

Characteristics of a Stewardship Parish



FAITHFUL STEWARD

Diocese of Rapid City

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INTRODUCTION

The three primary lenses in which the Diocese of Rapid City views Stewardship are — Generous Hospitality: invitation, welcome and fellowship; Lively Faith: prayer, study and formation; Dedicated Discipleship: to love God and to love neighbor with an intentional heart. Living a life of stewardship means whole-heartedly peering through these three indispensable lenses so that we may truly live a Catholic Way of Life, hearing the voice of Jesus, following Him and imitating His way of life.

As written in the Pastoral Letter from the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, *Stewardship: A Disciples Response*, “Stewardship is fundamentally the work of the Spirit in our lives. When we accept our lives as sheer gifts, the Spirit can use us as apt instruments for spreading the Gospel. Wherever the Spirit works, there is joy. Good stewards are always joyful bearers of the good news of salvation.”¹

“This Pastoral Letter asks this important question, ‘Who is the Christian Steward?’ The Christian Steward is ‘one who receives God’s gifts gratefully, cherishes and tends them in a responsible and accountable manner, shares them in justice and love with others, and returns them with an increase to the Lord.’”² The theology of stewardship is rooted in the proclamation of the *kerygma*³ of the Gospel with faith and joy. The *kerygma* of our faith, simply put, is the Paschal Mystery — the life, suffering, death and resurrection of Christ; His preaching, His teachings, His life and the promises he makes about the Kingdom of God.

The very heart of discipleship is faithful stewardship. We are invited to be stewards of everything the Lord has created and given to us, receiving it joyfully with gratitude and then sacrificially sharing with others from what we have received.⁴

¹*Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response*. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 1992, page 1.

² *Ibid.*, page 2.

³ The apostolic proclamation of salvation through Jesus Christ; in Greek ‘to proclaim.’

⁴ Diocese of Wichita, Stewardship Office.

FOUNDATIONAL STRUCTURES OF A STEWARDSHIP PARISH

“Which of you wishing to construct a tower does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if there is enough for its completion? Otherwise, after laying the foundation and finding himself unable to finish the work the onlookers should laugh at him and say, ‘This one began to build but did not have the resources to finish.’” (Luke 14:28-30)

In the beginning of the Book of Genesis, we read the story of God creating the heavens and the earth, giving form, shape and structure to all of His creation. God created order out of chaos so that Adam and Eve, our first parents, could live a life of blessedness and enjoy the fruit of God’s creation. God made them partakers and sharers of his Divine Life. The fall of Adam and Eve [Original Sin] separated them from God’s divine nature and brought disorder, threatening a return to chaos in the world.

Throughout the history of our salvation, God has continued to draw us back to himself through the Law and the Prophets. In the fullness of time, God sent his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, so that we might have life and have it more abundantly (cf. John 10:10). God truly desires that we share in His eternal kingdom through a generous response on our part. He invites us to keep His commandments and his teachings fixed in our hearts because they lead us to eternal life.

As disciples of the Lord Jesus, we know of the importance of living a life ordered in grace and virtue. Being faithful to the structures established by Christ and his Church, through Scripture and Tradition, keeps our parishes and Diocese faithful to the mission of Jesus “to go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

A stewardship parish has established structures necessary to guide the parish in an intentional and proactive manner in order to assist the parish and her members to embrace the life to which they have been called. These foundational structures create an environment and provide the necessary resources so that Generous Hospitality, Lively Faith and Dedicated Discipleship can encompass the whole of parish life.

