

THE VIBRANT PARISH

A PLACE TO ENCOUNTER THE LIVING CHRIST



In 2011 His Beatitude Sviatoslav together with the bishops of the UGCC asked us to pay special attention to the renewal of parish life, as the basis for the on-going development of our Church. The parish is the place where we encounter the Living Christ, where we can grow spiritually and where the Good News of the Gospel is proclaimed, so that it can be shared with others. Our Synod encourages us all together and individually to reflect on and work for the development of our parish community, and to take an active role in the mission of the Church by fostering these aspects of parish life:

THE WORD OF GOD AND CATECHESIS

LITURGY AND PRAYER

SERVICE TO ONE'S NEIGHBOR

LEADERSHIP – STEWARDSHIP

COMMUNION – UNITY

A MISSIONARY SPIRIT

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STEWARDSHIP OF DIVINE GIFTS: a Christian Way of Life

Practical Workbook for Parishioners

This publication is part of the “VIBRANT PARISH” program

STEWARDSHIP OF DIVINE GIFTS: A Christian Way of Life

*Practical Workbook
for Parishioners*



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“The Miracle at Cana of Galilee” (p. 17), “The Multiplication of Loaves and Fishes” (p. 26), *iconographers: Rev. Theodore Koufos and Valentin Streltsov*;

“The Last Supper” (p. 5), <http://www.crestinortodox.ro/religie/o-veste-buna-139723.html>;

“Put out into the deep” (p. 7) <https://jcflondon.wordpress.com/2014/09/14/jcfl-reflection-4th-september-2014/>;

“The Parable of the Sower” (p. 23), <http://comorinemuritoare.ro/bLOGOS/?p=4180>.

Foreword from the Father and Head of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church



Glory to Jesus Christ!

Reverend Fathers,

With great joy I recommend this *Practical Workbook for Parishioners* on the theme of “Stewardship of Divine Gifts: A Christian Way of Life.” The Synod of Bishops of the UGCC explored this theme during its session in September 2014, and the “Working Group for the Realization of the Strategic Development of the UGCC till 2020” took the main points expressed during the Synod and gathered them in a practical format for implementation in our parish communities.

I am particularly grateful to Bishop Ken (Nowakowski), who is chairman of the

Working Group since October 2011 and who carries responsibility for this new addition to the series of publications in our “Vibrant Parish – a Place to Encounter the Living Christ” program. I also wish to thank Bishop David (Motiuk) of Edmonton, Bishop Paul (Chomnytsky) of Stamford and Rev. Dr. Andrij Onuferko for their work on the individual themes in this publication.

Every person is gifted in some manner. At the same time, Our Lord God placed upon us a responsibility to properly use these gifts, that is, to share them for the glory of God and for the good of one’s neighbour.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, I hope that this Workbook will help you deepen your understanding of the sense and meaning of God’s gifts in the building up of the Kingdom of God, so that you might commit yourselves to a more generous gifting of time, talents and treasure for the good of your parish community.

Let everything be done for the glory of God and for the good of His People!

The Blessing of the Lord be upon you!

+ SVIATOSLAV

“We offer to You Yours of Your own on behalf of all and for all.”

Divine Liturgy
of St. John Chrysostom



INTRODUCTION

“Remember, O Lord, those who bear fruit doing good works in Your holy churches and remembering the poor. Send down Your mercy upon all of us.”

Divine Liturgy
of St. John Chrysostom

Points to remember:

- At the Synod in September 2014 our Bishops dedicated considerable time to reflect on “Stewardship of Divine Gifts – a Christian Way of Life.” They would like to share key aspects of that reflection with the clergy and faithful laity of our Church.
- Developing a good understanding of Christian stewardship will help us strengthen not only our parish communities, but also our personal spiritual lives, our families, our Church as a whole.
- We live in an increasingly secular society, and so good Christian Stewardship will help reinforce those Christian foundations and values, which modern society increasingly seems to forget or neglect.



STEWARDSHIP – GENERAL PRINCIPLES



1. The every Gift is from God

Stewardship of Divine gifts begins with an awareness that everything comes from God and ultimately belongs to God, and serves to give Him glory. At each Divine Liturgy we pray: “for all good giving and every perfect gift

is from above, coming down from You, the Father of Lights.” The Church also encourages us in its services to “commend ourselves, and one another, and our whole life to Christ our God.”

Points to remember:

- A simple definition of Stewardship: the wise use of human (natural and spiritual) as well as material resources for the building up of the Kingdom of God.
- Stewardship begins with an awareness that everything comes from God and ultimately belongs to God.
- The most important gift we have received is that of salvation in Jesus Christ
- That gift requires our response: sacrifice, dedication and a sense of shared responsibility for the life of the Church and her mission on earth.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. My life is not my own but God’s. What does this phrase say to me?
2. Do I try to foster an awareness of God’s ownership over all of creation? How?
3. If everything we are and have is a gift from God, how does that impact my life as a Christian?
4. What does the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ mean to me? Is there anything more important for me in my life?
5. When in the Liturgy we are encouraged “to commend ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God” how does this phrase speak to me personally?





