

Antilles Episcopal Conference

Pastoral Letter

on

**STEWARDSHIP AND THE REVITALIZATION
OF PARISH LIFE IN THE CARIBBEAN**

I. INTRODUCTION

1. As we address this letter to you at the start of a new millennium, we wish to acknowledge the many advances made by the peoples of the Caribbean in recent times. We thank God for them. The advances made in the areas of education, social mobility, culture, economic well-being and political freedom are especially remarkable. They should certainly give us a sense of pride in who we are.

2. This progress also gives us some hope for the future as we face the challenges of globalization. But we must admit that it has come at a price. We can now be counted among those many countries in the world which were once easily described as “Christian”, but now make little or no attempt to measure themselves explicitly on Gospel values.^[1]

3. The liberal democracies in our region seem most determined to promote secular and consumeristic priorities. It is as though democracy itself is thought to depend on these priorities. Meanwhile ethical values and the truth about the human person, made in the image of God are acknowledged without conviction.

4. At this crossroads in our history we find ourselves surrounded by a culture of violence. Unfortunately, violence is seen by too many as the only solution to whatever problems they have. It is their solution to family and personal problems, to poverty and to economic and political differences. For many who live in fear, it is even the solution to the problem of violence itself!

5. We therefore welcome the Holy Father’s timely call for a “new evangelization” – new in ardour, methods, and expression^[2] We believe that the Church in the Caribbean needs to make a strong response to the grave moral dangers and socio-economic difficulties facing all our societies today. We believe this response must be practical and mainly at the level of the parish – to include the active participation of the laity, who must be empowered to both live and proclaim the Gospel to society^[3]

6. The “new evangelization” is therefore an urgent call for the revitalization of parish life. In this letter we urge you in the words of St. Paul: “do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, who has marked you with his seal” (Eph. 4:30) in Baptism/Confirmation. We need a new ardour for the task ahead; we need to discern new ways to build up parish life, and also new ways to express and proclaim the Gospel to our communities.

7. The Holy Father has rightly asserted that for this revitalization to be genuine it must be (1) an ongoing process and (2) it must be on the basis of the principle that the parish is above all a Eucharistic Community^[4]

II THE EUCHARIST – CALL TO STEWARDSHIP

(1) The night before he died, at the Eucharistic Meal that anticipated in an unbloody manner the sacrifice of our redemption on the morrow, Jesus laid aside His garments and washed the feet of His disciples, impressing upon them that although he was their Teacher and Lord, he had washed their feet:

“After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers ⁷ greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them” (Jn 13:12-17).

(2) The link between the Eucharist and our service of one another within the context of our redemption was made clear. Earlier, Jesus had said: “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). This intensely Eucharistic statement means that the Eucharist itself must be seen by all as a continual reminder that the physical Body of Christ was broken for us, and his blood poured out for us, in the service of our salvation. Then, says Jesus: “I have set you an example...”

(3) Addressing the newly baptized in Rome, St. Peter exhorts them: “Each one of you has received a special grace, so, like good stewards responsible for all those graces of God, put yourselves at the service of others.” ^[5] Thus are Christians called to a stewardship.

(4) Stewardship is a sharing, an acceptance of a common responsibility for the Church, recognizing the Body of Christ for what it is. The faithful, thankful for what they have themselves received, freely give of their time, of their talents and of their treasure so that they may truly own the Church. Not just the material structures that the Church building is, but the Church in itself, the material *and the living* stones.

(5) The greatest treasure of all that we are called to share is the Eucharist Itself.

(6) The Eucharist is both a Sacrifice - the redemptive sacrifice of Christ offered once and for all on the cross on Calvary, and made present on our altars at Mass, and a Sacrament - the Real Presence of Christ on our altars under the appearances of bread and wine.

As a Sacrifice

(7) “This cup is the New Covenant in My Blood” (1 Cor 11:25). The Holy Spirit, acting in and through the ordained priest, makes the unique Sacrifice of Christ present for us on the altar at every Mass we celebrate. This is the means given us by Christ by which we join with Him in expressing our commitment to the New Covenant, mediated by Him between the Father and ourselves, even as the Father renews His own commitment to us and to our salvation.

