



INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

# CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP

e-Bulletin • December 2021



## A STEWARDSHIP PRAYER for Advent

Heavenly Father,

You give us this blessed season of Advent as a gift of time to prepare for the coming of the Christ Child.

But all too often we turn this gift into a source of frenzy, stress and anxiety; a time where we're apt to prepare for a Christmas celebration looking perfect on the outside, but spiritually exhausting and without true meaning.

Restore in us that inherent quest for quiet expectation and hope.

Show us the way to a more peaceful, prayerful disposition that makes us more open to a conversion of heart.

And give us the courage to let go of things that are ultimately unimportant to the true meaning of Christmas.

Help us be good stewards of this Advent season, so that on the Feast of the Nativity, we will be ready with our own sacred space for the arrival of your Son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we now pray.

Amen.

## The Season of Advent: A Fruitful Time for the Christian Steward

Probably nothing challenges a Christian steward's use of time as much as the seasons of Advent and Christmas. Each year, we marvel at the irony of it: a time to honor and ponder God's great mystery, the Incarnation, somehow falls prey to a time of stressful shopping, endless "to do" lists, strained checkbooks, and guilt over what's not getting done. Sometimes those nonstop Christmas tunes begin to grate on our senses.



---

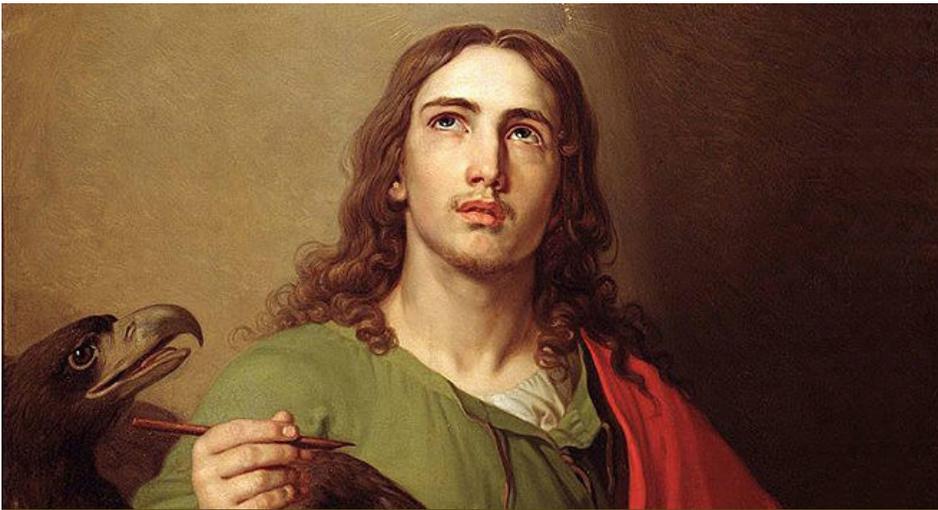
Only you and God can determine the best use of your time. Ask God which traditions are life-giving for you, and be bold enough to leave the others behind.

---

How does the Christian steward answer this challenge to devote time to reflection and prayer while incorporating the best and most fruitful of our cultural traditions into this festive season? One suggestion would be to set aside a special time of reflection right at the beginning of Advent for determining what our priorities for the season will be. Set aside an hour and begin by rereading the Christmas story in the Gospel of Saint Luke. Ask God to help you know what is the most generous and beneficial use of time in God's service during this season. Ask for help in setting aside time for prayer each day. Don't be afraid to cross things off your "must do" list if they add stress to what should be a peaceful time.

Only you and God can determine the best use of your time. For instance, some people find annual Christmas cookie baking a reflective, creative time and a wonderful way to share. For others, it's a self-imposed burden and a sure-fire way to a messy kitchen and a calorie overload. Likewise, that extra party may be just what someone needs to unwind and commune with friends while for another it may be the gateway to exhaustion or a temptation to overindulge in food or drink. Ask God which traditions are life-giving for you, and be bold enough to leave the others behind.

