



St. Paul's Episcopal Church 
of Newburyport, MA

“As Good Stewards of God’s Graces ...”
Preparing our hearts to live generously

Introduction

Typically, stewardship is a euphemism in religious circles meaning financial giving or fundraising. But it is much more than this. Stewardship is, in one sense, simply what it means to be a human person. God is God and we are not. The world, our lives, our resources, everything is God's, and we are stewards of God's gifts. We can be faithful stewards or unfaithful stewards, but we cannot help but being stewards. It is simply who we are.

When Scripture uses the image of the steward for our life with God, as it often does, it is teaching us that we are to care for all that we have and all that we are for God's purposes of love and mercy, to move things in God's direction, not just serve our own ends. And as all that we have and all that we are has been entrusted to us by God, God has gifted our lives to us. So, stewardship is not just about money but our whole lives. The whole of the Christian life, the whole of the truly human life, is learning to be a faithful steward.

Scripture talks about stewardship of the earth (Genesis 1:26; Psalm 8:6) (and we are learning constantly how critical this is), stewardship of our bodies (Rom. 12:1; 1 Cor. 6:19-20), of our families (Ex. 20:12; Proverbs 22:6; Mark 7:9-13; 1 Tim. 5:8)—raising children, caring for our marriages and for elderly family members, for instance, and even of stewardship of the Gospel (1 Cor. 4:1; 9:16-17; 2 Cor. 5:18-20; 1 Peter 4:10)—to preserve and proclaim the truth of Jesus Christ, this gift we've been given. We focus on financial giving in stewardship so often

because, well, Jesus does, but also because it is perhaps the most difficult aspect of our lives to surrender to God's purposes of love and mercy in the world. Stewardship is central to our life together as a community, our faith and spiritual growth, and our care for others, and deserves real consideration and prayer.

Often throughout the Christian year, different liturgical seasons are marked by preparation: Advent prepares us for welcoming the birth of Christ, Lent prepares us for Christ's death and resurrection at Easter. And as we look to make our pledges, it seems appropriate to take time for intentional preparation. Stewardship, our life as human persons and a community before and with God, is too significant to ignore that intentionality and purpose.

Each October we celebrate Ingathering Sunday, when we gather in our pledges to give for 2023. Ingathering is *not* a liturgical season! But conscious preparation, in a similar way perhaps as Advent and Lent, can be immensely fruitful for us.

This booklet takes us through a week of daily devotionals on the subject of stewardship in preparation for making our pledges, or just for our own spiritual nourishment. I invite you to take a few minutes each day leading up to Ingathering Sunday (or whenever you receive this!) to reflect on Scripture, contemplate God's grace, and pray. The first six days seek to help us think through what stewardship really is and what it means for us, the seventh includes practical information for

thinking through how to live out the first six days as a church community.

I hope this helps to center you, draw you into God's presence and love, and move us closer to one another as a parish family.

With prayer and thanksgiving,

Father Jarred

rector@stpaulsnewburyport.org

Day One: Beginning with God

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it (Psalm 24:1–2)

For God so loved the world that God gave ... (John 3:16)

We begin in stewardship like we begin in prayer — with God. Prayer happens not because of who we are, though we are the ones who pray. Prayer happens, prayer makes sense, because of who God is. It begins with God and not us. God is always present, always active, always with us not because of anything we have done or not done, or ever could do or not do, but because God is the God who is here, who is with us. God's love and mercy and grace are with us not because we earn them or deserve them, but because *God is love, God is God's grace and mercy.*

And prayer is, first of all, just to acknowledge this — it's awareness. So that, to pray is to respond to God's presence and activity by directing our own presence and activity towards God. It's responding to who God is by offering up who we are — responding to God's presence by being present in return, giving the entirety of who we are back to God — our joy, our frustration, our shame, our compassion, our anger, our whole being.

Stewardship is in this sense a kind of prayer. Stewardship begins with God, not us. We are stewards because God is who

God is—the one who holds the earth “and all that is in it, the world, and all those who live in it.” God is also the one who gives. The first thing we know of God is generous gift: “God so loved the world that God gave ...” We are, all of us, stewards of God’s gifts because of who God is. God is the one who “owns” (for lack of a better word) everything, and God is the one who gives *everything*. We receive all that we are and all that we have as gifts from God and for God.

