



# GRATEFUL DISCIPLES

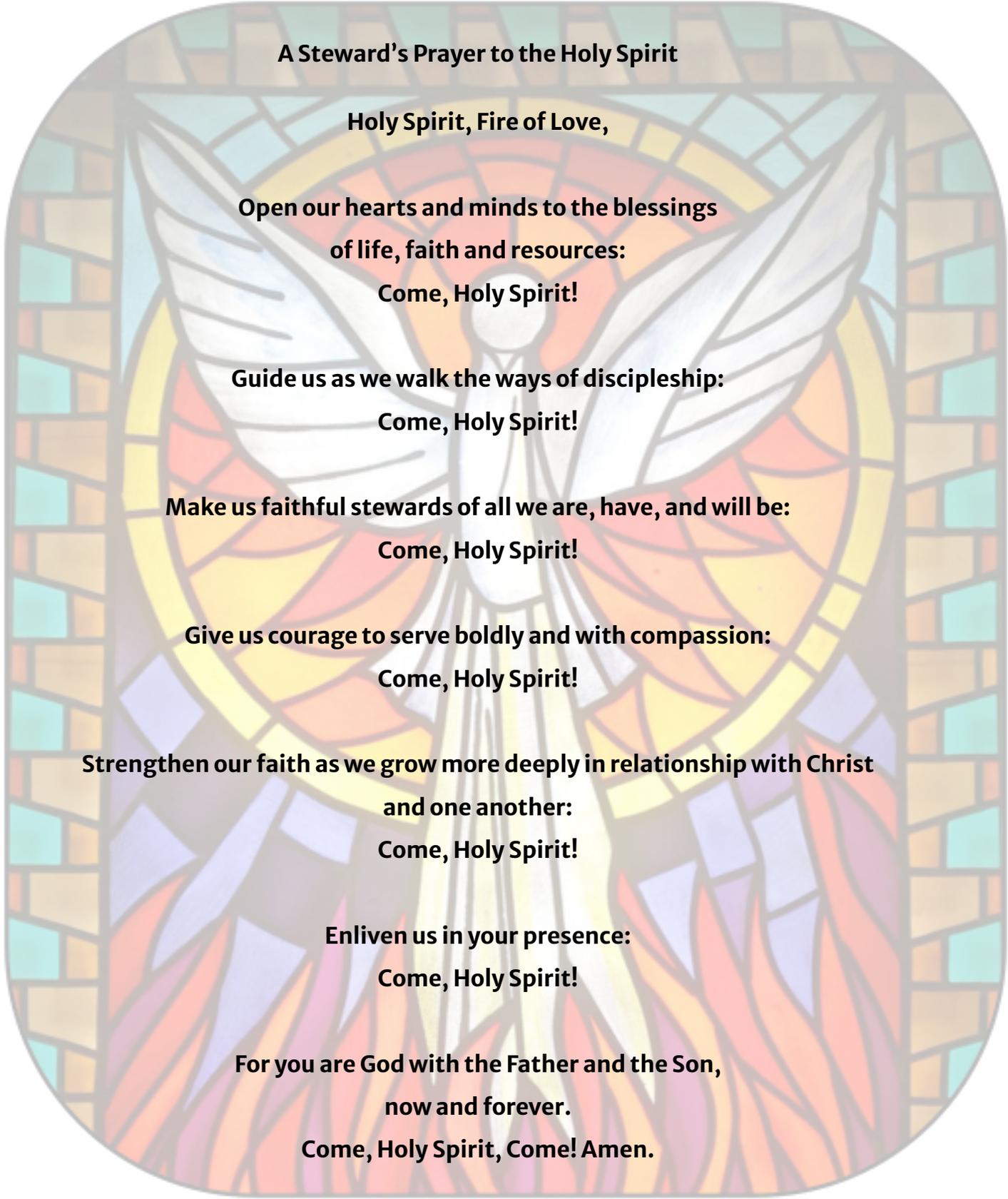
## THE GRATEFUL DISCIPLES RETREAT

The Start of  
Stewardship:  
Gratitude

Stewardship is an  
Expression of  
Discipleship

Stewards Share in  
Grateful  
Response

Stewards Answer  
Christ's Call



**A Steward's Prayer to the Holy Spirit**

**Holy Spirit, Fire of Love,**

**Open our hearts and minds to the blessings  
of life, faith and resources:**

**Come, Holy Spirit!**

**Guide us as we walk the ways of discipleship:**

**Come, Holy Spirit!**

**Make us faithful stewards of all we are, have, and will be:**

**Come, Holy Spirit!**

**Give us courage to serve boldly and with compassion:**

**Come, Holy Spirit!**

**Strengthen our faith as we grow more deeply in relationship with Christ  
and one another:**

**Come, Holy Spirit!**

**Enliven us in your presence:**

**Come, Holy Spirit!**

**For you are God with the Father and the Son,  
now and forever.**

**Come, Holy Spirit, Come! Amen.**

## **Session 1: The Start of Stewardship: Gratitude**

**Leader:** As we begin our time together, let us be mindful that God is always with us, always seeking to be in deep and profound relationship with us, always speaking to us through sacred scripture, through the sacraments and traditions of our faith, through one another, and in the silence of our heart. So we begin by taking a few moments to quietly prepare our hearts and minds .... and listen to God's word.