(8) In reaffirming this commitment to the Father, we share with everyone the acknowledgement that He is “our God”, the one God and Father of all, and we are “His People”. Then, as we share the Eucharist at the Table of the Lord, we are drawn together in unity by the same Holy Spirit, and become ever more perfectly the Body of Christ, having care one for another:

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. There [must] be no dissension within the body, but the members [must] have care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.” (cf 1 Cor 12 ff)

As a Sacrament

(9) The Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ, truly, really and substantially present in the Blessed Sacrament, reserved in our parishes, to be shared with all who believe. The parishioners are collectively to accept responsibility for it, for it is the greatest treasure in the Church. True, the direct responsibility for the Reserved Species falls on the Parish Priest himself. But he does not bear this responsibility alone. Out of their respect for this Treasure of treasures, Christ’s faithful are to see to it that the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar is reserved and worshipped under circumstances that are the best they can manage – the Church building itself, the tabernacle, the monstrance and the other sacred vessels, the altar linen and decoration, the deportment of priest, ministers of the Eucharist, altar servers and parishioners. We, the Bishops, are especially grateful to those who so lovingly lavish their attention on maintaining the beauty of the House of the Lord. Our faith says to us “Jesus Christ, truly God, truly Man, is here!”

(10) The response to the Eucharistic presence of Christ is an attitude of constant gratitude for so great a gift, a gratitude that prompts to adoration before Him, to love for one another as we celebrate a common eternal redemption in Him, a love that He has made the central sign of our discipleship. We are prompted to a willingness – a yearning – to do what we can to make that Presence loved and respected. For we are stewards in the first place of the Christ of the Eucharist.

(11) The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: “the other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesial ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented towards it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch” ^[6]

And so, the Eucharist must be seen by all parishioners to be central to parish life. Not simply by its frequent celebration, but more, by the faithful being led to see and experience the Eucharist as “the source and summit of Christian life”, characterized by the love we have for one another. This means that central to the process of Christian formation is growth in a discerning faith that enables us to recognize and reverence the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament ^[7], as well as in the Word proclaimed, in the fellowship of the faithful, in the priest-celebrant, and in the world around us, especially the poor, weak and vulnerable.

(12) In another light, we who gather round the Table of the Lord are the Family of God. We are not strangers, a mere collection of people, but “part of God’s household” ^[8] in which each person has his part to play. For any household to run smoothly, its members must learn to work together to deepen the bonds of love. This is also true for the Church. Members must work together and take a practical interest in the material and financial needs of the parish.

8. It is to Christ, then, that we must look for our model of Christian stewardship. It is in Christ that we find the strength to make the sacrifice to become faithful stewards. A steward must know the mind of the owner to be faithful. Stewardship begins and continues with a deepening relationship with Christ.

9. As Christian stewards, we seek to be disciples of Jesus Christ and to live out that discipleship in our daily lives and activities. Our mission is to serve and to experience a true conversion of heart. Thus, Jesus Himself becomes our model. We become co-responsible with Christ and with all the people of God for the spread of the Gospel, for the care of creation, and for the love of the poor.

III STEWARDSHIP AND THE EUCHARISTIC COMMUNITY

10. The Church in the parish should be seen to be the family of families. St. Paul, in order to emphasize this fundamental unity and interdependence of all the faithful, describes the Church as the “Body of Christ”: “When one (member) suffers, all of them suffer, and when one receives honour, all rejoice together”^[9]

11. In the Acts of the Apostles (2:42) the first Christian community is described like this: “They were faithful to the teaching of the apostles, the common life of sharing, the breaking of bread and the prayers.” While it is true that this verse describes the ideal facets of the first community’s life and not its liturgical programme, it is for that reason even more remarkable that this description of the early community is so easily a description of the Eucharistic liturgy: fidelity to the Word, koinonia, breaking of bread, prayers^[10]

12. This helps us to see how much the Eucharistic liturgy formed and shaped the identity and witness of the early Church. Being a Eucharistic Community is to find in the Eucharist both our identity as Catholic Christians, and the “shape” our witness to society should take. Central to this “shape” is the practice of Stewardship.

13. The parish as a Eucharistic Community is called to welcome the stranger without any discrimination (Jas. 2:1-9). It is also called to welcome and make room for the full range of the charisms, services and ministries of all parishioners and to organize them for the building up of the Body of Christ. In the Community, each individual is steward (or caretaker) of all his God-given gifts and talents, entrusted to him to be put “at the service of others” - both within the Household of God and in the wider community.

