



Diocese of Grand Rapids
Office of Stewardship and Development

Stewardship News

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LENT IS HERE

Tracy Earl Welliver

Can you believe Lent is here already? It seems like not that long ago I was decorating a Christmas tree! Time waits for no one and that is why it is important to make a mindful commitment now to not let this Lenten season pass you by.

Lent is a great time to focus on growing as an everyday steward. The temptations are always there to procrastinate or to give in to spiritual laziness, but the Church's observation of Lent offers us so many tools to help us get on track. Increased devotions such as Stations of the Cross, various parish missions, or Lenten focused literature are all gifts that your parish may be offering to assist you in this season.

With the Passion being the focus of Lent, it is easy to contemplate the value of true generosity. How could someone give more than Jesus? He gave until His life was spent on a cross. When contemplating how we can increase our generosity in all aspects of our life, we only need to look to the Cross.

Of course, this also brings home to us that more may be asked of us than we bargained. The temptation is to not give too much, out of fear that might face persecution or worse.

But we take solace in the fact that we are disciples of One who had the same temptations. He overcame those temptations. He rejected the easy way out. His love and generosity could not be contained.

Jesus gave it all so that you and I have the chance to do the same. This Lent, look to the greatest example of stewardship that ever lived. Jesus will show us the way to a observe a Lent that will soon bring forth great Easter fruit.

Lent Is Here

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Stewardship and the Season of Lent – Changing Ourselves

A Christian steward is by nature a reformer. Lent reminds us that trying to change the world will not work if we don't first of all change ourselves.

Why We Need to Steward the Everyday Things

It's easy to take the little things in life for granted. We can get caught up in the idea that stewardship is just about the big things. But there is so much more to living out true stewardship than grand and extravagant actions.

Be a Good Steward of the Lenten Season

The goal of Lenten practices is to prepare ourselves to enter into the paschal mystery of Holy Week with a more humble spirit and determination to follow Jesus Christ. Being good stewards of Lenten practices is essential to having a fruitful Lenten experience.

Living for Christ – A Stewards Guide to Lenten Commitments

The Lenten commitments we make are frequently a lot like New Year's resolutions – they sound good, but we don't get far into the new year before they've been broken and then abandoned.

Stewardship Starts With God

Ever struggle with the issue ownership? In I Chronicles Chapter 29, king David embraced the principles of stewardship. David recognized all he had, including his position, successes, finances, lands and material possessions – all had come from the hand of God.

Searching For God?

For Christian stewards, the search for God in our lives can never be a half-hearted, tepid response. It must be all or nothing.

Stewardship and the Season of Lent: Changing Ourselves

Source: ICSC e-newsletter

Saint Ignatius of Loyola offered us these words of wisdom, which seem particularly relevant in the season of Lent: “He who goes about to reform the world must begin with himself, or he loses his labor.”

A Christian steward is by nature a reformer. We attempt to live our lives in a way that makes the world a better place. We vote. We contribute to charities that we believe in. We build up our Catholic parishes so that they might shine the light of truth into our weary world. We work to alleviate poverty and injustice. We await the New Jerusalem. Many of us work in schools, parishes, and diocesan offices where we bring a passion for reforming our world. Christian stewards who work in other environments endeavor to bring Christian values into the marketplace.

Lent doesn't ask us to stop any of these efforts. But, as we hear “the voice of one who cries in the desert” proclaiming the beginning of Lent, we know that the Church in her wisdom has given us a beautiful season to look inward, to seek quiet time in our own desert. Saint Ignatius, Saint John the Baptist, and the season of Lent remind us that trying to change the world will not work if we don't first of all change ourselves.

Lent points the way to what really matters: Christ. We are asked to experience Him who is the reason for our endeavors, our passion, our work in this world.

