship is a Way of Life**

## FROM BISHOP RYAN

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I was ordained an auxiliary Bishop for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles in 1990, May 31st. So I was present at the Conference of American Bishops in November of that year. Before that time, Archbishop Thomas Murphy had spoken to the American Bishops and did so in the form of a challenge: "How do we develop among ourselves and our priests, deacons, seminarians and lay people a spirituality of giving which offers a biblical concept of stewardship?" His words prompted (or so I am told) a spirited discussion among the Bishops and the result came in the form an Ad Hoc Committee on Stewardship. Archbishop Murphy became its first Chairman.

The Archbishop gathered several Bishops and two laymen as the first members of the Ad Hoc Committee and they began working toward writing a pastoral letter on Stewardship. The Committee, under the leadership of Archbishop Murphy, included: Bishops Joseph Immesch, John McRaith, William McManus, and Robert Morneau. The lay committee members were Dan Conway and Vito Napoletano; other lay advisors included Jim Kelley, Fred Hofheinz, and Dutch and Barbara Schultz.

What I learned after I became a member of that Committee is there was a kind of survey of the Bishops as to what they would like to see in such a letter. Two major themes emerged: the first, that the letter should deal with development - the development of financial resources for the Church at large (the US Church); the second, that the primary theme should focus on developing a stewardship model of being a disciple as indicated in the words of Archbishop Murphy that prompted the beginning of the Committee.

What followed was a strong discussion among the members of the original committee as to which way to follow. The Bishops and laymen were definitely leaning on the side of the latter, and despite some continued opposition from a few Bishops, the formation of disciple stewards with its emphasis on a spirituality of giving that would involve a Gospel dimension became the direction. So in 1992, my first year as the Bishop of Monterey, they completed their work and the pastoral letter was printed and approved by the Body of Bishops.

The book became the largest selling publication ever of the American Bishops, and continues today to lead in the numbers of copies people purchase from the Conference. My engagement came after my installation as the Bishop of Monterey. We, in Monterey, had a large deficit of several millions of dollars. I had an idea that perhaps this Ad Hoc Committee might be a place where I could gather some ideas of

how to raise significant funds to assist us in erasing this deficit. With my usual spontaneous response to any idea of mine or others which I liked, I approached Archbishop Murphy and asked if I might be considered a future member of the Committee. With what I remembered later, a twinkle in his eye, and well aware that I did not know what stewardship and the Committee was all about, he kindly said yes, and not later but then and there.

So I joined the Committee and learned from an extraordinary group of true steward Bishops and laymen that stewardship was about the formation of a stewardship spirituality involving time, treasure and talents. I read the Pastoral Letter at the same time that I listened, fascinated and inspired by these men, who lived stewardship as Bishops and leaders of their Dioceses as well as the added modeling from the two laymen. I also became aware and attended at the next gathering of National Catholic Stewardship Council, at their national meeting.

In my Diocese, I began to work on implementing a program of stewardship formation Diocesan-wide and in terms of parishes. My first step involved inviting and covering the costs of several pastors every year to attend the orientation weeks on stewardship held in the winter months, one in Northern California and another in Florida. They were powerful, spiritual and enthusiastic and most of the pastors I sent (and attended with them) came away profoundly changed. We also began an annual Stewardship Day bringing in the best presenters who were available as well as using some of our pastors to share their experiences of implementing stewardship in their parishes. We did these for a full day with lunch provided, and they became the source for real growth in a stewardship spirituality in our parishes and with our people.

Remarkably, the collections on Sunday increased as well as a better response to our annual Bishops' appeal.