14. These charisms or graces of the Holy Spirit, which we receive in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, are celebrated and offered up to God by the faithful in the Eucharist to be transformed into ministries and services in the Church. In other words, in Baptism/Confirmation we are both called by God and given the special gifts by the Spirit to fulfil our calling as members of the New Covenant people of God. In the Eucharist our New Covenant relationship with God is celebrated, renewed and strengthened. God gives Himself totally to us and we reciprocate by giving ourselves totally to Him.

15. In his first letter to the Corinthians (12:4-7) St. Paul helps us to see what it means to be stewards of God’s gifts, and to be a Church filled with the Holy Spirit:

16. “There is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of services to be done but always the same Lord; working in all sorts of different ways in different

people, it is the same God who is working in all of them. The particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose.”

17. The Apostle then lists some of the many gifts given by the Holy Spirit to the Baptized and concludes that “all these are the work of one and the same Spirit” given for the building up of the Body of Christ. ^[11] This using of God’s gifts to build up the Body of Christ is what Stewardship is all about.

18. Again in his letter to the Ephesians (4:1-7a, 11-16, see also L.G. 32), St. Paul gives us the “Ephesian Model” of the Spirit-filled Church, the Baptised Community, and shows how in this model of the Church each member becomes “fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself”.

“Then we shall not be children any longer, or tossed one way or another and carried along by every wind of doctrine, at the mercy of all the tricks men play and their cleverness in practising deceit ... so the body grows until it has built itself up in love.”

19. It is through participation in the Church’s life and ministry, by each parishioner being a steward of his gifts (Talents) as well as of his very life (Time) and resources (Treasure), that the faithful are led to spiritual maturity and to a deeper loyalty to the Church.

20. Even though the word “stewardship” may not be familiar to many Catholics, we have all often expressed our appreciation for those “pillars of the Church” who give “yeoman’s service” and who are very prayerful and would “give their last penny” to a person in need and to any parish fund-raiser. This is a type of stewardship.

21. However, what is different and distinct about the stewardship in the New Testament and commended in this letter is this: First, each and every member, and at every age, is called to participate fully in the life and ministry of the Church in the parish and to see this participation as a ministry based in the Sacrament of Baptism. Second, while most of us have been brought up to respond generously to special parish requests and fund-raisers, we are now being asked to view our giving as an essential extension of our spiritual life.

22. In this giving the Biblical “tithe” (i.e. 10% of income) should be used as our guide.^[12] The important thing is that our giving should be regular (“Every Sunday, each of you must put aside what he can afford ...” I Cor. 16:2), systematic and proportionate to our income and should be decided on after prayer and serious thought. Such giving both expresses and reinforces our Eucharistic spirituality and our trust in God’s loving providence.^[13]

23. We are very aware of the economic difficulties we all face in the Caribbean at this time. The Church faces them as well! This only adds a certain urgency to our call for each parish to practise Stewardship. Stewardship is to affect how a parish both raises and expends income.

24. St. Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, responded to the fears some may have about giving in hard times:

“Do not forget. Thin sowing means thin reaping Each one should give what he decides in his own mind, not grudgingly or because he is made to,

for God loves a cheerful giver. And there is no limit to the blessings which God can send you – he will make sure that you will always have all you need for yourselves in every possible circumstance, and still have something to spare for all sorts of good works.” [14]

25. Stewardship then is not a new programme, an optional extra to be added to our present list of parish programmes. It is about transformation (conversion), about greater involvement of all the faithful in parish life and ministry. It is about discipleship and spiritual growth and maturity. It is about a deeper understanding and participation in the Eucharist.

26. The truth is that all human beings are called to be stewards, stewards of God’s gift of creation, the primary sacrament of His love. To thankfully take responsibility for the integrity of creation (Gen. Chap. 1, esp. verses 26-31) is an important part of what it means to be made in God’s image. We constantly need to be reminded, and to proclaim to the world: “The earth and its fullness belong to the Lord, the world and all that dwell in it” (Ps. 24:1). We are all in the world not as owners but as tenants and stewards.