2. The Mission of the Church

The Word of God calls us to conversion and to a life in faith. Liturgy grants us the possibility to unite ourselves to the one sacrifice of our Lord, given on the Cross, and to give our life in sacrifice to God. Through works of mercy, *diakonia*, we allow others to experience how good the Lord is.

Points to remember:

- The six elements of “The Vibrant Parish: a Place to Encounter the Living Christ” should always be present in our minds and hearts.
- Every parish community, no matter how small, is called to make the first three elements a priority in its life and mission: preaching the Word of God and Catechesis, Liturgy and Prayer, and Serving One’s Neighbour through works of mercy and justice.
- The other elements flow from the first three. They focus on who does the work and with what resources (Leadership-Stewardship), on how and why we fulfill our mission (with a sense of Communion-Unity), always mindful of the Gospel mandate to preach the Kingdom of God to the world (Missionary Spirit).
- This is not a theoretical or abstract mission, but one that is fulfilled concretely

in our own time and where we live by actual people, by US!

- It is our calling and mission to place the gifts we have received in God's service.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. Have the priorities of the "Vibrant Parish" (Word of God and Catechesis, Liturgy and Prayer, Serving One's Neighbour, Leadership-Stewardship, Communion-Unity, Missionary Spirit) become a priority for my personal and family life? In what ways?
2. Do I understand that I am called to help build the Kingdom of God in my time and where I live?
3. Am I committed to do my part in placing the world at the service of God and His plan of salvation for humankind?

3. Stewardship of God's Gifts is rooted in the Sacred Scriptures

"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace."

1 Pt 4:10

Points to remember:

- Our understanding of Christian Stewardship is rooted in Sacred Scripture
- Texts such as the parable of the just and unjust servant (Lk 12:42-46) or the parable on the talents (Mt 25:14-30, par. Lk 19:11-27) emphasize that we are caretakers of the gifts of the Kingdom of God, not its owners.
- The Greek word *oikonomos* (literally: "house-ruler") is used in texts, such as 1 Pt 4:10 (good *stewards* of God's varied grace) and 1 Cor 4:1-2 (*stewards* of the mysteries of God... it is required of *stewards* that they be found trustworthy).

- In the New Testament we also find mention of *oikonomia*, used in reference to: 1) God’s plan of salvation for the human race, 2) the fulfillment of that plan in Jesus Christ, 3) our participation and responsibility in the fulfillment of that plan.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. Which of the servants best describes me in the Parable of the Talents (Mt 25:14-30)?
2. What does it mean when we say that our life and all the things we possess are given to us “on loan” from God?
3. Am I a “good steward of God’s varied grace” in my personal and family life, in my parish community?

4. Stewardship of Divine gifts – Our Shared Responsibility

“For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”

Rom 12:4-8

Points to remember:

- Christian Stewardship involves all members of the Church, and not just the bishops and clergy.
- St. Paul teaches us that we are all members of one Body (see Rom 12:4-8) and that in the Church each person has his or her purpose.

- All of us have gifts and blessings, but also limitations, inadequacies, and weaknesses. That is why we are called to work together, supplementing in one another that which is lacking.
- We need to trust the Holy Spirit, who always supplies the Church with all that is needed for her to fulfill its mission.
- We have different gifts, perform different services and activities. To each is given the manifestation of the Holy Spirit “for the common good” (see 1 Cor 12:4-7)

Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. How do I understand my calling to be an active member in the Body of Christ?
2. Have I ever asked myself what my gifts might be, and asked in prayer for the Lord to show me how I might use those gifts?
3. How do the words of St. Paul apply to me when he speaks about all Christians using their gifts “for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7)

STEWARDSHIP OF GIFTS – TIME, TALENTS AND TREASURE



1. Stewardship of Time

“Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, «In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.» Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

2 Cor 6:1-2

Points to remember:

- Time is a unique gift, given to all, but not in equal measure.
- Time is a non-renewable resource: it cannot be reacquired or exchanged. We must choose whether to use it wisely or waste it.
- We usually think of time in a chronological sense, but the Scriptures also have a different understanding of time from God's perspective of eternity. With the coming of Christ chronological time is called to be transformed into supernatural time, the time of invitation and salvation, that is, God's time. Frequently the Greek word *kairos* (sometimes translated as "season") is used in this sense.
- There are moments when we can experience this transformation of time, especially in the liturgical life of the Church: the eternal salvation offered in

Jesus Christ is made present "here, today for us."