God is God and we are not. Stewardship is, first of all, just to acknowledge this—it’s awareness. To be a faithful steward is to respond to the reality of who God is by recognizing who we are—receivers of gift, dependent and in need, reliant upon God for all that we are.

This might seem obvious enough, it is surely just part of what we mean by the word “God,” but to live this out is a radical move in our world that changes the way we think about possession, ownership, and our very selves.

Our society is run entirely on the precepts of private ownership and that we are entitled to what we earn and have—and, of course, that others *aren’t*. I earned it and I have it, it’s mine, I can do with it what I please.

It’s a dangerous power game that enslaves the poor and keeps them enslaved to their poverty so that others can amass more and more and feel justified in doing so. But it’s also on a more direct and basic level a denial of our humanity.

If we begin with the understanding that everything belongs to God, that means that we actually don't "own" anything—not even ourselves. All that we have and all that we are is *gift* by the grace of God.

And this is liberating. To recognize that we are stewards is to recognize and embrace our humanity. It means we get to be ourselves. And this removes us from the constant anxiety of being in control and making it all work as if we were gods of our own lives. So we praise God that we are not god, and that the One who is, is the giver of all good gifts.

Reflection Question:

Stewardship is first a recognition and awareness that God is God and we are not. How is this comforting and liberating for you? And how does it affect how you see yourself as a steward in response to God's generosity?

Prayer:

God who holds us in creative hands and made us to be ourselves, help me to live in awareness of your presence and gratefulness for your blessings, always responding to your grace. You are God, I am not. Thank you. World without end, now and for ever, thank you.

Day Two: Stewardship as Spiritual Formation

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:19–21)

These words of Jesus are often understood to mean that if you look at where you spend your money, you will see where your heart truly is, what you truly love and value (or we could say, worship). This might be partly true. But we spend money on all kinds of things that are completely benign out of necessity. I do not love paying the utility bills! They are not a reflection of my heart.

What Jesus is actually saying is, “if you want your heart to be in the right place, put your treasure there and let your heart follow.” The point is what behavioral psychologists tell us today: if we change our behaviors, our habits, our actions, our minds and hearts will follow. It’s not that how we spend our money reveals what sort of people we are, but what sort of people we want to become. And this is a blessing. When our hearts aren’t really in it, there’s something we can do to change that, we aren’t stuck. If you want to love others and love Jesus more, give your time, talent, and treasure toward those things you want to care about, toward the person you want to become, and you will come to really care about those things and become that person. Jesus is laying out a very practical vision of

spiritual formation, of transformation and renewal – and it’s stewardship.

Stewardship is a basic and foundational exercise of our faith and enriching of our lives. I heard a helpful analogy once: if someone says they want to get in better shape but says they plan to do so by switching to some new, trendy, only peanut butter diet, we might want to ask them, “have you tried the basics? What about regular exercise, balanced eating, good sleep?” In the same way, if a Christian says they really want to grow in their faith, so they decide to paint a giant cross on the side of their house. Nothing wrong with giant crosses, I guess (though it would be a bit weird!), but we might want to ask, “Have you thought about the basics? You’re a Christian. Have you prayed? Read the Bible? Gathered to offer the Eucharist with the Christian community? Served those in need?” These are distinctive, basic, Christian practices that enrich our spiritual lives.

Scripture presents stewardship, including financial giving, as a spiritual discipline, as a basic element of our movement toward God and growth in love in the way of Christ. Jesus spoke more about money than anything else other than “the kingdom of God” (and much of his talk about the kingdom of God was done with examples about money!), but he was never interested in money at all. He wasn’t a fundraiser, he lived a life of poverty, he gave constantly without taking. Jesus spoke so often to people about their use of money because he cares about our holiness, he wants us to live loving, whole, beautiful, and joy-filled lives, and that life is a life of gift, a life of offering.

We want the same in our church community. Yes, we have to pay the bills. Yes, running the parish costs about \$1,000/day and we have to meet the budget. But, ultimately, what we want for each other is to flourish in our lives with Christ and one another. To become more generous, more loving, more open and joyful people. And that is why we give—because we see the people we want to become, we look to Jesus and we see what becomes possible for our lives, and we know that how we live into that beautiful possibility is to put our treasure where we want our hearts to be.