Saint John the Baptist provides a challenge: “Anyone who has two tunics must share with the one who has none, and anyone with something to eat must do the same” (Luke 3:11). The Church provides some traditional guidelines: prayer, fasting, almsgiving. How we integrate these three guidelines into Lent's forty days is a personal decision, but one which should take us on a journey into our own hearts, where we ask ourselves why we labor, what our work and our life really mean, to Whom we and our life's work really belong.



Why We Need to Steward the Everyday Things

Stewardship Team - Dave Ramsey

Each morning you wake up, God gives you a day full of **opportunities to praise Him**. Whether it's the food in your pantry, your access to running water, or your dog greeting you at the front door when you get home from work, you have so many chances to notice the small—but extraordinary—gifts from your heavenly Father.

It's easy to take the **little things** for granted, isn't it? Sometimes we get caught up in this idea that **stewardship** is just about the big things—like our budgets, marriages or careers. We think the best way we can serve God is to do something big. But there is so much more to living out **true stewardship** than all of our grand gestures and big decisions. Stewardship means **managing God's blessings God's ways for God's glory**. That means *all of His blessings*, not just the ones that feel extravagant and life-changing.

Our lives are made up of millions of these little gifts. **And it's the collection of all these small moments that adds up to an abundant life.** What good would it be if we only celebrated God during the major milestones, with no regard for the sweet, quiet moments in between? It's in that stillness that we have room to really see how much God loves us. He doesn't just shower us with big gifts. He regularly gives us chances to hear, see, and experience His grace, His love, and His power in ordinary, everyday moments.

Give this a try. Breathe in. Now think of the person, the thing, or the moment that makes you happiest during the day. Maybe it's someone you love. Or maybe it's the feeling you get when you see a vibrant sunset on your drive home from work. Whatever it is, imagine it as a blessing from God. Picture it as something He has personally handed you as a gift to make you happy and joyful—and to remind you of Him.

Now think about an ordinary moment in your daily routine. Maybe it's something that feels mundane or monotonous. Something average by all accounts. Now do the same thing you did a moment ago. Imagine that as a gift from God. What if that is something He gave you to handle for His glory? What if those five extra minutes in the morning are a chance to get to know your neighbors, spend some quality time with your daughter, or to pray for a friend in need? **God might want you to use those small moments to set something huge in motion.**

With all of that in mind, imagine what the world would look like if we got serious about stewarding as many of these small moments as we could. That's what is really behind stewardship. We get the chance to see every little moment, interaction and opportunity as a **reminder of who made us and loves us more** than we could possibly put into words.

So don't get too hung up on the idea that stewardship only involves big and extravagant actions. **Start small with your daily routine.** What moments and circumstances in your life can you view through the **lens of stewardship**, no matter how mundane or average they may seem? Every moment counts. Every person counts. Every single thing in your life—no matter how big or small—is an **opportunity to remember we are blessed, loved, and called to live for Him and His glory.**

Be a Good Steward of the Lenten Season

International Catholic Stewardship Council

The Lenten season prepares us for the celebration of Easter. It is a time for Christians to embrace prayer, fasting, and almsgiving in a more concerted way. For some it is a time of healing, an opportunity to repair their spiritual brokenness. For others it is simply a good time to cultivate their spiritual lives in a more disciplined manner.

The goal of Lenten practices: to prepare ourselves to enter into the paschal mystery of Holy Week with a more humble spirit and determination to follow Jesus Christ. This ancient triad of prayer, fasting and almsgiving offers wonderful spiritual benefits. Being a good steward of these gifts by planning ahead and following through is essential to having a fruitful Lenten experience.

PRAYER: What greater gift could we give ourselves during Lent than the gift of prayer? The fruits of developing a disciplined time of prayer are bountiful. Make plans for a prayer time each day. Do not wait until you “find time” but make a time of prayer your priority. This will involve sacrifice on your part – perhaps giving up some television viewing time, using part of your lunch hour, or getting up in the morning earlier than usual. Along the way, spend some time in extra prayer with the community: a weekday Mass, Stations of the Cross. Whatever you decide, resolve to spend more time with the Lord.

