

Orthodox Christian Stewardship

*For every good gift and
every perfect gift is
from Thee, coming down
from Thee, the Father of
Lights...*

Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, "Prayer before the Ambo"



*Jesus Christ the Same, Yesterday,
Today and Forever*

EPISCOPAL COUNCIL & A CALL TO STEWARDSHIP

NOTES

“This is the time of year when we once again reflect on all that God has done for us and on our life as a grateful and joyful response to His gifts. From a position of responsibility and with paternal desire we encourage the flock entrusted to our care, to honor the present world by remaining on the path of an upright life in conformity with the divine teaching of the Church.”

“As we again express our love for God and each other, let us also express our love for the Church by being connected, involved in Her life and by putting our faith into action. The liturgical experience, important ministries and social and heritage programs of our local parishes are intended to include you and to meet your spiritual and social needs. We must care for our souls as for our bodies, our Church and our world. God calls us to this active stewardship of all things, especially His Church. This implies a commitment which puts God, family, faith and community as a priority. Express your love by giving of your time, treasure and prayerful support.”

*His Grace,
the Right Reverend LONGIN
President of the Episcopal Council
of the Serbian Orthodox Church
in North America*

a. *In a recent study by the PEW foundation, over half of all Americans spend more money on their TV, Cable or Internet bill than they gave to their respective Churches in a year.*

3. Annual Giving: the writing of one check, and VOILA! I am a member--I'm IN!
Imagine if God only blessed us once a year with His Grace? It would be like getting an annual shower! YUCK!

4. Reluctant-giving: You know, it becomes painful when you see another collection coming up in Church. When we have to write out a check, we see the looks of "Oh, not another one, gee I'm not rolling in dough, you know..." on our faces.

a. *Think about this: Did Christ go to the Cross reluctantly? NO! He gave of Himself abundantly--He practiced abundant giving. Can we do anything less?*

SO, HOW DO WE BEGIN?

What we need to do, both as the Body of Christ and as individual stewards, is to pray about our *relationship to God*, and what we can do to become better stewards of His Time, His Gifts to us, and His Grace He gives to all of us!

STEWARDSHIP

The exercise of Orthodox Christian Stewardship is the process of placing all of Creation in its proper perspective. It is the process of establishing the *correct set of priorities* in a Christ-centered, Spirit-filled life moving toward the Kingdom of Heaven. Once we dedicate ourselves to this, ALL earthly necessities will be provided. God does not ask us to take such a journey, without providing us for what we need on that journey!

The word Stewardship, for many of us, constitutes a very seldom understood and oft feared concept being tossed around by "those clergy." Thus, we must break down our current misconceptions:

I. Stewardship is NOT a financial issue!

It is ultimately related to our commitment to serving Jesus Christ; and, as long as we continue to think of stewardship in terms of money (dollars and cents) then we have completely missed the Orthodox and Scriptural understanding of what Christian Stewardship is!

II. Is the Church a business?

Too many of us approach the Church using a business mentality (the Church should be run like a business). Every business has a product, so what are we selling?

A. Salvation: saving souls for Christ!

Stewardship is that which provides greater commitment from Christ's People (i.e. the Church) which allows us to save souls for Him.

B. Stewardship is about our relationship with our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ!

STEWARDSHIP SIMPLIFIED

Let us put aside our prejudices when we hear the word “Stewardship” and think about what it means to breathe.

We all must breathe--inhale oxygen-rich air--and exhale carbon dioxide--in order to live. If we did not breathe in oxygen, we would die of oxygen deprivation. If we did not exhale CO₂, we would likewise asphyxiate and die.

When we look at the Image of the Orthodox Faith, and the Church--the Body of Christ--we can also see this “breathing” imagery (both in Genesis and at Pentecost). So, how does the Church breathe in and out?

- I. **Breathing out** is the work of the Holy People of God (the Church) moving out into the world to minister to the world. This is known as OUTREACH.
- II. **Breathing in** is the Holy People of God (the Church) returning to God that which is already His. This is known as STEWARDSHIP.
- III. We have already determined what happens if we don't breathe as individuals. The same thing happens to the Church: If we do not breathe out (Outreach) and in (Stewardship) then WE WILL DIE. Remember, the Orthodox Church will still exist around the world, in places that “breathe in and out” but ours will not!
- IV. Our Church is quickly becoming extinct in this country because we are not doing the Outreach and Stewardship necessary to keep it alive...in most cases.

privileges to which we are ‘entitled.’ This mentality breeds such attitudes which inspire very non-Christian things such as member v. non-member fees, etc.

- C. The ‘fund-raiser’ mentality is a losing proposition. If WE cannot support our own efforts as Orthodox Christian ‘stewards,’ what does this say about our *commitment to Christ*?
- D. We cannot rely on earned income to pay our bills. A good Annual Picnic or Dance will not enable us to accomplish plans. Nor can we rely on special appeals to fund projects--just look at any special appeal to see the truth of this!