- We need to examine how we manage time in our personal lives.
- We need to "make time" for God, dedicating a portion of our time each week for God's community of faithful.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. In what ways do I, as a Christian, experience time as a gift from God?
2. Do I practice good personal time management or do I often find myself wasting time on things that really don't matter?
3. In what ways do I use my personal time to serve others?
4. In what ways do I offer my gift of time to help build up my parish community?





2. Stewardship of Talents

“And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’”

Mat 25:20-21

Points to remember:

- When we look at our Christian community we can see that God bestowed us with many talents. We should ask God for discernment on how to best use these talents for His glory.
- We have *natural* talents, intellectual and physical, which we can and should develop throughout our lives.
- We receive our *spiritual* talents from the Holy Spirit. They allow us to act with a sense of not our, but God’s will, and move us to serve our neighbour for the sake of the Gospel.
- The Church speaks of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit (Isa 11:1-3) and also provides us with some tools to recognize when the Holy Spirit bears fruit through us and others (Gal 5:22-23).
- The Christian community needs both spiritual and natural gifts to fulfill its mission.

- We need to be able to offer our talents to the Christian community. No skill or ability is too small to be given back to God.
- Whatever we offer should be given in a spirit of thanksgiving to God, recognizing in Him the source of all that is good in us.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. What are my natural talents and do I share them with my parish community?
2. Do I pray for discernment, so that I may grow in spiritual gifts and be open to sharing them with others?
3. Do I recognize the spiritual gifts of my pastor and my fellow parishioners? What are these gifts? How do I show my appreciation for these gifts?

3. Stewardship of Treasure (Material Resources)



“...Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace

abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.”

2 Cor 9:6-8

Points to remember:

- If time and talents are a gift, then the material compensation which is produced by their application should be seen as a gift as well.
- The Church is called to act in this world and cannot fulfill her mission without a material foundation.
- The Christian community may find the material resources it needs in the form of an unsolicited gift. It may produce something of value or offer services for which it can justly seek compensation. However, for the most part the Church must ask for donations.
- Not only does a parish need the financial and material support of its members, but so does an Eparchy and the Church as a whole.
- St. Paul encouraged early Christians to be generous: "...for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:6-8).

- The Christian community must always receive with gratitude, never judging a person's generosity based on the size of the gift.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. Do I acknowledge as God's gift that which I have acquired through honest labor?
2. Do I have a sense of ownership for my parish and recognize my responsibility to financially support its mission?
3. How do I respond to special appeals, either from my Bishop, from His Beatitude or the Holy Father?
4. Do I judge others on the basis of how much or how little they give?
5. Do I teach generosity to my children and give them good example?

CONCRETE EXAMPLES OF PARISH STEWARDSHIP



1. Tithing: four hours per week for the building up of the Kingdom of God

“Every tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the LORD’S; it is holy to the LORD”

Lev 27:30

Points to remember:

- The biblical practice of tithing (offering one tenth of earning to the Lord) was practiced in early Christian Rus'-Ukraine, and indeed is still practiced in many Christian denominations today. Might we take another look at this practice, rethinking it in the context of a broader understanding of stewardship?
- St. Paul encourages generosity, as we have seen, but he doesn't specify amounts. It would seem, however, that the early Church had the same understanding found in the Old Testament: that the first and best portion of anything we acquire belongs to God (see 1 Cor 16:1-2).
- Might we not today commit ourselves to a modified form of tithing? Concretely: four hours per week dedicated to God's works. What we cannot offer in its monetary equivalent we should offer in time and talents.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. Is the tithing example of St. Volodymyr the Great something that I should be emulating in my life?
2. What does it mean to me when we say that the first and best belongs to God?
3. Do I think that it's reasonable to expect that I donate one tenth of my time, talents and treasure to the building up of the Kingdom of God?
4. Do I trust God when it comes to my personal financial security? (Mt 6:33: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.")?



2. Concrete opportunities for stewardship based on the elements of the “Vibrant Parish”

“Remember, O Lord, those who bring offerings and do good works in Your holy churches, and who remember the poor. Reward them with Your riches and heavenly gifts of grace; for earthly things grant them heavenly ones; for temporal ones, eternal, for corruptible, incorruptible.”

Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great

Points to remember:

- All of us should ask ourselves: how can I contribute to making my parish “a place to encounter the Living Christ.” We can all contribute in ways, great and small.
- The best way to think about our commitment and involvement in the parish community is from the perspective of the priorities of “the Vibrant Parish,” especially its first three elements.

- Each parish needs to make a list of its needs and possibilities for pastoral action, and reach out to its members, asking them to consider offering their time and talents

Practical Time-Talent opportunities:

It is time to make a commitment. Can I see myself taking on responsibilities or engaging in?

