



INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

# CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP

e-Bulletin • December 2019

## Christmas: A Stewardship Reflection



### A STEWARDSHIP PRAYER for December

Come, Lord Jesus!  
Make us good stewards  
of Advent.  
Strengthen our faith;  
calm our fears.

Come, Lord Jesus!  
We hear John the Baptist's cry.  
Open our hearts.  
Give us humility to repent.

Come, Lord Jesus!  
Let us walk in your light!  
Show us how we prepare your way  
and make straight your paths.

Come, Lord Jesus!  
We give you thanks and praise,  
for the shining star and angelic host,  
for Mary and Joseph,  
good stewards, both.

Come, Lord Jesus!  
We rejoice and are glad!  
For the Good News you bring  
And God's glory you revealed.

Come, Lord Jesus!

Amen

"Bah! Humbug!" was the attitude of Ebenezer Scrooge toward the two gentlemen who came looking for a Christmas donation to help the poor and homeless in the streets of London. "All I want to do is eat, drink and be merry!" was the attitude of the rich fool in Jesus' parable. Neither the wealthy but miserly Scrooge in Charles Dickens' classic, *A Christmas Carol*, nor Jesus' miserly fool in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 12:16-21), would find good company with Christian stewards who know those attitudes draw us away from God, not closer. As we await the coming of Jesus at Christmas, the Advent season is the perfect time to reflect on our own attitudes toward the things we possess and our need to share with others who are less fortunate.



There is, of course, no season quite so full of wild abundance as the Christmas season. We are entering a joyful, exuberant time, full of music, family, parties, good food and friends. But every Christian steward knows that there is a shadow side to abundance, particularly material abundance, which brings its own challenges.

Poverty, in North America and indeed worldwide, is growing, not diminishing. In the United States alone, one in six Americans now lives below the poverty line. The poor among us become invisible and the poverty that overtakes them becomes a scourge that brings a whole host of societal problems such as hunger, homelessness, crime and domestic violence.

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Moreover, a culture that is focused on consuming more and more and built on satisfying the self and ignoring the needs of other people is a culture that impoverishes the soul. A preoccupation with our own wants and possessions fosters a spiritual poverty that has no room for the Lord at its center. That kind of spiritual poverty neglects the true meaning of Christmas in its joy and abundance. Despite the great spiritual significance of this feast, the season becomes a time of material excess.

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Scrooge told his charitable solicitors that he wished to be left alone, and all the rich fool wanted was to be left alone with his material abundance. Christian stewards know that these attitudes are not compatible with being followers of Christ Jesus. Let us embrace the joy and the delightfulness of the Christmas season and at the same time remain mindful that the true joy of Christmas is not tied in to the wealth of goods under the tree, but to the abundance of love and generosity that fills our hearts and spills out to others, especially those most in need of our generous spirit.

## Saint John of Kanty

John of Kanty, also known as John Cantius, was born to a wealthy family in Kanti, near Auschwitz, Poland, in 1390. He was educated at the University of Krakow and was ordained a priest soon after completing his studies.

John was appointed a lecturer at the university and was known to be an effective teacher and preacher. He was assigned to a parish for a time, but after a few years was recalled to university life to hold a chair in theology.

John was held in such high esteem that his academic gown was used to invest each new candidate at the conferring of doctoral degrees. He was known to be a good steward of the students entrusted to him and saw to their religious instruction. He taught them to oppose false statements and opinions with courtesy and persuasiveness.

He was renowned not only for his teaching but also for his good humor, humility, simple way of life and generosity to the poor. He subsisted only on what was strictly necessary to sustain his life, giving food and clothing regularly to the poor. When he was urged to take better care of his health he replied by pointing out that the early desert fathers were notably long-lived.

His fame was not all confined to academic circles. He was a welcome guest at the homes of the nobility, although once his simple cassock caused the servants to refuse him admission.

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He made a number of pilgrimages, all by walking; four to Rome and one to Turkish-held Jerusalem where he desired to suffer martyrdom at the hands of the Turks.

John of Kanty died on Christmas Eve, 1473, at the age of 83. He was canonized in 1767. His feast day is December 23. He is the patron saint of Poland and Lithuania. His remains were interred in the Church of St. Anne in Kraków, where his tomb became and remains a popular pilgrimage site.





# A Stewardship Approach to Christmas Giving

The beautiful season of Advent is upon us, and with it a desire for the simplicity which fosters spiritual depth. This desire often runs into headwinds during December. A season which is often marked by excess and over-consumption coincides with the poverty and simplicity of the manger. It's a conundrum for the Christian steward.

We are increasingly aware of Pope Francis's call to be stewards of the environment. But let's face it, how many of us have felt a twinge of guilt on Christmas morning as garbage bags full of unrecyclable wrapping paper and protective plastic toy containers are carried to the trash. Do our children really need so much? Do we?