Key Characteristics Found in Parishes Who Have Built a Firm Foundation:

- Our parish has a mission/vision statement that is clear, concise and well communicated.
- Our parish has a pastoral plan with clear goals in areas such as formation (human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral), the liturgical and sacramental life of the parish, building maintenance and upkeep, service and outreach, governance and finance, and stewardship and vocations.
- In following Jesus' admonition that all be one, the parish employs a consensus model of decision-making that fosters unity within the parish, and the Diocese and the universal church and respects the hierarchal structure of the Catholic Church.
- Parishioners take personal responsibility for the upkeep, maintenance and programs of the parish.
- Our parish community gives from its financial resources generously, sacrificially and proportionately to organizations and individuals in need.
- Our parish uses a variety of communication methods that are useful and effective for the unique culture of the parish.
- Our parish has an updated census and has a plan for annually updating and evaluating parish census data and shares it with the Diocese.
- Our parish has adequate parish bookkeeping and reporting in keeping with the norms as outlined in the Diocesan Finance Manual.
- Our parish has a Parish Finance Council that meets at least quarterly.
- Our parish has a Parish Pastoral Council that meets regularly and is representative of the demographics of the parish.
- Our parish has an active and effective Parish Stewardship Council.
- Our parish evaluates its goals, mission statement and programs every three to four years and is open to change when necessary.

GENEROUS HOSPITALITY – Welcome, Invitation, Fellowship

“Let all guests who arrive be received like Christ, for He is going to say, ‘I came as a guest, and you received Me’ (Matthew 25:35). And to all let due honor be shown, especially to the domestics of the faith and to pilgrims.” (Rule of St. Benedict)

Generous hospitality can be described through the virtues of kindness and generosity shown towards guests and seeing others as Christ sees them. Christ sees with the heart of the Father, whose desire is to bring mercy, love and forgiveness to the sinner and to all in need. Jesus said: “I was a stranger and you made me welcome” (Matthew 25:36). Generous hospitality embraces everyone who comes through our doors, regardless of who they might be or what they might want, in the imitation of Jesus Christ. He challenges us to love as he loved. “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:12-13).

A Stewardship parish lives out the practice of generous hospitality. The atmosphere of the parish is welcoming to both parishioners and strangers. Parishioners, in-active Catholics, non-Catholics and newcomers are treated as welcomed guests in the same way Jesus would be welcomed. They are personally, intentionally and regularly invited to become more involved in parish life. There are regular opportunities for fellowship whereby personal invitations extended by staff and parishioners alike are integral to generous hospitality.

“Often our lack of hospitality is simply the failure to notice and acknowledge others and their needs—the needs of the larger world and the needs of those closest to us. Jesus models that attentiveness. Jesus noticed the sick, the excluded, the hungry, and those that others passed by. God continues to be attentive to all of us, all the time. You and I are called to heighten our awareness of others, so that we can carry on the ministry of Jesus.”⁵

⁵ Gruss, Most Reverend Robert D. *Welcome Address or the 2016 Summit Conference*, October 29, 2016.

Welcome

In Romans 15:7, Saint Paul speaks of God's mercy and fidelity as beginning with a welcoming heart. "Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God." Pope Francis, too, encourages us: "May the church be the place of God's mercy and love, where everyone can feel themselves welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live according to the good life of the Gospel. And in order to make others feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged, the church must have open doors so that all might enter. And we must go out of those doors and proclaim the Gospel."⁶

Key Characteristics of a Welcoming Parish:

- Our parish has a welcoming atmosphere where both parishioners and visitors feel welcomed, comfortable, and valued.
- Our parish is clean, well-kept and attractive. Items used for Mass are appropriately cared for and meet liturgical norms.
- Our parish regularly evaluates our building and grounds for how welcoming they are to the stranger and makes changes as needed.
- Our parish has an active ministry that welcomes new parishioners and invites guests to be a part of the community.
- Our parish communicates parish programs and events to newcomers as well as parishioners.
- Our parish has a yearly ministry fair or an equivalent opportunity for members to become involved in programs and ministries.
- When at church and outside of it, our parishioners embody steadfast kindness, compassion and forgiveness.
- Our parish has hospitality ministers on Sunday and at other parish events who are joyful, kind and attentive to the needs of all guests and parishioners.
- Our parish finds ways to thank people who give of themselves in discipleship.
- Our parish pays attention to the details, i.e. all doors unlocked, microphones are used properly, hearing devices are available to the hearing impaired, etc.

⁶ His Holiness Pope Francis, General Audience, June 12, 2013. www.w2.vatican.va. Accessed January 2017.