Sadly we lost Archbishop Murphy, who died of cancer. We struggled along in the ad hoc committee, and then one day the bishop president of the Conference called me and asked if I would take on being the Chairman of the Committee. I did so and remained for six years. As the tenth anniversary of the Pastoral Letter approached we had some lengthy discussions about writing a ten year anniversary new Pastoral. But at length all of us sensed that the Pastoral Letter itself could not be duplicated. We decided to write an introduction to the tenth anniversary edition. I took the responsibility to be the lead author and talked to many people, bishops (certainly from our Committee) and others, priests, and lay people and then began writing the letter. The Committee served as the editors and when we were satisfied, the Letter became the Introduction to the Tenth Anniversary edition now available.

What has been remarkable is the fact that stewardship has taken on an international flavor. It began with Bishops, priests, and lay people from Australia and Central and South America and has spread widely since. It created the reason for changing the name of the national organization to the International Catholic Stewardship Council (ICSC), its present name. It is interesting also that in our diocese several of our Hispanic priests from Mexico whom I ordained became among our best advocates and examples in their parishes. In all of these ways, it is a blessing that so many people are embracing the spirituality of stewardship in their lives. Stewardship as a way of life has its foundation in the conviction and the attitude of heart that life, and every aspect of life, is a gift. We can then find in ourselves a response of gratitude and self-surrender to the call to discipleship in the Gospel. "Have this mind in you." (Phil 2:5-11)

Most Reverend Sylvester Ryan  
Bishop Emeritus, Diocese of Monterey

# INTRODUCTION

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*“Stewardship is an expression of discipleship, with the power to change how we understand and live out our lives.”<sup>1</sup>*

This simple yet compelling statement from Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response captures the importance of forming people to grow as good and faithful stewards. Those who have been touched by this spirituality of stewardship recognize that everything we are, all that we have, and all that we will ever be is pure gift from God. Through that recognition, we grow in gratitude for our many blessings: our lives, faith, relationships, the capacity to love and show mercy, our talents, the minutes, days and weeks of our lives, our financial and material resources. With this deep and abiding gratitude, we learn to say “thank you” to God by sharing our lives and resources, living as people of service and mission, reaching out with Christ’s love in our lives at home, in our town or city, our parish and the world. We find ourselves consuming less, prioritizing our time and activity based in who we are as God’s blessed people, and we share more with others.

What a blessing such life is! As our bishops note, this way of life is transformative. It helps us to find meaning and purpose in life; we move beyond selfish impulses toward the needs of others; we find abundance everywhere, and share the richness of Christ’s life and love as grateful disciples. This spiritual way of life transforms the lives of individuals and the life of the parish.

Leading our parish and parishioners to embrace stewardship as a way of life is a dynamic process. The truth is, we will never be finished with this endeavor. Yet, the best practices of parishes help us to recognize key steps that are essential to help our parishioners accept the call to live as disciples and to grow as good and faithful stewards. Consider what follows as a plan, with action items for the essential steps on the path of discipleship and stewardship.

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<sup>1</sup> Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response, Introduction (Hereafter, quotes from this pastoral letter will be noted in the text as SDR)

## KEY FEATURES of GRATEFUL DISCIPLES

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Grateful Disciples has been carefully developed to provide stewardship leaders with a foundational understanding of the principles of stewardship and the content, practices, and strategies they need in order to lead their people to embrace stewardship as a way of life. **Grateful Disciples is much more than the guide you are currently reading. This book is only a portion of the story.** A link on page 62 will lead you to multiple web pages, containing resources for your use. **Use these downloadable resources to bring stewardship to life in your parish.** Look for the icons at the end of sections of this guide, indicating resources that will equip you every step of the way:



