



INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

# CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP

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## A STEWARDSHIP PRAYER for December

Gracious Lord,  
Let your goodness reveal  
itself to us,  
that we, made in your image,  
may conform ourselves to it.

We cannot imagine your majesty,  
power and wonder  
on our own; nor is it fitting  
for us to try.  
But your kindness and mercy reach  
from the heavens,  
through the clouds, to the  
earth below  
to show us the fruits of your  
Incarnation.

You have come to us as a  
small child,  
but you have brought us the  
greatest of all gifts,  
the gift of your eternal love.

Caress us with your tiny hands,  
embrace us with your tiny arms,  
and soften our hearts with your  
tender voice  
so that we might respond as  
humble stewards  
of your active presence in the world.

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

Amen.

*Adapted from a prayer by  
Saint Bernard of Clairvaux*

## Stewardship and Christmas: Turning the World Upside Down



For women in the ancient world, motherhood was prized and desired above almost all else. Sacred scripture tells of many women who pleaded with God to let them conceive. From Sarah, the mother of Isaac, to Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, the Bible is replete with women who finally, in their old age, were granted the gift of motherhood for which they had begged God. How

marvelously significant it is, then, that in the town of Nazareth those many years ago, a young girl named Mary, unmarried and probably feeling altogether unready for motherhood, was visited by an angel who delivered God's plea: would she give God a child? Mary's response is a model *par excellence* for all those who aspire to be good stewards: "Behold, I am the Lord's servant. Let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38).

And so the real mystery and beauty of Christmas is delivered: God turns the world upside down. In the words of the *Magnificat*, Mary proclaims the hope of every good steward: "My soul magnifies the Lord" (Lk. 1:46). He has dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart, lifted up the lowly, filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. Here is a new understanding of the God who desires not our begging and our pleas, but our 'yes' to God's invitation to be active stewards in his plan of salvation. For the Christian steward, the consumerism, the gaudiness, the excesses of our cultural Christmas can be overcome by answering the call to live simpler lives, to use less, to feed the poor, to quiet ourselves in stillness rather than grow louder in frenzied activity.

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In her book *The Vigil: Keeping Watch in the Season of Christ's Coming*, Professor Wendy Wright from Creighton University writes: "The ancient desert dwellers of our early Christian communities tell us that the surest way into the heart of God is to be still. In being still we learn to be attentive to the vast and hidden stillness that permeates all things."

In a world which prizes and desires wealth above so many things, the Christian steward finds in the stillness the true hope which lies at the heart of Christmas. Christ has come, and he comes again and again, and finally in the end, Christ comes. Once again, God implores us to receive this child in the stillness of our hearts, and respond to his call to transform the world's values – to turn the world upside down.

# Keeping Christ in Christmas by Feeding the Littlest Ones



The wonderful joy we feel in December as we await the coming of the Christ child is not so joyful for the millions of children in the United States who will go hungry this Christmas.

In every community in the United States where a county election commission announced the results of last month's historic elections, children woke up hungry. They spent the day hungry. They went to bed hungry. In fact, more than 8 million children go to bed hungry every night.

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*"Do not wait for leaders; do it alone, person to person."*

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As many as 17 million children nationwide are affected by food insecurity, a phenomenon defined by experts as inconsistent access to enough nutritious food to live a healthy life.

The consequences and costs of child hunger are severe. Research shows that lack of nutrition can permanently alter a child's brain architecture, stunting intellectual capacity and a child's ability to learn and interact with others. With hunger comes more frequent sickness and higher healthcare costs not to mention the resulting societal costs later on.

Many children will not enjoy a bountiful meal on Christmas day, or any day, and for many, there may be no festivities, no tree, no gifts. Christian stewards understand the obvious paradox as they celebrate the Incarnation of Christ as an innocent child.

Finding comprehensive remedies to hunger in the United States and worldwide is complex, subject to debate, and transcends politics and ideologies. But what is not subject to debate in Catholic social teaching is that Catholics don't let children go hungry. Good stewards are motivated by the words of Blessed Mother Teresa: "Do not wait for leaders; do it alone, person to person."

Like the Good Samaritan, good stewards do not avert their eyes from the needs of the littlest ones who suffer in our own communities and neighborhoods. They know they are called to reach out. Blessed Mother Teresa also said: "If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one." One way to keep Christ in Christmas is to Be Christ to a hungry child.