**Reader 1:** A reading from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians. (4:1-2)

Thus should one regard us: as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Now it is of course required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.

The Word of the Lord.

**Reader 2:** "An oikonomos or steward is one to whom the owner of a household turns over the responsibility for caring for the property, managing affairs, making resources yield as much as possible and sharing the resources with others. The position involves trust and accountability." (Stewardship, 20)

### **Stewardship Reflection:**

**What does stewardship have to do with our lives?** When we really think about it, we know that all we are, everything we have, all we will ever be is given to us by God. That is quite a lot to take in, isn't it? Yet it is true.

**Living as stewards** means that we care for and nurture all that we have been given: our very selves, our relationships, our material resources, every hour of every day we are alive. The good steward puts God first, nurtures loving relationships with family and friends, cares for one's health, lives simply rather than being consumed by material wealth, establishes a good balance between work and leisure, and so much more. These are all aspects of living a lifestyle of stewardship. When that nurturing "yields with increase," we find abundance overflowing: our relationships flow out to draw others in; our material resources are shared willingly and with love; our care of ourselves gives us physical and emotional energy with which to be productive. Recognizing that all is given to us by God, we nurture one more important thing: gratitude. In seeing that all is pure gift from God, we become grateful for the gifts we have been given.

**We are created in God's image**, designed to be living representations of God on earth. Our stewardship of our lives and resources is the way we bring God's love, care, attention, and mercy to the world.

**The challenge:** Stewardship requires us to trust in God's care for us. We must develop a sense of gratitude and be willing to be generous, as a response to all we have been given by God.

**Let's get practical.** Our daily decisions, from the way we use our time to the spirit with which we interact with others, take on new focus and meaning when we consider them from the perspective of stewardship.

**Let's be spiritual.** As you can see, stewardship is also a deeply spiritual way of life. Remembering that everything is pure gift from God leads us to see that Jesus is our best teacher of what it means to live as a steward. The way in which we embrace stewardship is closely tied to the way we commit ourselves to being followers of Jesus Christ. We will be called to sacrifice for the sake of others, and to give as lavishly as our loving God who has given us everything. And in this, our lives will be forever changed.

**Questions for reflection and sharing:**

What does it mean to you to know you are created in God's image?

For what are you especially grateful today? How does this gratitude lead you to a generous response to all you have been given?

## Session 2: Stewardship is an Expression of Discipleship

**Reader:** Mature disciples make a conscious, firm decision, carried out in action, to be followers of Jesus Christ no matter the cost to themselves.

Beginning in conversion, change of mind and heart, this commitment is expressed not in a single action, nor even in a number of actions over a period of time, but in an entire way of life. It means committing one's very self to the Lord.

Stewardship is an expression of discipleship with the power to change how we understand and live out our lives. Disciples who practice stewardship recognize God as the origin of life, the giver of freedom, the source of all they have and are and will be. They are deeply aware of the truth that "The Lord's are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it" (Ps 24:1). They know themselves to be recipients and caretakers of God's many gifts.

They are grateful for what they have received and eager to cultivate their gifts out of love for God and one another.

### **Stewardship Reflection:**

In Jesus' time it was not unusual for a person to seek out a master teacher from whom one could learn the ways of life and faith. Many expected that one of these teachers would be the Messiah, God's Anointed One, who would establish God's reign on earth.

Perhaps it isn't so different in our time. Hundreds of political, business, or self-help leaders present themselves as having the answers people need. If we're honest with ourselves, many of us hope one of these individuals will have what we're looking for.

**Our faith tells us** that Jesus is the Messiah. He is the Teacher who has the answers we need for our lives. Learning Jesus' ways is what discipleship is all about. Following Jesus is the work of our lifetime.

**What does discipleship have to do with our lives?** In baptism, we have been drawn into a living relationship with Christ and the Christian community. Baptism is the beginning of discipleship. In baptism, we begin a lifelong process of learning to live as Jesus teaches, and of bringing Christ's presence to others.

