



INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL CATHOLIC STEWARDSHIP

e-Bulletin • December 2025



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, John 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 Monday, December 9, 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

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her by God. 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 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.



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.



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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. Charitable food banks and pantries have seen a growing demand and are struggling to assist the millions who are 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.

Advent: *Exercising Good Stewardship of Our Spiritual Lives*

When you say the word “Advent,” what immediately pops into mind? A feast of color, a traditional manger scene bathed in soft candlelight, glistening snowflakes falling on festive trees, a yearning for the One who is to come.

But sometimes, the season brings other images: crowded stores, treats that tempt us to too many calories, limitless to-do and to-buy lists. Yet in the back of our minds, we hear the call to conversion. Christ is calling us to be good stewards of all that we have and all that we are. How can we keep Advent in such a way that it is a time to focus on the fundamentals of stewardship; of spiritual growth and preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ? Here are a few suggestions, not meant to be another to-do list, but rather a way to remind ourselves daily of our call to prepare a way for the Lord in our lives.

1. Begin the season with a list to prioritize what you really want spiritually, and in relation to friends and family, from Advent. Discard all the “extras” and the fantasy of the perfect Hallmark Christmas. List clear goals that bring growth and peace and quality time.

2. Take time to read the daily readings each day of Advent. The beautiful words of Isaiah are guaranteed to



inspire, and the commitment will guarantee you a bit of quiet and reflective time.

3. Do you send Christmas cards? Even if they are the standard signature only or newsletter variety, try to personalize one a day, writing a nice note to an elderly relative or a friend you haven't seen in a long time.

4. Embrace the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This will encourage you to reflect on your life, your gifts and where you fail to utilize them

for the good of others. It's a beautiful preparation for the coming of Jesus and the beginning of a new year.

5. Pray for patience. As you drive over icy streets or navigate through a crowded store, take time to pray for those around you and for those who struggle with much less. Become aware of people around you and lift them in prayer rather than see them as obstacles to your goals.

6. In the midst of a season of abundance, do not forget the poor in your community.





A STEWARDSHIP MOMENT

Second Sunday of Advent Weekend of December 6/7, 2025

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 13/14, 2025

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 20/21, 2025

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, 2025

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 27/28, 2025

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