

INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP

July 2025 • e-Bulletin

A STEWARDSHIP PRAYER *for July*

Lord and Creator,
You are the source of wisdom
and grace,
the author of human freedom
and creativity.
We thank you for these gifts,
and ask that you teach us
to be good stewards of
our creative spirits.
Show us how to quiet ourselves,
and to learn
the art of re-creation, reflection
and relaxation
so that we might recharge
and refill ourselves
for the work you have
planned for us.
Help us never to be too busy
to pause and realize
your gracious presence all around us:
in nature, in other people,
in ourselves.
Slow us down, Lord,
and teach us to be
stewards of our time of recreation.
Amen.



Being Good Stewards of Our Religious Freedom



The Christian steward knows that gratitude is at the heart of stewardship. Indeed, gratitude lies at the heart of our spirituality; it's a primary door through which we enter into a relationship with our Creator. Having the freedom to deepen our relationship with the Lord offers us much for which to be grateful.

And yet like so many things sublime and sacred, gratitude can be reduced to easy bromides or pious platitudes. Sometimes those of us in the U.S. reduce Independence Day, July 4, and the freedoms it represents, to just a good barbecue and fireworks show. Instead, Americans and all of us in the Western world should feel a renewed gratitude for the blessings of living in countries where our faith

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may be freely practiced, where we can freely assemble, and where we can stand up for justice without risking our very lives.

Last year, Pope Francis cited the mounting waves of anti-Christian violence sweeping the world. The pope was referring in particular to the Christians in the Middle East when he asked us, "Am I indifferent to that, or does it affect me like it's a member of the family?" The instability and upheaval in countries like Syria and Iraq threaten the faithful. The Middle East, which was 20 percent Christian in the early 20th century, is now four

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percent Christian with that population steadily declining. Refugees fleeing persecution are at levels not seen since post-World War II.

These are troubled times in our 21st century world. Religious intolerance and persecution are at a zenith, and much of it is directed against Catholics and other Christians. And throughout the world – China, North Korea, Sub-Sahara Africa, even India – Christians are a persecuted minority.



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Meanwhile, some are tempted during the warm summer months to take a “vacation” from Sunday Mass. Some travel and feel no necessity to find a local Catholic church. Some sit through Sunday’s liturgy with golf or the swimming pool on their minds. Some elevate their kids’ sports over Sunday worship.

The Christian steward, however, realizes that somewhere around the world, others are being persecuted for the religious freedom so many take for granted. The Christian steward goes to Mass, and with much gratitude, prays in unity and solidarity with their brothers and sisters throughout the world who suffer for our shared faith in Jesus Christ.

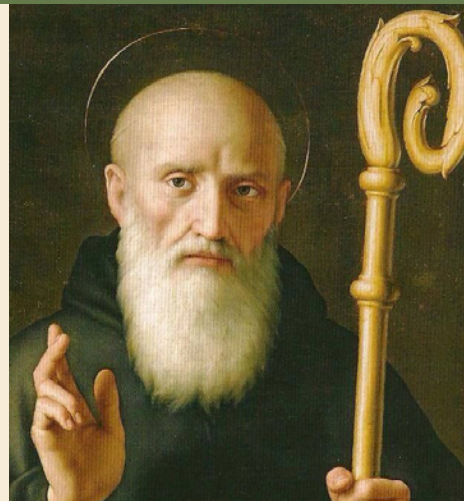
STEWARDSHIP SAINT for July

Saint Benedict

Saint Benedict, the father of Western monasticism, is considered a model of Christian stewardship. He authored the famous Rule of St. Benedict, a handbook of daily Christian living that emphasizes exercising stewardship over prayer, work, and community.

Born in central Italy in the town of Nursia around 480, Benedict studied in Rome as a young man. He was so distressed by the chaos and incivility he found there that he left the city and traveled to Subiaco, Italy to become a hermit. He soon attracted followers who wanted to join him in his simple way of living; imitating his style of prayer and work while respecting the rhythms of the day. Benedict stayed there for 25 years before taking a small group of his monks to Monte Cassino, near Naples, where he wrote the final version of his Rule.

The Rule of St. Benedict started a simple, spiritual tradition that exists to this day. It was meant to “...establish a school for the Lord’s service.” It is a set of Christian principles around which the members of the community were to organize their daily lives, focusing on the most



“Let all guests who arrive be received like Christ, for he is going to say: ‘I was a stranger and you welcomed me (Mt. 25:35).’”

important Christian values that would direct their daily actions and help them cultivate habits that would ensure good stewardship of their physical, emotional and spiritual well-being.

