

**STEWARDSHIP IN THE SERVICE OF THE CHURCH AND GOD'S PEOPLE
A PASTORAL LETTER OF ZCBC**

TO ALL PRIESTS, RELIGIOUS, SEMINARIANS AND LAITY

SUNDAY 4 FEBRUARY 2018, WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR CONSECRATED LIFE

Introduction:

Stewardship is about taking active responsibility of that which is entrusted to our care through managing, nurturing, controlling and proper administration so that the available resources meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The term stewardship means custodianship, utilization with responsibility bearing in mind that the vineyard belongs to the master as indicated in 1 Pet, 4:10-11 that; "As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace. Whoever preaches, let it be with the Words of God; whoever serves, let it be with the strength that God supplies, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" .

Stewardship entails the use of resources, money, time, talent and service in a responsible manner that promotes the growth of the individual, organization and community. In imitation of the wise steward of the Gospel in Lk. 12:42; 16:2 Christians ought to exercise a responsible administration over resources, personal and corporate, because these resources are ultimately not theirs but the Lord's. According to Stravinskis (1991), the practice of stewardship means that Christians forsake a self-aggrandizement and prefer instead a glorification of the One Who is over all, and an ardent attention to the common good. The concept of stewardship is premised on the idea of exploring, sharing and preservation of resources at our disposal. Stewardship demands trustworthiness, an unselfish attitude that advocates for an equal distribution of available resources for the common good. The Church is the vineyard and the master is the Lord Jesus Christ who has assigned his servants to manage, control, nurture, develop and have authority over the property dear to his heart. The fact of the matter is that the master gets offended by servants who abuse their authority to destroy the vineyard, compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in their pastoral letter on stewardship observes that identifying stewardship as safeguarding material and human resources and using them responsibly are one answer; so is generous giving of time, talent, and treasure. But being a Christian steward means more. As Christian stewards, we receive God's gifts gratefully, cultivate them responsibly, share them lovingly in justice with others, and return them with increase to the Lord. Stewardship is about responsibility, accountability, transparency and production.

Stewardship as discipleship:

Jesus calls his disciples by name to be in fellowship with him and he revealed the secrets of heaven to them. Likewise Jesus calls us by name to be in fellowship with him as his disciples who participate in the progression of his ministry by administering the vineyard of His Father using our gifts, talents, and resources.

It is the duty of those entrusted to take care of the church, bishops, priests, religious and the laity, old and young to imitate the Lord Jesus Christ through performing acts of compassion and love that bring people together and promote life in the spirit of the common good. True discipleship requires that we become faithful to the calling, exercising charity, hope and trust in the Lord. No one disciple can perform better if he or she is not convinced that Jesus is the compass of all vision and action or when one is divorced from the master. Simon Peter showed deep conviction and belief that there is no hope without the master in John 6:68. Stewardship mirrors our spiritual and moral disposition.

Stewardship is good management of someone's property just as stated in the Psalms 24:1 "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the earth and all who live in it". Discipleship means the act of being a convinced and adherent follower of someone or certain doctrine. Within the Christian circle we cannot talk of discipleship without stewardship and neither can we talk of stewardship without discipleship, the two are both sides of the same coin. As Christians, we are Jesus' disciples, and this means we must walk in the footsteps of Jesus who is our Savior and Redeemer.

We are full time and not part time disciples of Christ. Our whole life must be centered on the life of Jesus who is our master and savior. Christians today

urgently need to revive their commitment to whole-life discipleship because many times we think being a disciple of Jesus is only a Sunday commitment and not a daily experience. This is where we lose focus of Christianity, because as disciples we are also stewards of God, we play a very important role in the administration of God's creation.

Stewardship as authority:

Authority means the ability to teach, govern, control and determine the course of action for a particular group, place or people. Exercising authority entails the power to control and govern the environment and all creation. After His resurrection from death, Jesus in Matthew 28:18 said all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. He meant that he became the supreme ruler whose power to govern will have no end. That is why His authority should be a model for Christians to emulate. Because Christians draw their authority from Jesus Christ, they should exercise this right to exploit the earth and control resources wisely and not devastate it. The same applies to the way we administer that which is entrusted to us by the Church. As good stewards, it is pertinent that we exercise our authority to protect those who look up to us and the property at our disposal in a way that propagates life giving experiences.