Invitation

At the heart of invitation is the awareness that God has invited us first, not only to participate in His divine nature, but also to share in the building up the kingdom of God with our brothers and sisters. Intentional disciples invite others to share in the life-giving mission of Jesus Christ, encouraging them to become more fully engaged in their call. Fully engaged parish communities invite and welcome all people who live within their parish boundaries to a deeper life in the Gospel. We are called to reach out and invite those who feel lost, abandoned and alone; those in the Church, but who live on the margins; and those who have left the practice of their Catholic faith. The invitations that we extend to one another do in fact have the power change people's lives, to draw them closer to Christ and to a deeper life in the Christian community.

Key Characteristics of an Inviting Parish:

- Our pastor eagerly helps his people to discover and use their gifts and works collaboratively with his people to accomplish the church's mission.
- Our parish goes beyond bulletin announcements to invite parishioners to activities and makes regular use of one-on-one invitations.
- Our parish leaders and members regularly and consistently invite those who are no longer practicing their Catholic faith to return. We provide ways to allow them to share the story of why they left. We are a community who listens.
- Our parish leaders and members regularly and consistently invite new members to be part of the community and offers planned, regular evangelistic retreats and/or programs.
- Our parish programs and activities welcome new members, new leadership and new ideas.

Fellowship

When we speak of fellowship, we are really speaking about the Christian community of believers who gather to worship and to praise the Lord, following the example of the early Church – a faith community who were united in one heart (Acts 4:32). Fellowship is far more than the coffee and donuts after Mass or the occasional parish meal. True fellowship provides the space, time and atmosphere for parishioners and guests to form and nurture friendships that lead to this genuine unity.

Key Characteristics of a Parish that Values Fellowship:

- In addition to coffee and donuts, our parish offers opportunities for fellowship and hosts monthly or quarterly (if events are large) hospitality events.
- In our parish, there are adequate facilities for fellowship or a willingness to find creative solutions to the parish's need for space.
- Our parishioners are engaged with each other and with newcomers/visitors before and after Mass.
- Our parish regularly evaluates outreach and is intentional in its outreach to all demographics within the parish boundary, especially those who are "out of sight" (college students, the sick and homebound, the incarcerated, minority groups, those who feel isolated and alone).
- Our pastor and parish show particular care for the sacramental life of the sick and homebound.
- Our parishioners welcome their priests, deacons and religious sisters, inviting them into their families and lives.
- The majority of our parishioners put fellowship with Jesus Christ and His Church above their participation in sports, media or other leisure activities encouraged by our culture.

LIVELY FAITH – Prayer, Study, Formation:

“Run the race in such a way that you may win it . . . exercise self-control in all things . . . do not run aimlessly.” (1 Cor. 9:24-26)

The fundamental mission of the Church is to lead people to encounter Jesus Christ in a way whereby they are changed and transformed into His body. As people engage in this encounter, their faith is strengthened and they become more alive in the ways of the Gospel. “A lively faith is the fruit of the lived experience of God’s intimate and personal love within one’s heart”⁷ and is built on the foundation of prayer, study and formation.

At the heart of a stewardship parish is a vibrant public and personal prayer life centered on the Eucharist. In a stewardship parish, the teaching mission of the Church is recognized and strongly supported. A stewardship parish works to create a culture that develops virtue in its members and provides opportunities for them to grow in the areas of human, pastoral, intellectual and spiritual formation.

⁷ Gruss, Most Reverend Robert D. *Through Him, With Him and in Him: A Spiritual Guide to the Diocesan Priority Plan*, 2016, p. 31.

Prayer

A stewardship parish seeks God's will in all things, understanding that prayer is essential to discovering and following His will. The parish must be seen as a "School of Prayer"⁸ where regular opportunities for parishioners to learn how to pray well are offered, opportunities for parishioners to pray together as well as individually are planned, and the importance of a personal relationship with Jesus is emphasized.