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Saint Fabiola is the patron saint of difficult marriages, divorced persons, abused spouses and victims of unfaithful spouses. She was a Christian, born in Rome in the mid-4th century to a powerful and wealthy family. She was married off at a young age to an abusive and adulterous husband.

Saint Jerome, the most famous biblical scholar in the history of the Church, knew her personally, as he was her teacher and spiritual director. He wrote: "So terrible were the faults imputed to her former husband that not even a prostitute or a common slave could have put up with them." Fabiola was able to secure a divorce from her husband under Roman civil law, and then she remarried, violating the ordinances of the Church.

While she was still young, Fabiola's ex-husband died, followed shortly thereafter by her second husband. Upon the latter's death, she appeared before the gates of Saint John Lateran Basilica, dressed in penitential garb and sought forgiveness for marrying outside the Church. Her public plea for reconciliation was said to have made a great impression upon the Christian population of Rome, and the

pope received her formally again into full communion with the Church.

Fabiola devoted her immense wealth to the needs of the poor, the sick and the homeless of Rome. She became a physician and practiced medicine, treating patients with illnesses other physicians would avoid. She also supported the needs of the Church and parish communities throughout Italy.

In 395 Fabiola made a pilgrimage to Bethlehem, an experience which deepened her faith even more dramatically. She lived in a hospice for a time with a religious community, spent hours in prayer, performed menial tasks and cultivated a profound devotion to the simplicity and poverty of the Nativity.

When she returned to Rome, Fabiola sold all her belongings and co-founded what is known to be the first hospital in the Western world. Saint Jerome later wrote that this innovative institution became famous from Britain to Parthia (modern day Iran). And she continued to work tirelessly to treat patients that no one else would treat.

Fabiola died on December 27, 399, of natural causes, and her death was marked by an enormous procession befitting a state funeral. Roman citizens turned out by the thousands to express their gratitude for the life and ministry she had embraced in the city of Rome.

Her feast day is December 27th.

## Being Good Stewards of Our Personal Vocations

By Leisa Anslinger

To commit ourselves to live as disciples who steward our many gifts and blessings involves every facet of our lives. We will experience God's call differently in distinct moments of our lives. At times, we may recognize the call to give our time sacrificially; at other times, our treasure. In some moments, we may discern a call to active service among the poor, ill, or imprisoned; in other moments, our stewardship may be of prayer or the sharing of faith. In all of these times and circumstances, we follow Jesus Christ, and learn to embrace his way of self-giving love.

The young creature in the stall of Bethlehem was a human being with human brain and heart and soul. And it was God. Its life was to manifest the will of the Father; to proclaim the sacred tidings, to stir mankind with the power of God, to establish the Covenant, and shoulder the sin of the world, expiating it with love and leading mankind through the destruction of sacrifice and the victory of the Resurrection into the new existence of grace. In this accomplishment alone lay Jesus' self-perfection: fulfillment of mission and personal fulfillment were one (Romano Guardini, quoted in *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, p. 23).

In previous articles in this column, we have explored the call to discern and live out our vocation, the life vocation that each of us has, and the many calls we experience as followers of Jesus. Another way of saying this is to recognize that living out our vocational call is our mission. We fulfill our mission by being good stewards of our lives, gifts, and blessings. This ongoing discernment and fulfillment of our mission is one of the many things that makes stewardship leadership such a dynamic and sometimes challenging endeavor. Helping people recognize their mission to witness to and make Christ's love known through their stewardship is a sacred responsibility. As we celebrate Christmas this year, let us pray that we may fulfill this mission well and with grace. Merry Christmas!



# Advent: *Exercising Good Stewardship of Our Spiritual Lives*



When you say the word “Advent,” what immediately pops into mind? A feast of color, a traditional manger scene bathed in soft candlelight, glistening snowflakes falling on festive trees, a yearning for the One who is to come.

But sometimes, the season brings other images: crowded stores, treats that tempt us to too many calories, limitless to-do and to-buy lists. Yet in the back of our minds, we hear the call to conversion. Christ is calling us to be good stewards of all that we have and all that we are. How can we keep Advent in such a way that it is a time to focus on the fundamentals of stewardship; of spiritual growth and preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ? Here are a few suggestions, not meant to be another to-do list, but rather a way to remind ourselves daily of our call to prepare a way for the Lord in our lives.

