



INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP

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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

Advent – A Season of Hope

Advent is a time of waiting and expectation; a season of quiet anticipation and preparation. We are waiting for our Lord to come into the world as the baby Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem. We are also preparing for His return, His second coming as the shepherd-king, to restore harmony and right relationship to all creation. Advent is a season yearning for God to come and set the world right with perfect justice, truth and peace. It is a season of hope.

Advent is a time to emphasize preparation through prayer. While Lent emphasizes a spirit of repentance through prayer and fasting, Advent's prayers are prayers of humble devotion and commitment, prayers for deliverance, prayers of gladness and joyful expectation, prayers that await the light of Christ coming into the world.



We do not shrink from those Advent scripture readings that reveal a strong prophetic tone of accountability and judgment. Christ's disciples expect the Lord to hold them accountable for what has been entrusted to them just as a spouse, parent, teacher or supervisor holds us accountable. And just as the steward was found faithful in small matters by the master, we too are confident that we will be found faithful and will enter the joy of the Master. We have absolute trust in the Lord's countenance.

Assuredly, during Advent we anticipate the Lord's coming with hope. It is that hope, however faint at times, that keeps us from despair and the darkness of sin and its destructiveness. It is a hope that urges us to be kind, loving and compassionate toward one another. It is a hope that encourages our faith in a merciful God who continues to pour His grace upon us.

We don't know when Christ will come again to bring human history to its completion. But we celebrate with gladness the great promise of Advent and we rekindle that positive, joyful spirit within us because we know, as Zechariah prophesied, that the light of Christ will shine on all who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, and He will guide our feet into the way of peace.



STEWARDSHIP SAINT FOR DECEMBER

Saint Stephen

The day after Christmas is called “St. Stephen’s Day” to commemorate the first Christian martyr. It is also this “Feast of Stephen” that is mentioned in the English Christmas carol, “Good King Wenceslas.”

Stephen was a Greek-speaking Jew living in Jerusalem. He became a follower of Jesus Christ and was one of seven individuals chosen by the twelve apostles to serve tables, look after the distribution of the community funds (alms), especially to widows, and assist in the ministry of preaching.

Stephen was also a leader in the Christian group known as the “Hellenists,” a community that had its own synagogues where the scriptures were read in Greek. The Hellenist Christians maintained that the new Christian faith could not grow unless it separated itself from Judaism and specifically the Temple and the Mosaic law. The Hellenists also urged the expansion of the Church’s mission to the Gentiles.

The elders in a number of neighboring synagogues opposed Stephen and the Hellenists and charged him with blasphemy for saying that the Temple would be destroyed and that Jesus had set aside the Mosaic law even though Stephen maintained that Jesus came to fulfill the law, not set it aside.

When dragged before the Sanhedrin, the supreme legal court of Jewish elders, Stephen made an eloquent defense of the Hellenist Christian teaching. He charged his accusers of trying to stifle the movement of the Holy Spirit, of persecuting those who spoke prophetically and of betraying and murdering Jesus. Then he looked up to heaven and began to describe a vision he was having of the recently executed Jesus standing on the right side of God.

The council erupted into a furor and its members began shouting, covered their ears and ordered Stephen to be dragged outside the city and executed. As he was being stoned to death, Stephen asked God to forgive his attackers while the witnesses to his martyrdom placed their cloaks at the feet of Saul of Tarsus who consented to Stephen’s death. Saul would later undergo a conversion experience and become Saint Paul.

Saint Stephen was one of the most popular saints in the Middle Ages and in many countries his feast day of December 26 is still a public holiday. He is the patron saint of deacons and his name is included in Eucharistic Prayer I of the Mass.

Being Good Stewards of Our Personal Vocations

by Leisa Anslinger, 2022 recipient of the ICSC Christian Stewardship Award

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.



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.

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

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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!



Keeping Christ in Christmas by Feeding the Littlest Ones

The wonderful joy we feel in December as we await the coming of the Christ child is not so joyful for the millions of children in the United States who will go hungry this Christmas.

In every community in the United States where a county election commission announced the results of last month's historic elections, children woke up hungry. They spent the day hungry. They went to bed hungry. In fact, more than 8 million children go to bed hungry every night.

As many as 17 million children nationwide are affected by food insecurity, a phenomenon defined by experts as inconsistent access to enough nutritious food to live a healthy life.