"I just don't have time," is the frequent lament of the holiday season. But the Christian steward is aware that we all have the same amount of time, and to each is given an opportunity of returning the first fruits of that time back to God. The season of Advent offers just such a grace-filled opportunity.



## STEWARDSHIP SAINT FOR DECEMBER

### Saint John, Apostle, Evangelist and Protector of the Blessed Mother

At the foot of his cross, when Jesus looked down “and saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold your mother.’ And from that hour, the disciple took Mary into his home” (John 19:26-27). The disciple Jesus is referring to is Saint John, who would be the apostle who cared for Our Blessed Mother until she was assumed into heaven.

John was one of the twelve apostles and considered to be the author of the Fourth Gospel. The son of Zebedee, John was, like his brother James, one of the first disciples called by Jesus, who gave the two brothers the name “Sons of Thunder” for their zeal. They were very close to Jesus and were with him at his Transfiguration. John is identified as the Beloved Disciple who reclined next to Jesus at the Last Supper, ran with Saint Peter to the tomb of Jesus on Easter morning and who first recognized the Risen Lord at the Sea of Tiberias.

John played a leading role in the first Christian community in Jerusalem and is designated in the Acts of the Apostles as second to Peter in the upper room. He accompanied Peter to preach in the Temple, where they were both arrested and he traveled to Samaria to minister to the new Christian converts.

John is traditionally regarded as the author of four more New Testament texts besides the Gospel of John: the book of Revelation, and three letters.

In the eighteenth century, Pope Benedict XIV, a renowned scholar, accumulated evidence and traditions and wrote in his Treatise on the Holy Mysteries on Holy Friday that in order to ensure her safety from the persecutions being committed in Jerusalem at the time, took Mary to live with him in the Christian community at Ephesus, located in Asia Minor: He wrote: “Saint John, leaving for Ephesus, took Mary with him and it was there that the Blessed Mother was assumed into heaven.”

Saint Jerome, the most famous biblical scholar in the history of the Church, reported that when his age, most likely in his 90s, made it impossible for John to preach, he would be carried to the assembly and was in the habit of saying, “My little children, love one another.” When asked why he always used the same words, he is said to have replied, “Because it is the word of the Lord, and if you keep it, that is enough.”

Saint John passed away in Ephesus sometime between the years 100 and 117. He is the patron saint of Turkey and Asia Minor. His feast day is December 27.

## The Blessed Virgin Mary: Our Model of Stewardship

During the Advent and Christmas seasons, we have a number of opportunities to reflect on and honor the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is not only the greatest saint in our Catholic family of faith, but the model of stewardship par excellence. Mary teaches us the meaning of stewardship by her own life witness.



In anticipation of what God did for all in Christ, she alone was preserved from original sin “from the first moment of her conception.”

On December 8, we celebrate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This happens to be the patronal feast day of the United States of America. On this feast day we celebrate the conception of Mary in her mother’s womb without the stain of original sin. Pope Pius IX proclaimed this truth on December 8, 1854, that Mary’s preservation from original sin was a ‘singular grace and privilege’ given her by God. In anticipation of what God did for all in

*Continued on next page*

*Continued from previous page*

Christ, she alone was preserved from original sin “from the first moment of her conception.”

On December 12 millions of Catholics in the Western hemisphere will celebrate the Feast of Mary as Our Lady of Guadalupe, who Saint John Paul II declared as the Patroness of the Americas. This year we observe the Third Sunday of Advent on December 12. So, many parishes will celebrate this Marian feast on Saturday, December 11. In 1531 she appeared to Juan Diego on a hill outside Mexico City. A life-size figure of the Virgin as a young, dark-skinned American Indian woman with the face of a mestizo was imprinted on his cloak. The image gave the indigenous people of the Americas assurance that our Blessed Mother was loving and compassionate toward them.



On December 25, when we celebrate the Nativity of Our Lord, we celebrate the birth of Jesus through his mother, Mary. The Incarnation took place through Mary’s own flesh, and the infant Jesus was nourished by Mary’s own body. Mary, of course, plays a uniquely pivotal role in defining the reality of Jesus. Since all baptized Christians are members of Christ’s mystical body, we too are children of Mary.