Reproducible worksheets to guide your discussion



Stewardship articles for use in the parish bulletin or newsletter



A 6-meeting study guide, retreat outline, monthly formation template



A brief introduction to stewardship video



Samples from best practice parishes



## THIS IS HOW TO START

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- ❖ **Read this book in the company of others** – Identify the team that leads or will lead stewardship in your parish and consider the broader implications shared in this workbook. This may be a newly created or long-standing stewardship committee, a sub-group of your Pastoral Council, or a combination of these two groups, along with your pastor and parish staff.
- ❖ **Those who are new to stewardship:** this guide will provide a solid theological and practical foundation as you introduce establish stewardship.
- ❖ **Those who have established stewardship:** this guide will provide additional resources for reflection, skill-building, and timely material to equip you to continue to form your people as disciples and to grow as good stewards.
- ❖ **Take time to pray, read and discuss together** using the **worksheets** indicated. Use the prayer on page 63 as you begin each meeting. Each chapter is no longer than ten pages, making it possible to use the book in the context of parish meetings. This will insure that your study and discussions will bear fruit in your parish community. **Each chapter ends with Live the Vision, an inventory of current parish practices.**
- ❖ **Access the online worksheet materials,** bulletin articles, study guide, guided inventory sheets, samples, and introductory video via the link with login and password information, which is included at the end of this workbook on page 62.

This guide is part of a larger initiative for pastoral leader development, which can be found at [www.CatholicLifeandFaith.net](http://www.CatholicLifeandFaith.net). You may explore resources, access slides and articles, and contact us there for live or virtual events,. Go to the Catholic Life and Faith site often and stay in touch as we learn and grow together as followers of Jesus Christ and as good stewards of our many gifts.

The tone of this guide is intentionally informal, at times conversational. It is hoped that this guide will lead to the development of thought and practice to strengthen your parish, forming a more engaging and evangelizing community of grateful disciples and stewards.

## GUIDING FRAMEWORK

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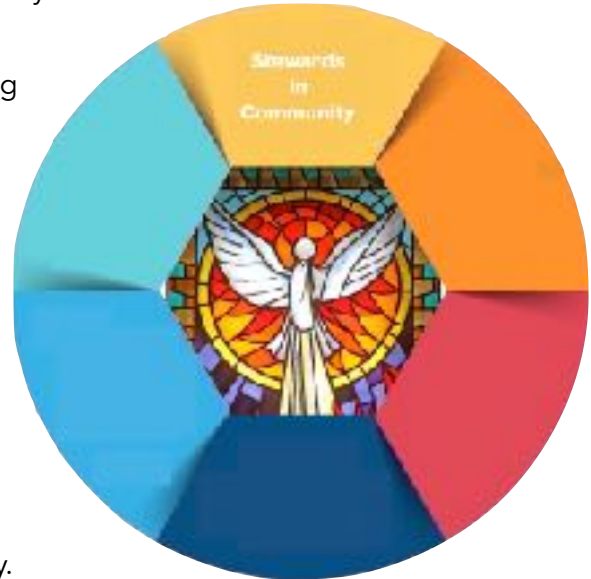
Throughout *Grateful Disciples*, six key steps of stewardship leadership will be explored, which are illustrated in the diagram below. These steps are reflected in the organization of this guide — each chapter corresponds with one step of the process of leading your community to embrace stewardship as a way of life. Note that the diagram is a circle — the steps are not once-and-for-all activities one can check off when complete. This is an on-going and life-giving process of transformation. The Holy Spirit is at the center of the diagram below. We rely on the Holy Spirit to inspire, guide, and strengthen us as we dedicate ourselves to Jesus Christ as disciples and faithful stewards.



## The Vision: STEWARDS IN COMMUNITY

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If you are reading this guide, it is likely that you are already familiar with this spiritual way of life or someone has told you about the deeper meaning of stewardship. As people who lead others to embrace stewardship as a way of life, it is important for us to clearly articulate what Christian stewardship is about and why it is important. This initial section is simply a brief overview for those who are new to stewardship, and a call to renewed reflection for those who are already familiar with it. In a later section we will focus on many ways to bring the message of stewardship to the parish community.