27. The specifically Christian dimension of stewardship must include this responsibility for the integrity of creation, for our environment. We are reminded of this at the Offertory in the Eucharist when the priest offers up our gifts of bread and wine with these words:

“Blessed are You, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this bread to offer which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of life.” “Blessed are You, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands. It will become our spiritual drink [15].”

28. The Eucharist expresses the essential relationship that exists between Creation, Incarnation and Redemption. Further, it expresses our thankful response to and appropriation of God’s gifts of Creation, Incarnation and Redemption. This is at the heart of stewardship.

29. Stewardship is therefore profoundly Eucharistic. It finds its “source and summit” in the Eucharistic liturgy because the journey of Christian initiation, which calls us to be stewards, “comes to completion and reaches its summit in the sacrament of the Eucharist”. [16]

30. We must now look more closely at the Eucharist and see how it motivates, supports and celebrates our Baptismal call to be “faithful stewards”, [17] and provides the Eucharistic Community with further themes for a programme of education for stewardship.

IV STEWARDSHIP IN THE CELEBRATION OF THE EUCHARIST

The Call to Penitence

31. The “universal call to holiness”, based on Baptism is a call “to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity.” [18] To properly respond to this call we must focus our lives on Christ “the founder of our faith who will bring it to completion”

(Heb. 12:2). To focus our lives anywhere else is to “miss the mark”, to miss the very purpose and aim of life and this is the meaning of the word HAMARTIA, the word St. Paul uses for sin. ^[19]

32. The call to holiness is therefore a call to conversion, to focus and reorientate our lives on Christ by using the Time he has given us as well as the Talents (gifts) and Treasure (income) in God’s service and in the service of the common good. This is important because it means that we cannot genuinely seek to overcome our various sins – which are symptoms of the fundamental mis-orientation of our lives – without seeking the grace of conversion. Our Saviour reminds us in his Sermon on the Mount that our hearts and our treasure are never separated! ^[20]

33. Being a good steward, i.e. giving of our time, talent, treasure, will always depend on the right focusing of our lives, our hearts and minds, on Christ. It is never a matter simply of how much money we give, but rather what proportion of our income we give. The Lord reminds us of this in the story of the “Widow’s mite” (Mk. 12:41-44).

34. The Penitential Rite at the very start of the Eucharist is therefore a call to examine our basic commitment to and practice of stewardship. Of course, this Rite does not replace our need to go to the Sacrament of Penance in the case of mortal sin.

The call to be “servants of the Word”

35. The Holy Father reminds us that the “primacy of holiness and prayer is inconceivable without a renewed listening to the Word of God”.^[21] In his Lenten Message, 2003, on the theme “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Ac. 20:35), he speaks about the need for all Christians to make a “serious discernment about (their) lives, with particular attention to the Word of God which enlightens the daily journey of all who believe” (Para 1). It is in light of the Word that we must all discern both the special gifts God has given to each of us and the way in which he wants us to use them as “faithful stewards”.

36. St. Paul shows us that a Spirit-filled Church is one in which all the members are involved in a variety of ministries and services (Cor. 12). The Holy Spirit is truly and powerfully present when the faithful practise stewardship. To be “anointed by the Holy Spirit” is to have Good News for the poor and marginalized of our world.

37. The proclamation of the Word in the Eucharist is to enlighten, to challenge and to enable the faithful to become “servants of the Word” in order for them to better work within the parish community and in the wider society. The Word equips us to call people to repentance that **16** they too may believe the Gospel and accept the Kingdom of God (Mk. 1: 14, 15), which St. Paul describes as a Kingdom of “Justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17).

38. The Word proclaimed in the Eucharist should therefore lead the faithful (1) to affirm their common belief in the Creed, (2) to pray for the Church and the world and for the needs of the community, and (3) to offer themselves, their time, talents and treasure to Almighty God in union with the Sacrifice of Christ in the Eucharist.

The call to union with Christ

39. The Offertory is an important moment in the Eucharistic liturgy for it is here that, like the Blessed Virgin Mary, the faithful offer their all in response to His Word – “be it done

unto me according to your word” or as another version puts it: “I am the servant (steward) of the Lord, let it be done to me as you have said.”^[22]

40. The Offertory should be seen as the expression of our stewardship, of our thankful response to God’s many blessings, as “all these blessings made man glorious, giving him what he lacked: friendship with God.”^[23]

41. At the Offertory the whole congregation participates fully in offering bread, wine, treasure, talents – life itself. Unlike in Old Testament times when to sacrifice meant the destruction of the thing sacrificed, in the New Covenant relationship with God, all our sacrifices are taken by Him, blessed, broken and transformed through the power of the Holy Spirit: bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ; we who receive His Body become more and more His body and His real presence in the world; our lives, our gifts and talents are transformed into “instruments of His love”, into “services and ministries” for the common good^[24] and we experience union with Christ in the Communion.