Key Characteristics of a Prayerful Parish:

- Our parish offers generous access to the sacraments, especially the Sacrament of Penance.
- Our parish fosters regular devotions outside of Mass (Exposition and Adoration, *Lectio Divina*, Rosary, Divine Mercy Chaplet, etc.).
- Our parish offers regular and consistent instruction/encouragement and experiences in personal prayer.
- Our pastor leads people to a deep intimacy with the Trinity⁹; parishioners pray daily for at least fifteen minutes and faithfully participate in the sacraments¹⁰, and where parents teach their children how to pray daily.
- Our parish prays daily for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.¹¹
- Our parish fosters increasing attendance at both daily and Sunday Mass consistent with the demographics of the community we serve.
- Our parish encourages and provides opportunities for communal participation in the Liturgy of the Hours as part of the universal prayer of the Church.
- Our parish is deeply in touch with the general needs of the parish community and includes them in the Prayers of the Faithful.
- Our parish prays daily for a strengthening of marriages and an openness to vocations to the priesthood, diaconate and consecrated life.

⁸ Traynor, Father Scott. *The Parish as a School of Prayer*. The Institute for Priestly Formation. 2013.

⁹ Gruss, Most Reverend Robert D. *Through Him, With Him and in Him: A Spiritual Guide to the Diocesan Priority Plan*, 2016, p. 33.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

Study

When we first find ourselves attracted to another person, we desire to know more about them. As we come to love another, the desire to know them more intimately grows. The same is true of our relationship with God and the Church. Dedicated disciples have a deep desire to study and to be life-long learners of the Catholic faith—to truly become students of Jesus. It is in this way we grow in intimacy with him.

The Church in her wisdom guides us and stresses the primacy of studying the Scriptures using the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and making use of other sound resources. The lives of the saints also provide a wealth of wisdom for growing in holiness. Lastly, mature disciples of the Lord should always be ready and willing to share how God has worked in their lives with others (cf. 1 Peter 3:15).

A stewardship parish strives to become a genuine school of prayer and study, and doing so is of the highest priority in the life of the parish community. This priority begins with the pastor. Both St. John Paul II and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI stress that the fundamental role of the pastor is not one of an administrator of projects, events and organizations, but is one who leads people to a deep intimacy with the Trinity.¹² Stewardship parishes have an intentional study plan for the whole parish community that will fuel the hearts of its parishioners leading them to an encounter with Jesus. The parish continues to guide them as they grow in this relationship.

Key Characteristics of a Parish that is Committed to Study:

- Our parish fosters a thirst for life-long learning measured in increases in the number of adult parishioners who seek out adult study opportunities.
- Our parish has a vibrant, planned, intergenerational and well-communicated formation program rooted in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.
- Our parish actively seeks out and welcomes individuals to the RCIA process.
- Our parishioners participate in the larger diocesan community events by attending such things as Pastoral Ministry Days, the Summit Conference, ReFuel, *Totus Tuus*, Veritas Splendor Institute, Lay Ministry Program, the Right to Life Conference, the Social Justice Commission's sponsored events and the Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion.
- Our parish leaders conscientiously work to make parish formation opportunities accessible to young families (i.e. provides them during a convenient time, provides quality child care, etc.).
- Our parish offers scripture study on a weekly basis.
- Our parish regularly and consistently teaches all ages about vocations.
- Our parish formation programs help equip parishioners to live their faith in daily life and public works.

¹² Ibid., p. 13.

Formation

In the *Spiritual Guide to the Diocesan Priority Plan*, Bishop Gruss highlights four pillars of formation that will assist parishioners and pastors in working together to help their people become true and dedicated disciples of Jesus Christ.¹³ These pillars (human, intellectual, pastoral and spiritual) provide a solid framework for forming and shaping the whole person, leading them on the intentional path to conformity into the heart of Christ. A stewardship parish uses these pillars to create, evaluate and administer its programs and events.

Fruitful formation must involve a comprehensive and systematic presentation of the core elements of the Catholic Faith and should inspire and teach one how to integrate faith into all areas of life. Formation encompasses the complete initiation into the Catholic Way of Life.