The Church cherishes good stewards who advance the cause of charity, justice, mercy and trust; those whose authority is that of service and not dictatorship or power. Dominion means taking good care of things, the whole of creation, things given or entrusted to us or those that we produce through our own efforts. This is what is meant in Genesis 1:26 when God pronounced that; "Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the cattle and over all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the ground." As humanity was created in the likeness of God, it therefore means that humankind should share the same mentality and intention of nurturing the environment and good governance of all things not for ulterior selfish motives but to improve and better the livelihoods. The idea of stewardship as authority is not about individualistic ends that promote self- aggrandization, voracity, power hunger, theft and corruption. This kind of authority is mostly exercised by political dictators. People in authority have the power to influence or command thought, opinion, ideology or behavior. Authority means power exerted over the minds or behavior of others. It is the right to govern or rule or

determine the conditions or systems that bind human existence. Humanity's ability to subdue the earth means it has authority to manage and improve the environment.

Good stewardship and authority should possess the characteristics of the willingness to serve, cooperate and collaborate. The exercise of authority is not a one man band but there are partakers whose role is to support how authority is discharged. That is why it is always important to involve the participation of people around us wherever our services and authority are required. Parishes, missions, schools, health centers and all church institutions need good stewards who govern with positive authority whose main objective is to promote community development through the participation of all. It is important to remind ourselves that our authority over people, goods and services does not turn into dictatorship but remains open to encourage dialogue, growth and participation of the people of God. Authority in stewardship should facilitate responsibility in the control of the Church's property. It means that we have jurisdiction in the management of goods and services that belong to the church, hence we act in place of the owner treating whatever is under our control as if we are the owners.

Stewardship as leadership:

Leadership is the act of inspiring subordinates to perform and engage in achieving a goal.

All leaders should be accountable to GOD the owner of everything and everybody. Leaders are those entrusted with, that is, given trust to take care of human and material resources to serve the Lord. They do not own but are entrusted. Every leader should have a stewardship lens.

God gave us dominion over all creation but take note that the way we treat material and other living things must be different from how we treat people created in the image of God. Human beings are led towards organisational goals. Leaders are given authority over people but should remain accountable to God and be faithful stewards themselves (Luke 16). All authority on the human plane is delegated authority. All authority on earth comes from the Sovereign of the universe. Note Romans 13:1-2: "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God."

God owns all leaders and gave them the leadership role, hence the need to use it to serve the Lord through others, 1 Peter 4:10, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." All what is exposed to us should not only be used to serve the interests of leaders as superior beings (superior priest/religious/parent) for we are not special but only called by God to be stewards. So leaders must humbly serve and bless those under them. They must not be guided by pride for the first shall be the last and last shall be the first according to the teaching of the Lord Jesus that: "Rather, let the greatest among you be as the youngest, and the leaders as the servant" (Luke 22:24-27). Good leaders must inspire fellowship not through coercion but through living exemplary lives worth emulating. Bishops, priests, religious and the laity should be living examples of Christian stewardship so that the world can draw principles of exercising power from people led by faith.

Authority bestowed on leaders is not theirs but comes from God like the disciples were given authority to cast demons and heal the sick; "Then He called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases" (Lk. 9.1).

Good leaders should not concentrate on the power they have to command respect, action and obedience but should be concerned about the effectiveness of their influence on their subordinates. It is not about whether you call yourself a leader or not. It is about what you have to show to people as a leader, the potential, capabilities and self-worthiness. It is this kind of leadership that transforms our leadership into stewardship. Many institutions have been ruined by imposing the leadership on people. People are tossed around, decisions are made without consultation, Parish leadership is hand-picked by the Parish priest because they protect his personal interests and Church property is treated as if its individually owned. If the Church should be the voice of reason on good governance and stewardship to governments and world leaders, the Church should examine its conduct, lest it become worse than those it seeks to give direction. The Church leadership must demonstrate this by the way she treats her people and how she takes care of resources in her custody.

It is the responsibility of every leader to take care of the interest of their

organization and consider their own personal interest last. Leaders must be people centred than material centred since people are the most precious resource that need to be cherished. Those in leadership are bestowed with the authority to rule over others. However, this does not make them into demigods but must always remember that people belong to God and must not be abused but be led to God their Creator.

