

Bishop Kettler
STEWARDSHIP TALK – 2018
SIOUX FALLS, SD

I hope you are comfortable with my not presenting an academic treatise about stewardship. I'm not capable of giving one. My desire over my nearly fifty years of priesthood ministry has been to keep myself and others connected with God and his plan for us. God made us because he wanted to share with us his love, purpose for existence and the value of all of his creation. God's desire for this is a blessing for us and, I think, pretty neat. When Bishop Swain asked me to visit with you, I was excited to do it – even though I wasn't sure what I would do. I have tried to support stewardship over the years.

Today I would like to discuss the idea of stewardship again – just to keep it alive in you. It fits right with God's plan. Also, I want to share some thoughts from Pope Francis' apostolic letter, Laudato Si. For Pope Francis wants us to have joy and peace of mind as we journey to the Kingdom. This journey which we call life.

After this, I would like to try to make some practical applications of stewardship. (I have used and am a strong believer in the way of life of stewardship and have some different experiences of what it can do for our parishes today) --- stewardship as a way of life for a parish and for a diocese, particularly a rural diocese.

So stewardship as you know is not a program. It isn't even time, talent and treasure. It shouldn't have as its purpose – to raise money. It is a rest of my life-time process of trying to follow Jesus as a real disciple. Stewardship can be the life blood of discipleship – or what Pope Francis calls Missionary Discipleship – disciples who reach out to others. It requires some kind of conversion. Stewardship is the nourishment for the life-long journey of conversion. It changes my attitudes and the “why” I live my Christian life. It's really taking the teachings of Jesus and trying to live them out. I am a shareholder of God's life, mission and vision for the world. Through

stewardship we recognize that we are co-creators in our part of the world and it is filled with hope and joy. Stewardship can help build healthy, happy families and it can renew/re-evangelize the Church. It connects Eucharist and prayer with the giving of our lives to God and others. It respects love and justice and it is prayerful at all times. It respects human life and tries to take care of the environment. It takes the focus off of self-centeredness and “this is all my stuff” attitude. It addresses the dangers in our world today: the “ism” of materialism, individualism and relativism of the secular culture. It offers a spirituality that the people can take home, exercise at work, live it at school and express itself through personal involvement and their involvement with others in community, school, work and church. Pope Francis wants us to have a deep sense of what he calls the joy of love. Stewardship brings joy and satisfaction and a positive view of money and work. All parishioners have a place in stewardship. It will bring greater involvement in parish life and it reaches out to the peripheries – to the poor, marginalized and lost. I think it can also involve young adults who often feel they don’t have a place in the Church. It encourages better hospitality in the parish, helps with welcoming liturgies. It can tell us “why” we do what we do and it can be communicated to others. It connects the many programs and ministries in a parish or diocese. It moves from maintaining the maintenance mode (the efforts of a parish) to growing a parish – despite lessening numbers – and developing a happy, alive community of missionary disciples of Jesus Christ in the parish. So stewardship is a way of life, a way of thanking God for all the blessings we have received by returning a portion of the time, talent and treasure allotted to us by God. Stewardship engages a spirituality that deepens our relationship with the Lord and it includes everyone.

Pope Francis in Laudato Si reminds us of a number of things: that we are all related back to God, related to our neighbor and related to the earth itself. We are people of the encounter. We human beings pretend that we, not God, are masters over all of nature. We have made ourselves Lords of the universe and tragically we have begun to think that human life is meaningless and is expendable. We can use up the universe and throw away the poor, the elderly, the infirm and the unborn.

When we harm the environment we harm ourselves and when we harm ourselves, we harm the environment. This is Pope Francis speaking to us.

Stewardship leads us to be protectors of what God has made and given to us to use wisely. We are not the owners of the earth. We, with God, are its caretakers and stewards. Stewards take care of things and stand up for the common good and the welfare of everyone.

When I was bishop in Fairbanks, Alaska, most of my people were Yupik Eskimo. I recall that when the people caught a seal, even after the seal was killed, they would go to the seal and give it a drink of water. The Yupik people knew that the seal had given its life to feed them. The seal was part of God's creation which the people deeply respected and were grateful for. Their love and respect for the world, the environment around them, and their deep care for each other and love of family were examples and models for me, and I think, for all of us. Respect and care for the environment is an essential part of the stewardship way of life and is promoted by stewardship. We are stewards not owners. We take the things God gives us – uses them where necessary and passes them on to our children.

These are some thoughts about the value of the way of life of stewardship and some reflections from Pope Francis.

Some practical suggestions about developing a stewardship way of life....

- 1.) Simply stepping into the stewardship way of life – nurturing our gifts and then sharing our time, talent and treasure – oftentimes will not happen.

One needs to take some steps to being a missionary disciple and then go about living the stewardship way of life.

There are different ways of doing this, but I like the ideas of Curtis Martin, the founder of FOCUS – Fellowship of Catholic University Students.

He suggests three habits which would, I believe, enable individuals and a community to eventually embrace the stewardship way of life.

- a.) Divine Intimacy – Communion with Jesus – developing a true living relationship with God – a personal encounter with Jesus – one which is intimate, life-long, life-giving and based on love and mercy. This relationship is not only with Jesus but with the Trinity – we are part of God’s Trinity – and live in the example of the Blessed Trinity.

We learn from Apostles’ teachings; Eucharist and sacraments; community – encountering our brothers and sisters, neighbors and the poor – fellowship, and prayer devotions. Without first a relationship with God, we won’t be effective stewards.

- b.) Authentic friendship. This means really loving the people you are working with/serving in your church community – e.g.: catechist – students, those on the margins, bible study, those we regularly socialize with, god parents, RCIA participants – being with them not only for that one or two hours we teach them – but forming a real relationship with them. Authentic friendship means developing a welcoming, warm parish community.

- c.) Spiritual multiplication – Forming a few deep relationships in family and community – based on commitment to them and faithfulness – long term.

When we develop these habits, they enable us to then enter the stewardship way of life. There needs to be steps into stewardship and a commitment to stewardship.

- 2.) I think that if stewardship is to take off and continue, the commitment of the pastor and staff is needed and stewardship needs to be talked about frequently – from the pulpit, parish bulletin, religious ed classes, adult ed and Bible study and you need to do the program: stewardship month, stewardship fair, etc – really involving/using the people who sign up for time and talent – perhaps having a volunteer coordinator – attending stewardship gatherings and meetings.

It is really helpful if a number of parishes or the whole diocese use stewardship – the bishop must also support this way of life.

- 3.) You do not have to be a large parish to do stewardship. Given what I said about Martin's three habits, once these habits are begun, any size parish can be a stewardship parish and it can involve everyone, young (young adults) people, and older. It might be good that you do stewardship in a cluster of parishes or a region/hub.

People in rural areas have a better sense of stewardship. They want to hand something which is good on to their children. They have a strong sense of community. Rural parishes are a good basis for stewardship. These folks are into gathering together. They are people of the land, grateful to God for this and are responsible for it.

What about parishes that are losing numbers, with few children, poorer Mass attendance, facing parish closing or mergers – with few volunteers? Help people start with the three habits, practice stewardship in the small parishes or the merged parishes. Remember you have not lost your parish with a merger. Your parish has changed. Always remember stewardship is not about money, but about involvement, participation and a way of life.

If you are already there, thanks. Keep going, recommit. You won't get into stewardship as a parish or larger region unless you try it and commit to it. It does work.

Prayers for you and for the stewardship way of life.