Reflection Question:

Jesus taught us to form our hearts through the use of our treasure. Who do you want to be? What kind of person do you want to become? Specifically, how generous would you like to be, and how can you invest in the condition of your heart through using your treasures to become that person?

Prayer:

Holy and loving Jesus, who cares who I am and who I become; guide me by your Spirit to want the right things, and help me put my treasure where I want my heart to be. Amen.

Day Three: Loving in the Right Direction

You cannot worship God and wealth (Matthew 6:24)

The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6:10)

Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions (Luke 12:15)

If stewardship is holistic, pertaining to our whole lives—all that we are and all that we have, why do we talk about stewardship so often in terms of money? Well, that holistic vision of our lives before God—that God is God and we are not, that we are (wonderfully) stewards of all that God has given, is really about worship. We cannot worship God and money, Jesus tells us. Interpreters have pointed out that he could have said, we cannot worship God and cruelty, or power, or selfishness, but he didn't, he said money. The First Letter of Timothy could have said pride, or anger, envy is the root of all evil, but it doesn't, it says the love of money is. Why?

Money is uniquely placed in our world to become a false god, to become the thing we love and desire most, even as it ruins us, drives us into anxiety and fear, and exploits others in our efforts to amass more wealth. Faithful stewardship is an aid to shape our love and worship in the right direction, to save us from idols.

This spiritual discipline that trains our hearts to recognize who God is and who we are, to direct our worship to God and not things or money, couldn't be more relevant and needed in our society. In our consumer-driven world, we are constantly convinced that we are the sum of our acquisitions—we are what we buy, or obtain, or own. And this is not only worshipping and loving in the wrong direction, it causes us endless anxiety—if I lose what I have, if I do not gain more, if I do not gain that thing that I'm so convinced I need, have I lost myself?

Jesus warns us against this way of life, the life we all find ourselves wrapped up in and surrounded by: "Take care! Be on your guard!" And his words, "life does not consist in the abundance of possessions," force us to consider the question: "of what *does* my life consist?" It's a much more profound reflection than it appears. And Jesus offers us another way forward. Not the way of consumer-driven anxiety and greed, but the life of gift—the life of love and offering.

Stewardship trains us up in worship, in other words, to love in the right direction, it is turning our whole lives toward God and others in love. How we use our money is so central to this because money so easily shifts our love and worship to itself. To let go of our money, to give and to use it for God's purposes in the world, reorders our love, recenters our lives in a world so bent on taking, gaining, and hoarding it, and this transforms who we are and reshapes our identity.

Reflection Question:

What do you find most difficult about giving away money? Does it initially spark anxiety in you to think about doing so, or joy? How do you think being intentional about giving generously could shift your perspective?

Prayer:

God of gift and offering, guard me against the idolatry of money, help me to worship you alone, and when anxieties around finances rise, remind me that life does not consist in the abundance of possessions but in the unwavering embrace of your love. Amen.

Day Four: The Equitable Community

Above all, maintain constant love for one another ... Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received (1 Peter 4.8, 10)

When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat" (Matthew 14:15–16)

If there is an overarching meta-narrative that defines the modern world, it might be that of meritocracy. Our thinking is consumed by it, our identities are often determined by it, and we can't escape it. It's so easy, especially for people of means, to distort the biblical picture of God's generosity. "I've earned what I have, I deserve what I have (meaning, of course, others do not), I've worked hard for it!" When, in reality, we don't deserve anything or own anything, as everything we have is gift and we are only stewards or managers of what is God's.

We can sometimes misuse the notion of God's abundant blessing in our lives as well, as if we have received much in order to have much rather than to be a blessing to others. We can distort God's generosity and blessing, God's desire for our abundance, to justify a life of hoarding and greed — what people often refer to as the prosperity gospel, which is, of course, no real gospel at all. If we've paid any attention at all to the message of Jesus, to the scriptures as a whole, it will

become abundantly clear that it is not God's will for us to be rich! We live in an imperfect and unjust world, and there has always been a massive disparity between the rich and poor. Some among us in our congregation, in our communities, among our friends and family will inevitably have more than others. This is in one sense just a brute fact about our world. But we cannot pretend like this is the goal or aim of our existence. For those of us with more, and even those of us with just enough, the response should not be: "Wow! I am so blessed—look at all I have!" but, "Wow! I am so blessed; how can I bless others? How can I play my part in creating a society of equity and justice?"