III.

True Orthodox Christian Stewardship is committing a regular amount of our time, our talents and our treasures to ensure that the work of Christ and His Church gets done!

- A. We are called to give regularly:

“On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper... and when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem” (1 Corinthians 16: 2-3).

1. Regular offerings help to offset the times of year when things slow down, or giving may become more difficult.
- B. Common examples of non-Stewardship giving:
 1. Crises-giving: the Church is in need--give! Infamous appeals letters, etc.
 2. Left-over giving: after we do what we “needed” to do (pay the bills, etc.), THEN we give to God.

BASIC STEWARDSHIP LIVING

I. We give to God that which is already HIS--our time, our talents and our treasure.

- A. **Time:** 168 hours/week is given to us by God. How much time do we spend in His House? In His Presence? Do we respect and honor Him with His Time, and give it back to Him?
- B. **Talents:** We are each blessed with gifts that make us unique. How am I making use of the talents with which He has blessed me? Do I use them for my own purposes, or for His? Do I let them go to waste?
- C. **Treasures:** We are blessed with our financial resources and possessions by God. Do we show our gratitude by giving back to Him from the FIRST fruits of our hearts?

II. Christian Stewardship IS proportional giving.

“What is the *minimum*?” Or, “how much do I *have* to give?” is NOT CHRISTIAN!!!

DUES MENTALITY:

We must lose the dues mentality as Orthodox Christians.

- A. We can not pay dues to the Church--the Body of Christ--because then we believe that we have a ‘right’ to something: “It is my RIGHT to vote! It is my RIGHT to be buried! It is my RIGHT to be Kum/Sponsor!”
- B. When we pay dues, we misunderstand the Church as a collection of rights for us. This is much in the same model as paying dues to a country club, or a civic group, along with which we have certain

BREATHING OUT

“...Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even until the end of the age...” (Matthew 28: 16-20).

The Great Commission of Christ is to bring all nations, countries, cities, peoples, to HIM. Are we doing this in our parish? Are we doing this to the best of our abilities and talents?

Our “Parish Mission” should be to save the people in our community, NOT to worry and fret about financial/material/earthly realm. **Is it?**

As a parish, we need to focus on reaching out, not only to our own, but also to those who are lost. Can we not relate, especially in our parish, to examples of friends who are disconnected from the Church?

A contemporary Orthodox Stewardship Director states, “Most parishes in America today utilize what I refer to as ‘Little Bo Peep’ evangelism--‘they’ll come back someday...’ and clergy use the ‘hatch, match and dispatch’ strategy (baptize, marry and bury them).”

Instead, our focus should be on actively searching out the lost sheep and bringing them back into the fold, just as Christ, the Good Shepherd does.

Every single MEMBER of the Orthodox Faith (a member is someone baptized and chrismated into the Communion of Christ) is responsible for spreading the Good News--the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are all responsible for taking the message of Salvation, given by Christ to His Church, and bringing it to the world in which we live!

BREATHING IN

The essence of 'breathing in' is STEWARDSHIP. We are talking about returning to God that which is already His. So, first things first: Do we believe that EVERYTHING belongs to God, and we are simply caretakers of that which He has graciously given to us?

Let us ask some questions of ourselves:

- I. **How many of us believe in God?**
- II. **How many of us believe that, by the Grace of God, all things of life are given to us as gifts and talents?**

IF we believe in the first two:

- III. **How many of us believe that what we own or possess is truly ours?**

Many acknowledge that there is a large difference in what we say we believe, and what we actually do. This is why we need to understand what STEWARDSHIP really talks about.

Did you know that that Holy Scripture speaks about "Faith" issues approximately 500 times?

Did you know that Holy Scripture expounds on the area of money and possessions over 2000 times?

This shows just how important our relationship with our 'possessions' is in the eyes of God. This is why Stewardship is NOT a financial issue--it is a spiritual one. What we do with our money and possessions reveals where out Faith truly resides.

Show me a man's checkbook, and I'll show you what's important to him. Recall the story of the Widow's Mite in the Gospel of Mark (12: 41-44). Compared to the wealthy, she gave ALL that she had... while the rich gave out of abundance, she gave even that which she had to live on.

STEWARDSHIP is about our PRIORITIES and COMMITMENTS--not amounts!

Ask yourself these questions: *Can I commit, as a part of my ongoing commitment to our Lord, Jesus Christ, a greater portion of what God has already given me (my time, my talents and my treasures)? If there is work in the parish to be done, will I donate my time and talents to help out? And what of my treasures (financial resources)--do I give from what is left over, or first off, to Him?*

Our priorities in this country are completely out of order--we already have too much. Last year, in this country, over 15 **BILLION dollars** were spent on renting storage spaces--so people could put things they own which have no place in their homes!

Many of us seek to identify ourselves by our possessions and things, NOT as People of God, as Orthodox Christians.

What if God blessed us the way in which we bless Him? What if He gave to us the way in which we give to Him?