

ABC'S Of Stewardship

A is for remembering *All is gift*. We have not done anything to deserve or earn all that God gives to us. God sends daily reminders of unconditional love through sunrises and sunsets, beautiful trees and flowers, warm hugs and kind words. As a steward, I need to be aware of these gifts.

B is for *Bounty*. In remembering all is gift, I am suddenly overwhelmed by the number of gifts that pass through my daily life. As a steward, I need to take time to be aware of the bounteous gifts that are freely given.

C is for *Commitment*. It's not easy to become a steward. It takes daily practice and commitment. Learning to trust God and others is often what makes this commitment especially difficult. Time also plays havoc with the commitment to stewardship. I don't have time to do the things I must do, so how can I squeeze out time for volunteering? Often, when I am beginning to create a change in my life, I need to establish a support system so that I am accountable not only to myself (I can accept about any excuse I create) but to someone else. I have a friend who will ask "Did you do your two hours of volunteer work this week?"

D is for *Discernment*. Discernment requires total honesty. How much of my time, treasure, and talent can I share? Can I give 10% of my earnings? Can I give 10% of my time? Can I give 10% of my talents? Some of us can give more and some of us can give less, but in the discernment process I need to look at where my values are. The challenge is to be totally honest in the discernment process.

E is for *Evangelization*. Evangelization often happens more by actions and deeds than by words. People notice how carefully I handle the gifts I've been given. My basic question is "How can the God-within-me, meet the God-within you?"

F is for *Faithful*. Once I've made a commitment to be a steward, the next challenge is to do it 24/7. There are days that I'm tired or want to take a vacation from the practices of stewardship. I quickly remember that God loves me 24/7 and never takes a vacation.

G is for *Gratitude*. As a steward, one must have a genuine sense of gratitude. I had a friend who asked me, "If all you had today was what you gave thanks for yesterday, what would you have?" Needless to say, the first time I was asked that question, I would have had very little.

H is for *Hospitality*. Stewardship invites us to be open and hospitable to everyone. We need to help others feel welcome, so they will offer to share their gifts. If I have an attitude that a project must be done "my way" or "There's too many people involved in this particular ministry, could you share a different gift," I may be turning some possible stewards away.

I is for *Identity*. We weren't just created by God, but we were created for God. We can never return to God anything that God hasn't given us first. The difference is that we return the gift with our love.

J is for *Jesus*. Many of the parables Jesus taught deal with stewardship. Why it is we have such a hard time believing that we are cared for and protected? Scripture gives us this message over and over.

K is for *Koinonia (Community)*. One of the fruits of stewardship is that people begin believing "this is my parish, and I need to help it!" Stewardship engenders an attitude of ownership and pride within parishes. Parishioners begin to see needs and offer to meet those needs through their time, talent, and treasure.

L is for *Love*. I can't love God more than I love my neighbor. Stewardship calls us forth to give because we love someone. Love replaces the sense of duty. Stewardship allows me to look for opportunities for giving because God has first given to me.

M is for *Money*. As stewards, we must be responsible consumers. We need to be aware of whether or not laborers are being paid just wages. We need to look at how items are packaged: is the waste ecologically friendly? We also need to reflect on our sacrificial giving how – much can I really give! What amount pushes me to trust in God just a little bit more?

N is for *Need*. As a steward, I must make distinctions between needs and wants. Is this something I really need or is it something I want? Again honesty plays an important role in answering that question.

O is for *Ownership*. As a steward, I own nothing. Everything I have is gift, and it is my responsibility to care for it. If I see everything as a gift, I won't be caught up in trying to process things. It is also easier for me to share with the poor because my self esteem does not depend on how many things I have.

P is for *Prayer*. Without prayer most people cannot be a steward. Having a relationship with God is necessary before one can take the leap of faith that is required of a steward. If prayer is a part of my daily life – I can think about God many times throughout the day.

Q is for *Quest*. Stewardship is a life long quest. The more I try to practice it, the more it will lead me to a deeper faith and commitment. The stewards we are today are much different from the stewards we will be twenty-five years from now.

R is for *Renewing* the earth. Part of stewardship is taking care of the environment. Recycling is the first step to becoming environmentally aware. Once we begin caring for the earth, it becomes easier to see how everyone is connected to each other. My choices affect everyone throughout the world. Human interdependence is necessary as it helps create solidarity with my brothers and sisters worldwide.

S is for *Sharing*. Stewardship is synonymous with sharing. We cannot hoard the gifts we are given. Gifts are never given for individual use but are meant to be shared.

T is for *Trust*. This is the heart of stewardship. If I cannot trust God to care and provide for me, I will continue to believe that gifts are scarce, and I will hoard them.

U is for *United in Spirit*. It is the Holy Spirit that inspires each of us to respond to the call of stewardship. Stewardship does not happen without an experience of conversion. Perhaps it is the simple experience of realizing that I'm doing an ordinary action with love rather than a sense of duty. In sharing conversion experiences with each other, we become united support systems that will affirm and challenge our commitment to stewardship.

V is for *Vocation*. All of us are called to be stewards. Through free-will we either accept or reject that call.

W is for *Way of Life*. Stewardship is not an addendum; it's not something I can do once in awhile when I feel like it. Stewarding believes that "we receive God's gifts gratefully, cultivate them responsibly, share them lovingly in justice with others and return them with increase to the Lord" (U.S. bishops' letter).

X is for *Excuses*. It is easy to make excuses as to why I shouldn't embrace the concept of stewardship. We all find ways to do the things we really want. Leave the excuses behind and embrace the gift of being a steward.

Y is for *You are Called*. Are you ready to let God take charge of your life? Will you allow God to be the wind in your sail?

Z is for *Zeal*. Once you begin living as a steward, there will be an extra bounce in your step as you experience the deep joy that comes from living with an attitude of gratitude and sharing your time, treasure, and talents.