It's not at all the design of God for some to have much and others to have little—this is how humans have distorted the gifts of God through societal sins, inequality, and greed, and often individual sins and greed—it's a result of our poor stewardship of God's gifts. God's abundant gifts are meant to be shared, meant to bring equity and justice, meant so that no one goes without.

And this communal and social aspect of our stewardship is so important. We give so that no one goes without. We give of our resources to care for one another and all in need. Where Jesus went, there was always enough, and he expected his disciples to live the same way. At the feeding of the 5,000 when the disciples realized the people were getting restless and hungry, Jesus responded, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." This is the call of discipleship. Our world is so certain that resources are scarce, that there isn't enough for everyone, that it is necessary that some go without. But the

truth is there are ample resources for all in the world, but humans have been bad stewards of the earth, of its resources, and of our personal resources. With Jesus, there is always enough, and if we are his disciples, if we are to live as Christ's body in the world, it means there must always be enough in our communal life together as well.

This brings a sobering reality to our life of stewardship. We are all stewards, absolutely and without question. We are not gods, but stewards of God's gifts. This is what it means to be human. But we can be faithful or unfaithful stewards. We see this clearly on the global scale — disparity between rich and poor, people going hungry, lack of care for the earth, and more. But this is true also at the very immediate and local level. We have the wonderful, beautiful opportunity to care for one another, to know that there is always enough for each of us — be that in love and emotional support in our time of loss, financial in our time of economic need, food for the hungry, shelter for the unhoused or refugee — there is always enough in our community.

But with this remarkable opportunity comes also a responsibility. If I do not give in proportion to what I've received and of which I have been made a steward, it means that either someone else has to cover my lack to meet the needs of everyone or everyone's needs will not be met, and we will not be living out the call of Jesus on our lives. It costs a certain amount to be given to assure an egalitarian, equitable community in which all are cared for and able to care for others beyond the community, and it's the call of every disciple to serve one another with whatever gifts we have received.

Reflection Question:

Where Jesus is, there is always enough. How can you contribute your part in ensuring our church family exists faithfully as a community where no one is without? What does it mean to hear the words of Jesus, figuratively or literally, “You give them something to eat?”

Prayer:

God of justice, through Christ you assure us there is always enough. Help me to see my church family as a community of belonging and equality, lead me by your Spirit to play my part for the blessing of this family, and may I, through it, always receive your blessing. Amen.

Day Five: The Joy of Giving

And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices, and tell of his deeds with songs of joy (Psalm 107:22)

Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7)

The Letter to the Hebrews says that Jesus “for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross” (Heb. 12:2). Christ’s self-gift of love was costly, yes, but it was also a gift of joy. 2 Corinthians states that “each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7) not because our giving is easy or isn’t sacrificial, but because living in the way of God’s radical generosity is a joy-filled life. In fact, we can give cheerfully *only* when we give holistically and sacrificially.

Easy giving that costs us nothing doesn’t bring true joy. If when my son turned 10 years old, I gave him a card with two dollars’ worth of nickels in it and said, “Happy Birthday,” even if he was sincerely grateful, it would have costed me nothing, not even a second thought, and would bring me no real joy at all. However, as we crunched numbers and cut back on our spending for several months to save up and get him the guitar he really wanted even as it costed us dearly — what joy filled our hearts as he unwrapped it, and what joy we still receive as the fruits of that gift are still growing a few years later. As the

joy of our salvation comes from the joy set before Christ as he gave himself for us, our own joy comes through generous giving.

So, joyful giving, being a cheerful giver, is costly. It means something to us because it changes us and our relationship to the receiver of the gift. It is also joyful just because it is done out of love. We often think of giving to the church out of necessity to keep the lights on, meet the budget, pay the staff and the bills, etc. These are certainly things that need to be done and that enable us to flourish as a community of service and love in the world. But we give not just out of necessity or because there are needs, but out of joy and love.

If someone buys their spouse or partner a piece of jewelry, it isn't out of a utilitarian need, it's just out of an abundance of joy, thanksgiving, and love for the other. Surely this relationship also includes giving out of need to one another—paying the bills, putting gas in the car, fixing the broken window at the house, so both necessity and choice, duty and delight are involved, and that's not a bad thing at all. Giving to the church for our participation in God's work of mercy and love among and around us involves both, too, and as we take care of what needs to be done, we can't forget the joyous delight of it as we tell of God's deeds with songs of joy and give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, but rejoicing as cheerful givers.