On January 1, Mary is honored as the “Mother of God,” which is the greatest of her titles. This title is the foundation for every other title attributed to her as she became the mother of God from the instant Jesus was conceived in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit. The title was formally announced by the Church in the fifth century.

## The ICSC Virtual Conference – An Excellent Advent Retreat

*By Leisa Anslinger*

A number of years ago, I visited with the pastoral council of a local parish. It was the first meeting of the season for the council, and the first meeting for newly appointed members. I was asked to provide a brief introduction to stewardship. After prayer, I asked the group “when I say the word ‘stewardship’ what first comes to mind?” This particular group’s sharing was insightful: God asks us to care for all that we are and all that is; stewardship is about sharing what we have; it is a faith-response to Christ; stewardship is about using well something that is really God’s. It was heartening to hear such understanding from this council, and encouraging that I have heard similar responses from many groups in the past few years.



---

The ICSC virtual conference is excellent for an Advent day of recollection or an opportunity to grow as leaders and as stewards by viewing the session recordings throughout the season of Advent; and most especially, to deepen our lives in Christ.

---

No longer, it seems, is “money” the first thing that comes to everyone’s mind when they hear the word “stewardship.” This increase in understanding is the result of the hard work, dedication, and leadership of many ICSC members: bishops, clergy and lay leaders. It is borne of consistent efforts to teach stewardship as a way of life. And just as stewardship itself is an expression of discipleship, applied in the daily circumstances of our lives, forming people as stewards requires us to continue to spread the message throughout the year.

I am grateful to know that many of us will gather soon, even though virtually, for our ICSC virtual conference. This is excellent for an Advent day of recollection or an opportunity to grow as leaders and as stewards by viewing the session recordings throughout the season of Advent; and most especially, to deepen our lives in Christ. Like the pastoral council with whom I met, we recognize that all we are and all we have truly are God’s. Our time together to learn, explore and grow as stewardship leaders is a way of stewarding well our talents, knowledge, time, and friendship, as people who are committed to Christ’s sacrificial way. Let us take this moment to re-dedicate ourselves as stewardship leaders, trusting in the providence of our good and gracious God in whose image we are created.

The ICSC 2021 Virtual Conference will take place December 1 and 2.  
Click [HERE](#) for more information.



# 2021 Virtual Conference



## RESTORE *our* JOY

Psalm 51:14

MODULE III | December 1-2

Join us to capture the inspiration and energy generated by the Orlando conference.

Designed for pastors, parish pastoral teams, parish stewardship and evangelization leaders and those interested in learning more about Christian stewardship as a way of life.

- Sessions are open to all virtual conference registrants
- Unlimited access to video-recorded sessions
- Share the experience of those who attended the Orlando conference
- Invite others who were not able to attend the in-person conference!

*Virtual conference attendees are welcome to join in on any module or session of interest.*



Click  
HERE to  
register

AS LOW AS  
**\$229**  
with group discounts

# Giving at Christmas



As Christian stewards, we know that this is precisely the time when sacrifice for others expresses our gratitude for the sacrificial gift of Christ to the world. What can we do?



We enter these hope-filled and joyous seasons of Advent and Christmas yearning for some return to normalcy. Our own sense of gratitude leads us to a heightened awareness of those who struggle during this time as well, their hardship made all the more difficult for them as they see the wealth around them.

As our economy gradually improves, the fact is that for millions of people, things are not getting better. Most of us are aware that the U.S. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) that was increased on October 1, has helped a great deal. But still, charitable food banks and pantries have seen a growing demand to assist the millions who are still in need.

This is just one example of the continued blight of poverty. Homelessness and hunger are not the legacy Christian stewards want to bestow on our nation's children, nor on hungry children in nations throughout the world.

During the Christmas season, it's especially important to remember our commitment to a Lord who comes to bring Good News to the poor. It can be tempting to neglect charitable giving as we focus on family gift-giving and the added expenses of the season. But as Christian stewards, we know that this is precisely the time when sacrifice for others expresses our gratitude for the sacrificial gift of Christ to the world. What can we do?