Stewards who are Christians must be concerned with:

- the welfare of subordinates as individuals, help people with life issues not just work issues.
As stewards of God, we should not treat people as machines by only stressing on the work that needs to be done and forgetting the welfare of those doing the job.
- Create a good working relationship that makes them happy, allow them to grow and improve, don't let the organisation grow while workers suffer. The people you lead are not yours they belong to God therefore give what is God's to God
- Encourage people to interact, build team work and grow to become a better institution that joins the global village in thanksgiving to God.
- Be in authority and under authority. God gave you authority over others but you still need to remain under authority of God.

Leaders as stewards must introspect, look at their character first, then their position last, they must be the first to obey God, must ask their attitude towards others. People are not led by what you say to them; but are led by what they see you do. Steward Leaders are self-leaders. Leadership is an art expressed by the demonstration of characters worthy of imitation, emulation and inspiration. It is neither a title nor a position but a service.

When you are a steward it's not about utilizing power to assert yourself while subordinates become subservient to it, but to serve all. Do not be led by pride, demanding people to serve you but you should serve the people and people will serve you.

A steward leader should correct those who stray from the truth, remove from the flock those who refuse to repent so as to protect the rest, and bless God's people by instructing them in His ways. St. Paul's words (Titus 2:15), "speak and exhort and reprove" indicate that different approaches are needed with different people. The way we run places entrusted to us depends on how we treat people who serve in those places. The same attitude will affect the way

we take care of the utilities of the place.

Stewardship and integrity:

A good steward must be someone with self-worth, good reputation and possesses some personal dignity to command respect in a community. Integrity generates trust for the steward by his/her master. Having integrity means doing the right thing in a reliable way. It's a personality trait that we admire, since it means a person has a moral compass that does not waver.

Stewardship and Church property:

The Church is the vineyard entrusted to us by God to run it. Everyone has the duty to take care, guard, use and improve the resources at our disposal. Church property ranges from human capital, talents, material, infrastructural, financial resources and all that supports the system of evangelization. As good stewards entrusted to run Missions, Schools, Hospitals, Charity Organizations, Seminaries and Spiritual Centers, Church personnel should endeavor to render their service for the common good and not for their personal ulterior motives. The goods and services that the church owns are important to support the material and spiritual life of the people of God. There is need for a deep spiritual formation for priests, religious and the laity so that they understand their role in the administration and protection of the Church's property. Lack of spiritual formation, maturity and detachment from materialism has contributed to the serious abuse of the Church's resources by those standing in as stewards. Stewardship ministry is a great way to care for the Church by putting the necessary measures that help in the leadership, management, control and use of resources. Developing guidelines that help in the management and control of property is paramount but above all, stricter formation of heart, positive attitude and understanding one's role in the ministry is key. The Social Teaching of the Church observes that; "The Church is concerned with the temporal aspects of the common good because they are ordered to the sovereign Good, our ultimate end. The Church strives to inspire right attitudes with respect to earthly goods and in socio-economic relationships."

On top of a positive attitude, the Church seeks to move with the signs of times in the management of its property. Leaving everything to chance should not be acceptable in Church institutions while a one man band practice has for years devastated the mission of the Church. It is important to identify qualified personnel who can assist in the running of Missions, Parishes, Health Centers, Schools and other institutions. Also, records and inventories should be put in

place to minimize abuse and disappearance of property including financial resources. Although stewardship has to do with delegation and accountability, it also means monitoring and evaluation of progress. Over-trusting because one is a priest, religious or long time Christian often leads to monopoly of ideas and resources by those in charge and at the end crumples the system.

Conclusion

Psalm 24 states that "The earth is the LORD's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it." Christ the Lord, did not in the least wish to destroy the very rich heritage of the law but he brought it to completion in a new and higher way – thus Governance and Stewardship in the Church. St. Paul does not deny the importance of discipline in the Church (cf 1 Cor. 5 and 6). Discipline implies accountability, transparency, good governance and orderliness which are fundamental for the common good. A high level of good governance and stewardship in the Church with all implications for the behaviour of the Church does not happen by chance. It is a result of planning, commitment, goal setting, and being stewards with depth of character i.e. being highly transparent and accountable. May God help us all to take active responsibility of that which is entrusted to our care through managing, nurturing, controlling and proper administration so that the available resources meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

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