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## Christ is calling us to be good stewards of all that we have and all that we are.

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- Begin the season with a list to prioritize what you really want spiritually, and in relation to friends and family, from Advent. Discard all the “extras” and the fantasy of the perfect Hallmark Christmas. List clear goals that bring growth and peace and quality time.
- Take time to read the daily readings each day of Advent. The beautiful words of Isaiah are guaranteed to inspire, and the commitment will guarantee you a bit of quiet and reflective time.
- Do you send Christmas cards? Even if they are the standard signature only or newsletter variety, try to personalize one a day, writing a nice note to an elderly relative or a friend you haven’t seen in a long time.
- Go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This will encourage you to reflect on your life, your gifts and where you fail to utilize them for the good of others. It’s a beautiful preparation for the coming of Jesus and the beginning of a new year.
- Pray for patience. As you drive over icy streets or navigate through a crowded store, take time to pray for those around you and for those who struggle with much less. Become aware of people around you and lift them in prayer rather than see them as obstacles to your goals.
- In the midst of a season of abundance, do not forget the poor in your community.





# A STEWARDSHIP MOMENT



## **First Sunday of Advent December 2/3, 2017**

The season of Advent is upon us, and in today's Gospel Jesus delivers a simple message through the pen of Saint Mark: "Be watchful! Be alert!" Christian stewards understand what Jesus meant when he said, "It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task." Good stewards realize that to each one a task is assigned by God. They have been set in a particular place and station in life, and have been gifted with unique relationships. How do we respond to the tasks or cultivate our relationships in a way that keeps us alert for the return of Christ?

## **Second Sunday of Advent Weekend of December 9/10, 2017**

Today's second reading is about Christ's coming again, "The day of the Lord," Peter calls it, but that day isn't December 25th. It's that other day, that second-coming-day about which Peter is concerned. He waits with great hope and anticipation for God to remake the earth into a place of perfect justice and peace. And he sets some demanding goals for the Christian community as it awaits that final day of accounting and reconciliation: strive to be at peace, without spot or blemish. Christian stewards work for peace. As we await the coming of Christmas, what can we do to promote peace in our homes, workplaces, community and world?

## **Third Sunday of Advent Weekend of December 16/17, 2017**

In today's second reading Paul concludes his letter to the Christian community at Thessalonica by providing it with actions to take as they wait for the return of the Lord. The first action is to rejoice always and give thanks in all circumstances. This sounds easy but it's not. The two words that make this task difficult are "always" and "all". This means giving thanks and rejoicing even when our circumstances are not always moments of joy and thanksgiving, or when we are confronted with a broken world. Prayerful stewards rejoice and give thanks in all circumstances because they are people of hope. A good reflection this week would be how the season of Advent can give you reason to hope.

## **Fourth Sunday of Advent Weekend of December 23/24, 2017**

In today's Gospel reading we hear proclaimed the story of the Annunciation, when the angel of the Lord announced to Mary that she would give birth to Christ through the intercession of the Holy Spirit. Mary allowed God's messenger to speak to her. She was attentive, not afraid to enter into a dialogue, then unconditionally obedient. Mary's acceptance of this mystery is a stewardship model for us. Good stewards remain open to the incursions of divine life into the normal course of their daily lives. How open are we to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our own lives? What might we do this last week of Advent to be more attentive to the Lord?

## **The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas Day) Monday, December 25, 2017**

In today's Christmas Mass at dawn we hear from the Gospel reading that God has entered quietly into the world. Not into the great city of Jerusalem, but into a small village about five miles south. Not into a noble family, but to an outcast couple keeping the newborn in a manger. Not announced by royal edicts, but to common shepherds, the first human heralds of Christ's birth. As Christian stewards we simply allow Christ to live in us no matter what our circumstances happen to be. We allow Christ to share his love with us and reflect that love out to others. We now are the heralds of Christ's Incarnation. What an unimaginable gift from a generous Lord. Good stewards rejoice in this gift and give glory to God.

## **Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph Weekend of December 30/31, 2017**

When Jesus is presented in the Temple, our Blessed Mother formally offers him to God's service without reservation. It is a service that Simeon prophetically foretells: a service to God that will turn the old laws and cultural norms upside down. Are we destined to hold on to old habits and customs tightly or like Jesus, are we willing to serve the Lord and proclaim the Gospel in new and creative ways?