There's been a movement afoot in the last few years to cut back on Christmas buying, especially as it pertains to our kids, whom we sometimes overindulge on that special day. The easy-to-remember plan is called "Something they want, something they need, something to wear, something to read." Following those four pointers, our children can receive four well-thought-out gifts that fulfill both practical and



fun desires. Think quality. Refrain from lots of "stuff," which we excuse as "stocking stuffers" and often are broken or discarded by New Year's Day. The plan can work for a spouse or another special person as well.

Another important consideration for the Christian steward is to remember that the Christmas need to give extends far beyond family. Schools, churches and faith formation programs often promote "giving trees" where we select a person or



family in need who may not receive a gift without our help. This is a great program for kids who can become totally involved in the selection, and perhaps with their allowances, even the purchase of a gift for a stranger.

Shelters collect socks, nursing homes need carolers, the clerk at the busy grocery store needs an extra smile, your pastor and your teacher might appreciate a special thank you note. There are scores of ways to give during the Advent and Christmas seasons. If we commit to keeping it a little simpler under the tree on Christmas morning, we'll have more time and energy for other forms of giving. We'll do the environment a favor, and we will give our kids a lesson in giving rather than getting. And that, of course, is an authentic Christmas message.

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# Being Good Stewards of Our Personal Vocations

by Leisa Anslinger, Associate Department Director for Pastoral Life, Archdiocese of Cincinnati

To commit ourselves to live as disciples who steward our many gifts and blessings involves every facet of our lives. We will experience God's call differently in distinct moments of our lives. At times, we may recognize the call to give our time sacrificially; at other times, our treasure. In some moments, we may discern a call to active service among the poor, ill, or imprisoned; in other moments, our stewardship may be of prayer or the sharing of faith. In all of these times and circumstances, we follow Jesus Christ, and learn to embrace his way of self-giving love.

The young creature in the stall of Bethlehem was a human being with human brain and heart and soul. And it was God. Its life was to manifest the will of the Father; to proclaim the sacred tidings, to stir mankind with the power of God, to establish the Covenant, and shoulder the sin of the world, expiating it with love and leading mankind through



the destruction of sacrifice and the victory of the Resurrection into the new existence of grace. In this accomplishment alone lay Jesus' self-perfection: fulfillment of mission and personal fulfillment were one (Romano Guardini, quoted in *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, p. 23).

We are all called to discern and live out our vocation, the life vocation that each of us has, and the many calls we experience as followers of Jesus. Another way of saying this is to recognize that living out our vocational call is our



mission. We fulfill our mission by being good stewards of our lives, gifts, and blessings. This ongoing discernment and fulfillment of our mission is one of the many things that makes stewardship leadership such a dynamic and sometimes challenging endeavor. Helping people recognize their mission to witness to and make Christ's love known through their stewardship is a sacred responsibility. As we celebrate Christmas this year, let us pray that we may fulfill this mission well and with grace. Merry Christmas!

## Special Advent/Christmas Member Savings!



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# Be a Good Steward of the Advent and Christmas Seasons

December is such a busy time of year, and a month that tempts us to lose sight of the profound spiritual importance of the Advent and Christmas seasons. The best way to stay focused on the coming of Jesus Christ is to be good stewards of his presence in our daily lives. Here are simple ways to exercise good stewardship of this sacred time of year.

having one set that is “kid-proof” which your children are allowed to handle. Kids love to make the Nativity story their own, and they especially love the angels!

**5. Plan a project to help someone this Christmas:** Identify someone with a genuine need, involve your whole family and see how happy you



**The best way to stay focused on the coming of Jesus Christ is to be good stewards of his presence in our daily lives.**



**1. Give God a very special gift this year:** Let this gift be something personal that no one else needs to know about, and let it be a sacrifice. Perhaps your gift will be to commit to spending more time with God daily. Perhaps there is a habit you know you should give up. Why wait for a New Year's resolution? Start now.

**2. Celebrate the season of Advent:** Light the Advent wreath candles each night before dinner. If you have children, let them offer their own prayers to the Christ child for whom we are waiting.

**3. Set aside a special time to read the Christmas story in the Gospel of Saint Luke 1:5-56 through 2:1-20:** Consider reading this account with your family and discussing it together.

**4. Put a crèche up in your home at the beginning of Advent:** Consider

can make someone this Christmas. Participate in your parish Adopt-a-Family program or call Catholic Charities or another charity and find a family through their programs. Make sure your children take part in shopping for a family who needs extra help and make them aware of the needs in your community.

**6. Take a group Christmas caroling to a nursing home or a children's hospital:** Get people together. Make it festive. Bring the gifts of your joyful smiles and voices to those who may need these gifts.