42. St. Paul therefore urges: “give yourselves as a living and holy sacrifice pleasing to God: that is our spiritual worship”; and then goes on to say that such a sacrifice of ourselves means not to be “conformed to the world” but rather to “be transformed through the renewal of your mind”.^[25]

43. The Sunday Eucharist should be “special”, it should be a joyful celebration of all the gifts God has given to His people. It should also be a joyful celebration of the various ministries these gifts have become through the transforming love of our Eucharistic Lord. In this way the faithful are better able to more fully and consciously participate in the Eucharist.^[26]

V CALLED TO GO!

44. In the Eucharistic celebration the Eucharistic community experiences itself as the **GATHERED** Church, gathered round the Table of the Lord, for the Word, the breaking of bread, the Koinonia and the prayers. At the end of the Liturgy the Eucharistic community does not cease to exist, but is commissioned to become the **SCATTERED** Church, to “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord”, to relate the Eucharist to everyday life in the world, to live Eucharistically.

45. St. John Chrysostom put it well: “Remember that he who said ‘This is my body’ and made good his words, also said ‘you saw me hungry and gave me no food’, and, insofar as you did it not to one of these, you did it not to me ... We must learn to be discerning Christians and to honour Christ in the way in which he wants to be honoured.”^[27]

46. Pope John Paul II has often stressed that “secularity is the true and distinctive mark of the lay person and of lay spirituality” and that “the laity (should therefore) strive to evangelize the various sectors of family, social, professional, cultural and political life”^[28] in order to shape the world according to God’s will. It should be clear, then, that the wide range of lay ministries needed today should include such areas as justice, defence of the powerless, providing bread for the hungry and care for the sick,^[29] family life, youth, counseling, the media, culture, ...^[30] The Holy Father urges that for these essential ministries to be exercised, there is urgent need for catechesis in the Church’s

social teaching. ^[31] For our Talents to become ministries, proper preparation and training are essential, and parish priests must arrange for them to be provided.

VI COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY: PASTORS AND FAITHFUL WORKING TOGETHER

47. The revitalization of parishes called for in the new evangelization is a call for greater participation of the laity in the life and mission of the Church. This should not in any way be seen as a devaluation of the ordained ministry. “Together with the ordained ministry, other ministries (based in Baptism 1 Pe. 2:9-10), whether formally instituted or simply recognized, can flourish for the good of the whole community, sustaining it in all its many needs ...” ^[32]

48. However, as the Holy Father has pointed out in *Ecclesia in America*, “this kind of renewed parish needs as its leader a pastor who has a deep experience of the living Christ, a missionary spirit, a father’s heart, who is capable of fostering spiritual life, preaching the gospel and promoting cooperation. A renewed parish needs the collaboration of lay people and therefore a director of pastoral activity and a pastor who is able to work with others.” ^[33]

49. As all the Baptised are called to be stewards of all God’s gifts, of Time, Talent, Treasure, so too each parish, led by its Pastor, is called to practise the stewardship of all its human and spiritual resources. For everyone and every institution must give an account of its stewardship. Pastors must therefore “be careful to discern the charisms and strengths of the faithful ... listening to them and through dialogue encouraging their participation and co-responsibility”. ^[34]

VII CONCLUSION

50. We now call on all pastors and all the faithful to work for the revitalization of parish life by being fully committed to our call to be “good stewards responsible for all God’s gifts”(1 Pe. 4:10). The Church and the people of the Caribbean urgently need this new evangelization to take place.

51. It is not a matter of inventing a “new programme” but of experiencing the parish as a genuine Eucharistic community, a community of stewards, a community in which a “detailed pastoral plan can be identified which will enable the proclamation of Christ to reach people, mould communities, and have a deep and incisive influence in bringing Gospel values to bear on society and culture.” ^[35]

52. Let us go forward in hope! For the Risen, Eucharistic Lord goes with us. His Word burns in our hearts and we truly know him in the “breaking of bread” (Lk. 24).