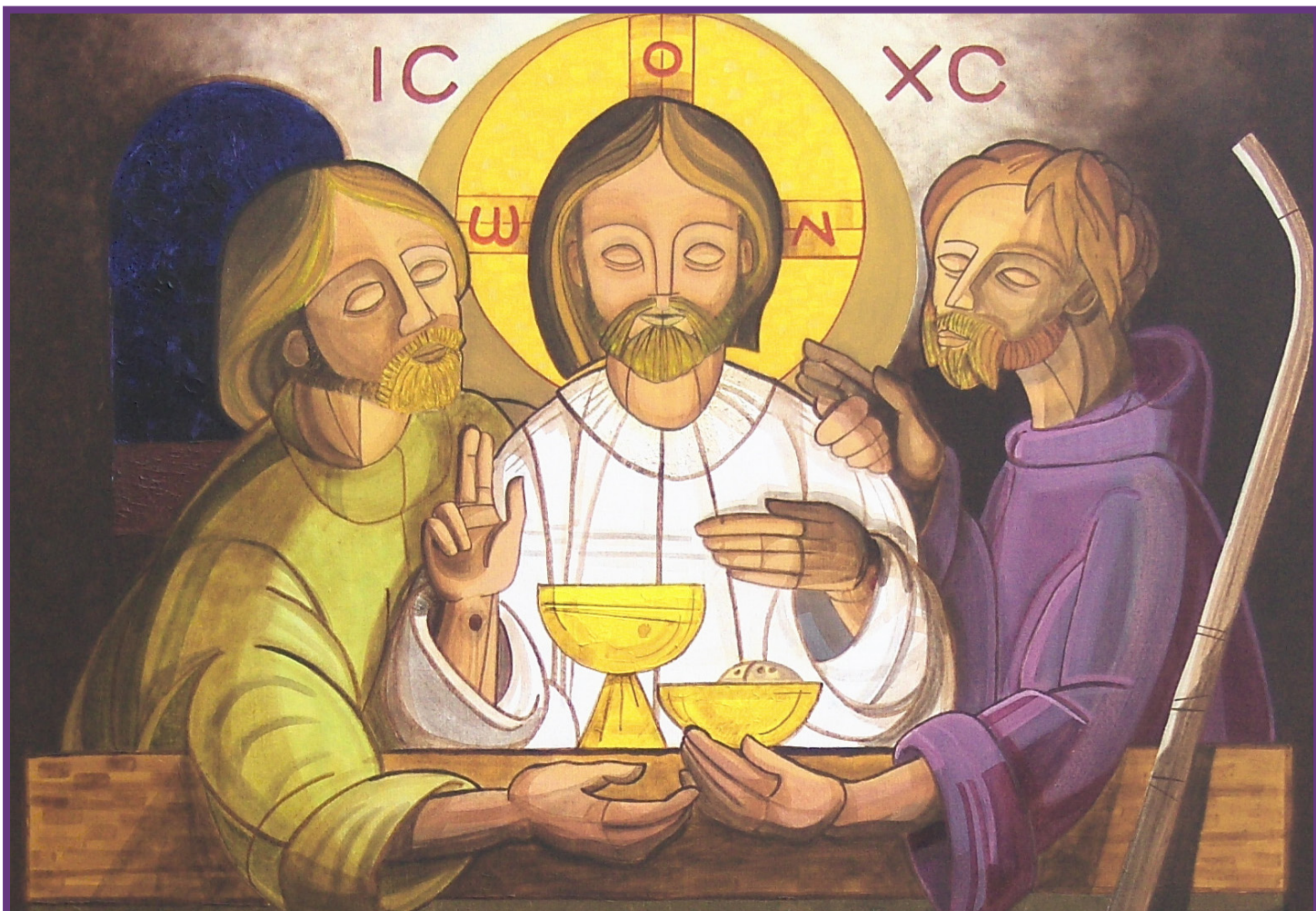
The consequences and costs of child hunger are severe. Research shows that lack of nutrition can permanently alter a child's brain architecture, stunting intellectual capacity and a child's ability to learn and interact with others. With hunger comes more frequent sickness and higher healthcare costs not to mention the resulting societal costs later on.

**"Do not wait for leaders; do it alone,
person to person."**

Many children will not enjoy a bountiful meal on Christmas day, or any day, and for many, there may be no festivities, no tree, no gifts. Christian stewards understand the obvious paradox as they celebrate the Incarnation of Christ as an innocent child.

Finding comprehensive remedies to hunger in the United States and worldwide is complex, subject to debate, and transcends politics and ideologies. But what is not subject to debate in Catholic social teaching is that Catholics don't let children go hungry. Good stewards are motivated by the words of Saint Teresa of Calcutta: "Do not wait for leaders; do it alone, person to person."

Like the Good Samaritan, good stewards do not avert their eyes from the needs of the littlest ones who suffer in our own communities and neighborhoods. They know they are called to reach out. Saint Teresa of Calcutta also said: "If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one." One way to keep Christ in Christmas is to Be Christ to a hungry child.



As our Church enters the final year of the
National Eucharistic Revival

Join us for the 61st Annual Conference

October 1-4, 2023 | Orlando, Florida

*Where we will unpack the theme, Eucharistic Stewardship,
found in the United States Bishops' pastoral letter.*

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Christmas: A Stewardship Reflection on Sharing



“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.

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.

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 fill our hearts and spill out to others, especially those most in need of our generous spirit.



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A STEWARDSHIP MOMENT

Second Sunday of Advent **Weekend of December 3/4, 2022**

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 10/11, 2022**

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 17/18, 2022**

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, 2022**

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.