

First Fruits

The Stewardship Newsletter of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey

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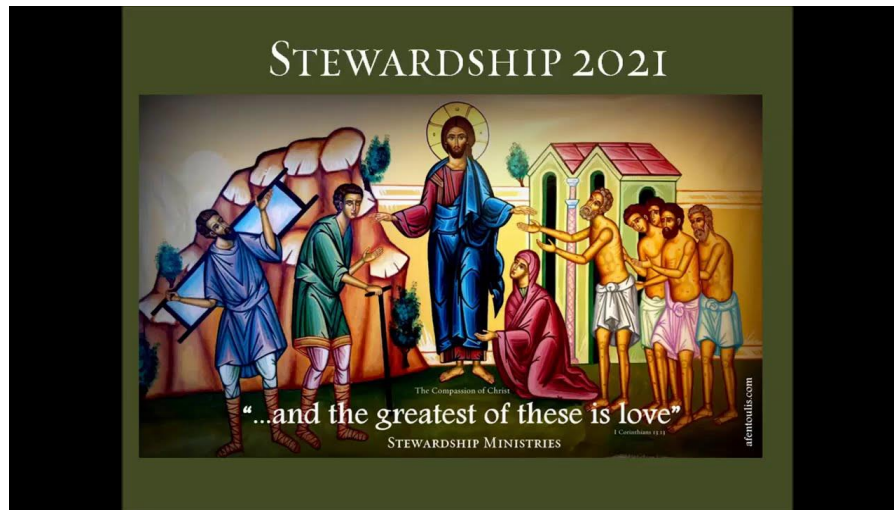
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Orthodox Christian Stewardship is a Christ-centered lifestyle, which acknowledges accountability, reverence, and responsibility before God. Orthodox Christian Stewardship is a call to all of the faithful to share willingly and cheerfully the gifts that God has bestowed on them including sharing these gifts for God's work in His Church.

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Come and See how we are all called to be Stewards of The Church!

- Stewardship is our active commitment to use all our time, talent and treasure for the benefit of humankind in grateful acknowledgment of Christ's redeeming love.
- Stewardship is caring for the needs of others.
- Stewardship is offering one's self to God as He offered Himself to us.
- Stewardship is what a person does after saying "I believe . . .", as proof of that belief.
- Stewardship is learning how to be a responsible and concerned caretaker of Christ's Church; it is learning how to enjoy Church life and be happy in Church work, for in Her dwells the fullness of the Spirit of God.

In his book, *Of What Life Do We Speak? Four Pillars for the Fulfillment of the Apostolic Work of the Church*, His Beatitude Metropolitan TIKHON defines the second pillar, Stewardship, as the “application of our spiritual life to the realities of the fallen world” (page 31). Stewardship often has to do with financial matters, but it more properly includes our care for our brothers and sisters, for the Church, for the environment, and for one another. [Click here](#) to read His Beatitude’s book at the OCA Website.

As we begin the great Lenten journey, these words remind each of us about the importance of the Great Fast and how this period in the life of the Church is a time for repentance, forgiveness, reflection, and growth.

Every year we make this spiritual journey through Great Lent, during which we gather together to pray at the various services. We gather together to seek God’s love and to deepen our own repentance. We gather together to seek guidance and salvation. We gather together as brothers and sisters in Christ as we prepare ourselves to celebrate the Great Feast of Holy Pascha! It is during this time, as such, that it would be beneficial for us, as Christians, with the guidance of our spiritual father, to choose a goal that is appropriate for our own spirituality. Perhaps we need to attend the frequent services that are offered on a more regular basis, or pray a little more each day, or read the Bible all the way through, or fast more often or more strictly, or extend our time, talents, treasures and efforts a little more. Whatever we realize we need to do to grow spiritually, we need to start today!

As we enter into this Holy and Great Lenten Season, we are all called to reflect upon our own lives and be reminded of what the Church teaches us about being a steward and what Christian Stewardship is all about. Being a Steward is something that we all need to take seriously. Being a steward of the Gospel of Our Lord is about being a faithful servant to Our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, being faithful to His Church, to His Commandments, to His Teachings, and to one another. We *all* need to put forth the effort, not just a few of us. We all need to come together and be those good and faithful stewards God is calling us to be. We pray that all of us will take this responsibility that has been entrusted to us seriously. For this is the only way we will grow spiritually and even, if God wills, grow in number.