FASTING: Christian stewards understand that all they receive, including the bountiful food and drink that is often taken for granted, ultimately comes from the Lord. By denying ourselves food for a time, we are reminded in physical and emotional ways of the Lord’s generosity. As we fast, thoughtlessness is replaced by gratitude and mindfulness of the needs of others. The ancient practice of fasting also conditions us for greater spiritual practices. Incorporate some aspect of fasting from food or drink into your Lenten practice, something in addition to the sacrifices we make on Ash Wednesday and the Fridays of Lent.

ALMSGIVING: This spiritual discipline heightens our sense of generosity. Just as an increase in prayer and fasting leads us to be more grateful for the gifts we’ve received, and promotes a greater awareness of others, almsgiving helps us to reach out to others in gratitude. Just as we don’t “squeeze in” time to pray during Lent, we also don’t scrutinize our checkbook when being generous with others. Again, make a plan and let a meaningful sense of sacrifice be your guide.



Living for Christ

A Steward's Guide to Lenten Commitments

Source: Fr. Peter Richards, St. Michael Catholic Church - St. Michael, MN

Making a Lenten commitment is simple. What's hard is keeping it! The Lenten commitments we make are frequently a lot like New Year's resolutions - they sound good, but we don't get far into the new year before they've been broken and then abandoned.

If you are like me, you approached Ash Wednesday with the intention of doing better than you did last year. But as Lent drags on, it seems as though we'll never get to Easter. Our enthusiasm wanes, and it seems harder and harder to keep our commitment. And then we begin to wonder "What's the point?"

Often, we realize we've already broken our commitment in some way - perhaps we decided we'd pray a decade of the Rosary every evening, but we were too tired one night or simply forgot. Maybe we slipped up and didn't abstain from meat. Maybe our goal was to attend daily Mass but we allowed other daily schedules to take a priority. So we conclude that we just can't keep a good Lent and give up trying to make it a special season in any way.

If you're tempted to give up, **don't do it?** Just pick up where you left off, ask God for forgiveness, and begin again. Our Lenten commitments should challenge us, and we can grow spiritually. We can even benefit from our failures if they help us better realize how much we need God's grace.

After all, nothing worthwhile is accomplished without discipline and structure. Whether it's a football player in training or a musician practicing an instrument, hard work, discipline and even frustration will be part of the process. Only those who keep at it will master the skills those activities demand.

The spiritual life follows the same principles. Spiritual growth requires hard work and discipline and practice. Making our wills conform to God's will is the result of repeated efforts over a period of years.

It is true that sometimes we need to reevaluate our Lenten commitments. If we are aware we're consistently failing in some point, we may need to modify it. But normally the value of our Lenten commitments comes from our steady, day-to-day observance of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving all through the season.

So when we fail, we should remember the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). He had failed miserably. Suppose he had concluded, "I've blown it. I rejected my father and my home. There's no way I can go back." He'd have given up in despair. But, coming to his senses, he decides to return home in penitence, to be a servant. But when he arrives home, he's welcomed with joy and restored to his position.

This parable sets forth the pattern we should follow when we fail in our Lenten commitments. Begin our observance again and keep on trudging the whole length through Lent until we come to the joys of Easter. God our Father will welcome us. Then we will indeed be ready to celebrate.



Stewardship Starts With God

Church of the Assumption ; Bellingham Washington

Take time to quiet your thoughts and concerns. Break open the Holy Scriptures and read 1 Chronicles Chapter 29: 1-18 - Offerings for the Temple. Online Catholic Bible link:

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible/index.cfm>.

David was at last seeing the fulfillment of a lifelong dream - to see the building of the Temple finally getting started. While David's son Solomon was assigned the task of building the temple, David's joy was not diminished for he had the thrill of raising the money before he died. He supported it well from the governmental treasures, and then gave out of his own pocket. When he organized the rest of the country to give, they did so very generously.

