



INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

# CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP

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## A STEWARDSHIP PRAYER *for December*

Lord,

As we journey through this Advent season, give us the wisdom to be good stewards of this time of grace, a time to be more prayerful, to listen more intently to Your Word; a time to allow our faith to grow and mature. Show us how to give witness to your Good News more fervently among our families, friends and those with whom we worship.

Help us be more aware of those who are poor, lonely or suffering; and to serve them as if we were serving You. And fill our hearts with hope, so that we may make straight Your path with confidence and zeal, and prepare for the joy of Your coming!

We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen



## The Season of 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.



Assuredly, during Advent we anticipate the Lord's coming with 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

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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.



We are waiting for our Lord to come into the world as the baby Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem.

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 Francis Xavier

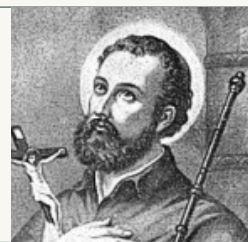
Francis Xavier was born in 1506 to an aristocratic Basque family near Navarre, Spain.

At the age of 19, he went to study at the University of Paris, and by age 24, he was already a teacher of philosophy who had a promising academic career ahead of him. His life changed after he became acquainted with Ignatius Loyola, and along with Ignatius and others, he helped found the religious community, the Society of Jesus. He was ordained to the priesthood in Venice in 1537.

As King John III of Portugal desired Jesuit missionaries for the Portuguese East Indies, Francis was ordered there in 1540. He landed at Goa, India, the capital of the then Portuguese colonies, on May 6, 1541.

Francis had a passion for proclaiming the Gospel and he evangelized to such widely scattered people as Hindus, Malaysians and Japanese. His letters reveal him as a tireless and enthusiastic missionary. Wherever he went, he lived with the poorest of the population, sharing their food and modest accommodations. He also spent countless hours ministering to the sick, particularly those afflicted with leprosy.

St. Francis Xavier has been called the patron of Catholic missions, and has been considered to have converted more people to Christianity than anyone else since St. Paul.



Francis ministered for more than two years in Japan and learned enough Japanese to preach in a simple style, administer the sacraments, and establish missions for missionaries who were to follow him. From Japan he had dreams of going to China, but this plan was never realized. He died on December 2, 1552, at age 46, on his way to mainland China. On December 11, 1553, Xavier's body was shipped to Goa and remains there still in the Basilica of Bom J sus. He was canonized in 1622, at the same time as Ignatius Loyola.

St. Francis Xavier has been called the patron of Catholic missions, and has been considered to have converted more people to Christianity than anyone else since St. Paul. Though his apostolate in the Far East lasted barely ten years, his example has inspired an immense amount of missionary activity in the countries of the Asian continent. He is the patron saint of Australia, Borneo, China, East Indies, Goa, Japan and New Zealand. His feast day is December 3.





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.

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" 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

## Be a Good Steward of the Advent and Christmas Seasons

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.

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.



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.

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 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 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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## Seven Things You Can Do for the Poor at Christmas



Sacred scripture teaches us that the prophet Isaiah was filled with God's spirit when he proclaimed that the Lord had sent him "... to bring glad tidings to the poor..." (Is. 61:1). It is that same spirit that keeps us mindful of the poor and suffering among us.

There are many things you can do during the Advent and Christmas seasons to assist efforts to bring glad tidings to the poor in your community. Whether you can volunteer individually, as a family or as part of a group or parish, the possibilities for serving the poor do exist. Consider following one or more of the seven suggestions below:

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1. Pray for the poor, and ask God to transform your own attitudes about those in need, realizing that all of us are poor in some way before God's grace.
2. Suggest that a petition be added to the Prayers of the Faithful asking that the members of the parish community open their hearts to the poor.
3. Collect food items for a food pantry in your community.
4. Volunteer to assist a pantry for a day of sorting, bagging or distributing.
5. Prayerfully consider whether your parish might participate, if only virtually, in the National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day events on December 21, sponsored by the National Health Care for the Homeless Council
6. Make your own generous financial gift to an organization that serves the poor.
7. Think about ways to use your professional skills in a volunteer capacity at your chosen anti-hunger organization. There are many programs, including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) screening and application assistance centers, food banks, and other anti-hunger organizations, that can use your help to make sure that all eligible people have access to nutrition assistance and anti-hunger programs.



You will find rich rewards in fulfilling these stewardships tasks. For Jesus said that whatever we do for one of the least of his brothers and sisters, we do it for him (see Matthew 25:40).



SAVE THE DATE!



## The Vestibule: A Monthly Parish Stewardship Network

SAVE THE DATE for *The Vestibule*, a new monthly networking group designed specifically for parish stewardship leaders!

**When: Thursday, December 19 at 2:00 pm ET** will be our second virtual gathering with parish stewardship leaders. It is a one-hour Zoom meeting facilitated by a veteran stewardship leader and will address numerous parish stewardship topics. Participants will be invited to ask questions, offer their own wisdom and experience or just sit back and take it all in.

Monthly discussions may include topics such as:



- Building a Culture of Stewardship in Your Parish
- Hospitality and Welcome: The Front Lines of Parish Stewardship
- Time and Talent: Getting the Most Out of Ministry Fairs
- Must-Have Practices that will Transform Your Parish
- Stewardship of Treasure: Helping Parishioners Embrace Generosity More Intentionally

An invitation and Zoom link will be sent each month to ICSC members.

*Join us! We hope to see you!*





### First Sunday of Advent

**Weekend of November 30/December 1, 2024**

In the Gospel on this first Sunday of Advent, Jesus warns his disciples about the end-time. He urges them to be vigilant, spiritually awake, to pray, and to avoid self-indulgence, spiritual malaise and a preoccupation with anxiety. Jesus advises against a lifestyle that embraces both earthly pleasures and worry. These will not matter when the Lord asks for an account of our stewardship. Stewards realize their lives are not just about the here and now. They know themselves to be reflections of God's active presence in the world and witnesses of the Lord's promises. As we begin this season of hope, let us reflect on what it means to devote every waking moment in our lives to the Lord.

### Second Sunday of Advent

**Weekend of December 7/8, 2024**

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 14/15, 2024**

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 21/22, 2024**

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)

**Wednesday, December 25, 2024**

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

**Weekend of December 28/29, 2024**

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?