Duc in altum ^[36]

Signed:

Archbishop Lawrence Burke, *Nassau*

Archbishop Edgerton Clarke, *Kingston*

Archbishop Kelvin Felix, *Castries*

Archbishop Maurice Marie-Sainte, *St. Pierre & Fort-de-France*

Archbishop Edward Gilbert, *Port of Spain*

Bishop Paul Boyle, *Mandeville*
Bishop Ernest Cabo, *Basseterre & Pointe-à-Pittrre*
Bishop Vincent Darius, *St. George's*
Bishop Charles Dufour, *Montego Bay*
Bishop Malcolm Galt, *Bridgetown*
Bishop Robert Kurtz, *Hamilton*
Bishop Gabriel Malzaire, *Roseau*
Bishop Osmond P. Martin, *Belize City*
Bishop Donald Reece, *St. John's-Basseterre*
Bishop Robert Rivas, *Kingstown*
Bishop Louis Sankale, *Cayenne*
Bishop Luis Secco, *Willemstad*
Bishop Benedict Singh, *Georgetown*
Rev. Fr. Wilhelmus de Bekker, *Administrator, Paramaribo*

Date: November 30th, 2003
1st Sunday of Advent.

END NOTES

Abbreviations

CCC Catechism of the Catholic Church
EA Ecclesia in America
LG Lumen Gentium
MF Mysterium Fidei
NMI Novo Millennio Ineunte
PO Presbyterorum Ordinis

Footnotes

- [1] NMI 40
- [2] EA 6
- [3] EA 44
- [4] EA 41
- [5] 1 Pet 4:10; See also EA 39
- [6] CCC 1324; LG 11; PO 5
- [7] 1 Cor 11:29; “corporally present”. MF 764
- [8] Eph 2:19
- [9] 1 Cor 12:26
- [10] Acts 2:42; St Justin – CCC 1345, 1346
- [11] 1 Cor. 12:8-30; also see 1 Cor. 12:4-11; Ro. 12:4-8; Eph. 4:11,12
- [12] Sirach 35:8-9; Mal. 3:8, 10; Lk. 11:42
- [13] Mt. 6:31-33
- [14] 2 Cor. 9:6-8 JB
- [15] Roman Missal - See also Sunday Preface V in Ordinary Time: “.... you made man the steward of creation”
- [16] EA 34

- [17] Lk. 12:48b. 1 Cor. 4:1-2 – The Eucharist itself also gives us the “programmatically first steps” to start the Stewardship process.
- [18] LG 40; 1 Pe. 2:9-10
- [19] Ro. 13:23
- [20] Mt. 6:21; Lk. 12:24
- [21] NMI 39 – Lectio Divina
- [22] Lk. 1:38; see also Lk. 16:2-12
- [23] St. Irenaeus, Against the Heresies, Bk. 4, 16, 2-5
- [24] CCC 1108, 1109; see also Mt. 10:39; Jn. 15:5
- [25] Ro. 12:1-2; see also Lk. 9:24,25
- [26] LK 10; see NMI 35
- [27] Hom. 50, 3-4; Jas. 2:14-17; see EA 35
- [28] EA 44
- [29] Lenten Message 2003, #3
- [30] EA 46,47; NMI 47
- [31] EA 54, 55
- [32] NMI 46; The Priest in the Third Millennium 16, passim
- [33] EA 41
- [34] EA 39
- [35] NMI 29
- [36] Lk 5:4 “Put out into the deep.”

**RECOMMENDATIONS ON
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE “STEWARDSHIP
AND THE REVITALIZATION OF PARISH LIFE” PROCESS**

A. THE PROCESS

1. The Parish Priest shares with and explains the Pastoral letter to the congregation and starts discussions in the parish – Parish Council, groups etc.
2. Parish Priest starts on a series of homilies (see the attached “Outline of Themes for a Programme of Education”) while inviting the first members of the Central Committee. This Committee is to be made up of three sub-committees (see below).
3. Parish Priest and Central Committee start having meetings to discuss and plan follow-up work on (1) each week’s theme (the Homily); (2) the roles of the Central Committee (as a co-ordinating body) and of each sub-committee; (3) getting the message across to the parish
4. Sub-Committees start to meet and to relate to the congregation. Pledge Cards could be introduced after approximately six months of teaching, to be returned for a Mass of Commitment at an advertised date. (Some parishes may need more time.) Remember that as an ongoing process Stewardship Pledge Cards are not final – education is ongoing and people make changes etc.
5. As Ministries/Services come on stream a thorough Parish Visitation should be planned.

