

### • Stewardship as Gratitude for God's Gifts:

St. Paul urges generosity to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 9:11, 12, and 15. He sees this as an expression of their obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and also as an act of thanksgiving to God for his "indefinable gifts". The kind of stewardship being urged here is not based on coercion by the leaders of the congregation, but is a response of gratitude to God for his prior goodness.

**If members of the Church have no sense of a personal experience of God at work in their lives for which they feel they need to give God thanks every day, then no Stewardship Programme is going to make a difference. (First Mark of Mission: "To proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God.")**

### • Stewardship as Discipline, Testing and Spiritual Growth:

In 2 Corinthians 8:8, 9, 13, Paul appeals to the generosity of the Christian community and suggests that the level of their response is indicative of their level of spiritual discipline and growth. It becomes a real test of the genuineness of their love for the Lord Jesus Christ. It is clear in this context that **stewardship, in terms of generosity, is inseparably linked with the confession of Jesus Christ as Lord of one's life and commitment to the spiritual discipline of simplicity of living. (The Second Mark of Mission: "To teach, baptize and nurture new believers.")**

### • Stewardship as Co-workers within God's Kingdom:

This idea permeates the creation stories in Genesis and takes on a peculiarly Christian flavour in the New Testament in the notion of God as the planner/steward who calls human beings to share in the proclamation of the mysteries of God as they have been revealed in Jesus Christ. Embodied in this position are the concerns for the environment, and the promotion of social justice and equality for the poor and marginalized, along with the proclamation of the gospel. This is certainly what the Kingdom of God is all about and we who seek to be included in building the Kingdom must become a part of this project of God. **(Several Marks of Mission)**

### Establishing a Stewardship Programme

Implementation of a stewardship programme within the life of a congregation involves:

- A planned programme of study of the biblical and theological understanding of stewardship
- A focused strategy to sensitize and encourage members to explore ways in which the programme will take shape in their congregation
- A commitment by each member to specific expressions of stewardship which would include their time, talent and money.

### Faithfulness – A Responsibility

It should be clear, then, that the practice of stewardship is not to be conceived as the way to increase members and raise the income of the Church. This may be a consequence, but not the primary purpose.

Stewardship has a lot to do with faithfulness, trustworthiness, and prudence in the exercise and discharge of responsibility to use all that God has entrusted to us. Our stewardship begins with God's invitation to become co-workers and participants in the proclamation of his mysteries. Faithfulness in undertaking this mission brings us into a special relationship with God and the world. From the one comes the mysteries and to the other, the mysteries must be proclaimed.



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# Stewardship & The Marks of Mission

Much of the discussion about Christian stewardship within the Church tends to boil down to stewardship of time, talent, and money. This is, however, just a small part of the bigger picture.

The word stewardship does not appear in the Bible. It is derived from an English word, "steward," which in the biblical context, comes from a group of words which have as their root meaning "house" and "to manage." The words imply responsibility and accountability.

### Stewardship and Creation

In the Old Testament, the earliest references to the notion of stewardship are found in the creation stories in Genesis 1 & 2. Here God creates human beings and places them in a relationship with the rest of the created order in which they are to be responsible before God for the proper utilization of creation and all that it produces. **(Fifth Mark of Mission: "To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and to sustain and renew the life of the earth.")**

Other Old Testament references to stewards relate to persons who manage someone's household. Such references are found in Genesis 43:19, 44:4, and 1 Kings 15:18. The passages in Genesis 43 and 44 refer to Joseph who is a steward in Potipher's household and, therefore, is responsible and accountable to the master in fulfilling his assigned duties and responsibilities.

## Stewardship in the New Testament

There are several passages, including parables of Jesus, which use the concept of stewardship in the sense of the management of possessions. In Luke 12:42, there is the parable of the Faithful Steward as told by Jesus – the one whom the master finds at work when he returns home. Here the word speaks of faithfulness, prudence, and trustworthiness.