A hallmark of Christian stewardship is hospitality, making room for others. St. Benedict found this aspect of the Christian life especially important for his communities. In his Rule, St. Benedict writes:

“Let all guests who arrive be received like Christ, for he is going to say: ‘I was a stranger and you welcomed me (Mt. 25:35).’ ‘And to all let due honor be shown, especially to those who share our faith’ (Gal. 6:10) and to pilgrims...In welcoming the poor and pilgrims the greatest care and solicitude should be shown, because it is especially in them that Christ is received” (Rule of St. Benedict 53:1-2, 15).

The Rule of St. Benedict was meant to stand on the shoulders of the Gospels and many spiritual writers throughout the ages attest to its transforming power to change lives. It teaches the principles of stewardship, shows one how to live in a way that is uniquely countercultural and invites its adherents to enter into a deeper and more joyful relationship with the Lord.

St. Benedict died in approximately 550. He is the patron saint of monks and farm workers. In 1964 Pope Paul VI declared him to be the patron saint of Europe. His feast day is July 11.

Christian Stewardship and the Need for Recreation

Is there such a thing as a stewardship of recreation? Some people might dismiss the thought. But they'd be wrong.

In his book, *The Gift of the Jews*, author Thomas Cahill observes that, in receiving the Ten Commandments, the ancient Hebrews did something no other ancient society had ever done: they established a day of rest. "The God who made the universe and rested bids us to do the same, calling us to a weekly restoration of prayer, study, and recreation (or re-creation)."



For those of us in the Northern Hemisphere at least, probably no other month bids us to relax as the month of July does. Backyard barbecues, days at the pool or the beach, a recreational outing or simply the lazy idleness of a mid-year Sunday afternoon invite us to slow down. And this invitation should be heeded. Sometimes, our society induces in us a sense of guilt if we're not "doing." But turning off the computer and the phone and spending quality time with those around us, or finding time for our own interior lives, is stewardship of our time which leads to the place where God dwells. It's a good example for our kids as well: July presents a wonderful time to "rest" from all the electronic screens and busyness that dominate their young lives.

July is also the month when U.S. citizens celebrate the proclamation of their freedom. When the Hebrew people first received the Ten Commandments, they too had just received their freedom from the Egyptians after a sojourn in the wilderness. Cahill thinks it's no coincidence that a people recently liberated were in need of a directive to rest and reflect. "Leisure," he writes, "is the necessary ground of creativity, and a free people are free to imitate the creativity of God."

So, the next time you feel guilty about a quiet, reflective time of doing "nothing," remember that recreation also means "re-creation." To be a truly creative person, a steward of our interior resources, we must honor our need to rest, relax, be with others, read and play.

Fifteen Random Stewardship Ideas for the Month of July

1. Think of a charity which is amply blessed at Christmas. Remember them with a gift mid-year.
2. Invite a single friend over for a meal.
3. Attend an extra Mass on a weekday this month.
4. Abstain from something you like – meat, a latte, a cold drink – on Fridays and save the money for a charity.
5. Take your rosary with you for an early morning walk.
6. Recycle more.
7. Each day, say a prayer for one of the world's trouble spots.
8. Turn off the TV, phone, and computer, and spend an hour devoted to someone you love.
9. Surprise an old friend with a phone call.
10. Buy or pick a flower for someone without a "reason."
11. Take your family to a farmers' market if in season.
12. Stop for a moment during your busy day and enjoy an ice cream cone or other favorite treat.
13. If you hear a great homily, tell the homilist.
14. Splurge on some produce and buy enough to share with someone in need.
15. On occasion, try turning your prayer before meals into a spontaneous prayer of thanks, using your own words.

Goodness Always Spreads: *A Reflection for Stewardship Leaders*



by Leisa Anslinger

About five years into my parish's stewardship journey, we held a special meeting with our pastoral council and stewardship commission. It was an opportunity to look back at where we had been, and to plan for the future. The conversation turned to the misunderstandings that some still had about the spirituality of stewardship, and to the ways we could improve our stewardship education. In the midst of the discussion, one of our long-standing commission members stunned us when he said, "Well, it really isn't as though God earned the money or the resources I have. I earned those. God may have given me the talents with which to do that, but those things that I own are mine." It was at that moment we all realized how far we had to go in spreading the message of stewardship!

We who are dedicated to fostering stewardship as a way of life often find ourselves at junctures in our ministry:

- We begin introducing the spirituality of stewardship, yet often find that

words fail us as we try to capture the depths of this way of gratitude and generosity.