**7. Give a surprise gift of service to each member of your family:** The idea of giving an unexpected gift of service to members of your family reveals your own love and concern for them. You might consider giving your spouse a day away, running an

errand for your brother, or cleaning out a closet for your mother. Make it personal and meaningful.

**8. Send Christmas cards and thank you notes that convey a spiritual message:** This is an easy way to share your faith during the Advent season. Don't just sign your name! Include a personal message with each card. Set aside some time after Christmas Day to write thank you notes and help your children to write thank you notes for the gifts they receive. This is a wonderful habit for a lifetime, and a good way to foster a steward's gratitude for all gifts.

**9. Write a Christmas letter to someone far away such as someone in the service, or perhaps someone working or ministering in a foreign country:** It has been said that receiving a letter when you are far away from home is like opening a priceless gift on Christmas morning, no matter what day of the year. Many people are unable to travel home for the holidays, so it can be a very lonely time for them. Write a special Christmas letter to someone of your choice.

**10. Attend Christmas Mass together with your family:** December 25 falls on Wednesday this year so make sure you are present at the Table of the Lord. If you are alone this Christmas or don't have family living near you, invite a friend or a neighbor to join you.





## A STEWARDSHIP MOMENT

### First Sunday of Advent

**Weekend of November 30/December 1, 2019**

On this first Sunday of Advent Jesus urges his disciples to stay awake and prepare themselves for the Lord's coming. Good stewards prepare themselves and await Christ's judgment in joyous expectation. This attitude requires genuine spiritual maturity, of course; the kind that is cultivated by prayer, participation in the sacraments, loving attention to family and one's communion of faith, and love for one's neighbor. Are we prepared for the Lord's second coming? Are we ready to receive Christ? Are we ready to look joyously for Christ's judgment?

### Second Sunday of Advent

**Weekend of December 7/8, 2019**

In today's Gospel reading John the Baptist warns his listeners: "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" The Church's yearly Advent herald is a call to repentance. The season of Advent urges us to be open to a conversion of heart. Christian stewards heed this call daily, and take the need for conversion in their lives seriously. As a family of faith, do we hear this call to conversion amidst the massive holiday spending? The increase in credit card debt? The urge to buy things that are not necessary? The incivility on the roadways during the holidays? Are there patterns in our own lives that need to be converted?

### Third Sunday of Advent

**Weekend of December 14/15, 2019**

From the loneliness of his prison cell John the Baptist asks of Jesus: "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" The weeks before Christmas offer much to be joyous about, celebrating with family and friends, the glitter of seasonal decorations, the excitement of gift giving and receiving. But in our midst there are the lonely and neglected, the poor, the hospitalized, the wayward, the shut-ins. There are those who feel that they have no hope. To whom should they look? Discipleship in the Lord includes being good stewards of others. Are there those in our family, our neighborhood, our community to whom we can reach out to show them a sign of Christ's presence in their midst?

### Fourth Sunday of Advent

**Weekend of December 21/22, 2019**

In today's Gospel we hear of the coming of Emmanuel, which means "God is with us." We celebrate three Advents: the birth of Christ, his Second Coming, and his presence in the world today. Our daily lives are attended by God's presence. Indeed, "God is with us." The Good News of Christ's Incarnation is that we are the sign, the "sacrament," of Christ's presence in the world. People are supposed to see us, see how we love one another, see how we treat the stranger among us, see how we give comfort to the poor and afflicted, and share the Good News with joy. They see how good stewards are the light of Christ. And there can be no possible response except to say: "God is here!"

### Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)

**December 25, 2019**

Amidst the beautiful Christmas readings at today's Masses is a reading from a small New Testament letter from Saint Paul to his protégé, Titus, read at Midnight Mass. Saint Paul reminds Titus that God has given us a gift in the person of Jesus Christ. This gift represents God's active presence in our lives and in our world. This gift redeems us from evil and death. This gift purifies us as God's people. This is a gift that also comes with an expectation: that we receive it with thanksgiving, allow it to transform us into Christ's image; and from it, learn how to live a life "eager to do what is good." Take time the next few days to reflect on the marvelous gift we celebrate at Christmas, and how we might become better stewards of this gift.

### Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

**Weekend of December 28/29, 2019**

In today's second reading we listen to one of the most compelling exhortations for Christian living: "Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col 3:17). "Whatever you do"---that means the whole of life is to be related to Christ Jesus. Everything in life, every activity, can become an act of glorifying the Lord. Good stewards commit even their daily routine to Christ: doing everything "in the name of the Lord." Perhaps it would be a good idea this week to memorize this marvelous verse and repeat it to yourself frequently. Make it part of your morning prayer each day.