Reflection Question:

Can you think of a time when you gave something away or as a gift and it filled you with joy? What made the experience joyful, and how might that affect how you give to the church community?

Prayer:

God of our salvation, through your self-offering in Christ you have established the way of gift as the way of joy. Give voice to our song and teach us to give ourselves away in love, that we too might learn true rejoicing. Amen.

Day Six: The Transforming Community

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved (Acts 2.44-47)

Acts 2 is the famous passage of Pentecost—the coming of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Church. And the earliest Christians were most distinguished by their generosity and care for each other. They sold what they had and shared all things, living together in unity and assuring that no one went without. It is a beautiful, if seemingly radical and surprising, way of life that exemplified Christ's love and modelled the community of equity and justice that Christians are called to be, and that faithful stewardship aims toward.

The abundant gifts of God are meant to be shared, meant to be common. 2 Corinthians 9:8 says, “God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, *so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.*” The Letter is written to the church in Corinth as a whole, so the *always having enough* refers not just to an individual alone having all they need but that through the sharing of God's abundant gifts together *everyone* has all that they need. And this is the purpose of God's provision—*so that, it says, so that there will be enough shared by all.*

What is striking in this passage in Acts in particular is how others found this way of generous living so compelling that they joined in. And by joining in they didn't just become spectators. Day by day more and more people were themselves giving their abundance for the good of the whole, assuring that no one went without. They joined and gave of themselves and their goods also. Often, we fear that talking about money and asking people to give to care for the whole community and those in need is a turn off, but it was actually the immense generosity and giving that drew people in, not turned people away—others wanted to give freely too!

And this is because the generous life, the life not driven by anxieties of having enough and making enough and getting enough, but giving and receiving from one another is what we are made for. As human beings we are stewards, we are gifted all that we are and all that we have by God *so that* there will always be enough of everything and no one goes without.

We give in different ways and live in a different world today than the earliest Christians, but the principle remains, however it is expressed. God gives so that we will give. God cares for our needs so that we might meet each other's, and the way of Christ is the way of Christ's community, upheld and supported by faithful stewardship and generous living. And this life remains beautifully attractive. Imagine who we could become, what an offering of love and embrace we would be to the world, if we could live into this faithful way of being stewards of God's graces.

Reflection Question:

What do you think attracted so many people to the generous living of the earliest Christians? How can faithful stewardship reflect that life in our community?

Prayer:

God who saves the poor, for all the times I have held back my resources while others suffered, I am sorry. For your provision, I thank you, and for your endless grace and forgiveness, I praise you and rejoice. Amen.

Day Seven: How and How Much?

A certain ruler asked Jesus, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him ... “Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven ...” (Luke 18: 18, 22)

Zacchaeus ... said to Jesus, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house ...” (Luke 19:8–9)

Jesus also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on” (Luke 21:2-4)

In each of these interactions Jesus instructs or acknowledges, praises or rebukes different amounts from different people living in different circumstances. The “ruler” in the first passage is told that to truly enter the kingdom of God, to live under God’s reign or follow after God, he had to sell *all* that he had. Zacchaeus takes half of his possessions and gives them to the poor and pays back four times as much to anyone he defrauded as a tax collector. Jesus announces that as a result of his generosity that salvation had come. In the last passage, a widow puts in two copper coins — all that she has — and Jesus acknowledges that she has actually given more than the rich persons who had clearly given a larger amount than two coins, but, what they had given was insignificant as they gave from their surplus.

The emphasis is on real sacrificial giving — giving that affects the way we live and affects the lives of others for good.

Equitable proportional giving is also emphasized: more is expected of the rich than the poor widow (though she shocks by giving all she had).

In real practical terms, we should think and pray about how much we should be giving in line with, at least, the six points covered above in the previous daily devotions: in recognition of who God is and in response to God, in a way that forms us spiritually and is transformative, in a way that produces equitable relationships with others and cares for those in need, joyfully, and expansively — drawing others into this transforming grace with us.