### Grateful: All We Are and Have Are God's

Our beginning point is really quite simple, and yet profound. We are created in God's image and likeness. Let that sink in for a moment. While we have been taught

"Genesis, telling the story of creation, says God looked upon what had been made and found it good; and seeing the world's goodness, God entrusted it to human beings...Now, as then and always, it is a central part of the human vocation that we be good stewards of what we have received — this garden, this divine human workshop, this world and all that is in it — setting minds and hearts and hands to the task of creating and redeeming in cooperation with our God, Creator and Lord of all." (SDR, 41)

this fundamental truth, few really let this understanding direct the way in which they live. We are created in God's image. This primary recognition of who we are immediately calls for *gratitude*, and for *response*. All we are is a blessing, given to us by God in trust. Our very lives are a gift, breath upon precious breath.

More than that, being created in God's image bears with it responsibility. As Scripture scholar Art Zannoni notes, Sacred Scripture helps us to understand this: while the early peoples of the world carved idols and believed that the spirit of the god whom

they carved resided within the idol, the people who believe in the One God were told not to create idols, because we are to be the living image of God in the world. It is as though the Biblical narratives help us to see that “we are called to be the transparency through whom God is seen,” Zannoni explains.<sup>2</sup>

We are called to be the transparency through whom God is seen. This is not really news, is it? We know this through the teaching and example of Jesus Christ. If each of us woke up every morning with the recognition that the day is a gift, through which we may make God’s love seen and felt by those around us, what a different world this would be! How our lives might be changed if we reflected on this call to make God known each evening as we come to the end of the day. Our “examination of conscience” might be the response to a simple question: In what way did I, or did I not, make God’s love seen and felt today?

Let us take this further by thinking about the idols that fill our minds and hearts, diverting our energy, attention, and devotion away from God and God’s ways. The U.S. Bishops, in their pastoral letter on stewardship, call our attention to some of the contemporary idols, the “destructive ‘isms’, that are a part of our secular culture. (SDR, Introduction) Accepting the call to be disciples and stewards provides a means for putting God at the center of our lives and shaping our actions and decisions accordingly. In this way, a spirituality of stewardship provides a practical way to connect faith with our daily lives. When we grow as stewards, we learn to recognize that we have a *need to give* — we are created in the image of God who is the giver of all good things.

“An oikonomos or steward is one to whom the owner of a household turns over the responsibility for caring for the property, managing affairs, making resources yield as much as possible and sharing resources with others. The position involves trust and accountability.” (SDR,

To be a good steward of our lives and possessions means much more than simply “taking care” of them. The steward is one who not only cares for the property or possessions of another; the steward nurtures the other’s possessions and brings them to yield, with increase.

In many ways, growing as a steward is about recognizing the grace of God. The good steward recognizes that all we are, have and will be truly is God’s. We are called to steward it all well, as grateful disciples, leading us to be generous, as a reflection of the generosity of God. [Additional content follows, leading to the worksheet below.]

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<sup>2</sup> Zannoni, Art, The Bible Speaks on Stewardship, ThePastoralCenter.com

## Live the Vision

### Stewards in Community



Reflect on your initial thoughts and observations in reading Chapter 1, *Stewards in Community*, using the chart below to guide your discussion. Refer back to the major points of each section as you share together. Retain this worksheet for use in your later planning and implementation.

The vision of stewards in community in your own experience and in your parish	1= a new concept 2 = very rarely have considered 3= have experienced occasionally 4= is a guiding principle	Why you rated as you did Note specific examples as much as possible
Grateful: All we are and have are God's		
Grateful disciples: Jesus as the supreme teacher		
Grateful disciples pray		
Stewardship is profoundly Eucharistic		
The Three T's and more		
What does this "look like" in real life? The steward's personal response		
The parish is transformed into a community of disciples who live as stewards		



Following your Live the Vision discussion, summarize your conversation below. A planning process, including the identification of immediate next steps, is provided at the end of this guide. For now, if potential action items or strategies were identified in your discussions, record them here for later reference.

Upon what do you have to build? What opportunities for development or growth emerged in your discussions?