**Living as a disciple** is a way of life that holds as its foundation and model Jesus Christ. "Following Jesus is the work of a lifetime. At every step forward, one is challenged to go further in accepting and loving God's will. Being a disciple is not just something else to do, alongside many other things suitable for Christians; it is a total way of life and requires continuing conversion." (SDR, 15)

**What does Jesus teach us?** Think of the many Gospel stories you have heard or read over the years. Jesus' message is pretty straightforward when we get right down to it:

- Love God before all others
- Love our neighbor as ourselves
- Serve and love as Jesus serves and loves
- Reach out to the poor, sick, oppressed, lonely, and imprisoned
- Be part of Christ's mission to bring about the fullness of God's reign.

**The challenge:** As straightforward as Jesus' path of life is, it is easy to see the challenge in embracing Jesus' way as our way.

Every step of this path will call us beyond ourselves, beyond what is comfortable, and beyond what may seem "normal" for many in our world. The way of the disciple is love, compassion (which means to suffer with), humility, forgiveness and peace. Jesus teaches his disciples that caring for the needs of the poor is to serve Christ himself.

**Let's get practical.** In embracing discipleship as our way of life, there will be many little things, and some big ones we will need to do.

**Let's be spiritual.** This is not something we do alone! We will find strength and guidance through the Holy Spirit and the community of faith as we commit ourselves to learning and following Jesus' way.

**Questions for reflection and sharing:**

What are the practical implications of living as a disciple for you at this time in your life?

What challenges do you face in trying to live as a Christian disciple in today's world?

What helps you along the way?

## Session 3: Stewards Share in Grateful Response

**Reader:** “Jesus is the supreme teacher of Christian stewardship, as he is of every other aspect of human life; and in Jesus’ teaching and life self-emptying is fundamental.

In describing the resulting way of life, Jesus does not waste time proposing lofty but unrealistic ideals; he tells his followers how they are expected to live. The Beatitudes and the rest of the Sermon on the Mount prescribe the lifestyle of a Christian disciple (cf. Mt 5:3-7:27). Although it does not suit worldly tastes, “the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God.” (1 Cor 3:19)

Jesus sometimes describes a disciple’s life in terms of stewardship (cf. Mt 25: 14-30; Lk 12:42-48), not because being a steward is the whole of but because this role sheds a certain light on it.” (Stewardship, 19-20).

**Reader:** A reading from the Gospel according to Mark (10: 17-30)

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answered him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud; honor your father and your mother.’” He replied and said to him, “Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth.” Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, “You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to [the] poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” At that statement, his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” The disciples were amazed at his words. So Jesus again said to them in reply, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through [the] eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

They were exceedingly astonished and said among themselves, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “For human beings it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God.” Peter began to say to him, “We have given up everything and followed you.” Jesus said, “Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this

present age: houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come.

The word of the Lord.

**Reader:** "Christ's response is more than Peter or any other disciple could reasonably hope or bargain for ... Giving up means receiving more, including more responsibility as a steward; among the consequences of living this way will be persecution; and even though discipleship and stewardship set the necessary terms of Christian life in this world, they have their ultimate reward in another life" (Stewardship, 21).

### **Stewardship Reflection:**

**What does generosity have to do with our lives in faith?** We might be thinking, "But isn't it enough to go to Mass on Sunday and put a little money in the collection, or give to a local charity?" How generous is generous, after all? This is where generosity is connected to gratitude: as we become more mindful of the many ways we are blessed with life, love, resources and more, we also face the need to be more generous. Generosity is the fitting response to God's overwhelming love!

**The challenge:** We may not like to admit it, but we are surrounded by a culture that values "me first." Even when we have decided to grow as a good steward, we will be tempted to think, "But I earned the money -- it's mine to do with what I want," or "Enough is enough -- I need more time for myself!" And such thoughts or comments will find plenty of reinforcement from the world around us. We will have to be committed to continue on our path to a more generous lifestyle. Still, when we really give this thought, we realize that each of us has a need to give selflessly. It is in such giving that we find meaning, purpose, and holiness.

**Let's get practical.** Growing in a generous spirit is not something that will happen over night. It is much more likely to take place one step, one decision to share after another. We will also find many more opportunities for generosity once we begin looking for them.

**Let's be spiritual.** "Christian stewards respond in a particular way to the call to be a disciple. Stewardship has the power to shape and mold our understanding of our lives and the way in which we live." (SDR, 42) Just as generosity is tied to gratitude, it is also tied to trusting God in all things. Growing in trust is an intersecting point where faith and life meet. We learn to trust that God who has given us every good gift will be with us in

all things. We grow in a desire to give generously in response to such great blessings. This life of trust, gratitude and generosity is a way of living as a follower of Jesus. Jesus, who gave attention to those who were sick and suffering, the lonely, and those in need of spiritual companionship; Jesus, who even when tired and in need of time for himself, “stopped everything” to teach those who came seeking him; Jesus, whose very life was poured out in sacrifice for our sake and for that of the whole world. How can we not respond by giving of ourselves, our time and attention, our talents and resources? To grow in generosity is to see ourselves as a reflection of Christ, called to share Christ’s presence with others, as we surely are!