- Make a generous donation to an agency that distributes food such as your local food bank.
- Ask your parish, or local Catholic Charities, how you can assist a family who may need help at Christmas.
- Take the opportunity to educate your children about poverty, and help them to participate in giving trees and food drives at school.
- Discuss with your family how you might sacrificially limit spending on certain items in an effort to share more generously with those in need in your community.
- Explore how you can help address issues of poverty legislatively and practically by visiting the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

# 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.

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 can make someone this Christmas.



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 or friends and discussing it together.

**4. Put a crèche up in your home at the beginning of Advent:** Consider having one set that is "kid-proof"

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. 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.

**7. 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.

**8. 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.

**9. Enjoy an eco-friendly Christmas:** Christmas is a time when a large number of people enjoy excess and extravaganza, but the environmental cost can be quite dramatic. Arguably, a million miles of unrecyclable wrapping paper is thrown in the trash every year. Look for simple ways to cut down on waste over this festive period. Where possible, use recyclable gift wrap.

**10. Attend Christmas Mass together with family or friends:** December 25 falls on Saturday 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

### **Second Sunday of Advent** **Weekend of December 4 /5, 2021**

In today's second reading, Saint Paul prays with joy and confidence for his friends in the Christian community at Philippi. He is encouraged that the community has partnered with him to proclaim the Gospel. He sees Christ's active presence and plan of salvation at work in the community. God's overarching plan is unclear to us. But when we see evidence of God working through others, doesn't it give us reason to hope that Christ is alive among us? Does the witness of others help our own prayer lives? Does it inspire us to be partners with others in promoting the Gospel? Food for thought in this second week of Advent.

### **Third Sunday of Advent** **Weekend of December 11/12, 2021**

In today's Gospel we hear the prophet John the Baptist being asked an insightful stewardship question: "*What should we do?*" Each group wants to know the appropriate response to John's call; each reply points to how they should treat others. John does not simply say, "Be baptized." Rather, he points them to their jobs and personal relationships. John's message is simple: judgment is near, and repentance includes treating others well. We should be willing to share what we have with those in need. To listen to John the Baptist is to be called to account. Do I give only of my excess, or am I the good steward who is willing to make daily sacrifices in order to help others?

### **Fourth Sunday of Advent** **Weekend of December 18/19, 2021**

As we draw close to the great Feast of the Nativity, we hear the bold stewardship proclamation twice in today's second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews: "Behold, I come to do your will, O God!" Who is this Jesus? Who are we that

we should follow him? Many want him as a friend, a guide, a king, an advocate. We long to see the face of God. Jesus reveals the nature of God, the servant sent to give us new life in Him. Take time to ponder: Do we have the courage to follow Jesus? To show others the face of God? To say to the Lord: "Behold, I come to do your will?"

### **The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas Day)** **Saturday, December 25, 2021**

In today's Christmas Mass at dawn we hear from the Gospel reading that God has entered quietly into the world. Not into the great city of Jerusalem, but into a small village about five miles south. Not into a noble family, but to an outcast couple keeping the newborn in a manger. Not announced by royal edicts, but to common shepherds, the first human heralds of Christ's birth. As Christian stewards we simply allow Christ to live in us no matter what our circumstances happen to be. We allow Christ to share his love with us and reflect that love out to others. We now are the heralds of Christ's Incarnation. What an unimaginable gift from a generous Lord. Good stewards rejoice in this gift and give glory to God.

### **Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph** **Sunday, December 26, 2021**

The ultimate aim of Saint Paul's Letter to the Colossians is to teach the community how to deepen its relationship with Christ Jesus. His list of virtues summarizes the ideals of communal stewardship: *compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience*. For Paul, practicing these virtues opens our hearts to Christ as individuals and as a worshipping community. This is how the Christian community ought to live. This is how its members should behave in their dealings with others, particularly with fellow believers. As we approach a new year, how might we embrace one of these virtues more fully in order to deepen our relationship with Jesus?