- We walk the path of stewardship in the parish or diocese for a while, and find the message "sticks" with some, while others seem happily determined to ignore this call. The call to self-giving love is challenging!

What do we do in such junctures, as individuals and as parish or diocesan leaders?

These are the things we can continue to reflect on as parish leaders. I would like to suggest that we begin by taking Pope Francis' words in *Evangelii Gaudium* to heart: "Goodness always tends to spread. Every authentic experience of truth

*As it expands, goodness takes root and develops.
If we wish to lead a dignified and fulfilling life, we have to reach
out to others and seek their good.*

- After the first few years of lay witnesses, ministry fairs, annual renewal and a variety of stewardship formation processes, we find ourselves at a plateau, in which growth slows or stops. Participation in ministry stays about the same, as does financial giving, participation in communal prayer and sacramental celebrations, and efforts to move beyond the current status is stymied.

and goodness seeks by its very nature to grow within us, and any person who has experienced a profound liberation becomes more sensitive to the needs of others. As it expands, goodness takes root and develops. If we wish to lead a dignified and fulfilling life, we have to reach out to others and seek their good" (EG, 9). May our ministry as stewardship leaders be filled with this goodness of God, reflected in our thoughts, words and actions!

NEW IDEAS

to Increase Financial Support for Your Parish

A parish is the community that nourishes our Catholic faith and it needs financial resources to ensure that its mission remains sustainable. The ICSC conference is an ideal venue for learning how to create more vibrant parish communities by promoting stewardship and more generous giving in several ways including introducing offertory enhancement, legacy giving, and other fundraising essentials.

Selected themes to help you increase financial support include:

- Cultivating a community of generosity through the offertory collection
- How digital technology can enhance parishioner engagement and the weekly offertory
- How to talk about money with parishioners
- Achieving your maximum potential in parish fundraising
- Stewardship of treasure: raising awareness of the Gospel imperative toward generosity
- “Making the ask” of your parish’s top giving prospects
- What a parish annual appeal looks like
- The essential steps to launching a successful parish capital campaign

STEWARDSHIP: A JOURNEY OF HOPE

Chicago, Illinois | September 21-24, 2025

 **ICSC** | **REGISTER TODAY!**

Don't miss this opportunity to learn how to promote more generous giving in your parish!



A STEWARDSHIP MOMENT

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Weekend of July 5/6, 2025

In today's Gospel, we hear Jesus inviting his disciples to be evangelizers. "The harvest is abundant," Jesus says. But those who are willing to invite others to a deeper relationship with the Lord are few. Good stewards who are willing to witness their Catholic faith to others know they are "like lambs among wolves." They are encouraged to be gentle, patient and loving, knowing they may face rejection and even fierce opposition. Jesus invites us to be better stewards of our faith, to give positive, courageous, joyful witness to others who have turned away from their relationship with him. Is there someone we should be reaching out to this week?

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Weekend of July 12/13, 2025

Today's Gospel turns our attention to one of Jesus' most familiar stories, the Parable of the Good Samaritan. It is about living how God intended us to live: to acknowledge God's divine love and compassion lavished upon us, and to extend that love and compassion upon others without reservation. We can find a lot of reasons for not stopping to help someone. We can talk ourselves out of being Good Samaritans. Strangers are not our responsibility, or are they? Good stewards understand that God's mercy is a gift that must be shared, and that doing the right thing, acting as Jesus would act toward others, is the only course of action for one who lives according to the demands of the Gospel. How might you be a Good Samaritan this week?

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Weekend of July 19/20, 2025

Martha and Mary are the focus of this weekend's Gospel, which abounds with rich themes about hospitality, service, and finding the right balance between action and prayerful attention to the Lord. Christians who are good stewards of their faith life realize that if they are too busy to enjoy peaceful, private time with the Lord, then something is out of balance in their spiritual lives. If we make time for Mass, but then carry on with our busy schedules without prayer, meditation and reflection, we are missing out. If we find ourselves anxious and harried by life's routines, could it be a sign that something in our spiritual life needs some serious attention?

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Weekend of July 26/27, 2025

A prominent theme in today's Gospel parable is generosity. Late at night, a sleepy friend responds to his neighbor's request for food for an unexpected guest. Jesus suggests that it would be unthinkable for a friend to deny a friend in need. A friend would most certainly give what is asked and more. Through this story, Jesus illustrates God's generosity. Good stewards realize the extraordinary love and graciousness with which God showers us. We need never convince God to be generous. God is already that generous friend. His abundant love bathes us in goodness. This week, prayerfully reflect on God's generosity to us. What should our response be to that generosity?