**Questions for reflection and sharing:**

Jesus asked the rich young man to sell what he had to give to the poor in order to have treasure in heaven. In what ways are you weighed down by possessions and/or money?

In what ways do you, or do you not, steward your time well? Do you sometimes waste time that could be better used in service, caring, or toward your spiritual growth?

Who in your life seems to have given up much for the sake of the Gospel? What visible reward, if any, has there been for that sacrifice? What keeps you from doing the same?

## Session 4: Stewards Answer Christ's Call

**Reader 1:** "The Christian vocation is essentially a call to be a disciple of Jesus. Stewardship is part of that. Even more to the point, however, Christians are called to be good stewards of the personal vocations they receive. Each of us must discern, accept, and live out joyfully and generously the commitments, responsibilities, and roles to which God calls him or her."

"Every person should walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of a living faith which arouses hope and works through charity."

"The Christian vocation is essentially a call to be a disciple of Jesus ... Jesus' call is urgent. He does not tell people to follow him at some time in the future but here and now – at this moment, in these circumstances. There can be no delay."

**Reader 2:** "Becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ leads naturally to the practice of stewardship. These linked realities, discipleship and stewardship, then, make up the fabric of a Christian life in which each day is lived in an intimate, personal relationship with the Lord."

"Refracted through the prisms of countless individual vocations, this way of life embodies and expresses the one mission of Christ: to do God's will, to proclaim the good news of salvation, to heal the afflicted, to care for one's sisters and brothers, to give life – life to the full – as Jesus did."

**Reader 3:** "Following Jesus is the work of a lifetime. At every step one is challenged to go further in accepting and loving God's will." Do you believe that you are called? What experiences in your life have reinforced or validated your faith in that call?  
(Stewardship, 11-15)

**Reader 4:** Certain of God's love, we listen to a reading from the book of the prophet Jeremiah:

The word of the Lord came to me thus:

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,

before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you.

"Ah, Lord God!" I said, "I know not how to speak; I am too young."

But the Lord answered me, "Say not, 'I am too young,'

To whomever I send you, you shall go;

whatever I command you, you shall speak.

Have no fear before them, because I am with you to deliver you," says the Lord.

The word of the Lord.

### **Stewardship Reflection:**

"Those who enter Jesus' new covenant find themselves growing in a union of minds and hearts with others who also have responded to God's call. They find their hearts and minds expanding to embrace all men and women, especially those in need, in a communion of mercy and love.

The Eucharist is the great sign and agent of this expansive communion of charity. 'Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf' (1 Corinthians 10:17). Here people enjoy a unique union with Christ and, in him, with one another. Here his love – indeed, his very self – flows into his disciples and, through them and their practice of stewardship, to the entire human race. Here Jesus renews his covenant-forming act of perfect fidelity to God, while also making it possible for us to cooperate. In the Eucharist, Christians re-affirm their participation in the new covenant, they give thanks to God for blessings received and they strengthen their bonds of commitment to one another as members of the covenant community Jesus forms.

And what do Christians bring to the Eucharistic celebration and join there with Jesus' offering? Their lives as Christian disciples: their personal vocations and the stewardship they have exercised regarding them, their individual contributions to the great work of restoring all things in Christ. Disciples give thanks to God for gifts received and strive to share them with others"

(Stewardship, 37).

### **Questions for reflection and sharing:**

Jeremiah protested that he was too young to answer God's call. What are some reasons you might hesitate to respond to the Lord's call?

What particular gifts, talents, and abilities have been entrusted to you? How do you perceive yourself to be called to steward these gifts at this time?

How does the Eucharist shape, form, and nourish you to live Christ's covenant of love?

Who in your life has been an outstanding example of one who has heard the call of God and answered it? How has he or she exemplified good stewardship?



Lord God,  
You alone are the source of every good gift,  
of the vast array of our universe,  
and the mystery of each human life.  
We praise you and we thank you for your great power  
and your tender, faithful love.  
Everything we are and everything we have is your gift,  
and after having created us  
you have given us into the keeping of  
your son, Jesus Christ.  
Fill our minds with his truth and our hearts with his love,  
that in his Spirit we may be bonded together  
into a community of faith,  
a parish family,  
a caring people.  
In the name and Spirit of Jesus,  
we commit ourselves to be good stewards  
of the gifts entrusted to us,  
may all our activity help build your kingdom,  
our obedience bring true freedom,  
our generosity increase love,  
our sacrifice bear generous fruit,  
our death lead to eternal life.  
Amen.