Key Characteristics of a Parish that Promotes Formation of the Whole Person:

- Our parish has a strong culture of vocations measured in the number of parishioners who have actively explored a call to priesthood and/or religious life.
- Our parish is attentive to cultivating and supporting holy families.
- Our parish has a strong marriage preparation program and ongoing enrichment for marriage that promotes and supports the Church's vision for marriage as a vocation, a call from God to live a life of generous, self-sacrificial service to one another and the community.
- The parish accompanies and encourages couples to achieve full communion with the Church through the process of annulment, convalidation, etc.
- Both our pastor and parishioners respect the dignity of the human person and pursue the common good with humility and docility with particular attention to the Church's Social Doctrine.
- Our parish leaders and parishioners regularly discuss virtue, set forth examples of heroic virtue, and evaluate programs and policies in light of how they foster virtue.
- Our parish offers parishioners the opportunity to hear and give witness talks 3-6 times/per year, which provide inspiration and concrete examples for living the Catholic Way of Life.
- Our pastor preaches regularly on stewardship and teaches on the importance of intentional, planned giving and an attitude of generosity with all of our gifts and resources.

¹³Gruss, Most Reverend Robert D. *Through Him, With Him and In Him: A Spiritual Guide to the Diocesan Priority Plan*. 2016, p. 91-92.

DEDICATED DISCIPLESHIP:

“Let your love for one another be intense, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” 1 Peter 4:8-11

“He answered, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.’” (Luke 10:27)

Dedicated disciples have made a conscious and firm commitment to Christ and exemplify that commitment in concrete actions. Their love of God is made visible in a commitment to both personal and communal prayer. Their love of neighbor is made evident in the regular practice of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. They live with a sense of gratitude and are intentional in graciously and sacrificially giving of their time, talent and treasure.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: “The disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live on it, but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it, and spread it.”¹⁴ As challenging as this may be, it is a call to action, a call to engage our brothers and sisters in real conversations about Jesus, who is alive and dwells within us. This call involves far more than merely attending Sunday Mass.

In the Gospel of Matthew, we hear these strong words of Jesus: “So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 10:32-33)

Dedicated Discipleship is about becoming intentional with our relationship with the Lord and one another. A dedicated disciple strives to give witness to and accompany all people, including: (1) those who have never heard the Gospel, (2) those who have fervent and mature faith, and (3) those who are baptized but have “lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel.”¹⁵

For a dedicated disciple who is rooted in Christ, this ministry of the Lord does not feel like a burdensome task, but brings joy to the heart. They feel compelled to live generous lives in service to God and others.

¹⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., no. 1816.

¹⁵ Gruss, Most Reverend Robert D. *Through Him, With Him and In Him: A Spiritual Guide to the Diocesan Priority Plan*. 2016, p. 12.

Characteristics of a Parish that Practices Intentional Love of God and of Neighbor:

- Our parish has a significant number of parishioners who are willing to make their faith visible, to share it with others and to witness inside and outside the parish.
- Our parish has many parishioners who practice intentional generosity of their financial resources. Because of this generosity, our parish has adequate financial resources to maintain and improve our assets and serve the people of our parish and community.
- Our parish is intentional and active in caring for the poor and marginalized, inside and outside the parish. This is included as a line item in the budget. It is part of our parish's sacrificial giving.
- Our parish is one where the majority of parishioners recognize that we are one body in Christ – active, inactive, unevangelized – and understands and practices solidarity.
- In keeping with their personal charisms, our parishioners generously give of themselves in service to the activities within and outside of the parish. This service is rooted in prayer, organized and planned.
- Our pastor, parish leaders and parishioners understand and practice the “art of accompaniment”¹⁶ in various aspects of parish life.
- Our parish practices the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, both individually and in an organized and intentional manner as a community.
- Our parish has a good number of mature disciples who actively lead others to mature discipleship.
- Our parish has apostolic zeal reminiscent of the early Christian communities we read about in the Acts of the Apostles.¹⁷

¹⁶ “The Church will have to initiate everyone—priests, religious and laity—into this ‘art of accompaniment’ which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. Ex 3:5) . . .Spiritual accompaniment must lead others ever closer to God . . .to accompany them would be counterproductive if it became a sort of therapy supporting their self-absorption and ceased to be a pilgrimage with Christ to the Father.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 169 and 170)

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.2.