When it comes to thinking about an actual number, things become a bit more difficult to determine for us on a personal level. It would be a lot easier if everyone came together, put their cards on the table, showed what they earn, what their expenses are, and we all lined that up proportionately and equitably with how much each of us should be giving to support one another and the work of Christ's redemption in our midst — and maybe we should do that! But in absence of that kind of openness, we can look to Scripture, to the example of Jesus, and to the needs of our community, and think prayerfully about what our contribution to our common life should be.

In the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament, there was a prescribed amount for these of a tithe, or 10%. 10% of one's wealth and

income went to the temple, 10% basically for parties — I'm in favor of bringing this back! And 10% taken every third year to make sure the needs of all were met, that there was equitable, sustainable living in community for all. This averages out to about 23% per year. But there were then also voluntary offerings, first fruits offerings, and other periodic giving on top of that.

In the New Testament, there is no direct prescription for a particular percentage, but clear guidance around giving being holistic, sacrificial, equitable, communal, proportionate to each person, and joyful. We need to be able to discern what that looks like for us, but we don't have to (and shouldn't!) do it alone (in fact, in absence of our communal "lay your cards on the table" encounter, I would be happy to sit down with anyone who wishes in confidence and help think through this together — with or without numeric specifics).

Many Christians still follow the principle of the tithe, giving 10% of their income. And studies show that Christians who do this are generally happy about it, don't want to stop, and that it is an important aspect of their life and faith. Many others would argue that we live in a very different world than ancient Palestine or other points of Christian history, with other expenses for daily life like healthcare, utility bills, and numerous other things, and 10% seems to them as a stretch.

I would suggest that one looks at what a tithe would mean for them and then work from there as a starting point to get some perspective. Perhaps if you look at your current giving, and it is

2% or 3% of your income, jumping up to 10% in one leap would be too much. But maybe going up one percent per year for a few years in a row and seeing how that works would be possible. You could also consider a tithe of net, after tax income, rather than gross, before tax income, and see if that is a reasonable sacrifice of joy and thanksgiving. Or perhaps even a tithe of disposable income — what's left after you pay the bills. We all need to begin where we are and do what we are able with our given situation.

What is important is that, first of all, we hear these words of Scripture: “Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7). Give meaningfully and generously and do so with deep joy. If you are prayerfully considering what to give and can't come to a place of joy, whether because the amount is too great or too small, it probably isn't right. No reluctance, no compulsion, no guilt. This is about the freedom to be joyful stewards of God's gifts. We do have to remember, too, that giving “as you have made up in your mind” doesn't mean in isolation from the community, disconnected from the needs of others, or without consideration of what your particular role is in giving to the whole life of the church family.

Part of that life of the whole family, the making sure that all have enough and that we are living a life together of equity, also means that as people have different circumstances, and circumstances change — like job loss or changing jobs, elderly parents needing care, unforeseen medical expenses, or any number of things — giving in proportion to one's circumstance

can mean that you need to lower your giving amount. And the communal nature of our stewardship also means that if you are in any kind of need, the proportionate giving of the rest of the family should be here to meet it with no reluctance, no compulsion, no guilt—but cheerfully in love.

So pray, talk with others in the community about giving, dream about our future together and what is possible through faithful stewardship, and give and receive in grace, contentment, and joy in response to God’s gifts, for the good of others, and for your own spiritual growth, realizing that the abundant life that Christ promises is the life that gives itself away—unreservedly, holistically, and always with thanksgiving.

Reflection Question:

What amount of giving in accordance with your own personal circumstances will bring you joy, lead to spiritual growth, and provide for the community? If you are able to increase your pledged giving or if you are pledging for the first time, how might you need to adjust your budget or how you manage your finances in order to give joyfully and meaningfully?

Prayer:

God who welcomes and receives our humble gifts, help us give in sincerity and joy, and use our offerings for your purposes; we make our prayer through Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

How Do I Pledge?

You can pledge by returning a physical pledge card (one has been mailed to all parishioners) to the church on Ingathering Sunday or anytime thereafter, or by mailing a card to the church.

Or, you may fill out the online pledge card at <https://stpaulsnewburyport.org/pledgecard>, or by scanning the following QR code.



A Prayer for Stewardship

Generous God, the author and perfecter of our faith, from you comes every good thing; teach us to share in your generosity with joy and thanksgiving and grant us the grace to grow together in faith, serve the world in your mercy, and offer ourselves in love to you and our neighbor.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior, who gave himself for us and lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God now and for ever. Amen.