NOTE: The lists provided below are given as an example. Each parish is invited to use it, expanding or shortening it according to its concrete needs and possibilities for action.

The Word of God and Catechisis

- Catechist
- Catechist assistant
- Christian initiation instructor (for parents and godparents)
- Pre-Marriage instruction volunteer
- Adult education facilitator

- Bible study leader/member
- Catechumenate team leader/member
- Parish School volunteer
- Youth group leader or coordinator
- Young adult leader
- Librarian / Media resource volunteer
- Parish bookstore volunteer

Missionary Spirit

- Evangelisation committee member
- Visiting lapsed Catholics
- Outreach to newly arrived
- Outreach to the unbaptised
- Parish Neighbourhood Outreach
- Media relations volunteer
- Parish hospitality (Ushers/greeters)

Liturgy and Prayer

- Altar server
- Liturgy Committee Member
- Sacristan
- Reader
- Cantor
- Choir member
- Choir Director

- Prayer group leader
- Prayer group host
- Prayer group member
- Caretaker of vestments and linens
- Prospora baker
- Families praying for special intentions
- Church cleaning volunteer
- Church decorator (eg. feast preparation)

Communion-Unity (Koinonia)

- Parish photographer
- Brotherhood member
- Sisterhood member
- Sunday coffee volunteer
- New immigrant volunteer
- Baby and child care during church event
- Transportation for the immobile to church services and events
- Ecumenical team member
- Parish social committee member
- Kitchen volunteer
- Social media coordinator

Serving One's Neighbour (Diakonia)

- Adult day care volunteer
- AIDS program volunteer
- PRO-LIFE ministry volunteer
- Bereavement volunteer
- Soup kitchen volunteer
- Visiting elderly volunteer
- Visiting sick volunteer
- Visiting shut ins volunteer
- Parish food bank volunteer
- Needy children volunteer

Leadership-Stewardship

- Financial Council member
- Pastoral council member
- Stewardship Committee/Team member
- Auditor
- Sunday collection volunteer
- Fundraising volunteer
- Various professionals:
- Medical doctor
- Plumber
- Carpenter
- Electrician

- Computer software specialist
- Computer hardware specialist
- Parish grounds maintenance – landscaping volunteer
- Parish building maintenance volunteer
- Cleaning volunteer
- Lawyer
- Realtor
- Mechanic
- Auto / parish equipment maintenance volunteer
- Parish Website maintenance volunteer
- Graphic designer
- Newsletter/bulletin work volunteer
- Secretarial work volunteer
- Office volunteer
- Parish archivist

3. Pastoral and Financial Councils, Financial Planning



Points to remember:

- Two parish organizations are called to play an important role in the life of a parish.
 1. The PASTORAL COUNCIL assists and supports the pastor in planning and organizing the broader activity of the parish community.
 2. The FINANCIAL COUNCIL advises, assists and supports the pastor in financial and administrative matters.
- The *Handbook for Pastoral Planning* is an important tool to help a parish prioritize its activities with a view towards its mission.



- It is important for parishioners to know the financial state of its community so that they might also have a deeper sense of their responsibility in material matters.

Instead of Questions for Personal reflection

Every parish should develop an *annual Pastoral Plan*, invite all parishioners to

participate, especially in the first two sessions of Pastoral planning: *Count our Blessings* (What are we doing already?) and *Dare to Dream* (What would we like to do?).

Parishioners should be invited to consider whether in the future they might be willing to serve in the Parish Pastoral and Financial Councils.

Practical Suggestion: If you have a large parish, you may consider creating a “**Stewardship Committee**” within the Pastoral Council. This would be a group of individuals who would assist the pastor in developing lists of tasks within the parish, and look for individuals who have specific talents, who might serve in Parish Council structures or help the parish fulfill its Pastoral Plan. If you are a smaller parish, then at least consider calling together a small “**Stewardship Team**” of Pastoral Council members. Members of such a Stewardship Committee or Team might be called upon to assist in presenting this WORKBOOK to the parish community.

STEWARDSHIP OF GOD'S GIFTS – A WAY OF LIFE



“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

Ephesians 5:1-2

Key points:

- Christian Stewardship is a way of life and a continuous process of conversion in order to make God a priority in our lives.
- It requires a spirit of sacrifice and a readiness to share of one's time, talents and treasure.
- It is nothing new, for the Church has always had to administer its many gifts, sometimes effectively, but sadly, sometimes less so.
- It is the Gospel in action by concrete individuals, in a concrete place, in a specific time, with those gifts-resources, which God has given us.
- Let us, therefore, together be good stewards of God's gifts and share them for the building up of His Kingdom.

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