## God: The Planner/Steward

In the Epistles of St. Paul, there are several passages which introduce us to a new understanding of stewardship, that is, stewardship not of material things, but of the mysteries of God.

- In 1 Corinthians 4:1-2, there is the notion of the ministry of the apostles as that of stewards of God's mysteries.
- In Ephesians 1:10, Paul speaks of God's plan with reference to the mysteries of his will, thereby implying that it is God who is the planner or steward. This is a reversal of how we have understood stewardship as St. Paul is suggesting that this is not an activity that begins with us.

## Christians as Agents of the Great Steward

**If God is the planner/steward, then any stewardship which we exercise must be derived from God.** Thus, in Ephesians 3: 9, Paul speaks of the grace that was given to him "to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for all ages in God who created all things." God, who is the planner/steward has, therefore, called Paul to share in this task of stewardship.

In this context then, the Church may be understood as the community called to be the means by which the plan of God is made known. Members of the Church, therefore, become co-workers with God, not just in terms of the care of creation, or in the stewardship of time, talent, and money, but in making his plan and purpose known to the created world. So, **stewardship begins with an understanding of ourselves as persons called to be a part of God's ministry and mission which include evangelism. (Marks of Mission 1 & 2: "To proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God;" "To teach, baptize and nurture new believers.")**

In 1 Peter 4:10, we have a reference to the Christians as stewards. They are being urged to be good stewards of the manifold grace of God. They are to serve one another, empowered by the gifts which they have received from God. It is clear here, that the stewards are operating on behalf of God, but that they do it in the power which he supplies. In other words, that they are co-workers, and participants in his plan/management.

The concept of stewardship is common in biblical thought. It implies that humankind is responsible before God for the use of the created world, the social health of people, and the full development of each person's abilities for the building up of community. So then, this understanding of stewardship challenges us to see that our task is to discern God's plan for the created world and humankind, and to commit ourselves as members of the Church to become a part of that transformation which seeks to bring all things and all persons into conformity with that plan.

**(Fifth Mark of Mission: "To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and to sustain and renew the life of the earth.")**

**Many congregations are prepared to focus on stewardship when the finances are proving insufficient to meet budgetary needs and the membership list is decreasing. As legitimate as these concerns are, stewardship is not a crisis response programme. Neither is it something to be confined to certain times and seasons within the life of the congregation.**

## Stewardship of Time, Talent and Money

There are certain events and texts in biblical literature which have informed the practice of stewardship within the life of the Church, and which demonstrate how individuals and communities are able to apply their time, talent and money in advancing the mission and ministry of the Church.

### • Stewardship as response to those in need:

– In Acts 11:27-30, when a famine arose in Judea, the disciples in Antioch determined that according to their ability each would send relief to the believers living in Judea.

– Likewise in 2 Corinthians 8:13-14 and 9:12, Paul challenges the Corinthian Christians to offer relief to others in need out of their present abundance.

– Christian stewardship requires a response to the needs of those facing deprivation and need of one kind or another. This is the basis on which congregations become involved in outreach ministries. **(Third Mark of Mission: "To respond to human need by loving service.")**

### • The virtue of generosity:

– The blessings which attend the righteous who are generous and conduct their affairs with justice are underscored in Psalm 112:5-9.

– The same exhortation to generosity is found in 2 Corinthians 8:2-3, 9. This generosity must not be exercised grudgingly or sparingly, but abundantly as indicated by Paul in 2 Corinthians 9:6, 7, 9. This expression of generosity is not dependent on wealth, but with the ability to be compassionate. **(Third and Fourth Marks of Mission: "To respond to human need by loving service;" "To challenge violence, injustice and oppression, and work for peace and reconciliation")**

### • Sharing with Community:

The image of the Church after the Day of Pentecost is one characterized by unity, the sharing of material possessions, and generosity in the distribution of goods on the basis of need. Thus, in Acts 2:44-47, the people are described as having "glad and generous hearts". Here, then, is a picture of a Church which is alive, joyful, and generous. **(Third Mark of Mission: "To respond to human need by loving service.")**