

April 29, 2011
Vol. 2, Issue 4

In this issue:

Morally Responsible Investing for
the Catholic Institutional Investor

(GSN) Lent is the Season
for Stewardship

Stewardship and
Capital Fundraising



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Stewardship and Capital Fundraising

I. WHAT IS STEWARDSHIP?

Stewardship is not about money or possessions or even skills and talents. It's about spiritual principles. Stewardship is a response to Jesus' invitation: "Go, sell all that you have and give it to the poor, and come follow me." Stewardship is discipleship in action; it is what we do after we say we believe.

In their 1992 stewardship pastoral the American bishops describe four characteristics of a Christian steward.

The first characteristic is *gratitude*. A Christian steward is "one who receives God's gifts gratefully." Gratitude assumes that we acknowledge God as the true owner of all that we have and all that we are. Gratitude to God, and to those who have shared themselves with us, helps us maintain a true sense of identity as Christ's disciples.

The second characteristic is *accountability*. A good steward is "one who cherishes and tends God's gifts in a responsible and accountable manner." Accountability reminds us that we are responsible for what we do (or fail to do) with our time, our talent, and our money. As Christ's disciples, we are responsible for building up God's kingdom, and on the Last Day, we will be held accountable.

The third characteristic is *generosity*. A Christian steward is "one who shares God's gifts with others out of justice and love." Generosity propels us outside of ourselves – often in ways that contradict our own interests. The lives of the saints give us countless examples of individuals whose generosity won them true freedom and joy. Giving is good for us; it is also right and just to share what we have been given with others.

The final characteristic is *the willingness to give back to the Lord with increase*. God wants us to take his gifts and develop them. A Christian steward is called to be productive, to make a difference in the world.

Traditional Christian spirituality teaches us to give back to the Lord by means of the ascetical principles of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. In prayer, we give back to God our time (and our hearts). By fasting, we deny ourselves the good things that we want and need, but the more genuine our self-denial is, the more we flourish and grow. Through almsgiving, we share what is rightfully ours with others; if we give from the heart, we gain infinitely more than we have given away. Prayer, self-denial, and sacrificial giving are the essence of what stewardship is all about!

II. WHAT IS A CAPITAL STEWARDSHIP CAMPAIGN?

A capital campaign is an extraordinary fundraising activity. Why? First, the project is above and beyond the organization's daily activities. Second, donors are invited to make commitments over and above their ordinary giving stretched out over several years.

Three things are necessary to be successful: First, communicate a genuine need, and help people become personally committed to meeting that need.

Second, involve a large number of people. Successful campaigns are the result of strong leadership and active, grass-roots involvement of volunteers.

Third, ask people to make sacrificial gifts. There is no way around this. The good news is that every year millions of people in parishes and dioceses throughout the country make substantial commitments of time, talent, and money to meet the Church's extraordinary needs!

A capital campaign based on stewardship principles has to do what any successful fundraising program does. It has to communicate a compelling case; it has to have strong leadership and many active volunteers; and it has to encourage sacrificial giving. That's standard operating procedure. A stewardship-based approach goes two steps further: 1) It includes

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stewardship education that must continue long after the campaign is over, and 2) it invites people to discern God's will in their lives, always a more challenging invitation than simply asking for a financial commitment.

By teaching stewardship principles, by emphasizing prayer and discernment, and by providing concrete opportunities to participate in the mission of the Church, an integrated approach to stewardship and capital fundraising can make a real difference. It can raise the money needed to fund Church ministries while, at the same time, providing opportunities for genuine spiritual growth.

Capital stewardship campaigns are an excellent opportunity to teach stewardship principles and challenge Catholics to make substantial commitments of time, talent, and treasure based on prayerful discernment of God's will. The approach is really quite simple. First, communicate the case – including the very real financial needs. Then, invite people to become actively involved in the campaign. Finally, ask everyone to pray, “Lord, what do you want to do through me to fulfill your will for our Church?”

The results may be surprising—a spiritual experience that far outweighs its financial success!

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