David's Prayer of Thanksgiving (1 Chronicles 29:10-18) came from the overflowing heart of one who had just given his fortunes to see the dream of a lifetime fulfilled. Truly, this was King David's finest hour. David clearly embraced the principles of stewardship: the greatness and worthiness of God, God's ownership of all things, God's supply from His eternal resources and our looking after them as "tenant farmers," and how God tests the integrity of the heart.

David enjoyed his giving because these principles became his own. It is when we refuse to accept them, and sometimes even challenge them, that giving becomes an irritation to us. To talk of giving from our own supply will only raise our defenses and lower our sights. But those who embrace these principles for themselves will surely enjoy their giving, for it comes from a pure heart of love. Good news! God loves a cheerful giver!

God Is Head Over All

So whatever there is of beauty in this world belongs first to God, because He created it. He has allowed us to enjoy it, but it still belongs to Him. The same is true with our portion of this world's material goods. God still retains ownership, but he has entrusted them into our care for our enjoyment and use. And He frequently calls on us to distribute them according to His purposes and plans, He does this regularly, for example, in bringing our tithes and offering to Him. And periodically, there are special projects and concerns He wants us to support. Since He still owns these material goods, He can recall them or give them to someone else at any time He chooses, even without our permission. We simply have them on a temporary loan basis, perhaps best expressed as a "tenant farmer."

David clearly recognized that all he had, including his position, his successes, finances, lands, and material possessions - all had come from the hand of God. Sure, he had worked for it. Yes, he had fought the giant

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Goliath, and many other battles during his forty years as king. Indeed, he was successful, having solidified the Israelite control over the lands they possessed, and extended their boundaries to its greatest extent in Israel's history. He could have said: "I got all of this by myself, by my own work, battles, and struggles. I risked my life for this, and now it's mine, all mine!"

While it may be common for that attitude to prevail with some Christians, David could never have said it. Not as long as he maintained the concept that God owns everything – everything. And from His eternal resources, God had supplied everything that David had and was. And David knew it. David realized that he had not received a thing in this life that God had not provided. David knew that he did not earn anything totally on his own – even his skills, talents, and abilities came from God.

Once again, take time to quiet your thoughts and concerns. Read again 1 Chronicles Chapter 29: 1-18 – Offerings for the Temple, and then ask God to search your heart. Settle the issue of God's ownership in your own heart, along with your willingness to be the steward God asks and expects of you. Especially in your giving.



Searching for God?

International Catholic Stewardship Council

A priest told this story once to illustrate how important it is to identify what you truly value and then pursue it.

He was a teenager, he said, and he and his cousin were playing basketball in his cousin's driveway. Suddenly, the cousin realized he had lost a contact lens. This was before the era of disposable contact lens. Back in those days, you bought one pair of hard contact lens and kept them until the next time you had an eye exam. They were costly, and people often found themselves on all fours searching for a missing contact.

So it was with the future priest and his cousin. They scoured the driveway and even looked in the surrounding grass. Alas, no contact lens was found, so they went inside to have a soda. In the house, they told the cousin's dad what had happened. He immediately went outside and started to search.

"It seemed that he was out there forever," said the priest. "He looked and looked and looked. And amazingly, he found that contact lens. Why did he find the missing lens and we didn't? Because my cousin and I were looking for a contact, but my uncle was looking for a hundred dollars."

To the priest, this humorous memory held a deeper truth: when we know the value of something, and desire it enough, we will be relentless in our search for it.

For Christian stewards, the search for God in our lives can never be a half-hearted, tepid response. It must be all or nothing. The search is a lifelong commitment. Thomas Merton offered a **basic principle of stewardship**: "A life is either all spiritual or not spiritual at all."

What is the stewardship question for me? Am I ready and willing to commit to the long search for God in my life?