6. Central Committee should plan for an annual Mass of Renewal of Commitment (this affords an opportunity for continued education and for parishioners to change their pledges etc.)

B. ORGANIZATION

1. Make use of committees already in existence if this is at all possible.
2. The Parish Priest must see himself as Facilitator, Enabler, Co-ordinator. He may need to appoint a Parish Director/Administrator.
3. The Parish Priest must take leadership, as Presider of the Eucharist and of the Eucharistic Community, and introduce the “revitalization” programme to the Parish Council and to the entire parish (at the Eucharist or parish meeting). He must also take responsibility for the series of homilies in the “Programme of Education” document.

CENTRAL COMMITTEE

- To be made up of three sub-committees: Education, Finance, Talent/Ministry.
- To oversee the overall co-ordination of the process.
- To practise Stewardship of the parish’s human, physical and financial resources.

(I) Education Sub-Committee

1. Members to properly understand Stewardship as Eucharistic.
2. Promote the understanding of parish as Eucharistic Community.
3. Promote Stewardship by tracts, fliers, banners, tapes, discussion groups, in co-operation with the other sub-committees.
4. Take responsibility for a regular parish leaflet/magazine and keep parish informed of upcoming events.
5. Inform parishioners of the importance of ministry/service in the parish. The role of the laity.
6. Set up training/educational programmes for specific ministries, in collaboration with the “Talent/Ministry” sub-committee.
7. Prepare and introduce Pledge Card and plan an annual Renewal/Commitment Sunday.

(II) Finance Sub-Committee

1. Educate and encourage parishioners in the Stewardship of Treasure: regular, systematic, proportionate.
2. Keep record of Stewardship giving (envelopes) and give weekly/monthly accounts to congregation.
3. Note giving trends.
4. Share parish (“Household”) financial aims, projects, problems, successes, expenses etc. with the congregation and give regular up-dates.
5. Give regular accounts of the parish’s stewardship.

(III) Talent/Ministry Committee

1. Members properly understand the role of the laity. The importance of lay ministry/service in THIS parish. (Apostolicam Actuositatem; Christifideles Laici; L.G. 30-38.)
2. Develop an awareness of charisms/gifts/talents of parishioners and plan for their organization and training in collaboration with Education Sub-committee.

3. Through literature, talks, a “Ministries’ Fair” etc., and in collaboration with the Education Sub-Committee, to make known to parishioners the various ministries/services needed in the parish.
4. Encourage parishioners to offer themselves for service, and keep a record of all persons involved in which ministries, and encourage faithful participation.
5. Ministries/Services
 - (a) Administration (1 Cor. 12:28 “ ... administration in the Church”)
 - office skills (computer, etc.); registers, record-keeping and research, production of leaflets, tracts, physical resource management, etc.
 - (b) Liturgical
 - Readers, Animators, Altar Servers, Music, Florist, Altar Guild, Church Beautification (Gardeners), Ushers, etc.
 - (c) Evangelization/Social
 - Parish Visitors, Hospital/Sick Visitors, Hospitality, Poor and handicapped, outreach, etc.
6. Special attention should be given to the Hospitality and Parish Visitors groups immediately after their formation. Hospitality – to make the congregation a “welcoming community”. Parish Visitors to arrange a Parish Visitation to target the entire parish community. Parish visitation should then become a regular undertaking (specially to the sick and lapsed) with each Visitor being “responsible” for maintaining contact with no more than 10 homes.
7. The Talent/Ministry Sub-Committee to organize in groups the persons involved in specific ministries – to have oversight, plan training sessions, and ensure overall co-operation.

Note: Collaborative Ministry

1. The need to “work together”.
2. Role of Parish Priest: Facilitator, Enabler, Co-ordinator (i.e. encouraging participation and making it possible; arranging for the training and education of parishioners; taking responsibility for the various services/ministries to work together to achieve a common goal/vision).
3. Collaboration in the formation of a “detailed pastoral plan”.

