

## **All is “Gift”: A Call to Stewardship**

*Message by Most Rev. Samuel J. Aquila given at the Diocese of Fargo  
Stewardship Enhancement Days meetings held  
in Carrington, Fargo and Grand Forks, N.D., in November 2008*

Thank you for taking the time today to learn about and reflect upon the call to stewardship.

It is a call to each of us, individually and collectively, to serve as stewards of that which is entrusted to our care.

As I prepared for this talk, I consulted the Oxford American Dictionary for a definition of the word “steward”. I found two definitions which I want to address today, starting with the second and moving to the first.

A “steward” is defined as a “property manager”. As property managers we:

- invest finances wisely so that earnings may be plentiful and can be used, in turn, to benefit ourselves and others.
- As property managers, we care for and maintain property, such as with a house or a car, so it will meet our needs for an extended period of time.
- And, finally, as property managers, we live within our means, prioritizing and meeting our individual and family obligations with the resources we have, rather than buying things with credit and hoping to be able to pay for them later.

This definition of a “steward” as a “property manager” highlights the material side of our call to stewardship.

The Dictionary, though, gives us another definition which must be considered in union with that of being a property manager.

A steward, the definition points out, is one who serves as an “attendant” to people, such as passengers on a ship, aircraft or train. In other words, stewards attend to those -- assist those -- who are traveling with them in this journey of life.

Our role as stewards is two-fold. We must manage what we have – the many gifts of time, talent, and treasure bestowed upon us by God – so that we can attend to the needs of others. The People of Israel in the Old Testament were aware of this truth as they gave the first 10 percent of their fruits and earnings to God. In the New Testament we see the early followers of Jesus holding everything in common.

To understand stewardship, we must, first, realize from whom all things come. In Psalm 24, verse 1, we read: “The earth is the Lord’s and all it holds, the world and those who live there.”

“All” is the Lord’s – every object, every person. Nothing is ours. All is “gift”.

In society today, that concept is hidden, pushed aside. The anti-God, anti-life agenda so prevalent in our society and in our media today wants us to believe that all we have is “earned”. It tells us that we should continuously strive to get more and more – for the more we have - the more we possess - the more valuable we are as people and the happier we will be.

That, my brothers and sisters, is a lie. Psalm 22 tells us, “The poor will eat their fill; those who seek the Lord will offer praise.” And Psalm 24 reminds us, “The clean of hand and pure of heart, who are not devoted to idols, who have not sworn falsely, they will receive blessings from the Lord, and justice from their saving God.”

We have value not because of what we “have” and what we “have done”, but because of “who” created us! God chose to give us life. Life itself is the “first gift”. All that comes to us in life, then, is “gift”, too. Even the suffering. Even the difficulties. For it is suffering that causes us to reflect more deeply on the “meaning” of this life God has given to us. And when we reflect, we see – we are not here on this earth for ourselves. We are here for all.

God’s example – his gift of life to us – is our call to give to others. It is our call to stewardship. We cannot fulfill only one part of the definition. We cannot manage our property without sharing it. We cannot share if we do not effectively manage. We cannot give as God gives to us, if we do not love as God loves us.

There are many efforts we can, and should, undertake to inform ourselves and instruct the faithful about the call to stewardship and how we can respond to that call. I encourage each of us in those efforts and pray that they will bring much fruit.

As we go about our work of promoting stewardship, let us not forget that the instruction that is most effective is that which is taught through example. When we, as bishop, priests, lay directors and parishioners, offer people an example of stewardship through our love for them and our service to them and others, they will respond.

My prayer for you is that you will come to know more deeply each day the love of God for you personally so that you may love as He loves. Through your example of love, may the world recognize that all is “gift” and that our true treasure lies, not here in this life, but in the eternal life that awaits us in heaven. May God bless you with the generosity of heart and mind to be faithful stewards, answering His call to care for the gifts He has given us and to share them with others. I thank you for your presence here today and hope that it will truly be blessed.