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## Stewardship

When we become Christians, we move from being consumers of resources to Stewards of God's Gifts.

We live in a consumerism-based culture. Consumerism is the theory that a progressively greater consumption of goods is economically beneficial to society. Our consumerist culture has its roots in the Industrial Revolution.

For the first time in history, products were available in outstanding quantities, at outstandingly low prices, and thus available to virtually everyone. So began the era of mass consumption.

The Industrial Revolution also birthed the concept of planned obsolescence: the idea that a product has a limited life span and when it wears out, you throw it away and replace it with something new. Planned obsolescence is the mechanism which ensures a steady stream of customers for products. An example is women's hosiery. The first mass-produced women's stockings did not easily get runs in them. That limited the market for future purchases. When women's hosiery was knitted from nylon fibers, getting a run in one's stockings was inevitable. That guaranteed more rapid repeat purchases.

Consumerism spawned by planned obsolescence and mass consumption has a way of converting our "wants" into perceived "needs." We are convinced that the only way to be acceptable is to drive the right car, own the bigger house, and dress in the right designer clothes. The insidious message is that if you don't conform to this standard of behavior, you are somehow unworthy.

Our consumerist society has given us the benefit of seemingly cheaper goods. However, we are beginning to see the negative impact of mass consumption on the environment and on workers whose labor has been obtained at less than livable wages around the globe. Our culture's consumerist habits have tempted many people to live beyond their means by purchasing goods on credit to the point of financial ruin.

### *A Counter-Cultural Faith*

The life and ministry of Jesus Christ was profoundly counter-cultural. What brought Jesus to the cross was his constant criticism of the powers and social systems of his culture that marginalized people and gave them the message that they were beyond God's saving power. Lepers, disabled, tax collectors and prostitutes were all pushed to the margins of society and told they were unworthy. Jesus reached out to them. He continues to reach out to those who feel unworthy today. The Christian faith is still counter-cultural. In his letter to the Romans, St Paul writes:

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God—what is good and well-pleasing and perfect." (Romans 12.2)

If our culture is one which is based on the economy of consumerism, what is the counter-cultural alternative? It is to be transformed from a consumer into a **steward of God's gifts**.

### *What is a Steward?*

The differences between a consumer and a steward attitude are:

Attitude towards...	Consumer	Steward
Acquisition of goods	I buy it because I <i>want</i> it	I buy it because I <i>need</i> it
Use of Credit (Affordability)	If I have the means to buy it, I do (whether I can afford it or not)	I consider whether I can afford it; what the impact will be on others
Future Sustainability	Lives in the now, not worried about the future	Thinks of the impact on future generations
Needs of others	Sees self as separate from others	Sees self as bound up in the well-being of others
All things	Everything is mine to use in whatever way I see fit	Everything comes from God; I am accountable to God for its wise use

**Steward** is a very ancient term and appears in the Bible in several forms. One of the most common forms is the Greek word **oikonomos** (pronounced ee-KON-no-mos). *Oikon* refers to household; the *oikonomos* was the one in charge of household management (the steward). It is also from this word we get the English word *economy*. Being a steward is about economics, about God's economy, not ours.

In medieval legal terms, a steward is an official, appointed by the legal ruling monarch to represent him or her in a country, with a mandate to govern in his or her name. **A steward is one entrusted with the care of something and who cares for it with the same diligence as would the owner.** Stewards managed the business affairs of their masters. This was not just about care-taking of the master's property; it was about wise decision making!

### *Christian Stewardship*

When the word "stewardship" is used in the church, we only think about money. Christian stewardship is not about money—it is about **the right use of God's gifts for God's purposes.**

During the Eucharist in our parish at the *Offertory*, when our gifts of bread, wine, music, and money are given to God, we say:

**All things come of thee, O Lord,  
and of thine own have we given thee.**

This simple sentence says it all—everything comes from God and we are giving back to God only what already belongs to God.

When we embrace the vision that stewardship is the right use of God's gifts for God's purposes, we begin to see that money is only a fraction of stewardship. Stewardship involves proper care of our bodies through diet and exercise (since the body is a gift from God), care of our environment, proper use of credit and living beyond our means, and considering the working conditions in the countries which produce the goods we need.

When we are Baptised and become Stewards of God's Gifts, we acknowledge the reality that everything and everyone comes from God. We have an obligation to care for God's creation...all of it! We need to think, pray, and act in ways which will build up the people of God throughout the world.