C. OUTLINE AND THEMES FOR A PROGRAMME OF EDUCATION

Notes:

- (1) This programme follows the structure of the Pastoral Letter, which is used as a basic Study Paper.
- (2) In each section of the programme many themes are given. Only use what are appropriate for a specific parish programme to introduce Stewardship. But remember Stewardship must be an ongoing process.
- (3) The Introductory Teaching programme should be for about six months (using homilies, talks, discussion groups, tracts, banners, etc. etc. to promote the themes).
- (4) The appropriate organizational structure should develop simultaneously with the educational programme.
- (5) Remember: Stewardship is Eucharistic – living out the Eucharist. Not an imposed programme or gimmick to make money. It is to revitalize the parish for more effective ministry and evangelization.

- (6) Stewardship is to be practiced by parishioners AND the parish itself, as an institution.

THEMES

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The New Evangelization. Our need to respond to problems facing our people today.
2. The New Evangelization and our need for change. For renewal (new ardour); for greater participation (new methods); for greater impact on wider society (new expression).
3. Renewing our Baptismal/Confirmation Call to be disciples/stewards.
4. "Parish Alive" - means more than enthusiasm.....

II THE EUCHARIST –CALL TO STEWARDSHIP

1. Christ, or model of service to each other.
2. Stewardship as sharing.
3. We share specially the Eucharist itself. Sacrifice and Sacrament.
4. Becoming a welcoming parish community.
5. Parish as "Household". Each member pulling his/her weight, and being concerned about each other.
6. The Eucharist shapes our identity and our witness as Catholics.

III STEWARDSHIP AND THE EUCHARISTIC COMMUNITY

1. Being a Welcoming Community. The stranger, lapsed, each other. Appreciating each other's "talents" and contribution.
2. God has given each person gifts. Life/Time; Talents – what are yours? - Money: jobs etc. We are stewards of them all.
3. Gifts are for the "building up the Body of Christ". Stewardship.
4. Stewardship: our thankful response to God's total giving of Himself.
5. The "Ephesian Model" - The need for spiritual maturity.
6. "The earth and its fullness is the Lord's".
7. Regular, Systematic, Proportionate giving - what this means, and its importance to (a) personal spiritual growth, (b) parish mission and outreach.
8. Stewardship of Creation: protecting the environment – what this could mean for the parish.
9. Stewardship is profoundly Eucharistic.

IV STEWARDSHIP AND THE EUCHARIST

The call to Penitence

"The wages of sin (of 'missing the mark') is death." ... The "culture of death". Our need to FOCUS personal/community life on Christ.

Christ's call to conversion. The practical meaning and importance of conversion.

How exactly do we focus on Christ? Practically by (i) making time for prayer, bible study, Mass, etc. (ii) offering our talents and gifts in order to do some service/ministry in the parish and to better witness in the work-place. (iii) seriously and prayerfully reconsidering our monetary (treasure) support for the Church and its work.

The importance of regular self-examination, in order to maintain our focus on Christ.

Call to be servants of the Word

Servants, not manipulators of the Word. The importance of obedience to the Word.

Prayer is speaking to God AND listening to His Word.

“Praying the Scriptures” - how to read/listen to the Word.

Studying the Scriptures – studying our shared faith.

A “Word and Sacrament” Church/parish.

The “Ephesian model”.

The Scriptures and what it means to be a “Spirit-filled” Church.

The Spirit in our midst: empowering us for service, ministry and witness.

Call to union with Christ

The meaning and importance of the offertory.

Sacrifice. Christ’s sacrifice (establishing a New Covenant). Our sacrificial response of Time, Talent, Treasure.

Sacrifice and communion (intimacy) with Christ. Grace.

Receiving the Body of Christ strengthened to be more and more the body of Christ in the world.

Eucharist: The joyful celebration of gifts/ministries.

Called to Go

Being the Gathered Church – the gathered Eucharistic Community for Acts 2:42; Eph. 4:30-5:3.

Being the Scattered Church – living Eucharistically in the world. What this means?

Evangelizing (a) parish community
family, school, work-place
cultural and political life
the media....

Evangelization - “The Church is the only institution that exists for non-members”.

New ways to proclaim the Kingdom of God. (Inculturation; media; etc.)

(5) On being a “sign of contradiction”.