The Great Lenten Season and Journey, itself, reminds us of the constant need to re-evaluate and recapture that which is central to our lives as Orthodox Christians, to restore balance in all we do, and in repentance to make an earnest attempt to set aside a portion—the “first portion”—of our time, talents, and treasure to acquire the peace of the Holy Spirit. This can be seen and fulfilled by way of our stewardship or commitment to Christ and His Holy Church. Stewardship is understood to be a spiritual exercise whereby we, as God’s children, express our love and faithfulness in tangible ways through the giving of our time, talents and treasure, for the building up of the Body of Christ as best expressed in our parish life. For truly as Christ has taught, all things belong to God, and He has gifted them to us during our time on earth. As Christians, we are called to share these gifts with those around us. During this Great Lenten Season, let us encourage one another to support the good work being done by our Diocese through giving our time, talents, or treasure.

By entering the Season of Great Lent we discover -- perhaps for the first time -- the mercy and love of God revealed in the services, which open to us the great acts of salvation. In the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete, the celebration of the Pre-Sanctified Liturgy, the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, and the many other services that are offered during Great Lent, the body of Christians is made into the Body of Christ. In these celebrations, the Kingdom of God is being proclaimed and revealed. With the

proclamation of the Gospel we are given the opportunity to receive the living Word of God, which renews and illumines those seeking "to run the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1). By embracing this Word, we are invited to draw near and receive, from the table of the Kingdom, the Bread of Life and the Fountain of Immortality.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, a great and awesome gift has been entrusted to us. By entering the Great Lenten Season, we are given the opportunity to proclaim, in word and deed, the Gospel of new and eternal life. Let us draw near together, as a Diocesan Family, and enter with great joy into the mystery of the spiritual and liturgical life of our Church. And let us proclaim to the world the saving acts of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ by fulfilling and proclaiming His Beloved Gospel.

So, let us join together as a Diocesan Family, as a family in Christ, in making a commitment to bring Christ to the world by being those faithful Stewards that we *all* have been called to be! Let us come together during this holy and great Lenten season, so that on Pascha Night, with one voice across our God-Protected Diocese, we may gloriously and triumphantly proclaim the joyous message of our Lord's Glorious, Holy, and Life-Giving Resurrection on the Third Day by proclaiming the words of praise: "Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!"

Remember, our life is not about us – it is about Our Lord! It is about His Gospel! It is about His Church! It is about our salvation in the Heavenly Kingdom. This can happen – and it will happen – as long as we keep our focus on Christ!

Truly, as Christ has taught, all things belong to God, and He has gifted them to us during our time on earth, and as Christians we are called to share these gifts with those around us. In order to fulfill the responsibility of giving back to God a portion of what He has given us, we must remind ourselves that:

"We, though many, are One Body in Christ, and each of us a member of one another."
{ROMANS 12:5}

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A FEW WORDS ON STEWARDSHIP: SPIRITUAL GIVING



Orthodox Christian Stewardship is a way of life, which acknowledges accountability, reverence, and responsibility before God. A primary goal of Stewardship is to promote spiritual growth and strengthen faith. Becoming a Steward begins when we believe in God, to Whom we give our love, loyalty and trust, and then act on those beliefs. As Stewards, we affirm that every aspect of our lives comes as a gift from Him. Stewardship calls on the faithful to cheerfully offer back to God a portion of the gifts with which we have been blessed.



An Orthodox Christian Steward is an active participant in the life of the Church.

The parish encourages all who accept the Orthodox Faith to become practicing Stewards. Each year the Steward is expected to carefully review his or her personal circumstances and make a commitment of time, talent, and treasure to support the Parish and her ministries, and as we are able, to support the wider ministries of our Diocese and National Church – their institutions and organizations.

Effective stewardship ministry is not a single event or project. Rather, it is going out to our people wherever they are in their walk with Christ, listening to their concerns, helping them to realize their importance as branches of the True Vine and encouraging them to offer their gifts in His service. We use various resources to support our efforts, but unless we meet with our people personally, sincerely listen to their ideas and concerns, and share a vision for the future of the parish, our efforts will not reach their full potential.

In *Oriented Leadership*, their book on Orthodox Christian leadership, Benjamin Williams and Michael McKibben speak of stewardship as the call of the faithful to share willingly the gifts that God has bestowed on them, including sharing these gifts for God’s work. Stewardship is devotion and service to God and His Church as persons, as families, as a parish, as a Diocese, as a National Church, and as the Church Universal. Stewardship is our active commitment to use ALL our time, talent and treasure for the benefit of humankind in grateful acknowledgement of Christ’s redeeming love for us, “On Behalf of All and For All!”

Stewardship is caring for the needs of others.

Stewardship is offering one's self to God as He offered Himself to us.

Stewardship is what a person does after saying "I believe..." as proof of that belief.

- Williams and McKibben in *Oriented Leadership*

